



House of Commons  
Northern Ireland Affairs  
Committee

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# The Omagh Bombing: Access to Intelligence

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**First Special Report of Session 2008–  
09**

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## The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Northern Ireland Office (but excluding individual cases and advice given by the Crown Solicitor); and other matters within the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (but excluding the expenditure, administration and policy of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Northern Ireland and the drafting of legislation by the Office of the Legislative Counsel).

### Current membership

Sir Patrick Cormack MP (*Conservative, South Staffordshire*) (Chairman)

Mr David Anderson MP (*Labour, Blaydon*)

Rosie Cooper MP (*Labour, West Lancashire*)

Christopher Fraser MP (*Conservative, South West Norfolk*)

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Mr Stephen Hepburn MP (*Labour, Jarrow*)

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Mr Denis Murphy MP (*Labour, Wansbeck*)

Stephen Pound MP (*Labour, Ealing North*)

Mrs Iris Robertson MP (*Democratic Unionist Party, Strangford*)

David Simpson MP (*Democratic Unionist Party, Upper Bann*)

### Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at [www.parliament.uk/niacom](http://www.parliament.uk/niacom). A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are David Weir (Clerk), Georgina Holmes-Skelton (Second Clerk), Emma McIntosh (Senior Committee Assistant), Becky Crew (Committee Assistant), Karen Watling (Committee Assistant), Becky Jones (Media Officer) and Mr Tes Stranger (Committee Support Assistant).

### Contacts

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## Intelligence and the Omagh bombing

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1. Twenty-nine people and two unborn babies died in the Omagh bombing of 15 August 1998, the single worst atrocity committed during or after the period commonly known as the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Several hundred were injured, more than 250 of whom were taken to hospital. No one has been successfully convicted in relation to the bombing.

2. On 15 September 2008, a BBC Panorama programme, “Omagh: what the police were never told”, suggested that the Government’s Communications HQ at Cheltenham (GCHQ) had tracked mobile telephones belonging to some of the alleged bombers. The programme suggested that intercept intelligence was not passed to the police sufficiently promptly to assist detectives investigating the bombing in bringing the perpetrators to justice.

3. Two days after the broadcast, the Prime Minister asked Sir Peter Gibson, the Intelligence Services Commissioner, to “review any intercepted intelligence material available to the security and intelligence agencies in relation to the Omagh bombing and how this intelligence was shared”.<sup>1</sup> Sir Peter provided a full, classified report to the Prime Minister before Christmas 2008, and a summary version was published on 21 January 2009. Sir Peter concluded that “to the extent that any relevant intelligence was derived from interception, it was shared with RUC HQ and Special Branch South promptly and fully”, and that any “intelligence derived from interception as might have existed could not have prevented the bombing”.<sup>2</sup>

4. Sir Peter explained that his full report to the Prime Minister contained material that “if released more widely, would reveal information on the capabilities of our security and intelligence agencies. Knowledge of these capabilities would benefit those who currently seek to cause harm”.<sup>3</sup>

5. Announcing publication of the summary report in a statement to the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced his “intention today to make the full, classified report available to Members of the Intelligence and Security Committee for their scrutiny”.<sup>4</sup> The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons under Standing Order No. 152 (2) to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Northern Ireland Office. The Intelligence and Security Committee is not a Select Committee of the House of Commons, having been established under the Intelligence Services Act 1994, as amended, to “examine the expenditure, administration and policy of (a) the Security Service; (b) the Intelligence Service; and (c) GCHQ”.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Sir Peter Gibson, Review of Intercepted Intelligence in Relation to the Omagh Bombing of 15 August 1998, published 16 January 2009, para 1.

2 Sir Peter Gibson, Review of Intercepted Intelligence in Relation to the Omagh Bombing of 15 August 1998, published 16 January 2009, paras 27 and 29.

3 Sir Peter Gibson, Review of Intercepted Intelligence in Relation to the Omagh Bombing of 15 August 1998, published 16 January 2009, para 2.

4 HC Deb, 21 January 2009, Col. 35WS,

5 Intelligence Services Act 1994, section 10(1).



















