



Cabinet Secretary

PRIME MINISTER

**ALLEGATIONS OF UK INVOLVEMENT IN THE INDIAN
OPERATION AT SRI HARMANDIR SAHIB, AMRITSAR 1984**

1. You set out at Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons on 15 January 2014 the Government's overall view on the tragic events surrounding military action at Sri Harmandir Sahib (informally known as the Golden Temple complex) in Amritsar in 1984: "...What happened at Amritsar 30 years ago led to a tragic loss of life. It remains a source of deep pain to Sikhs everywhere". The purpose of this report is not to investigate or pass judgement on those events, but to meet your request to establish the facts about UK advice to the Indian Government on its plans for an operation at Sri Harmandir Sahib, as mentioned in the two documents released inadvertently as part of annual releases under the Public Records Act.
2. It is worth noting that the fact that the UK provided some operational advice at the request of the Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator had already been put in the public domain in 2007 through a book by Bahukutumbi Raman (a former member of India's Intelligence Research and Analysis Wing).


3. To meet your remit I have looked at:


- (i) why the UK Government agreed to a request from the Indian authorities to provide military advice on their contingency plans for operations at Sri Harmandir Sahib;
- (ii) the nature of the UK assistance provided;
- (iii) the impact of that assistance on the actual operation conducted by the Indian Army; and
- (iv) whether Parliament was misled.

4. We have searched around 200 files (in excess of 23,000 documents) held by all relevant Departments covering the handling of events in Amritsar, from December 1983 (when the occupiers started to arm and fortify the complex), through to June 1984. Some military files on various operations were destroyed in November 2009. This included one on the provision of military advice to the Indian authorities on their contingency plans for the temple complex. I understand this was part of a routine process undertaken by the Ministry of Defence at the 25 year review point. The decision to destroy files is made by the relevant officials on a case by case basis, assessing relevance to ongoing operations and the broader historic significance. In this instance it was apparently not felt necessary to preserve the file. However, copies of at least some documents on the destroyed files were also in other departmental files; and taken together these files provide a consistent picture of what happened.

OVERVIEW

5. I attach (Annex A) a chronology of the contacts recorded in the files between the UK and Indian authorities relating to the military operation at the temple complex. The key point is that there is no record of any assistance to the June 1984 operation (called “Blue Star” by the Indian Government) other than the limited military advice provided in mid-February.
6. There are records of a range of other visits by Indian officials and officers in that period. However, according to the files, these do not appear to have had any link to the planning of, or support for, Operation Blue Star or indeed Operation Sundown¹:

 there had been previous UK military contact in 1982 with the Indian Counter-Terrorism Unit (the “Special Group”). But it was well before the situation at Sri Harmandir Sahib became critical, and involved different personnel. There is no suggestion in the later files relating to this visit two years earlier that it had touched at all on issues in the Punjab;

 the Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator visited London in mid December 1983. No request for military advice was made during this visit. Nor is there any evidence that planning for, or assistance with, any potential operations at the temple complex were discussed with the UK authorities;

¹ See paragraph 17 below, which refers to recent Indian media reporting of a planned “Operation Sundown”. There is nothing in the UK files that confirms the existence of such a plan.

FO
DS there was a separate, unrelated visit to India by different UK military officers on 2 February 1984, a few days before Ministerial approval was given for the specific advisory role on contingency planning.

7. Allegations appeared in the Sunday Times on 10 June 1984 that Indian Intelligence officers had made several visits to the UK to seek expertise in planning the Indian operation at the temple complex. There were two visits from Indian officials in the February to June timeframe, but the files show that they did not relate in any way to that operation.

KEY FINDINGS

Why did the UK provide India with advice from a military expert?

8. It is clear from documents on file (Annexes B and C) that this was a response to an urgent request from the Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator for expert military advice on Indian contingency plans for potential action against those occupying the temple complex. The recommendation and decision to agree this request were based on advice from the British High Commission that it would be good for the bilateral relationship, whereas refusal would not be understood by the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi.
9. The recommendation to Ministers was explicit that the UK Government could not contemplate assistance beyond that which might be given by the military adviser. There is no evidence in the files, or from discussion with officials involved at the time, that other forms of assistance for the operation – for example equipment or tactical intelligence – were provided for the

Indian operation. There does appear to have been some internal UK military consideration, immediately after the UK military adviser's visit to India, of whether to offer training for the potential operation, if requested by the Indian authorities, and if agreed by UK Ministers. But there is no evidence in the files that any Indian request was made, or that Ministerial permission was ever sought. Nor do officials interviewed recall any such request or offer.

10. As would be expected in the normal course of bilateral relations, the files confirm that there were on-going contacts between UK and Indian officials around the time of Operation Blue Star on potential defence-related sales, including the potential sale of Westland helicopters for civilian purposes. However, there is no record linking the provision of UK military advice to the discussion of potential defence or helicopter sales; or to any other policy or commercial issue. The scope for such a linkage is not suggested in any submission to, or comment from, a UK Minister or official. In sum, there is no evidence that the UK, at any level, attempted to use the fact that military advice had been given on request to advance any commercial objective.

11. The only UK request of the Indian Government, made after the visit, was for prior warning of any actual operation, so that UK authorities could make appropriate security arrangements in London. In the event, the UK received no warning from the Indian authorities of the launch of the operation.

What was the nature of the military advice?

12. The UK military adviser was in India between 8-17 February, including a ground recce, with the Indian Special Group, of the temple complex. This

was before - and unrelated to - the exchange of fire between Indian security forces and the occupiers of Sri Harmandir Sahib that started on 17 February.

13. I have seen the UK military adviser's visit report and the assessment which he gave the Indian authorities on 13 February. It is clear from this that the purpose of the visit was to advise Indian Counter Terrorist Team commanders on the concept of operations that they were already working up for action in the temple complex, including tactics and techniques. It is the long-standing practice of successive governments that we do not release such documents. However, I can confirm that the report makes clear that the military officer's instructions were that no UK manpower or equipment should be offered beyond the visit of this single military adviser. His assessment for the Indian authorities also made clear that this type of operation should only be put into effect as a last resort when all other courses of negotiation had failed. Beyond this, it made no comment on the timing of any potential future operation.

14. The UK officer's report back to the UK authorities stated that the main difference between the original Indian plan and his advice was that the original plan was based on obtaining a foothold within the south complex and fighting through in orthodox paramilitary style. With a view to reducing casualties, the UK military adviser recommended assaulting all objectives simultaneously, thereby assuring surprise and momentum. The advice given to the Indian authorities identified sufficient helicopters, and the capability to insert troops by helicopter, as critical requirements for this approach. The UK advice also focused on command and control arrangements, and night-time co-ordination of paramilitary with Indian Special Group forces. The

overall tone, but not detail, of this report was reflected in the formal FCO report back to the Prime Minister's office on 23 February (Annex D).

What was the impact of the UK advice?


15. The files provide limited insight into the overall impact of this advice on the Operation Blue Star which took place over three months later on 5-7 June. There is no record in the files of any formal or detailed military debrief from Indian to UK personnel, only references to the fact that one had not been received.
16. The UK High Commission in Delhi reported in February that the revised plan had been approved by Mrs Gandhi. However, it was not clear to contemporary UK officials whether this referred to a revised plan drafted by Indian officials that they had edited in the light of the UK military officer's advice, but which UK personnel had not seen; or whether Mrs Gandhi had been shown the UK military adviser's paper.
17. Recent Indian media reports suggest the operational plan developed by the Indian interlocutors of the UK military adviser was called "Sundown", and focused on detaining Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the leader of the Sikh dissidents occupying Sri Harmandir Sahib. There is no mention of "Operation Sundown" in UK files. Nor do those interviewed recall that name. Nor was the UK military adviser's report of February focused on a "snatch" operation. The plan it focused on was designed to re-establish control over the temple complex. It is, of course, possible that Indian


planning went through several iterations after the UK military adviser's visit and report.

18. A quick analysis by current UK military staff confirms that there were significant differences between the actual June operation, and the advice from the UK military officer in February. In particular, the element of surprise was not at the heart of the operation. Nor was simultaneous helicopter insertion of assault forces to dominate critical areas. The paper on the operation made public by the Indian authorities on 13 June 1984 makes clear that it was a ground assault, preceded by a warning, without a helicopter-borne element, which became a step-by-step clearance supported by armour and light artillery.

19. The FCO files (Annex E) record the Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator telling a UK interlocutor, in the same time-frame as this public Indian report, that some time after the UK military adviser's visit the Indian Army took over lead responsibility for the operation, the main concept behind the operation changed, and a frontal assault was attempted, which contributed to the large number of casualties on both sides. There is some other corroboration in the files of both a shift in the overall Indian command arrangements, and a change in the plan from that discussed with the UK military adviser in February:

□ the UK military adviser's report suggested that the Indian intention in February 1984 was to pursue a police/paramilitary operation and avoid use of the Army;

 however, Mrs Gandhi's letter to Mrs Thatcher of 14 June 1984 (Annex F), explaining her decision to take military action against the occupiers of the temple complex complex, stated that the occupiers had been strengthening their position, that India's paramilitary forces were insufficient in number, and so the Army had had to be sent in. It is also important to note that this letter made no reference to any UK assistance, suggesting strongly that this was not regarded by the Indians as being of any great significance or relevance. Nor did Mrs Thatcher's reply of 29 June (which was released 3 January 2014 and is in the public domain) refer to UK advice;

 a key UK officer recalls being told in July 1984, by one of the Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator's senior officials, that after the February visit it had emerged that the Indian Special Group and Army did not have the helicopter capabilities for a simultaneous assault. The decision had also been taken to sacrifice surprise by warning civilians in the complex to leave before an impending assault, in an effort to reduce casualties.

20. The overall impression that the UK military officer's advice had limited impact in practice on the operation implemented by the Indian Army is consistent with the public statement on 15 January 2014 by the operation commander, Lieutenant-General Brar, that "no one helped us in our planning or in the execution of the planning." It is also consistent with recent reporting in the Indian media that there was a change of plan and approach in the months after the visit of the UK military adviser.

Was Parliament misled on UK involvement?

21. There is no record of a specific question to Ministers about practical UK support for military operations at the temple complex, despite at least one contemporary press article alleging more sustained advisory support than was in fact provided (see paragraph 7).

22. However, on 30 July 1984 the then MP for Slough, John Watts, asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs “what representations he has received from the Sikh community in the United Kingdom about the storming of Golden Temple in Amritsar; and what discussions Her Majesty’s Government have had with the Government of India about this incident?”. Ray Whitney, then Parliamentary Under Secretary, replied that “the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received petitions and numerous letters from the Sikh community in the United Kingdom about recent events in the Punjab. As this is an internal Indian matter, we have not sought to discuss it with the Indian Government.” My view is that the Parliamentary Question and Mr Whitney’s reply were almost certainly directed at the question of UK-Indian discussions post the storming of the temple complex, and therefore in this context Mr Whitney did not mislead Parliament. This is reinforced by the fact that neither Mr Whitney nor his office were copied any of the relevant papers on the UK military officer’s earlier visit in February, which was treated as Top Secret. Mr Whitney is now deceased.

CONCLUSIONS

23. My overall conclusions are based on the available written records in UK government files 30 years after Operation Blue Star, and discussion with officials involved at the time. My conclusions focus on the facts of the extent of any UK assistance. They do not make a subjective assessment of whether that assistance should have been provided. Nor do they assess the Indian Government's decisions on whether and how to conduct the operation; or how UK-Indian relations developed following the tragic events at Amritsar. My conclusions are as follows:

- (i) the UK Government did send one military officer to provide military advice on Indian contingency plans for an operation at Sri Harmandir Sahib.
- (ii) This military advice was a one-off. It was not sustained.
- (iii) There was no other UK military assistance, such as training or equipment, to the Indians with Operation Blue Star.
- (iv) The UK Government did not link the provision of this military advice to defence sales. The decision to help was taken in response to a request for advice from a country with which the UK had – and has – a close relationship.
- (v) The military advice from the UK officer had limited impact in practice. The actual operation implemented by the Indian Army

differed significantly from the approach suggested by the UK military officer.

24. In support of these conclusions, I recommend the public release of the documents in annexes B to F. They include the specific letters referred to in the already released documents. In line with the practice under successive governments we do not release information relating to the intelligence agencies or special forces.

JEREMY HEYWOOD

3 February 2014

Documents attached to the report (a number of limited redactions have been made on national security grounds and relevance to the report)

- Annex A Chronology of UK/Indian contact over Operation Blue Star
- Annex B MOD Submission of 3 February 1984 seeking Ministerial approval for a military adviser to travel to India and provide advice to the Indian authorities on early contingency planning to remove occupiers from the temple complex at Amritsar.
- Annex C Letter of 3 February 1984 from Private Secretary/Foreign Secretary to the Principal Private Secretary/No. 10 outlining plan for a military adviser to travel to India and provide advice to the Indian authorities. The note from Robin Butler to Brian Fall of 6 February 1984, which was released on 3 January 2014, is the response to this letter.
- Annex D Letter of 23 February 1984 from Private Secretary/Foreign Secretary to the Principal Private Secretary/No. 10 reporting on the outcome of the UK military adviser's visit. The letter from Brian Fall to the Private Secretary/Home Secretary of 23 February 1984, which was released on 3 January 2014, referred to the content of this report.
- Annex E Internal FCO minute of 7 March 1985, which attaches an earlier internal (undated) note recording views of the Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator on the role of the UK military adviser and Operation Blue Star.
- Annex F Mrs Gandhi's letter of 14 June 1984 to Mrs Thatcher, which sets out her reasons for ordering operation Blue Star.

Annex A

<u>Chronology of UK/Indian contact over Operation Blue Star</u>	
15 Dec 1983	A large number of dissidents fortify Sri Harmandir Sahib complex at Amritsar.
15/16 Dec 1983	Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator meetings in London. No discussion of Sri Harmandir Sahib.
30 Jan 1984	A request is received from the Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator for UK operational advice to assist with the ongoing situation at the temple complex.
2- 3 Feb 1984	Approval is sought and granted by the Foreign and Defence Secretaries for a UK military adviser to travel to India to assist.
3 - 6 Feb 1984	Further approval is sought from the PM and granted
8 – 17 Feb 1984	Visit of UK military adviser to India, including a recce to Sri Harmandir Sahib. A short report is submitted to the Indian Authorities with high level recommendations and advice.
17 Feb 1984	Unrelated exchange of fire between Indian security forces and the occupiers of Sri Harmandir Sahib.
21 Feb 1984	UK military adviser submits a visit report to UK authorities
4 June 1984	JIC assessment that states the UK had been given no warning of the Indian Authorities launching an operation at the Temple
5 – 7 June 1984	Indian Authorities undertake military operation to remove the dissidents from Sri Harmandir Sahib, named Operation Blue Star
14- 29 June 1984	Exchange of letters between Mrs Gandhi and Mrs Thatcher about events in the Punjab.

LOOSE MINUTE

Personal for:
AUS(D SATFF)

Through:
DMO

Supported 7/6 3/2

INDIAN REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

AIM

1. This submission seeks MOD approval for a visit to India to provide advice to the Indian authorities.

BACKGROUND

2. Representatives of various extremist Sikh groups have, over the last year or so, taken up residence within the Golden Temple at Amritsar; some of them are believed to be armed. By a convention dating back to the British period in India, representatives of the Indian authorities, including the police and armed forces, do not enter the Temple precincts in uniform. A recent widening of the rift between the moderates and extremists may soon force the Indians into some sort of action. They are now therefore preparing a contingency plan for action against the extremists.

3. It is this plan on which the Indians have sought expert advice. The request was by the Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator. It was clear this approach had been made after very careful consideration and that the matter was of considerable importance to the Indian Government. believe that Mrs Gandhi would be aware of this request. The High Commissioner in New Delhi fully supports the proposal. He has commented that the request demonstrates the close relationship between Britain and India. A positive response would earn a good deal of credit; at the same time Mrs Gandhi would find it hard to understand a refusal.

4. has been consulted and confirms that he can provide a suitably qualified and experienced officer at short notice to provide the advice sought.

PROPOSAL

5. would arrange for the visit to be carried out. They would make it clear /to. ...

to the Indians that the identity of the adviser should be adequately safeguarded and that HMG could not contemplate any assistance beyond that which might be given by the adviser.

ASSESSMENT OF RISK

6. Knowledge of this request has been tightly controlled by the Indians; and it is very much in their interests that the visit should not come to public notice. In these circumstances assess that the risk of any embarrassment to HMG is slight.

FURTHER CLEARANCE

7. The Foreign Secretary believes that, in the interests of our bilateral relations with India, we should respond positively to the request. Subject to the concurrence of the Prime Minister and if necessary the Secretary of State for Defence, he has therefore authorised make arrangements with the Indians for an early visit by a suitably qualified adviser. The Foreign Secretary would inform the Prime Minister of the outcome of the adviser's visit; and, in view of possible repercussions among the Sikh community in this country, the Home Secretary would be informed if the Indians seemed likely to proceed with their plan.

RECOMMENDATION

8. I recommend MOD approval is given for an early visit to India by a in order to meet this request.

3 February 1984



London SW1A 2AH

3 February 1984

*Dear Sir**MS*

Indian Request for Advice on Plans for the Removal of Dissident
Sikhs from the Golden Temple

The Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator, _____ has sent an urgent request to _____ for advice on an Indian plan for possible action against the dissident Sikhs currently occupying parts of the Golden Temple in Amritsa. The Foreign Secretary believes that the Prime Minister would wish to be aware of the approach and our proposed response.

Representatives of various extremist Sikh groups have, over the last year or so, taken up residence within the Golden Temple; some of them are believed to be armed. By a convention dating back to the British period in India, representatives of the Indian authorities, including the police and armed forces, do not enter the Temple precincts in uniform, but _____ understand from _____ that a contingency plan for possible action against the extremists is being drawn up by the Indians. The Indians have requested that _____ provide an expert to advise on this contingency plan.

The fact that this request has been made personally by _____ underlines not only its delicacy but the importance attached to it by the Indian Government. Given the nature of the request, and from what is known of the role played by _____ it seems likely that Mrs Gandhi would have been informed before the request was made. In putting the request _____ made it clear that it had not been made lightly and that he was looking for help from them on a matter of real importance to the Indians.

The High Commissioner in New Delhi fully supports the proposal. He has commented that the request demonstrates the close relationship between Britain and India. A positive response would earn a good deal of credit; at the same time Mrs Gandhi would find it hard to understand a refusal.

TOP SECRET & PERSONAL



that it is of some importance that a response should be given quickly, not least because they understand that the latest developments at the Temple, where the rift between the moderates and extremists has now widened, may soon force the Indian Government's hand.

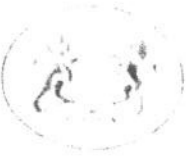
The Foreign Secretary believes that, in the interests of our bilateral relations with India, we should respond positively to the request. He has therefore authorised discuss the request with the [redacted] and with the MOD and, subject to the agreement of the Prime Minister and (if the visit is to be made by a member of the armed services) of the Secretary of State for Defence, to make arrangements with the Indians for an early visit, either by [redacted] or by another suitably qualified adviser. [redacted] would make clear to the Indians that the true origin of the advice must be adequately safeguarded and that HMG could not contemplate assistance beyond that which might be given by the adviser. The Foreign Secretary would inform the Prime Minister of the outcome of the adviser's visit; and, in view of possible repercussions among the Sikh community in this country, the Home Secretary would be informed if the Indians seemed likely to proceed with their plan.

I am copying this letter to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office) and Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

Handwritten signature

(B J P Fall)
Private Secretary

F E R Butler Esq
10 Downing Street



23 February 1984

De. Robin

Amritsar

You asked for a report on the visit by _____ to India to advise the Indians on their intention to divest the Golden Temple of Sikh extremists. _____ has reported as follows:

- a. The _____ spent eight days with the Indians. He travelled and operated _____ Our speedy response to the Indians' request for assistance was much appreciated by them and they put every facility at the disposal of their visitor. He made a ground reconnaissance of the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar on 10 February, flown there by special helicopter. It was clear to the officer that the Indians had not given much thought to how they should root out the extremists, beyond applying the 'sledgehammer to crack a nut' principle. With his own experience and study of this kind of problem, he was able to advise the Indians of a realistic and workable plan which Mrs Gandhi approved on her return from Moscow on 16 February.
- b. Sir R Wade-Gery, who was most impressed by the officer, made three points to him at the beginning of his visit:
 - (i) Our reaction to the Indian request can have done Anglo/Indian relations nothing but good;
 - (ii) it was therefore vital that there should be no leak about the visit. If there were, it would be extremely embarrassing for both sides, and, if the leak sprang from us, the Indians would never forgive us;
 - (iii) if and when the Indians put the plan into operation and if it went wrong, they should not be able to pin any blame on us.

/On this



On this last point, a difficult one, the draws attention to likely difficulties and various requirements that need to be fulfilled if the plan is to have a reasonable chance of success.

- c. In summary, believe that this was a very useful visit which passed off well and should have left the Indians well satisfied. It remains to be seen whether Mrs Gandhi has the political will to act. The officer had the impression from the Indians that she would proceed.

have seen the telegram from New Delhi reporting the shooting in the Gold Temple last weekend and the deployment of a 'commando squad'. The was not present at the time. do not consider that the shooting arose from an attempt by the Indian authorities to implement their plan, but believe that the arrival of the commandos, if confirmed, could presage an operation.

In view of the possible repercussions among the Sikh community here of any action by the Indian authorities against the extremists in the Temple, I shall be writing separately to the Private Secretary to the Home Secretary (as was agreed in the earlier correspondence).

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

John 24/4

(B J P Fall)
Private Secretary

F E R Butler Esq
 10 Downing Street

Copy no 1 of 2 copies

FROM:

DATE: 7 March 1985

Flag A 1. Sir W Harding asked for a further note.

Flag B 2. With my minute of 22 February, 1984, I submitted a draft
letter to No 10 reporting on the visit to India.
/ I attach a note on subsequent developments.

TOP SECRET AND PERSONAL

1. Subsequent to _____ visit, and in response to FCO telegram 362 of 11 May to Delhi, _____ asking for prior warning of military intervention in the Golden Temple and pointing out the importance of forewarning in the context. In the end we were not given any specific briefing until the day the actual invasion of the Golden Temple took place (5 June, 1984).

2. However, _____ (then Indian equivalent of our Intelligence Co-Ordinator) asked _____ in Delhi on 13 June, 1984 to express his gratitude to _____ the prompt and helpful response which resulted in the _____ report. Although some of _____ recommendations were used, the main concept changed once the Indian Army took over _____ who sponsored _____ visit). A frontal assault was attempted, using some of the Indian Special Forces and casualties were suffered. _____ emphasised that the large number of deaths was not the result of poor implementation of the _____ plans, nor of any deficiency in the plans but was due to the Army's decision to do it their own way.

3. We have received no specific comments _____ about the Army's assault on the Golden Temple.

Message from Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister
of India to The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher,
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

New Delhi, June 14, 1984

Dear Prime Minister,

We have a troubled situation in Punjab. Of all malefactors, those who wear the religious garb are the most dangerous. As you know the Akali Dal Party lost to my party the Congress in the General Election of 1980. Towards the end of 1981, the Akalis raised a number of demands, hoping to regain their following among Sikhs. Government tried its utmost to come to some agreement with them. Unfortunately, as the talks proceeded they shifted their stand and in the end hardened their attitude considerably.

In the meantime, the terrorists were strengthening their position. It is now established that they were in contact with and receiving help from hostile outside elements. Their objective was secession and disrupting the unity of our country. The para military forces were insufficient in number to control growing terrorist activities. So we had to send in the army. The troops and officers included men of all faiths, including Sikhs. It is never easy to undertake security action involving a place of worship, especially in a country where religion is so easily and often used for political ends. But this place, so sacred to people of the Sikh faith, had been converted by terrorists into a base of operations. We did know that arms were being collected there. But only after last week's action did we realise how vast and sophisticated these weapons were. Many bore foreign markings. We also found some foreign nationals among the desperadoes. For months a reign of terror was unleashed from the temple complex, holding all Punjab to ransom. We had no choice but to send an army unit which exercised the utmost restraint, using a minimum of force. They had strict instructions not to damage the holiest shrine in the area, the Golden Temple proper. In the process they suffered heavy casualties.

Another area within the temple complex, the Akal Takht, which we had asked our forces to avoid, was found to be used by the terrorists as their hide-out and was full of grenades and other weapons. The damage there was also largely due to explosions from within. One of the main religious leaders incharge has told us that it was taken over by the terrorists and that he himself had not been allowed there for nearly 4 months.

Although the hard core of the terrorists within ha
been liquidated, we have a difficult period ahead of us.
Many in the Sikh community have been shaken by this
traumatic event. The process of healing and conciliation
will take time but we shall persevere.

With warm regards,

INDIRA GANDHI

TOP SECRET AND PERSONAL

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Copy No: 4 of 4 copies

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cc FCO
CO

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

6 February 1984

BF | Thank you for your letter of 3 February about the Indian request for advice on plans for the removal of dissident Sikhs from the Golden Temple. The Prime Minister is content that the Foreign Secretary should proceed as he proposes. She will look forward to receiving a report on the adviser's visit and notes that the Home Secretary would be informed if the Indians seemed likely to proceed with their plan.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

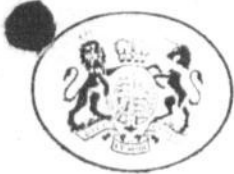
F. E. R. BUTLER

Brian Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

TOP SECRET AND PERSONAL

TOP SECRET AND PERSONAL

NBPM
Pl. file



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

23 February 1984

3

Dear Mr...

Sikh Community

The Home Secretary will have seen press reports of communal violence in the Punjab. The Foreign Secretary wishes him to be made aware of some background which could increase the possibility of repercussions among the Sikh communities in this country.

The Indian authorities recently sought British advice over a plan to remove Sikh extremists from the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The Foreign Secretary decided to respond favourably to the Indian request and, with the Prime Minister's agreement, an SAD officer has visited India and drawn up a plan which has been approved by Mrs Gandhi. The Foreign Secretary believes that the Indian Government may put the plan into operation shortly.

An operation by the Indian authorities at the Golden Temple could, in the first instance, exacerbate the communal violence in the Punjab. It might also, therefore, increase tension in the Indian community here, particularly if knowledge of the SAS involvement were to become public. We have impressed upon the Indians the need for security; and knowledge of the SAS officer's visit and of his plan has been tightly held both in India and in London. The Foreign Secretary would be grateful if the contents of this letter could be very strictly limited to those who need to consider the possible domestic implications.

I am copying this letter to Robin Butler (No 10), Richard Mottram (MOD) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Hand over

Oral statement to Parliament

Statement on the Indian Operation at Sri Harmandir Sahib in 1984

Organisation: Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Delivered on: 4 February 2014

Topic: Foreign affairs

Minister: The Rt Hon William Hague MP

World location: India

Location: House of Commons

The Foreign Secretary's statement to Parliament on the Indian Operation at Sri Harmandir Sahib in 1984.

The Rt Hon William Hague MP

With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the Cabinet Secretary's report on the Indian Operation at Sri Harmandir Sahib, also called the Golden Temple, in Amritsar in June 1984.

The House will recall that on 13th January concerns were raised regarding two documents released to the public in the National Archives.

The documents relate to the painful events that followed the occupation of the Temple site by Sikh dissidents in December 1983, which led to a six-month standoff with the Indian authorities.

In June 1984 a three-day military operation by Indian forces known as 'Operation Blue Star' took place. Official Indian government figures estimate that 575 people died. Other reports suggest as many as 3,000 people were killed, including pilgrims caught in the cross-fire.

This loss of life was an utter tragedy. Understandably, members of the Sikh community around the world still feel the pain and suffering caused by these events.

Given this, we fully understand the concerns raised by the two documents. They indicated that in February 1984, in the early stages of the crisis, the-then British government sent a military officer to give advice to the Indian government about their contingency planning.

Many in this House and the whole country rightly wished to know what connection, if any, there had been between this giving of advice and the tragic events at Amritsar over three months later.

Within hours of the documents coming to light, the Prime Minister instructed the Cabinet Secretary to carry out an urgent investigation in four critical areas: why advice was provided to the Indian

authorities, what the nature of that advice was, what impact it had on Operation Blue Star, and whether Parliament was misled.

The Cabinet Secretary was not asked to investigate Operation Blue Star itself, or the actions of the Indian government, or other events relating to the Sikh community in India.

While the Cabinet Secretary has investigated these specific matters, I can make clear that during his investigation no circumstantial evidence has been offered, or has surfaced, of UK involvement in any subsequent military operations in the Punjab.

This investigation has been rigorous and thorough.

The Cabinet Secretary and officials have met Sikh organisations to ensure that their concerns informed the investigation.

They have spoken to individuals associated with the two documents, although some officials are now deceased.

They have examined Hansard records from 1984 to the present day.

And they have carried out an extensive and thorough search of the files held by all relevant Departments and Agencies from December 1983 to June 1984.

Their search through some 200 files and over 23,000 documents found a very limited number of documents relating to Operation Blue Star.

The Report notes that some military files covering various operations were destroyed in November 2009, as part of a routine process undertaken by the MOD at the 25 year review point. This included one file on the provision of military advice to the Indian authorities on their contingency plans for Sri Harmandir Sahib. However, copies of at least some of the documents in the destroyed files were also in other departmental files; and taken together these files provide a consistent picture of what happened.

The Cabinet Secretary's investigation is now complete. Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and it is now being published on the government website.

The report includes the publication of the relevant sections of five extra documents that shed light on this period, but which would not normally have been published.

We have taken this step because the whole investigation has been based on a commitment to the maximum possible transparency. We want to be as open as possible with the British public, in so far as that does not undermine the principle upheld by successive British governments of not revealing any information relating to Intelligence or Special Forces.

The main findings of the Cabinet Secretary's report are as follows:

First, on why the UK provided advice to the Indian government, the Cabinet Secretary has established that in early February 1984, the-then government received an urgent request to provide operational advice on Indian contingency plans for action to regain control of the temple complex. The British High Commission in India recommended that the government respond positively to the request for bilateral assistance, from a country with which we had an important relationship. This advice was accepted by the then-government.

Second, the Cabinet Secretary then examined the nature of the advice that was provided to India following that decision. He has established that a single British military adviser travelled to India between 8th and 17th February 1984 to advise the Indian Intelligence Services and Special Group on contingency plans that they were drawing up for operations against armed dissidents in the temple complex, including ground reconnaissance of the site.

The adviser's assessment made clear that a military operation should only be put into effect as a last resort, when all attempts at negotiation had failed. It recommended including in any operation an element of surprise and the use of helicopter-borne forces, in the interests of reducing casualties and bringing about a swift resolution.

This giving of military advice was not repeated. The documents show that the decision to provide advice was based on an explicit recommendation to Ministers that the government should not contemplate assistance beyond the visit of the military adviser, and this was reflected in his instructions. The Cabinet Secretary found no evidence in the files or from discussion with officials

involved that any other form of UK military assistance – such as equipment or training – was given to the Indian authorities.

The Cabinet Secretary's report therefore concludes that the nature of the UK's assistance was purely advisory, limited and provided to the Indian government at an early stage in their planning.

Third, the report examines what actual impact UK advice had on the Indian Operation, which took place between 5th and 7th June 1984, over three months later.

The report establishes that during that time the planning by the Indian authorities had changed significantly.

The number of dissident forces was considerably larger by that time, and the fortifications inside the site were more extensive.

The documents also record information provided by the Indian Intelligence Co-ordinator that after the UK military adviser's visit in February, the Indian Army took over lead responsibility for the operation and the main concept behind the operation changed.

The Cabinet Secretary's report includes an analysis by current military staff of the extent to which the actual operation in June 1984 differed from the approach recommended in February by the UK military adviser. Operation Blue Star was a ground assault, without the element of surprise, and without a helicopter-borne element.

The Cabinet Secretary's report therefore concludes that the UK military officer's advice had limited impact on Operation Blue Star.

This is consistent with the public statement on 15th January this year by the Operation commander, Lieutenant-General Brar, who said that "no one helped us in our planning or in the execution of the planning".

It is also consistent with an exchange of letters between Mrs Gandhi and Mrs Thatcher on 14th and 29th June 1984 discussing the operation, which made no reference to any UK assistance. Those parts of the letter relevant to Operation Blue Star are published with the Cabinet Secretary's report today.

The Cabinet Secretary has also examined two other concerns raised in this House and by the Sikh community, namely that Parliament may have been misled, or that the decision to provide advice may have been linked to UK commercial interests.

The report finds no evidence to substantiate either of these allegations. The investigation did not find any evidence in the files or from officials of the provision of UK military advice being linked to potential defence or helicopter sales, or to any other policy or commercial issue. There is no evidence that the UK, at any level, attempted to use the fact that military advice had been given on request to advance any commercial objective. The only UK request of the Indian government, made following the visit, was for prior warning of any actual operation, so that UK authorities could make appropriate security arrangements in London. In the event, the UK received no warning from the Indian authorities before the operation was launched.

The Cabinet Secretary also concludes that there is no evidence of Parliament being misled. There is no record of a specific question to Ministers about practical British support for Operation Blue Star, and he concludes that the one instance of a Written Question to Ministers related to discussions with the Indian government on behalf of the Sikh Community after the Operation.

In sum, the Cabinet Secretary's report finds that the nature of the UK's assistance was purely advisory, limited and provided to the Indian government at an early stage; that it had limited impact on the tragic events that unfolded at the Temple three months later; that there was no link between the provision of this advice and defence sales; and that there is no record of the government receiving advance notice of the operation.

Nonetheless, we are keen to discuss concerns raised by the Sikh community. The Minister responsible for relations with India, My Rt Hon Friend the Member for East Devon, will discuss these with Sikh organisations when he meets them later today. This reflects the strong, positive relationship the government has with the British Sikh community which plays such a positive role in so many areas of our national life.

We are also determined to look at the wider issues raised by these events about the management and release of information held by government. Under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, the 30 year rule has been superseded by a 20 year rule, so that from 2022 all annual

releases will be after 20 years. However, it is not clear at the moment that this change is being approached in a uniform fashion by all departments. The Prime Minister has therefore decided to commission a review to establish the position across government on the annual release of papers and the ability and readiness of departments to meet the requirements of moving from a 30 to 20 year rule, including the processes for withholding information. This review will be carried out by the Prime Minister's Independent Adviser on Ministerial Standards, Sir Alex Allan.

Nothing can undo, Mr Speaker, the loss of life and the suffering caused by the tragic events at Sri Harmandir Sahib. It is quite right that the concerns that were raised about UK involvement have been investigated. It is a strength of our democracy that we are always prepared to take an unflinching look at the past.

But I hope this investigation and the open manner in which it has been conducted will provide reassurance to the Sikh community, to this House, and to the public, and in that spirit I present it to the House.