



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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23rd January 1980

MO 19/3

(2)

Prime Minister

Dear Michael,

Ans 24/1

You asked in your letter of 18th January for a note on the precautions being undertaken by the Army in the light of the assessment in JIC (80)(N)(IR)1 that there may be further mortar attacks on security force bases.

Although paragraph 5 of the JIC assessment refers to the Provisional IRA having tested mortars "recently", the Army in Northern Ireland had in fact identified a particular threat of further mortar attacks some weeks ago. All border bases were made aware of the assessment at that time.

Mortar attacks have of course been a continual threat, particularly at such bases, for a number of years. The measures which are taken to counter this threat rest upon a fairly detailed knowledge of the Provisional IRA's expertise in this field. We know, for example, from captured weapons that their latest, largest and most dangerous mortar, the "Mark 10", has a useable range of about 150 metres (although in laboratory conditions its absolute maximum range is about 500 metres). The Army is thus able to design its protective measures and its early warning system to cover the area around the bases from which the greatest threat comes. At Forkill a picquet is permanently in a position from where it can observe possible mortar firing points and can direct quick-reaction forces to the right area. Crossmaglen has a Closed Circuit Television System which views the Market Square. Newtownhamilton is similarly equipped with CCTV. At all border bases patrols visit all possible firing points at frequent but irregular intervals. The bases at Crossmaglen and Forkill are also

Thin down level up. They hold on they were helped upon a mortar attack.

They can't get out in line.

/ being ...

M Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street

Have seen but they were worried about mortar attacks

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by 19/1

being mortar-proofed, as was explained in our letter of 10th January. In general we are satisfied that adequate measures are taken to minimise the chances of further successful mortar attacks by the Provisional IRA.

I am not.

If, despite the preventive measures I have outlined above, terrorists do manage to stage an attack, soldiers in the bases are well versed in immediate action drills to move into positions giving the best possible protection whilst at the same time enabling them to return fire and protect the base offensively.

I am sending copies of this letter to Roy Harrington (NIO) and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

David Omand

(D B OMAND)

I think MOD is taking this matter much too casually - as this letter reads. Please reconsider further and report again
MS.

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