

2.10 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains to the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the recent deployment by the States of Jersey Police of semi-automatic rifles on the streets of St. Helier:

Does the Minister believe that the recent deployment by the States of Jersey Police of semi-automatic rifles on the streets of St. Helier was an appropriate reaction to the incident and does he stand by his statement that this incident reinforced the need for the police to be provided with Tasers?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand (The Minister for Home Affairs):

At the risk of over-crispness, the answer to both questions is yes.

2.10.1 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

It does seem to me that policing is something of an art and I am concerned that police officers who overreact to an incident do untold harm to the image and public confidence. Surely responding to allegations of assault should not require armed police breaking down doors to question a suspect that may have stabbed somebody with a screwdriver. So would the Minister explain precisely what serious threat to public safety justified armed officers breaking into a private residence? Or was this merely an attempt to try to justify the use of Tasers?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

The current policy of the States of Jersey Police, in relation to deployment of guns, follows that of U.K. forces. Guns may be deployed where a senior officer has reason to suppose that officers may have to protect themselves or others from the following subjects: (a) a person who is in possession of or has immediate access to a firearm or other potentially lethal weapon, (b) a person who is otherwise so dangerous that the deployment of armed officers is appropriate. I approve of those criteria. Those criteria were carried out where followed in this particular case. This involves an ongoing investigation, which is likely to lead to criminal charges and therefore I do not want to go into too much detail, but the information, as I understand it, which the States of Jersey Police had, was that a person had been stabbed in the face in St. Helier in broad daylight and they reacted to that information in accordance with the criteria which I have set out.

2.10.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Minister just mentioned the U.K. police. I would just like to remind him, when I stood against him for the Ministry and a lot of other Members supported me for one reason, that I said if I had the job, I would send our police to inner cities and see how it is done there and *vice versa*, only maybe over small amounts of time. Has the Minister progressed this, because we are deploying armed officers to one incident when in the U.K. they are dealing with demonstrations and everything armed only with CS gas, at the moment and not Tasers and not anything like what we do. Is the Minister for Home Affairs absolutely sure that our police are up to date, on the ball and are using good initiatives in all sorts of crime and will he look into sending them away?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I thank the Deputy for telling me what she said during a previous occasion when I, of course, was not here and I was unaware that she had said that, but I can assure the Deputy that the police are trained to a very high level. I can also assure you that in our current police chief, we have one who worked not very far from the centre of London, in the city of London, and had to deal with issues related to gun crime and other such issues, and so he is very much up to speed with that. I have full confidence in our officers, both senior level and in relation to, I understand, 31 trained firearms officers.

2.10.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I understand. Does not any form of training, does the Minister not agree, need renewing and it needs looking at in other contexts, in other areas? Jersey is very isolated and insulated and we have small amounts of crime and, like the incident the other day, I say we overreact very often and will the Minister not reconsider? It is always keep on training, keep on looking at best practice in other places just across the water.

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I do not agree that there was an overreaction recently. I would remind Members that we are still only less than 9 months since a tragic event in which 6 people were stabbed to death. The police must be prepared to act appropriately. Now, the current policy of the States of Jersey Police is to use minimum force in order to effect safety. But public safety is absolutely paramount and if the police receive information of a stabbing in the face in St. Helier, in broad daylight, they must react in such a manner as will ensure public safety.

2.10.4 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Much along the lines of my colleague, Deputy Martin, it is probably unfortunate that the Chief of Police used an example of: “No one would have expected someone to walk down the street in Guernsey with a samurai sword.” The last individual who walked through Jersey with a samurai sword had his case thrown out and dismissed. So rather than this, should the real emphasis not be on training for the police to make sure a proper case is made and people are brought to justice or given the help that they need?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

I do not think it is factually correct that in the incident the Deputy is referring to the person walked through St. Helier with a samurai sword. He took items to police headquarters and surrendered them. But the issue as to that particular case, in which I continue to be in correspondence with the individual victim, those issues are not policing matters. The police investigated that properly, it was a matter for prosecutors and for the courts as to how it was then dealt with.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Can I just correct the Minister, because the gentleman walked through town and tried to get a lift from a motorist armed with a Katana sword and 2 throwing knives.

2.10.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier

Would the Minister outline what alternative strategies were considered short of sending in the armed unit?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

No, I will not. This is an operational matter and I am not going to delve into operational matters in detail, particularly when we are dealing with a current investigation which is likely to lead to criminal charges. It is totally inappropriate for Members, with respect to the Deputy, to be asking me questions which would delve into those sorts of details.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier

Can I object? Would the Minister not acknowledge that knowing the policies in place is a matter of public importance and that he does not have to conflate that with dealing with a particular incident?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, if I may say so, you asked a question as to what alternatives were considered in that particular case, which is not a question of policy, that is an operational matter.

[11:00]

2.10.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

On the question of proportionality, I would ask the Minister for Home Affairs whether he thinks it was a proportionate response to send officers with automatic weapons as opposed to, let us say, a pistol. Surely automatic weapons are more appropriate for, say, an armed robbery or an act of terrorism?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

These are the standard weapons, as I understand it, which would be deployed by the States of Jersey Police on which they are trained. Pistols are notoriously far less accurate as weapons and I certainly would not want them to be deployed in response to incidents.

2.10.7 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

In relation to the Minister's last comment, all I can say is do not stand in front of me if I am using a pistol. I happen to be a rather good shot. It seems to me the Minister believes that an armed response to an allegation of assault is best done with Tasers rather than guns. Presumably he is suggesting it is preferable to be shot dead with electrical charge rather than a bullet. Would he agree that the belief that Tasers are less harmful than firearms means that they are in fact more likely to be used at the outset rather than as a last resort?

Senator B.I. Le Marquand:

If Tasers had been available in this particular case, then I am informed by the police that they would have deployed both Tasers and guns in response to this particular case. I am very much in favour of the police having the lower degree of lethality, if that is good English, of weapon available to deal with an appropriate incident and it is for that reason that in cases like this, cases which involve a knife, in particular or bladed weapon or something of that nature, it is highly desirable that the police deploy a lower level of force. Now, there is a category of cases, a matter which has been looked at by a Scrutiny Panel but I believe that there is a category of case where it would be appropriate to deploy Tasers where it would not be appropriate to deploy guns. But I do not accept that that, thereby, would make police officers more trigger happy and I have an example from Guernsey where I understand that they deployed Tasers on 60 occasions but only fired once, and that is the sort of ratio that I would also expect to happen in Jersey.