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AMBASAÍD NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

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SECRET

17 September 1991

PA
Rents
to Embassy
London
file

Mr Sean O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear Assistant Secretary

You will wish to be aware of a conversation which I had recently with John Ware of BBC Panorama. Ware was the producer of the controversial programme on the UDR some time ago and, more recently, their programme on shoot-to-kill. He is currently preparing a programme on the Anglo-Irish Agreement in the aftermath of the recent talks initiative.

I have known Ware for some years from my previous position in Anglo-Irish Division. His reporting has tended to focus very much on security issues where his coverage has generally been very sympathetic to our concerns. However, because of this focus on security issues, he has tended at times to be led into the somewhat shady and duplicitous world of paramilitary and security force intelligence activities in Northern Ireland.

It is in that context that Ware has maintained a continuing relationship with the former Belfast chief of UDA intelligence, Brian Nelson, who was arrested as a result of the Stevens Inquiry and who is currently being held on remand in Crumlin Road Prison charged with murder.

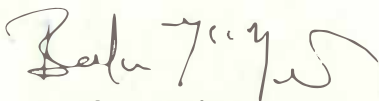
Ware's relationship with Nelson began some months before Nelson's arrest, when Ware was researching material for Panorama in Northern Ireland. At that stage, Nelson was being used by the UDA leadership as a source of inspired leaks to the media designed to damage the Stevens Inquiry and the RUC. He has maintained contact with him since his arrest - visiting him on a number of occasions in Crumlin Road Prison.

Ware described Nelson's current state of mind as confused. On the one hand, he is naturally angry at being dumped on by the army and being left to take the fall. At the same time, he appears to still have some faith that, in the end of the day, the army will look after him. The most obvious evidence of Nelson's residual faith in the army is the fact that he still retains the services of a firm of solicitors closely associated with legal work on behalf of the Ministry of Defence in Northern Ireland. Ware told me that he could not form a judgement one way or the other as to whether Nelson will in the end enter a vigorous defence - something which Ware felt could prove deeply embarrassing for the army.

As an example of the type of "embarrassment" which could arise, Ware told me that while Nelson denied that his army handlers had ever suggested possible assassination targets to him, Nelson mentioned by way of an aside that they had on one occasion suggested to him that the UDA should draw up plans for a bombing campaign in the South. Apparently his army handler at the time felt that this would have a "positive effect" on southern attitudes on extradition. Ware was inclined to believe Nelson's allegation on this point largely because of the manner in which he made it - "as though it was a minor matter of little consequence". Ware told me that Nelson seemed genuinely unaware of the profound seriousness of such an allegation. The plans in question are apparently part of the box of files which the Stevens team retrieved from army intelligence in Thiepval Barracks. (Nelson, who realised that the Stevens team were closing in on him, had earlier handed the files to military intelligence for safe-keeping.)

I am passing on the above for your information. I am not in a position at this stage to form a judgement on the degree of credence which can be placed in Nelson's allegation which, if it enters the public domain, will obviously cause considerable controversy. In that context however, I understand that Nelson is, at the moment, anxious to avoid further publicity and has no plans to go public with this latest allegation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Brendan McMahon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brendan McMahon
Press & Information Officer