

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2011/127/1006
Creation Date(s):	2 June 1981
Extent and medium:	8 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Name:

IRA +

Libya

10 JUN 1981

AMBASCIATA D'IRLANDA
VIA DEL POZZETTO, 105
00187 ROMA
TEL. 678.25.41 - 2-3-4-6

571

cc

Mr. Kinsan

DI Taoiseach

Mr. Kirby

DI Justice

CONFIDENTIAL

PR 4/81 (Tripoli)
2nd June, 1981

Libyan connections with terrorism and subversion

Summary

1. The above subject was frequently mentioned to the Ambassador during his recent visit to Tripoli. The Libyans are clearly concerned about their image in this connection and have frequently disavowed support for terrorism in recent months.
2. The Spaniards recently demanded a clarification of remarks made by Ghadaffi about ETA. As a consequence, the Libyans issued a press statement to the effect that they did not support ETA's demand for Basque independence and they supported the territorial unity of Spain. The Spanish Ambassador said that he had been unable to obtain solid evidence of Libyan aid for ETA. Similarly the British Ambassador said that he had failed to uncover such evidence about Libyan involvement with the IRA in recent years.
3. The Libyan media apparently present the Northern Ireland situation as a straightforward struggle between "freedom fighters" and "British Imperialism". However the references made to Ireland by the Libyan side in the Ambassador's contacts with Libyan officialdom were unexceptionable. Ghadaffi stated in a radio interview on 15 May that Libya had never furnished military assistance to the IRA. He made a reference to Irish unity, which was also unexceptionable, in a speech in Moscow last month. Apparently, too, he has just repeated in a Time magazine interview that Libya gives the IRA moral, but not material, support.
4. The Greeks are concerned about reported Libyan contacts with dissident elements in Greece. The Swiss and Austrians are apprehensive about the activities of the very large staffs of the Libyan People's Offices in Berne and Vienna.

10 JUN 1981

AMBASCIATA D'IRLANDA
VIA DEL POZZETTO, 105
00187 ROMA
TEL. 678.25.41 - 2-3-4-5

571
cc.
Mr. Kinsman
D. Taisse
Mr. Kirby
D. Justice

CONFIDENTIAL

PR 4/81 (Tripoli)
2nd June, 1981

Libyan connections with terrorism and subversion

Summary

1. The above subject was frequently mentioned to the Ambassador during his recent visit to Tripoli. The Libyans are clearly concerned about their image in this connection and have frequently disavowed support for terrorism in recent months.
2. The Spaniards recently demanded a clarification of remarks made by Ghadaffi about ETA. As a consequence, the Libyans issued a press statement to the effect that they did not support ETA's demand for Basque independence and they supported the territorial unity of Spain. The Spanish Ambassador said that he had been unable to obtain solid evidence of Libyan aid for ETA. Similarly the British Ambassador said that he had failed to uncover such evidence about Libyan involvement with the IRA in recent years.
3. The Libyan media apparently present the Northern Ireland situation as a straightforward struggle between "freedom fighters" and "British Imperialism". However the references made to Ireland by the Libyan side in the Ambassador's contacts with Libyan officialdom were unexceptionable. Ghadaffi stated in a radio interview on 15 May that Libya had never furnished military assistance to the IRA. He made a reference to Irish unity, which was also unexceptionable, in a speech in Moscow last month. Apparently, too, he has just repeated in a Time magazine interview that Libya gives the IRA moral, but not material, support.
4. The Greeks are concerned about reported Libyan contacts with dissident elements in Greece. The Swiss and Austrians are apprehensive about the activities of the very large staffs of the Libyan People's Offices in Berne and Vienna.
5. It is believed by Western diplomats in Tripoli that financial considerations and administrative inefficiency are factors limiting Libya's ability to mount and maintain a coherent continuing programme of aid to subversive organizations abroad.

CONFIDENTIAL

PR 4/81 (Tripoli)

2nd June, 1981

Libyan connections with terrorism and subversion

The Secretary,
Department of Foreign Affairs.

Libya's attitude towards and alleged connections with terrorist and subversive organizations are closely followed by the Western European Missions in Tripoli and were frequently referred to during my courtesy calls and other contacts on my recent visit.

It is abundantly clear from statements made by Ghadaffi and other Libyans in recent months that they are concerned about the country's general image in this respect. Ghadaffi has repeatedly disavowed support for certain terrorist organizations. However, he seems to put the IRA in the same category as the Palestinians and to distinguish the operations of the Basque ETA from terrorism pure and simple. For convenience of reference, I quote two of his recent statements already notified to you by telex:

"So far as the Red Brigades or the Bader-Meinhoff band are concerned, we consider them to be simply terrorist organizations. The whole world knows that. So far as the ETA are concerned, it could be that they resort to terrorist actions but it seems to me that their aspirations - the independence of a region of Spain - are very clear and precise. It is different from the Red Brigades. The Irish IRA, which we support, is different from all three. We support the claims of peoples like the Palestinians but we condemn terrorism".
(Italian TV interview, 10 March, 1981).

He (Ghadaffi) defended the "revolutionary violence" of the Palestinians and the IRA. "We give our moral support to the Irish because they are fighting for their independence. Ireland is

TA
AMBASCIATA D'IRLANDA

VIA DEL POZZETTO, 105

00187 ROMA

TEL. 678.25.41 - 2-3-4-5

- 2 -

Ireland and Great Britain is Great Britain". (Italian press reports of Ghadaffi press conference in Tripoli, 15 March, 1981).

The Spanish Ambassador told me that the ambiguous reference to ETA was very badly received in Madrid. He had been instructed by telephone to seek an immediate "clarification". This he did in an interview arranged at very short notice with Foreign Minister Obeidi. He told Obeidi very frankly what Madrid required and it was provided by the Libyans in the following press statement issued by JANA, the official Libyan press agency, at 4 p.m. on the day following the TV interview in question:

"Colonel Ghadaffi stated on the occasion of an interview granted to Italian TV that the Red Brigades and the Bader-Meinhoff organization are both terrorist organization and represent the same kind of thing although they are wont to change their names. The Leader added that the Spanish Basque organization was seeking independence and that the Jamahiriyah does not support this demand but supported the territorial unity of Spain. He added that the problem of the Basques is an internal problem and that the Jamahiriyah does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. The Leader stated that he vigorously condemns all forms of terrorism".

The Ambassador said that Madrid was well satisfied with the terms of this statement. In regard to ETA, he said that he was constantly hearing reports of training being given to ETA people in Libyan camps and of other connections including the supply of arms. However, he had been unable to confirm these reports. In fact, he had no real way of doing so. ETA people could come into Libya from any part of the world carrying all kinds of passports.

The British Ambassador made brief reference to the IRA when I called on him. Certainly, there had been some involvement in the past and it was known that IRA and UDA people had visited Tripoli. However, he had failed to uncover evidence of any Libyan aid to the IRA in recent years although rumours of such aid and of IRA representatives being seen in Tripoli were persistent. He volunteered his view that any confirmation of the truth of these rumours would certainly mean a final and complete

- 3 -

rupture in the already strained relationship with Libya (my PR 2/81), including the closing down of his Embassy.

I was given to understand during my stay in Tripoli that the Libyan media generally presents the Northern Ireland situation as a straightforward struggle between "freedom fighters" and "British Imperialism" with no attention being given to any other factor such as, for example, the policy of the Irish Government. This was certainly the general impression that I gained from the news bulletins in Arabic, a language that I do not understand, on the main TV channel. More confidently I can say that it was the picture presented in the news bulletins in English and French broadcast on the second TV channel. Also, those Irish residents in Tripoli whom I succeeded in meeting during my stay confirmed to me that the Northern Ireland situation is in fact presented to the Libyan public in such stark terms.

The matter of Ireland came up twice during my meetings with Libyan officialdom. Mr Assia Babba of the Foreign Ministry (who is something like a Deputy Secretary in our terms) made reference to Northern Ireland but only in the context of the Catholic-Protestant confrontation there which he contrasted with Catholic-Protestant relations in the world generally. He referred to no other aspect of the question. Later the matter of Ireland was raised by Foreign Minister Obeidi during my call on him. As already reported (my PR 1/81), he seemed concerned only to indicate Libya's goodwill and to emphasize Libya's distaste for all terrorism and violence.

Obeidi and Assai Babba are sophisticated and experienced people and one may reasonably assume that their unexceptionable references to Ireland were carefully calculated. No doubt they are aware that Ghadaffi's public posturings are uncongenial to us.

Since returning from Tripoli I have read in the Italian press of further remarks made by Ghadaffi on 15 May in an interview given to a US radio station: "We are against the Red Brigades. We consider them to be a terrorist group and we have never furnished military assistance to them or to the guerrillas of the IRA or Salvador. We are decidedly against terrorism". This reference to the IRA is hardly true in view of what we know about the S.S.Claudia episode. However, it is interesting if it can

AMBASCIATA D'IRLANDA

VIA DEL POZZETTO, 106

00187 ROMA

TEL. 678.25.41 - 2-3-4-5

- 4 -

be taken as an indication of the present position and of future intentions. Perhaps Ghadaffi is now intent on mending his position about Ireland. We could hardly object to what he said at the Kremlin banquet in Moscow last month, as quoted in the weekly Jamahiriyah Ma

"The Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya believes that the Arab unity based on the masses and socialism and the Kurdistan, Irish, German and African unities are a development of the divided nations in order that they positively share in reinforcing peace in the world and developing the material and moral production enormously."

I have treated of his reference to German unity in another report. So as the mention of Kurdistan is concerned, the Turkish Ambassador in Tripoli told me that he had taken this up with the Libyans. He was assured that the target of Ghadaffi's reference was Syria. He believed that this explanation was true although he felt that it did not make strict sense. He said that it was not the first occasion on which Ghadaffi had made disconcerting statements about the Kurds.

The Greek Chargé said that Athens was somewhat concerned about reports of Libyan contacts with dissident elements in Greece. They had no proof. They know, however, that Ghadaffi had had some involvements with the colonels' régime. Interrogation had established too that the man now serving a prison sentence for the murder of a Libyan exile in Athens was a captain in the Libyan army. However, the Libyans had disavowed connection with him.

The Swiss and Austrian Chargés told me that concern was felt about the heavy staffing of the Libyan People's Offices in Berne and Vienna. There were 19 Libyans in the Berne Office and permission had been sought to open a consulate in Zurich. There were 17 Libyans in the Office in Vienna. In each case the local Government wondered what legitimate activity could exist to keep such numbers employed. The Pakistani Ambassador told me that, according to his count, members of the staffs of People's Offices had been expelled from 28 countries, entire staffs being involved in some of these cases.

- 5 -

Incidentally, I was told by some Western diplomats in Tripoli that they learned several months ago that the Libyans had selected someone to be head of their People's Office in Dublin. The official in question was named to them. However, he had now gone abroad to another post.

On the subject of Libyan connections with terrorism, two points were made to me in Tripoli (The diplomatic community is very close and I have the impression throughout that I was hearing the collective distilled wisdom of the body of Western diplomats). Firstly, Ghadaffi's financial resources are in fact not unlimited and he does not simply pour out money to his foreign associates. In this connection I understand that after the flamboyant break with Arafat last year (which, of course, is now healed) the latter issued a statement which sought to show that the amount of Libyan aid given to the PLO had been far from commensurate with Libya's public assertions of support. Secondly, the Libyan administrative machine is not believed to be capable of mounting and maintaining a coherent continuing programme of aid to subversive organisations abroad. As a qualification to this view, however, it is generally accepted that the stories of East German technical assistance for Libyan secret service activities are true.

I note that today's Italian papers carry two items relevant to the subject of this report. Speaking to Italian journalists in Rabat yesterday King Hassan said: "You have 20.000 Italians in Libya. They are hostages like the Palestinians in the Lebanon. If you did not have to fear for their fate, you would be freer to act against terrorism. But there is danger that they will end up in a concentration camp. Send no more Italians to Libya and you will be freer to act."

Yesterday also, according to the reports, Ghadaffi returned to the subject of the IRA in a Time magazine interview:

"There is no reason to include the PLO among the terrorist organizations; also the cause of the Irish people is not terrorism. We give the IRA moral, but not material, support."

In the same interview, Ghadaffi is said to have referred to the possibility

- 6 -

of recalling the Libyan students (some 4.000 in number) at American universities: "If anyone should choose to remain in the United States, that would mean that he had taken the side of America. There are revolutionary committees which practice revolutionary violence. Anyone who opposes the will of the people will be punished".

In regard to these committees, I noted from the Jamahiriya Mail (25 April) that a joint Libyan students Committee for Britain and Ireland held what was called a two-day festival in Birmingham to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the so-called students' rising of 7 April, 1976. They sent the following cable to Ghadaffi:

Dear Brother Ghadaffi
Great Al Fateh greetings

On 7 April, 1976, the students' struggle has been decisively won in favour of the revolutionary forces in the Jamahiriya. On this 5th anniversary, the Jamahiriya students in Britain (sic) express their aspirations in more genuine revolutionary practices through the revolutionary committees.

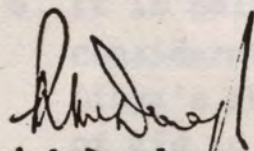
This occasion is a confirmation of the people's authority where wealth and power are in the hand of the people.

We promise you to follow the Al Fateh revolutionary course for freedom, socialism and unity guided by the Green Book.

God is Great..... Al Fateh for ever.....Committees are everywhere.

Jamahiriya students in Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

One may conjecture that the students in Ireland are lumped together with those in Britain so that the People's Office in London may exercise an appropriate measure of control. However, the arrangement seems to do some violence to Ghadaffi's thesis that "Ireland is Ireland and Great Britain is Great Britain".


Ambassador