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TELEGRAM NUMBER 97 OF 18 APRIL 1984
AND TO DESKBY 190001Z HONG KONG FOR SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR PRIME MINISTER FROM HOME SECRETARY
ANGLO/LIBYAN RELATIONS.

1. AS YOU KNOW THERE HAS BEEN SOME SLIGHT EASING TODAY IN THAT OUR STAFF IN THE EMBASSY IN TRIPOLI HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES. THE SITUATION, HOWEVER, REMAINS TENSE AND UNPREDICTABLE. THE NUB OF THE PROBLEM IS HOW TO GET ALL THE PERSONNEL OUT OF THE PEOPLE'S BUREAU IN ST JAMES'S SQUARE AND WITHIN THAT PROBLEM IS THE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT ISSUE OF THOSE WHO DO NOT IN OUR VIEW HAVE DIPLOMATIC STATUS. WE DO NOT KNOW WHO THESE ARE OR HOW MANY. I DO NOT HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT WE ARE DEALING WITH IRRATIONAL PEOPLE AND THERE CAN BE NO CERTAINTY THAT ANY PROPOSAL OR DEVICE WHICH WE PUT TO THE LIBYANS (IN TRIPOLI BECAUSE THAT IS WHERE THE INSTRUCTIONS COME FROM) WILL DO THE TRICK.

2. AS I SEE IT WE HAVE A NUMBER OF OPTIONS:-

(A) TO CONTINUE AS WE ARE. I DO NOT THINK THAT THIS COURSE IS LIKELY TO SUCCEED IN THE NEAR FUTURE SINCE THE LIBYANS HAVE BEEN MAKING IT INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT THEY ARE NOT PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE FURTHER WITH THE POLICE.

THE POLICE HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN REDUCING THE TENSION WITH THE PEOPLES BUREAU BUT THE LIBYANS SEEM TO BE PREPARED TO SIT IT OUT HOLDING THE THREAT OF RETALIATION AGAINST US.

(B) TO BREAK OFF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN THE NORMAL WAY.

THIS WOULD INVOLVE SETTING A DEADLINE FOR MUTUAL EVACUATION. THIS APPROACH WOULD WORK WITH A REASONABLY CIVILISED GOVERNMENT, BUT WE CANNOT NECESSARILY BE SURE IN THE CASE OF THE LIBYANS. THEY MIGHT MERELY REFUSE TO MOVE OUT WITHIN THE STATED DEADLINE.

(C) TO WORK FOR MUTUAL EVACUATION BY PUTTING A PACKAGE TO THE LIBYANS GUARANTEEING NOT ONLY FULL DIPLOMATIC TREATMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VIENNA CONVENTION FOR THOSE WHO HAVE IN OUR VIEW DIPLOMATIC STATUS, BUT ALSO FOR THE REST FREE ESCORTED PASSAGE TO THE AIRPORT FOR IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE. ONE VERSION OF THIS PACKAGE WOULD INCLUDE AGREEMENT IN ADVANCE THAT IT WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY A BREAK IN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS.

WE NEED THIS IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT THE PEOPLES BUREAU WILL REMAIN EMPTY. OTHERWISE THE RISK WOULD REMAIN THAT OTHER NON-DIPLOMATIC LIBYANS NOW IN BRITAIN WOULD RE-OCCUPY IT.

(D) AS FOR (C) ABOVE, BUT WITH THE DIFFERENCE THAT THE BREAK IN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WOULD NOT BE INCLUDED IN THE PACKAGE TO BE AGREED, BUT WOULD BE HELD IN RESERVE FOR UNILATERAL ACTION BY US LATER.

ONE DIFFICULTY HERE WOULD BE THAT WE SHOULD BE OPEN TO THE CHARGE OF HAVING MISLED THE LIBYANS UNLESS WE WERE ABLE TO FIND A FRESH PRETEXT AT A LATER STAGE THOUGH THAT MIGHT NOT BE TOO DIFFICULT: AND THE LIBYANS MIGHT THEN RESPOND FORCIBLY AGAINST OUR COMMUNITY IN LIBYA.

3. ALL OF THE ABOVE COURSES INVOLVE SOME RISK AND THE DANGER OF SOME DOMESTIC CRITICISM, AND I MUST REPEAT THAT THERE IS NO CERTAINTY THAT ANY OF THEM WILL WORK. WE HAVE, HOWEVER, TO CHOOSE THE LEAST OF THE EVILS.

4. ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE TO TRY TO SCALE DOWN OUR RESPECTIVE DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIONS, IN WHICH CASE WE WOULD HAVE THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS.

(A) THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE HEADS OF MISSION AS A MARK OF DISAPPROVAL LEAVING THE REST OF THE STAFF IN PLACE. THIS WOULD BE ENTIRELY UNSATISFACTORY IN THAT IT WOULD LEAVE THE PEOPLE'S BUREAU MANNED AS BEFORE.

(B) TO NEGOTIATE A SCALING DOWN ON BOTH SIDES. THIS MIGHT BE DIFFICULT TO AGREE ON AND WOULD LEAVE THE SAME PROBLEM AS IN (A), THOUGH ON A LESSER SCALE. IT WOULD ALSO NOT DEAL WITH THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE DIPLOMATIC STATUS IN THE PEOPLE'S BUREAU UNLESS WE ARE PREPARED TO IGNORE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEM.

5. RICHARD LUCE AND I ON BALANCE PREFER OPTION 2(C) THOUGH OPTION 2(D) IS A FEASIBLE ALTERNATIVE, EITHER OF COURSE WOULD POSE DIFFICULT PRESENTATIONAL PROBLEMS, INCLUDING THE FACT THAT WE HAVE HITHERTO INDICATED THAT WE SHOULD WANT TO SEE THOSE WITHOUT DIPLOMATIC STATUS QUESTIONED BY THE POLICE. WE WOULD HAVE TO FACE THESE PROBLEMS SQUARELY AND SAY THAT, REGRETTABLY, THIS COURSE INVOLVES LETTING A MURDERER GO FREE: BUT THE OBJECTIVE MUST BE TO AVOID FURTHER VIOLENCE OR LOSS OF INNOCENT LIFE. WE COULD ADD THAT ON THE BASIS OF PROFESSIONAL ADVICE IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE WOULD BE AVAILABLE TO BRING A CHARGE AGAINST ANY ONE OF THE 40 IN THE PEOPLE'S BUREAU WHO MIGHT HAVE FIRED THE SHOTS WHICH KILLED THE POLICEMAN. FURTHERMORE IT SEEMED TO BE THE BEST COURSE TO CLEAR OUT THE PEOPLE'S BUREAU QUICKLY, THEREBY REDUCING THE RISK OF ANY FURTHER VIOLENCE OR POSSIBLE DAMAGE TO BRITISH PROPERTY OR PERSONNEL IN BRITAIN OR IN LIBYA.

6. IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO USE AN INTERMEDIARY TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE LIBYANS. THE PROBLEM HERE IS THAT ANY NEGOTIATOR WILL TEND TO WORK TO A MIDDLE COURSE WHICH MAY BE DIFFICULT FOR US TO ACCEPT. ON THE OTHERHAND, IF WE COULD FIND A PERSON WHO ENJOYED BOTH THE CONFIDENCE OF THE LIBYANS AND OURSELVES, IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO USE HIM TO EXPLAIN CLEARLY TO THE LIBYANS EXACTLY WHAT WE HAVE IN MIND AND TO REASSURE THEM THAT WE SHALL BE WILLING TO CARRY OUT ANY COMMITMENTS THAT WE MAKE. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT AT PRESENT THEY BELIEVE THAT ONCE WE PERSUADE THEM TO LEAVE THE BUILDING WE SHALL ARREST OR SHOOT THEM.

7. SOME OF THE LIBYANS NOW SEEM TO BE BEHAVING AS IF THEY WOULD LIKE TO FORGET WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST FEW DAYS AND TO 'GET BACK TO NORMAL WORK' WITH US AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. BUT WE ARE ALL AGREED THAT AFTER WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST FEW DAYS THIS WOULD BE QUITE UNACCEPTABLE.

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