

CONFIDENTIAL



CP  
②  
Prime Minister  
CP  
8/3  
[Handwritten signature]

PRIME MINISTER

PROTECTION OF POLICE IN RUC BUILDINGS

I have been reviewing the state of protection with the Police Authority and the Chief Constable, in the light of the mortar attack on Newry RUC Station on 28 February, in which nine police officers were killed. In view of your personal interest I am sending you this note. This was the eighteenth attack with this particular weapon, and from the previous seventeen there were only two fatal casualties. But the evident waywardness of the weapon in no way absolves us from taking all possible precautions against it.

2. In terms of building stock, there are three types to be considered: buildings constructed before the present terrorist campaign, those built since, and temporary constructions. There is, besides, a gradation from buildings located in highly vulnerable areas to those where attack by mortar can, practically speaking, be ruled out.

Older Buildings

3. These are of many types, and proofing against mortars requires individual treatment. The crucial matter is, of course, the roof, for protection against horizontal attack is much less difficult. A group of scientists, engineers and others has been looking at this problem since mid-1984 and is making progress with the experimental development of a heavy duty netting material which might serve to bounce a missile away from the roof to a place of safety. The properties of each safety net would have to be individually calculated for each building. Besides that, experiments are going on with various materials which might afford protection against a mortar exploding in a roof. I have ensured that this work has the highest priority.

CONFIDENTIAL

/New





New Buildings

4. New police stations in vulnerable areas are now built with roofs of specially reinforced concrete, of two skins with a space between (similar to the prototype at Crossmaglen). Walls and windows of the buildings, and perimeter walls, are all carefully designed to meet the characteristics of the site. Technology in this field is developing continuously, and there is little doubt that the Northern Ireland experts are in the van.

Temporary Constructions

5. The RUC's rapid expansion in the past decade has made the use of temporary buildings inevitable in many stations, including vulnerable ones. Prefabricated buildings are highly vulnerable, but (i) they are no more vulnerable to vertical attack than the roof of a permanent building which has not been specially strengthened; (ii) there are circumstances in which the very flimsiness of a portacabin reduces the physical damage to those inside it, because the blast can escape more easily and there is nothing to crush them. The long-term answer is evidently to move from prefabricated structures to purpose-built stations. In the meantime, experiments are going on with strengthened anti-blast panels for the walls.

Underground Quarters

6. Stations have not usually been built with basements, and the creation of extensive underground quarters would be extremely expensive. We should also expect the Force to encounter opposition from police officers if asked to spend extended periods eating, sleeping and working underground. We shall discuss further with those concerned whether there are any possibilities in specific cases, but the difficulties with existing buildings are probably insuperable.

Location of Stations

7. It might seem that stations would be more secure if located outside the main built-up areas, where they could be more





effectively patrolled (they would certainly be easier to build than in town centres). But the majority of mortar attacks hitherto have been in rural areas, not in the centre of large towns like Newry. Besides, as a matter of policy, the RUC rightly think it important to make their services to the community available in the centre of town. Locations are carefully chosen to avoid being overlooked etc. Some police facilities (eg CID) can be shifted to sites on the edge of a town; plans are now being drawn up for such a station on the outskirts of Newry, which will relieve some pressure on the premises attacked last week.

The Building Programme as a Whole

8. An efficiency scrutiny was made last year of the provision of buildings for the RUC. An action plan resulting from it is now being implemented. The main objective is to achieve more complete liaison between all the agencies involved, and thus a smoother and swifter completion of the building programme at a marginally reduced cost. We will be keeping a close eye on the effectiveness of these arrangements.

Dispersal of Personnel in Stations

9. The scale of the Newry disaster was partly due to a concentration of police officers in the canteen at teatime. There may be some room for discouraging such large congregations and we shall discuss this further with the Chief Constable. But there are occasions, eg briefings, on which it is operationally necessary to bring people together, and there will always be a reluctance to carry out artificial procedures such as staggered mealtimes.

10. I am sending copies of this minute to Leon Brittan, Michael Heseltine and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*DH*

D H  
8 March 1985