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FAX

To: HQ Press Section

From: Embassy London  
From: Helena Nolan

British Press Summary  
29 April 1994

There are extensive reports on yesterday's revelations of contacts between the IRA and Iranian intelligence with editorials in *The Times*, *The Financial Times* and *The Sun*.

*The Times* editorial views the "clandestine contacts" as "further proof of the untamed aggressiveness of Iran's revolution" and sets Iran's offer to the IRA in the context of President Rafsanjani's current campaign to bolster his revolutionary credentials at home, in the face of domestic political and economic difficulties. The editorial also considers it unlikely that Britain will take any stronger action against Iran and risk losing an annual £297 million of the British export market.

*The Financial Times* focuses on the wider implications of the revelations for the international image of the Iranian regime, lending weight to US assertions that Iran should be shunned by the international community.

*The Sun's* editorial headed "Mad Mullahs", calls for the expulsion of Iranians from Britain.

In most papers these latest revelations of contacts between Iran and the IRA are set in the context of longstanding links which are said to have existed since the 1980's. Many reports point to the provocative renaming of the Teheran street, on which the British Embassy stood, in memory of hungerstriker Bobby Sands. Reports link the operational head of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence in Europe, Emir Hussein Taghavi, with the IRA connection. Most reports also comment that the reported Iranian link, coupled with the recent upsurge in violence have increased doubts over the sincerity of Sinn Fein's attitude to the peace initiative. Unionist calls for tough action and sanctions against Iran are also widely reported.

In its front page report, *The Independent* refers to "informed sources" who said that "two centres of IRA Iran collaboration were Dortmund and Munster. They said a meeting was also held in November in Teheran with the IRA, the Greek 17 November Group, the Corsican nationalists and ETA, the Basque separatists. It was agreed then the 17 November Group should serve as a conduit between the IRA and Iran". *The Independent* also suggests that the initial report in Monday's edition of the Greek newspaper *Eleftheros Typos* on an Iranian/IRA drugs for guns scheme, was based on information leaked by the British intelligence services.

*The Mail* reports that it "has learned that Britain's intelligence service suspects Iran of being the source of at least one shipment of arms transferred to an IRA ship at sea last summer" and that "funds are believed to have been flowing into IRA coffers for the past 18 months." The *Mail* article continues with a detailed report on how the joint MI5, MI6 and Scotland Yard surveillance operation was launched 16 months ago following the interception of a telephone call between "a

man in Dublin thought to be an IRA quartermaster and a man in London" by GCHQ Cheltenham. The report claims that the Irishman was "watched" and "trailed" to various meetings with Iranians in Paris and at least three other European cities over the last year.

In its report *The Express* says that "last night Downing Street admitted that severing relations with Britain was on the cards". This report also refers to MI6 being aware of meetings in Paris and also in The Hague where money was handed over to the IRA, but claims that "intelligence chiefs decided to blow the whistle when an arms deal seemed imminent. There comes a time when the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. Britain has now reached that point, said one source."

*The Financial Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian* suggests that the IRA tilt towards Iran is a result of a decrease in US funding and a crackdown on racketeering in Northern Ireland. The FT also notes that two Germans were recently arrested in Greece in connection with a drugs operation involving the IRA and the Middle East. The FT considers that evidence of a link between the IRA and drug trafficking may impact on support for Sinn Fein in the forthcoming European elections. The report also notes that Warren Christopher has emphasised Washington's concern following a conversation with Douglas Hurd about the allegations. The FT also reports that Teheran has stepped up its links with the Japanese Red Army.

The other main story, which is linked to the revelations of contact with Iran, are reports of warnings from the RUC Chief Constable that the current renewed "wave of terror" in Northern Ireland may worsen and that the "defeated provos" may also be plotting revenge with another British bombing campaign. *The Independent* and *The Telegraph* editorialise on "the week's carnage" and "tit for tat sectarian murders" which *The Independent* describes as "deeply disillusioning".

*The Independent* editorial goes on to quote from the Taoiseach's speech on Wednesday and questions whether Sinn Fein can grasp or even recognise an historic opportunity.

*The Telegraph* considers that the latest spate of killings, though not new, "looks unusually ominous" as it may reflect the intention of "the hardliners in both communities" who wish to see the Declaration "consigned to oblivion". The editorial, which also refers to the Taoiseach's speech, goes on to warn that it would be "foolish" to mistake the silence of the Ulster Unionists on the peace process and Dublin's "manoeuvres and hints" to encourage Sinn Fein, for acquiescence. "It is not enough for Dublin to assume as it seems minded to, that Unionist feelings and views are a matter for London to deal with. Dublin appears to harbour a delusion that at the end of the day if it can deliver Sinn Fein to a conference table London can do likewise with the Unionists."

*The Guardian* editorial on the new South Africa parallels changes there with circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Other stories in today's papers include; brief reports on the outcome of the Fr Patrick Ryan case in Dublin, concerns about an IRA attempt to exploit D Day celebrations, a report in The Guardian that Mitchell McLaughlin has been granted a US visa to address the City Club in Cleveland Ohio and a Guardian parliamentary sketch piece by Simon Hoggart on yesterday's Northern Ireland Questions which focuses on tax deductible extortion and the subvention from the British exchequer and concludes that for the Unionists and the IRA "peace has become far too risky, would cost too much and upset too many people".

cc. A/Sec. D. Higgins  
T. Dalton A/I  
B. Kelly  
✓ cc. 29/4.

NOTE

Iran : Call by Iranian First Secretary

1. Dr. Vahid Karimi, First Secretary at the Iranian Embassy, called at his request this morning. His call, which was arranged before yesterday's British allegations of Iran-IRA contacts became known, was primarily for the purpose of discussing the date and agenda for the next meeting of the EU-Iran critical dialogue. Iranian Embassies in the Twelve capitals have been asked to raise this matter with Foreign Ministries.

X British allegations

2. Dr. Karimi however first raised the news of the alleged contacts. He said he had been speaking yesterday to Deputy Foreign Minister Vaezi and Dr. Ahani, Head of the West Europe Department of the Foreign Ministry, both of whom had advised him to issue the Iranian statement which appears in today's Irish papers. He had also been in touch with Dr. Ansari at the Iranian Embassy in London, who had had "a very tough day" yesterday. Dr. Karimi commended the Taoiseach's statement (reported in today's Irish Independent) about the allegations. He asked whether we had any information on the allegations and if this Department was involved in making any enquiries. I said the relevant Irish authorities were making enquiries but that Middle East Section was not involved. I added that as was well known any contacts with the IRA were a matter of great concern to the authorities here.

EU-Iran Critical Dialogue

3. Dr. Karimi then turned to the main purpose of his call. He was particularly keen to know whether we had any information on the likely agenda for the next round in the dialogue. I replied that the question of the dates would need to be settled first of all and that our understanding was that it fell to the Iranian authorities to come forward with proposals for dates. As for the agenda, that would likely comprise the established dialogue issues but would no doubt reflect also developments that had taken place since the Brussels meeting last November. Dr. Karimi said he would check



with Teheran to see what the Iranian position was on dates. Dr.Karimi mentioned that there had been "some misunderstanding" about the reception accorded to the recent EU demarche on the Rushdie case but that Iran "would receive the Rushdie letter". I said we would note that point. (Comment: the background briefly is that the EU has decided to let Iran seek dates for the next meeting because of the manner in which the Iranians had dealt with the most recent Rushdie demarche). I recalled that the pattern of meetings to date had been one dialogue meeting per EU Presidency and noted that if a meeting during the Greek Presidency were to take place, arrangements would need to be set in train well before the end of June.

#### Human Rights

4. Dr.Karimi handed over copies of four statements made by the Iranian delegation at this year's CHR in Geneva. He noted that the statements dealt inter alia with the Islamic concept of human rights.

#### Visit of Minister Andrews to Iran

5. Dr.Karimi described the visit as being "very successful" and would help to develop Irish-Iranian cooperation in the fishery sector.

#### Proposed Visit to Iran of Minister for Agriculture

6. Dr.Karimi said Minister Walsh was expected to visit Iran within the next few months to discuss Irish beef exports there. He said Irish beef was "very popular" in Iran.

#### UCD and Iran

7. Dr.Karimi said his Embassy was in touch with UCD with a view to setting up an English-language training project at third-level in Iran.

#### Agriculture Scholarships for Iranian Students

8. Around 20 Iranian students would be coming to Ireland to take up the D/Agriculture scholarships provided for within the framework of the Ireland-Iran Joint Commission. Dr.

Karimi is in touch with D/Agriculture on the arrangements.

Return of Iranian Ambassador to Dublin

9. Finally, Dr. Karimi said Ambassador Amin-Rad would resume his duties on Tuesday next, 3rd May. The Ambassador is currently in Teheran and was there during the visit of Minister Andrews.

S. Whelan

29 April 1994

cc. Political Director (in Moscow)

Mr. P. Hennessy

Mr. B. Hawkes

Mr. O Riain

Ambassador, Teheran