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No. 163/89

To J. Hayes

From R. Murphy (please copy J. Dillon, Anglo-Irish)

Date 4 July 1989

Total number of pages (including this one): 5

Subject: Press coverage of Hanover car bomb attack

The car bomb attack which killed one British soldier and injured members of his family on Sunday, 2 July has been a big story in the German press and TV over the past two days. The story broke too late on Sunday to get detailed coverage in yesterday's papers but it was reported briefly on most of their front pages and is covered in depth in papers today. It was the first or second item on the TV and radio news yesterday, tied in in several cases with up-dates on the situation in NI and particularly the state of the PIRA.

Among the aspects covered by the German papers (some using agency reports, others a correspondent in Hanover): the fact that the 31 year old soldier was getting into his parked car when the bomb went off (papers speculate as to whether it was the insertion of the key or the movement of the car that triggered it), the

injuring of the soldier's wife and children in an area where German citizens could just as easily have been victims, the likelihood that plastic explosives were used, the IRA's claim of responsibility including its claim to be fighting the British government everywhere, and the report attributed to the Federal Prosecutor's Office in Karlsruhe that two men aged 30-35 were seen acting suspiciously at the scene and are being sought by police. There is comment about the large numbers of British soldiers and dependents in FRG and on the difficulty of protecting them.

Coverage ranges from the mass circulation Bild newspaper - which points out that Germans are in danger too - to the quality press, e.g. in Die Welt, second lead story with emphasis on previous attacks on British service people in Germany.

One paper which gives the story extensive coverage is the heavyweight Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (right of centre). The paper has a front page editorial and two long pieces on page 3, one a factual report from their Hanover correspondent, the other an update on the IRA by FAZ's London correspondent Ulrich Grudinski. The latter is headed "Bringing fear and terror to the defenceless: the IRA wants to fight London everywhere". Grudinski argues that the provisionals' failure to make their mark in the elections in NI and in the South has driven them to attack "soft" targets again. No consideration is given to those in the firing line, whether they be British personnel or their German neighbours. The Hanover attack, the 11th such in the FRG in 11 years, was a calculated use of terror to bring attention back to "the Irish affair", since the IRA has cause to worry about falling support "among its own people" in Ireland. Grudinski analyses the NI election results and concludes that Sinn Fein's strategy of ballots and bullets failed as regards the former, adding that in the Republic they have remained politically unimportant. He quotes Sir John Hermon's prediction that the PIRA would turn more to attacks in Europe. He concludes with a profile

onnnnf living conditions of British soldiers and families in
FRG, emphasising policy of integration with German community. He
refers to possibility of troops being returned to barracks if
threat from IRA became too great.

Embassy translation of FAZ editorial follows.

Translation

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 4 July 1989

Intent on an audience

The murderous deed which killed a British soldier on Sunday in Hanover and which seriously injured his wife and his four children gives rise to consternation, and at the same time our sympathy for the victims and the grief they suffered.

That a bomb attack should create horror is, in fact, its perverted political purpose. The British should feel horror and with them their German neighbours. The deed is aimed at two addressees. On the one hand it claims to be against the "crown", i.e. against the British state, which this crown symbolises, against every kind of uniform or institution which bears this symbol. But in practice such deeds have primarily to do with the public. The public is taken hostage against the government. In this fight with malicious means it does not matter who the victim is. It is always an enemy; it could be anybody. If one wanted to protect the British soldiers and their families in the FRG thoroughly one would have to lock them into housing estates behind barbed wire fences, in surroundings which look beleaguered and where the inhabitants also feel beleaguered. Is this desirable? The British soldiers and their relatives should as long as possible be given the opportunity to live in civilian German surroundings, for private reasons and for the sake of a lively neighbourliness among allies.

Behind these attacks it seems, as our London correspondent describes it, that a struggle between competing Irish groups is taking place. The IRA is looking for renewed attention in its own country. This case - as also the case of other persistent terrorism in Europe, in the Basque country - demonstrates that such groups are only as strong as their rooting in the political biotope at home. The Catholic population in Northern Ireland (as well as in all of Ireland) decides by showing horror or agreement

whether this fight that has been going on for years and decades will be continued in this bloody, hopeless way. The Protestant part of Northern Ireland also plays a role in the decision. This depends on whether it can detach itself from its peculiar attitude of militancy, fear, defiance and provocation.