

Ref: A0967



Security 6
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Prime Minister

MR. ALEXANDER

(on return from W'bin, with
ref.)

Counter Terrorist Contingency Arrangements

Your minute of 4th December conveyed a number of questions put by the Prime Minister on OD(T)(79) 3 of 11th October.

I attach a note prepared by the Home Office in consultation with the Security Service, the Department of Energy and the Ministry of Defence on the issues raised by the Prime Minister.

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M.J.V.

(M. J. Vile)

14th December 1979

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COUNTER TERRORIST CONTINGENCY ARRANGEMENTS

Terrorist threat to nuclear materials

1. A successful terrorist attack on a nuclear installation or a nuclear convoy would require a well trained and armed group which had detailed knowledge of the location of the material and of the measures in force to protect it, and which was equipped to overcome the physical barriers it would encounter. Similarly a surreptitious attack would require a detailed knowledge of both the location and the protection measures.
2. There is no evidence to suggest that any known terrorist group is contemplating attacks on protected nuclear targets in the UK or that they or any of the Arab governments, with the support of some of the international groups, are likely to do so.
3. The indigenous anti-nuclear movement in the UK has, to date, shown a reluctance to use violent action in pursuit of its aim to achieve a ban on the development of nuclear power, although some foreign groups have advocated direct action tactics.
4. It was in view of these factors that the threat to nuclear materials and installations was assessed as low, when compared to targets such as British Airways at London Airport. The threat is kept permanently under review by the Security Service.

Access by UKAEA Constabulary to automatic weapons

5. These are held in armouries at each of the four sites rather than carried by constables. The weapons are, however, held ready for immediate issue, together with charged magazines. The Station Officer on duty at a site is authorised to issue weapons; and it would take from five to twenty minutes, depending on circumstances, to bring the weapons to bear at the point where they are needed. A faster response would require automatic weapons to be carried as a matter of course.

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Threat to AWRE

6. The Security Service assessment is that there is no reason to believe that the threat to AWRE is higher than that to other nuclear establishments.

7. The AWRE site is protected by an armed MOD police force and protective measures are, in general, similar to those at sites owned by the UKAEA and BNFL. The arrangements are nevertheless continually under review, and a study has recently been completed which takes into account the potential long term terrorist threat. A number of measures have been recommended and are being implemented. It is the intention to make a report to OD(T) next year on security at AWRE.

8. Improvements have also been made to the security of military nuclear materials in transit.

Supplies of gas masks and protective clothing

9. Stocks of adequate protective masks and clothing are available for use by specialist teams from the MOD and from civil nuclear establishments which might be called to the scene of an incident involving toxic gases and substances. The Fire Service also have adequate supplies of breathing apparatus and protective clothing to provide protection against most toxic gases and substances.

10. The Police Service does not possess protective equipment to the same standard. The degree of expertise required in the use of such equipment would make it impracticable for all police officers to be so equipped; and their role in dealing with such hazards should not make this necessary. However, the study referred to in paragraph 18 of OD(T)(79)3 will include a review of the need for protective equipment and a further report will be made to Ministers in due course.

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