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THE STEVENS REPORT - MAY 1990

AN ASSESSMENT

1. Introduction. The Stevens Report on allegations of collusion between members of the Northern Ireland Security Forces and loyalist paramilitaries was published, in summary form only, on 17 May 1990. The published Summary includes 83 recommendations which have been made for implementation in respect of:
  - a. Information and Intelligence Systems (18 recommendations)
  - b. The RUC, and (31 recommendations)
  - c. The British Army, including the UDR (33 recommendations).
2. In this assessment the published report has been studied in respect of the following matters:
  - a. The major findings of the Enquiry
  - b. Loyalist paramilitary groups
  - c. Security Forces practices
  - d. Weaknesses identified in security systems
  - e. Action taken against persons as a result of the Enquiry
  - f. Recommendations made in the report as published.

3. Findings. The report publishes three significant findings as a result of the Enquiry. Firstly, it states "Evidence and information has been obtained which shows that certain members of the UDR have been involved in collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries" but adds "it would be wrong to conclude that there is a significant proportion of UDR soldiers who are involved with paramilitaries" (para 24). This point is reinforced "..... the passing of information to paramilitaries has been restricted to a small number of individuals. It is neither widespread nor institutionalized (para 11 and para 41). Secondly, the Report finds (para 27) that official information has passed, illicitly, into the hands of Loyalist paramilitaries who used it to enhance their own intelligence systems and as an aid to the targeting of persons suspected of being Republican terrorists. Thirdly, the report finds that a limited number of persons have passed on vehicle index computer information to unauthorised persons (para 32).
4. Loyalist Paramilitary Groups. The Enquiry recovered Security Force documents; written material produced by paramilitary organisations; open source material used by Loyalist paramilitary groups for Intelligence purposes and surveillance notes which detailed potential targets and their habits (para 4). Furthermore, "a complex network of intelligence of all types was uncovered, involving the supply and exchange of information between Loyalist paramilitary groups, with the <sup>Ulster</sup> Defence Association at the centre" (para 45).<sup>1</sup> The report acknowledges the pressures which paramilitaries are likely to exert on young <sup>potential</sup> recruits for the Security Forces in strong Loyalist areas, particularly in Belfast (para 25).

5. Security Force practices. The RUC has the primary responsibility for the command and control of the collection, collation, development evaluation and dissemination of all terrorist related intelligence (para 31). Photo montages were produced by the British Army, in co-operation with the RUC. The Army did NOT keep records of production and distribution up to 1988 (para 6). The latest date of any document traced to the possession of Loyalist paramilitaries in June 1988 (para 10). No document of a security classification higher than RESTRICTED has been recovered or came to the notice of the Enquiry as having been in the hands of any terrorist organisations (para 9). Since September 1989 steps have been taken to improve the security of information (para 10).

6. Weaknesses identified in security systems. The report makes several references to weaknesses in security procedures. There was "a lack of any mechanism for accounting for the movement" of terrorist recognition documents (para 7). The large number of documents and widespread distribution increased the risk (para 8). The lowest classification (presumably RESTRICTED) was applied to terrorist recognition information (para 9). There was a serious lack of accounting and deficient identification marking in relation to the production and distribution of documents (para 19). This made the origin difficult to trace (para 19). Procedures for reporting and recording of allegations of crime can be improved (para 24). The vetting/screening system for UDR recruitment was deficient in a number of areas (para 25). Even persons who had received adverse RUC vetting reports were recruited to the UDR (para 25). There was a lack of manpower in the Army screening section (para 26). Arrangements for liaison between the Army and the RUC need to be improved. A third reference is made to

"a serious lack of control and adequate accounting procedures" (para 28) and the widespread use of photocopiers by both the BA and RUC (para 28). The

report notes the failure of the authorities to recognise the value of the documents to terrorist groups and states that there were inadequate security procedures.

7. Action taken against persons as a result of the Enquiry

- a. A former soldier who sent a photo montage to a national newspaper was traced. He pleaded guilty to Official Secrets Act offences in Belfast Magistrates Court (para 18).
- b. 94 people were arrested in connection with the Enquiry. Of these, 59 were charged or reported (para 21).
- c. 28 members of the UDR were arrested in an operation in October 1989. Of this number, 7 were convicted of offences under the Firearms order, 1 is awaiting trial on more serious charges. 9 cases were referred to the DPP who said no further action was to be taken (para 23).
- d. 2 members of the UDR were arrested in connection with the disappearance of photo montages from Dunmurray RUC station and are awaiting trial (para 23).
- e. A number of collusion cases are still being investigated (para 22).
- f. There was no evidence to connect any member of the RUC with the Dunmurray incident (para 23) or with any other case.

8. Recommendations. The report proposes wide ranging recommendations applicable to the BA, RUC and to information and intelligence systems maintained by both forces. The major textual recommendations are the establishment of an RUC Anti Terrorist Squad (para 43); the introduction of accounting and supervisory functions to intelligence computer systems, the restriction of intelligence documentation to a minimum; strict control of dissemination and handling of intelligence documentation and higher standards of recruitment to and retention within the UDR (para 51).
9. Assessment The report as published sustains the allegations of collusion between members of the Security Forces, in particular the UDR, and Loyalist paramilitary groups. Other than to say that the practice was NOT widespread the Report remains vague and fails to quantify in sufficient detail the actual extent of collusion. The recommendations made are all embracing and it is understood that other unpublished recommendations have been made. The report has valuable security lessons which should be studied.