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British contacts with Libya

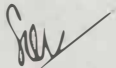
1. The British Ambassador, Mr. David Blatherwick, called to see me on 18th June to give further details of the meeting in Geneva between the British and the Libyans on support for the IRA. He said the British are continuing to evaluate the information but their initial view is that the details on arms shipments are largely in keeping with their own assessments. The information on funding reveals that Libya had given the Provisional IRA far more money than the British had thought. On the other hand, the Libyan information on training of Provisional IRA members was sparse and the details of the training imprecise. The information on Libyan contacts with Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin members was wholly inadequate and the British do not believe the implication that all Libyan contacts with the Provisional IRA ended in January 1990. The overall British assessment is that the Libyans have told them only what they suspect the British already know, with the intention of drawing them into further exchanges. While the British might be able to obtain information on the Provisional IRA, they felt the Libyans were unlikely to compromise Libyan personnel or operations. Despite what they regarded as the inadequacies of the information, they considered the fact it was provided as a positive step. They were taking a relatively positive line in public to encourage "both the Libyans to continue to be forthcoming, and PIRA's misgivings over what the Libyans had told us". The British have not yet decided on the next steps. Whether or not they reverted to the Libyans would largely depend on the outcome of the full assessment of the information.
2. Ambassador Blatherwick added a number of details. The Libyan delegation in Geneva was Mr. Al-Obeidi, a former Libyan Foreign Minister and representative to Tunis,

Messrs. Mohammad Muftah and Saleh Musallam, from the Libyan Foreign Ministry and the Libyan Chargé in Geneva. Most of the talking was done by Al-Obeidi.

3. After the UN representative had withdrawn, both the British and Libyan sides confirmed that the purpose of the meeting was simply for passing and receiving information and that it would not involve negotiations or discussions of other matters.
  
4. The broad picture which the Libyans had given was that a first Libyan contact with the Provisional IRA occurred in 1973 via the USSR. The Libyans regarded the Provisionals as a liberation movement needing help against the British army. They had been given assistance on this ideological basis, in common with other liberation movements such as SWAPO, between 1973 and 1976. Between 1976 and 1984 all contacts stopped. The subsequent deterioration of Libyan/British relations (shooting of the British Constable, British involvement in raids on Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986) led the Libyans to decide as a matter of retaliation to renew relations with the IRA. Most arms and material help was given in 1986. The Libyans stressed that the purpose of this aid had been to enable the IRA to confront the British army and not to inflict civilian casualties. Since 1987 most military and material help had been stopped but some had taken place in a small way from 1988 onwards. The Libyans stressed that they were providing the information as a way of improving relations between Libya and the UK and they asked that the information be kept on a confidential basis between the two countries. The British Chargé said he could give no undertaking on that matter. The Foreign Ministry representative then dictated replies to the nineteen questions which the British had submitted earlier via the Italians. This gave names of contacts, etc. The Libyans answered most, but not all, of the issues raised in

these questions. Their replies made clear that massive quantities of arms and ammunition, including SAM 7 missiles had been delivered. Mr. Al-Obeidi stressed the Libyan's willingness to answer other enquiries, and to supply details, if required, of the passports of the Provisional IRA contacts.

5. The tone of the meeting was polite and correct. The Libyans clearly wished to demonstrate sincerity and good-will, no doubt with Lockerbie in mind. There was no attempt to broaden the discussion beyond its stated purpose or to engage in wider negotiations. I thanked Ambassador Blatherwick for the information, which I said seemed an encouraging sign of a Libyan change of policy vis-a-vis the IRA.



Seán O hUiginn

18 June, 1992

cc: PSS  
Mr. E. Barrington  
Mr. Nally  
Mr. Brosnan  
Ambassador Small  
Ambassador O' Connor, Rome