Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Request Number: F-2010-01015

Keyword: Crime

Subject: Attempted Bombings, Shootings and Bomb Scares

Request and Answer:

I am writing to confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has now completed its search for the information.

Question 1

From January 1, 2010 until April 6th 2010 how many attempted bombings were there by dissident republicans (i.e. either didn't go off or were defused)?

Answer

I can advise you that there were three bombing incidents from January 1, 2010 until April 6th 2010 in which the devices were defused or made safe. Please note that an individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents recorded include explosions and defusings. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

The PSNI does hold some information regarding who has been attributed with responsibility for these attempted bombings which is being exempted pursuant to the provisions of section 30 of the Act.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which:

(a) states that fact,
(b) specifies the exemption in question and
(c) states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

The exemption/s, as well as the factors the Department considered when deciding where the public interest lies, are listed below:

- Section 30 (1) (a) Investigations and Proceedings Conducted by Public Authorities

This is a qualified, class based exemption which means that the public authority must consider the balance of the public interest in releasing the information against the public interest in withholding it.

The public interest considerations are outlined below.

In addition, the PSNI can neither confirm nor deny whether any further information is held regarding attribution, by virtue of sections 23(5) and 24(2) of the Act.

Section 23(5) is an absolute exemption, and as such, no public interest test is required. Section 24(2) is a qualified exemption which means I am required to conduct a public interest test in relation to its usage in neither confirming nor denying the existence of any additional information. This is also set out below.

Public Interest Test Section 30

Factors favouring release

Releasing police intelligence in relation to the attribution of the attempted bombings would lead to a better informed pubic and a more accountable service. The public interest would be satisfied in knowing that an efficient and effective investigation is being carried out.

Factors against release

Releasing this information would prejudice ongoing investigations and undermine the right to a fair trial.

Decision

The PSNI will not divulge information if to do so would adversely affect an ongoing investigation. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of the law enforcement role of the police service and providing assurance that the PSNI is appropriately and effectively dealing with crime, there is a strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police investigations.

It is therefore my opinion that police intelligence in relation to the suspected perpetrators should not be disclosed at this time.

Public Interest Test Section 24 – National Security

Factors favouring confirmation or denial

Transparency from public bodies in all areas of business.

Factors against confirmation or denial

The PSNI works in partnership with other agencies to combat issues such as terrorism. As such, intelligence may be provided by bodies listed at section 23 (3) of the Act. It is important, in any specific case, to protect whether intelligence was or was not received. Routine confirmation or denial would place operational capabilities at risk as there are terrorists who would act on such information and use it to their advantage, jeopardising the security or infrastructure of the United Kingdom.

Decision

I am obliged to weigh up the above factors in order to determine whether the public interest lies in maintaining a neither confirm nor deny stance. In this case, the public benefit of greater awareness is far outweighed by the potential risk to operational capabilities.

The PSNI has therefore determined that in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exclusion of the duty to neither confirm nor deny outweighs the public interest in confirming whether or not information is held.

However, this should not be taken as conclusive evidence that the information you requested exists or does not exist.

Question 2
How many bombs went off during this period?

Answer
In the period 1st January 2010 to 6th April 2010, there were 6 bombing incidents in which devices exploded.

Please note that an individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

Question 3
How many shootings against the security forces were there during this period?

Answer
There were 3 shooting incidents on the Security Forces during this period. All 3 incidents were against the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Question 4
How many bomb scares were there during this period?

Answer
There were 107 Bomb Hoax related offences recorded from 1st January to 6th April 2010. These offences include;

- Placing articles causing bomb hoax;
- Despatching article causing bomb hoax; and
- Communicating false information causing bomb hoax.

Please note; these figures are provisional and will be subject to change.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible, or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing foi@psni.pnn.police.uk.

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain

dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ www.psni.police.uk

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.