

file 500

MR. SHIPLEY

I attach a copy of the reply which I have sent to [redacted] letter. Despite very considerable experience in military intelligence and in the private sector, the experts detected in his letter signs that he knew little about the methods by which we gather intelligence about the IRA. Thank you, however, for passing his letter on.

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
ACT 2000

31 January 1984



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

31 January 1984

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The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you very much for your letter of 30 December about the destruction of the IRA which Peter Shipley delivered.

As you know, the Government is wholly committed to a firm response to terrorism wherever it manifests itself. By their very nature, as you will understand better than most, it is counter-productive to be specific about the measures that we are taking. But I can certainly say that a considerable intelligence effort is directed at Irish terrorism. Over the years Irish terrorist organisations have become more sophisticated and our own intelligence effort has had to adapt to the changes in tactics. For terrorist activity in Great Britain, liaison with the security authorities in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland is central to our strategy. In addition, of course, police forces make every effort to prevent easy passage between Great Britain and the island of Ireland through special units established at each port. These units use the powers specially provided by Parliament in the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976 and continued by the Government's own Bill which is just about to be introduced in the House of Lords after its passage through the House of Commons.

The Prime Minister does not therefore accept your premise that present security policies operate in a defensive posture.

/but she

But she is determined that our approach to countering terrorism should not become complacent or fixed in traditional patterns and she was grateful to you for passing on the suggestions in your letter.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Butler

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ACT 2000



SECRET

Pl. type attached
draft for my
signature.

HOME OFFICE
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

30 January 1984

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FERS

31.1.

ACT 2000

Richard Hatfield wrote to me on 26 January to ask us to let you have a draft letter which you might send on the Prime Minister's behalf in reply to letter of 30 December. I attach a draft reply.

Despite very considerable experience in military intelligence and in the private sector, he clearly knows little or nothing about our security and intelligence agencies or about the Metropolitan Police Special Branch. His misunderstanding is betrayed, for example, by the reference to "a plain-clothes extension of the SAS" to feed the police or military authorities with high-grade intelligence. The SAS have many roles but they have never aimed to acquire and supply high-grade intelligence by agent running or by technical means. If they did, they would be a different organisation. In preparing a draft reply we have been in the usual difficulty that it is impossible to go beyond bland generalisations in an unclassified letter.

The responsibility for acquiring and assessing intelligence about Irish Republican extremism and terrorism in Great Britain rests with the Metropolitan Police Special Branch, who were founded for this very purpose just over 100 years ago. Obviously intelligence directed at targets in Great Britain are important, but at least as crucial are their contacts with the Garda and the RUC. The collaboration between the three forces during the Tidey kidnapping and subsequently illustrates that these can and do reach a very high level. Of course, there are real difficulties about security liaison with the Irish Republic but in recent years it has been productive. In the last two weeks, for example, the police have made two highly significant finds, one in a wood near Hucknall in Nottinghamshire and one in a wood near Hackleton in Northamptonshire. In Nottinghamshire they found 80lbs of commercial explosive buried in two small plastic barrels. The search was a joint police/military exercise. In Northamptonshire the police found a variety of terrorist equipment buried in a plastic dustbin, including three grenades, two sub-machine guns, a Lugar pistol, three revolvers, timing devices, switches, detonators and radio receivers.

So far the Northamptonshire operation has not become public knowledge. Until it does, the police have made arrangements to detain any terrorists who visit the site. In the present context the significance of these operations is that information was supplied to the Metropolitan Police Special Branch by the Garda about a PIRA courier who was believed to be travelling to England from the Republic. The combination of this intelligence and highly effective surveillance by police officers led the police over a period of days to the two woods. It goes without saying that the police are following up these leads with every means at their disposal, including forensic examination.

I am copying this letter to John Lyon (Northern Ireland Office) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours (NW), Hugh

H. H. TAYLOR

DRAFT LETTER

ADDRESSEE'S REFERENCE

TO	ENCLOSURES	COPIES TO BE SENT TO
<p style="text-align: center;">CLOSED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(FULL POSTAL ADDRESS)</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">(FULL ADDRESSES, IF NECESSARY)</p>

LETTER DRAFTED FOR SIGNATURE BY PS/Prime Minister
(NAME OF SIGNATORY)

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you very much for your letter of 30 December about the destruction of the IRA.

As you know the Government is wholly committed to a firm response to terrorism wherever it manifests itself. By their very nature, as you will understand better than most, it is counter-productive to be specific about the measures that we are taking. But I can certainly say that a considerable intelligence effort is directed at Irish terrorism. Over the years Irish terrorist organisations have become more sophisticated and our own intelligence effort has had to adapt to the changes in tactics. For terrorist activity in Great Britain, liaison with the security authorities in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland is central to our strategy. In addition, of course, police forces make every effort to prevent easy passage between Great Britain and the island of Ireland through special units established at each port. These units use the powers specially provided by Parliament in the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976 and continued by the Government's own Bill which is just about to be introduced in the House of Lords after its passage through the House of Commons.

does not therefore accept your premise that present security policies operate in a defensive posture. But she
The Prime Minister ^{and} is determined that our approach to countering terrorism should not become complacent or fixed in traditional patterns. ^{Styger Lane} She was particularly grateful to you, ~~therefore~~, for passing on the ~~thinking~~ ^{Styger Lane} contained in your letter.

H.O. EST. 112