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Report rejects claim Omagh intelligence held back



The aftermath of the Omagh bombing in 1998, in which 29 people were killed, including a mother pregnant with twins.

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Allegations that vital intelligence about the Omagh bombing in 1998 was held back were rejected today in an official report.

Sir Peter Gibson, the Intelligence Services commissioner, said any information on the bombers taken from telephone intercepts monitored by the British government's listening station GCHQ (government communications headquarters) was passed to police but could not have prevented the August 1998 atrocity.

Twenty-nine people, including a mother pregnant with twins, were killed when a Real IRA car bomb exploded in the town after misleading warnings. No one has ever been convicted of the attack.

Sir Peter was called in by the British government after claims that GCHQ withheld intercepted intelligence about the bombers' movements on the day of the explosion, which caused the single biggest loss of life in Northern Ireland during the Troubles.

The allegations over GCHQ and the alleged failure to share intelligence surrounding the bombing were raised in a BBC *Panorama* documentary.

The allegations caused widespread concern and fuelled the claims of critics that more could have been done to prevent the bombing and to catch the killers, who remain at large.

In his report, which was released this morning, Sir Peter said: "I am satisfied that in the days surrounding 15th August and on the day itself, to the extent that any relevant intelligence was derived from interception, it was shared with RUC HQ and Special Branch South promptly and fully, and done so with the latter in accordance with procedures agreed with Special Branch South."

Sir Peter also said there was no evidence before him that the gardaí had warned the RUC of a likely attack.

Sir Peter's findings were drawn from a much fuller report, which has been classified for security reasons.

Michael Gallagher, whose 21-year-old son Aiden was killed in the bomb, said he would be asking to see the full version.

He said the victims' families were not against the security forces or the intelligence agencies.

"We believe that mistakes were made and those mistakes should be examined and put right to give us a better chance of preventing any future attack and catching those responsible," said Mr Gallagher.

He said there was also a question of personal accountability within the authorities.

"Who is going to take personal responsibility for Omagh and address those failings?" he asked. "Those of us in a democratic society expect that."

Families of the Omagh bombing victims will hold talks with British prime minister Gordon Brown next month over claims that security lapses could have played a role in the atrocity.

It is believed Northern Ireland Secretary of State Shaun Woodward has arranged for the relatives to meet the prime minister for discussions about the tragedy and how it was handled.

PA

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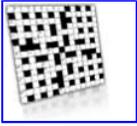
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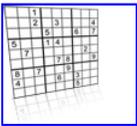
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