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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

Mr. McCloskey
Mr. Brown
29 1. 92
29 11

22 January 1992

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Sean O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

PSM
PSS
Mr Nally
Mr. Brown
Councillor A1
Sole Box
23/1

Dear Assistant Secretary

Alleged Leak of Information about Operation Loren

You will be aware that the British side raised with us here last Friday an article which appeared on page 9 of the Irish Independent headlined "border troops in fortress watch". They were concerned that the emergence of information about Operation Loren which involves the replacement of ten PVCs along the border, five initially in Fermanagh, before the work was due to start on 20 January. The British concern was conveyed to you and the matter was dealt with here on Friday on the basis of your instructions.

The reason for this letter is that that has not been the end of the matter. In the course of a telephone conversation with the British Deputy Joint Secretary on Friday, I was advised myself that there was the strongest concern at Ministerial level about the story. Over the weekend in the course of telephone conversations with Robert Alston about political matters, he told me that the story had been the most damaging for a long time and it might affect the provision of briefing to us in the Secretariat. He told me privately and not for attribution to him that Minister Mawhinney had put the story down to a leak at political or official level of the advance secret briefing given to us at Stormont on 10 January. Conscious that the British were in a state of emotion over the weekend about the Carrickmore bombing (which reinforced their concern about the Irish Independent story) and the controversy surrounding Mr Brooke, I told Alston that we would speak about it again this week. I did however ask him in the meantime to establish on his side what exactly was being alleged against us and why.

*Alston's
motives of
is Secretary?*

We got no response to that request but we did get a string of reminders about the depth of British concern, a formal request to Mr Crowley that the matter should be inscribed for discussion at the restricted session next Tuesday and comments from visitors to the Secretariat which made it clear that it was believed widely in the NIO that we had been guilty of a grave abuse of confidence

and that Ministers were going to take us to task etc. We were also referred to a follow-up story in the Irish News which appeared last Saturday under the heading "British Army to fortify border in Fermanagh"

In light of the British wish to discuss the matter at the next Conference, I asked Alston again today if he could elaborate on the charge that there had been a leak at political or official level on our side. His response was remarkably weak. He said it had been "assumed" by the security people that the leak must have come from a political or official source on our side and must have arisen because of the briefing given to us here on 10 January. I pointed out that the Irish Independent story was written by the security correspondent and referred in several places to security sources without giving particulars. Alston simply repeated that his side were deeply concerned and that it would be very helpful to his efforts to secure continued briefing on such matters if Minister Mawhinney were to receive an explanation at the restricted session next Tuesday and, most important, an assurance that the matter had not been leaked at political or official level.

I replied in fairly strong terms. I did not wish to minimise the importance of the matter or, still less, British concern about possible attacks on the personnel involved in Operation Loren. But the British side seemed to be asking us to perform a dance without specifying which dance they wished to see. They had made no effort to back up their allegations. I could not foretell what our Ministers might have to say but I doubted whether they would wish to engage in elaborate explanations at the behest of Minister Mawhinney and in the face of his assumptions about which I could imagine there might be some robust questioning.

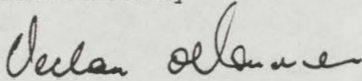
As to the implied threat not to give any further such briefings in the Secretariat, I said we attached importance to these briefings and it was the case that more information was passing between us these days. But the briefings were not some kind of grace and favour for which we should dutifully be grateful. The British side gave them in their own interest because they believed - rightly - that it could help them obtain a more understanding attitude on our side or at least prevent a burst of megaphone diplomacy. They knew very well that we would be under pressure from people living on both sides of the border about further inconveniences in their lives and worry about the future. It was also in the British interest to brief us because they would be requesting substantial cover from the security forces on our side of the border.

I pointed out that the story appeared in the Irish Independent a week after the briefing that had been given here and in the police channel, shortly after the local Bishops would have been

briefed (according to advance indications) and shortly before a wider briefing of community leaders.

In summary, unless the British had something more specific to offer, I suggested a good deal more caution in their remarks to our Ministers next Tuesday than had been evidenced here.

Yours sincerely



Declan O'Donovan
Joint Secretary