

Prime Minister has seen. *MR 27/4*
h.c.

As of about midday today the situation was as follows.

There is little fresh news from Tripoli. But the impression in London is that the situation there is not particularly tense. It still looks as though women and children may be allowed to leave the Embassy but the Ambassador will obviously have to judge the moment for this. The Ghanaian Ambassador in Tripoli has offered to mediate - no response has yet been given.

Similarly, there have been no significant new developments at the Libyan Embassy in London. We are still awaiting a response from Fitouri as to what the people inside the Embassy intend to do.

Cobra were agreed this morning that at some stage we should break diplomatic relations. But the question of timing is still being discussed.

The FCO tend to favour an early break in relations accompanied by an agreed framework for the departure of our people from Libya.

Cobra also discussed how we should treat the non-diplomats in the Libyan Embassy. The Libyans will, of course, make no distinction between their diplomats and non-diplomats. The FCO take the view that the Libyans are most unlikely to agree to surrender anyone in that Embassy - they also argue that the possibility of successful legal action being taken against anyone there is remote.

.../...

But the Home Secretary is taking a rather different view to the FCO. He is receiving advice from the police that the ending of diplomatic relations would be regarded by the people in the Libyan Embassy as a hostile act and an escalation of the situation, presaging forceful action. The police tactic is that of a classic siege, aiming to wear down the confidence of the Libyans.

The Home Secretary is also inclined to think that we should distinguish between the diplomats and non-diplomats in the Libyan Embassy, presumably only allowing the diplomats to leave, at least in the initial stage.

Andrew asked me how fastidious you were about whether we should attempt to bring one or more people to trial. I said that I did not think you could reasonably be asked to take a view when we were so far from the scene and there were divided views in London. I asked that we should receive a telegram later in the day, authorised by the Home Secretary and Richard Luce, containing the latest advice on the problem.

You should also know that no-one in London - neither the Home Secretary, Richard Luce nor Anthony Acland - see a case for your returning early. They detect absolutely no criticism of your absence. But more seriously, they fear that if you curtailed the visit, particularly given the meal which the media would make of this, a wrong signal could be sent to the Libyans. We could give an impression that some decisive action was about to be taken and this impression might be given at just the wrong time in the various negotiations that are going on. I must say that I think that this is wise advice.