

## The Joint Intelligence Committee

- 3.37 The minutes of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) disclosed to my Review suggest that the Committee, which was located in London, focused primarily on the terrorist threat in Great Britain and in continental Europe during the late 1980s.

## The relationship between the intelligence agencies

- 3.38 It is clear that the complex structural relationship between the three main intelligence organisations resulted in a considerable degree of strain within the intelligence system in Northern Ireland. The statements I have read and the submissions made to my Review suggest that the relationship between the RUC SB and Army intelligence was a difficult one throughout the 1980s. RUC SB officers consistently expressed the view that there was no need for the Army to run agents in Northern Ireland.

- 3.39 R/15 told me that he “*never thought there was a need for the military to have its own intelligence gathering structure*”. He also pointed to the difference between the police and military mindsets, which could “*lead to arguments as to what was or was not achievable and allowable under the extant criminal law*”. R/15 did, however, feel that there was a productive relationship overall between the FRU and the SB.<sup>10</sup> A former senior RUC officer told me that, when he was involved in intelligence-related work in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he had a “*difficult relationship with the FRU*”.<sup>11</sup>

- 3.40 The Army, on the other hand, saw an ongoing need for a unit to run agents separately from the RUC SB. The former CO of the FRU, A/05, told me in his oral evidence that:

*“... there are many people who became agents or informants in Northern Ireland, who would not work for the RUC, because of the perceived bias of that organisation, sectarian bias.*

*And that is why the army felt, and HQNI [Headquarters Northern Ireland] felt that it was necessary to have an organisation that could garner these people who wanted to assist, but weren't prepared [to work for] ... the RUC.”<sup>12</sup>*

- 3.41 Government documents show that the structure and co-ordination of the intelligence network was a source of continuing high-level discussion and concern during the late 1980s. In August 1988, for example, the disagreements between the Army and the RUC were evident when the Prime Minister was being briefed following a Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) bomb attack in County Tyrone which killed eight soldiers. The meeting was attended by Secretary of State for Defence Tom King, the Chief of the General Staff (CGS), the GOC,

<sup>10</sup> Note of meeting with former RUC officers, 25 July 2012, para 44

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., para 41

<sup>12</sup> Transcript of meeting with A/05, 7 September 2012, p. 4

the Chief Constable and a number of others. The note of the meeting taken by the Prime Minister's Office on 20 August 1988 recorded the CGS commenting as follows:

*“... intelligence was very badly organised. There was no common data base, insufficient coordination, and insufficiently rapid use of the raw data. This view was not shared by the Chief Constable. In elaborating the point the CGS agreed that action at brigade level and below was generally acceptable but the problems were both higher up, and inherent in the organisation. They included the fact that there were three agencies handling sources, and that there was insufficient interchange of information. The Prime Minister was very concerned that this situation appeared to exist, and it was agreed that very early meetings would take place between the Chief Constable and the GOC to consider what more could be done.”*<sup>13</sup>

3.42 Further meetings appear to have been held to stress the need for greater co-ordination of intelligence. A note from the Prime Minister's Office to the NIO dated 24 August 1988 included the comment that better co-ordination of intelligence *“is not an organisational matter, but a question of trust between those concerned, which can only be gained by working together”*.<sup>14</sup>

3.43 The case of the Army agent Brian Nelson is explored in detail in my Report and it is worth highlighting here the extent to which it exposed the uneasy relationships between the three main organisations involved with intelligence-gathering in Northern Ireland. The Army expressed concerns about its relationship with the Security Service as well as with the RUC SB. In a note to the GOC, the then ACOS G2 even claimed that:

*“The current DCI is well versed in these rivalries [between the agencies], and would lose no sleep at the removal of the Army's most effective source running unit [the FRU].”*<sup>15</sup>

3.44 It appears that the Security Service may have felt restricted in their ability to engage with the FRU in view of the state of the relationship between the Army and the RUC. In a memo dated 15 August 1991, a Security Service officer recorded that:

*“There is ... some restraint on developing the T Branch relationship with the FRU much further. The liaison has to be conducted with some delicacy in order to protect T8's steadily improving close operational relationship with the RUC.”*<sup>16</sup>

3.45 The former senior RUC officers I met during this Review generally felt that the relationship between the RUC SB and the Security Service was a much more harmonious one. R/15 described the relationship to me as *“fairly seamless”*, and former RUC Deputy Chief Constable Blair Wallace felt that the Service was a

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<sup>13</sup> Note of meeting with the Prime Minister, 20 August 1988

<sup>14</sup> Prime Minister's Office note to the NIO, 24 August 1988

<sup>15</sup> Undated note, *Intelligence in N Ireland* [see Volume II, pp. 298–301]

<sup>16</sup> Security Service, Director T Branch to Director General, 15 August 1991