



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Reference Code: 2019/101/2225

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Loyalist paramilitaries - South Africa

Background Note

Persons apprehended

Noel Little and James King, both leading members of Ulster Resistance, and Samuel Quinn, a senior NCO and Missile Instructor in the Territorial Army; Douglas Bernhart, an American arms dealer based in Geneva; Daniel Storm, a member of the technical and administrative staff of the South African Embassy in Paris and an official of the South African Arms Corporation [ARMSCOR]. All four were arrested on Friday 21 April. Storm was released on the ground of diplomatic immunity. Little, King, Quinn and Bernhart were charged on Sunday 23 April with illegal dealing in weapons and have been remanded in custody. The maximum period of remand is 4 months and any further remand can be ordered "in chambers".

Weapons found

The four were apparently found in possession of a "cut-away" demonstration model of a Blowpipe ground to air missile which had been stolen from a Territorial Army base in Newtownards on 12 April.

Background:

- The South African Government does not hide their interest in obtaining samples of weapons or weapons technology notwithstanding the UN arms embargo. Such military items are then copied, manufactured and exported by ARMSCOR. While the Blowpipe system is of ageing design, the model on offer in Paris may have been of interest to them as a British Army "own forces" model which has more sophisticated electronics than the "export" model available on world markets.

- Apart from the Blowpipe system, the South Africans would have a particular interest in more advanced systems being manufactured and developed by Shorts in Belfast - in particular, the more advanced Javelin missile currently being manufactured and, more especially, the highly sophisticated Starstreak system which is undergoing research and development at Shorts. It is unclear at

this time whether the deal being struck in Paris involved a cash payment by the South Africans in return for arms technology or whether the loyalists were to be paid in the form of an arms shipment.

- Attention has again focussed on the question of security at Shorts. The British have told us in the Secretariat that there has been only one recorded theft at Shorts - on 31 October 1988, when an aiming unit for the Javelin was stolen. This unit has never been recovered and no one has ever been charged in relation to the theft. However, there are suspicions that other items and blueprints have "gone missing" from Shorts in recent years. Such suspicions are supported by the fact that an arms find associated with Ulster Resistance in November last year included parts of a Javelin aiming unit. The British have told us in the Secretariat that Shorts do not know where these parts came from and have assured us that they are of no operational significance. We have also been assured that following the theft at Shorts in October last year, there has been a security review at all Shorts plants, that a range of measures to improve security has been implemented and that the implementation of a further range of measures will be completed by July of this year.

- The Paris incident raises a number of questions relating to the background of the sizeable arms importation by loyalists in January of last year. That shipment is understood to have been financed from the proceeds of a major bank robbery in Portadown carried out jointly by the UDA, UVF and Ulster Resistance. The shipment was also a joint operation by the three organisations and is reliably reported to have consisted of 200 rifles, 90 pistols, 30,000 rounds, 450 grenades and 12 RPG 7's. Two major arms finds by the RUC appear to have recovered the UDA's share and roughly half of the UVF's share. However, little headway has been made in recovering the Ulster Resistance share of that shipment. Overall, a significant amount of weaponry did get through to loyalist paramilitaries and may have been instrumental in the upsurge of loyalist paramilitary activity in recent times. (This year alone, loyalists have accounted for 33% of all

fatalities in Northern Ireland, as compared with 24% in 1988 and 16% in 1987.)

- While no definite link has been established between the South African Government and that arms shipment, there are reports that the South Africans, using Douglas Bernhart, may have acted as a go-between in arranging for the shipment in a "money for guns" deal involving a source in Lebanon. (Given the links between Israel and South Africa, these reports have in turn fueled a suspicion that the guns may have originated in Israel in the form of captured PLO weapons.) Overall, it is still unclear as when and how links were established between the loyalists and South Africa, though such links are thought to have originated through an uncle of Alan Wright (former leader of the Ulster Clubs with links to Ulster Resistance), who is reported to be an official of ARMSCOR.

Ulster Resistance

In face of the unwillingness of the UDA or the UVF to respond to Unionist politicians desire to act against the Agreement, loyalist politicians and businessmen created Ulster Resistance in November 1986. Principal among the politicians were Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson. Statements by Robinson gave the impression that the Ulster Resistance might be called upon to "fight". They were widely criticised by other politicians and churchmen as encouraging militancy. Moylneaux kept his distance from this organisation. The movement became beset with internal differences and Paisley and Robinson publicly disassociated themselves in November of last year. However, notwithstanding that "public disassociation", it is widely believed that the DUP, and more particularly Peter Robinson, continued to be a major force within Ulster Resistance. Indeed, the recent statement by Paisley that he intends to visit the men in prison in Paris raises questions about just how far Paisley himself has disassociated from the movement.

Government Reaction:

The Tanaiste issued a statement on 24 April expressing serious concern at the ability of loyalist paramilitaries to obtain weapons and sensitive material within Northern Ireland and indicating that the matter was being discussed with the British Authorities and that he had issued instructions that a protest in the strongest terms be made to the South African Government about the apparent involvement of a South African diplomat in the affair. In a statement to the Dail the next day, the Tanaiste

- congratulated the French Government
- outlined the terms of the strong protest made to the South African Government through the Ambassador in London
- expressed the Government's deep concern, as conveyed to the British Authorities, about the security implications of the ability of loyalist paramilitaries to obtain military equipment from establishments in Northern Ireland.

British Government Reaction: On 23 April, the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, in a reply to a special notice question in the Commons expressed the British Government's serious concern and indicated that the South African Ambassador had been summoned to the Foreign Office to be told of the grave view taken by the British Government of the matter.

This was followed on the 5th May when the British Government expelled 3 members of the South African Embassy - a Counsellor, First Secretary and a Sergeant in the Military Attache's office. While the British Government denied that the three had been involved with the Paris affair, it is understood that the three were selected on the basis of their probable links with ARMSCOR.

French Government Reaction:

On 28 April, the French Government formally expelled Storm and two other South African diplomats, who while not apparently directly involved with Storm, are understood to have been

involved with an earlier attempt by ARMSCOR to obtain French weapons technology.

South African Government Reaction: Foreign Minister Botha issued a statement on 24 April which reiterated their opposition to terrorism and gave the South African Government's assurance that it "is not supplying arms to any terrorist organisation". At the same time, he made it clear that it is the role of ARMSCOR to maintain South Africa's defence capability and that if "the actions in question exceeded South Africa's reasonable requirements, this had occurred without the knowledge of the South African Government and that if any organisation or individual is guilty of any contravention in this area, steps will be taken against those involved and it will also be ensured that no repetition occurs."

On 3 May, the South African Defence Minister (Magnus Malan) told the South African Parliament that their investigation "brought to light that there are state officials who were caught up in matters or activities which did not have the approval of Government and which were unauthorised". While admitting that South Africa was forced by the UN arms embargo to use the international arms black market and that "this market followed its own rules and had a moral code which did not always conform with diplomatic and legal standards", he reiterated their unequivocal opposition to terrorism and stated that "South Africa does not deliver or sell weaponry to terror organisations."

B. J. J. J.

Anglo/Irish Division
10 May 1989