

Observation Towers in South Armagh

The observation towers in South Armagh are undoubtedly intrusive and have been a matter of long-standing concern to the local community in the area. However, they form an integral part of the security and intelligence infrastructure in the Province. In the years immediately prior to their construction in 1985/86, the security forces had few successes in countering PIRA activities in the South Armagh area. The ramifications of this were felt widely beyond South Armagh, because South Armagh PIRA has traditionally played a leading role in planning and preparing many of PIRA's mainland attacks. Since their construction, the security forces have had considerable success in preventing or disrupting PIRA attacks in South Armagh and attacks targeted at the mainland. They have also contributed to a significant reduction in the number of security force murders by PIRA in the area. The Chief Constable and the GOC consider the towers to be a vital enabling capability and paramount to the safety of the security forces operating on the ground in the area.

2. The towers enable a systematic watch over the terrorists' areas of activity on both sides of the border. They support a number of important security and intelligence tasks - including:

- surveillance of terrorists, suspected terrorists and their associates;
- identification and detection of terrorist activities;
- provision of over-watch for both overt and covert security force operations; and

The key point.

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The issue is already being raised with NIO Ministers by each of these sources. But there is no prospect of early movement on the issue: as noted above, the towers constitute a vital element in our security and intelligence infrastructure which will remain essential until the risk of a resumption of violence by PIRA or other terrorist groupings is very small. Moreover, as we reduce the overt security force effort through patrolling activity, it becomes even more important that we preserve our covert capabilities and resources.

