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ANGLO/LIBYAN CRISIS: SITUATION REPORT AS AT 2000 HOURS 23 APRIL 1984

(Report from the scene at Annex)

MEDIA REACTIONS TO MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS ON THE BREACH

1. Media reactions to the decision to break-off relations have favoured the decision to breach. Adverse comment has concentrated on -

- a. The "Release of the murderer";
- b. Why action was not taken earlier;
- c. Whether the provision of the Vienna Convention can be considered satisfactory in the light of events at the Libyan People's Bureau.

2. Ministers will be considering the best approach to adopt on each of these topics in preparing the draft statement to the House (and question and answer brief) on Wednesday.

ACTION AGAINST LIBYANS

3. The police and security service have identified a number of Libyans whom it might be appropriate to deport on the grounds that their presence here is not conducive to the public good. The Home Secretary signed a deportation on one, Mabruk, this morning; Mabruk duly left on the 1510 hours flight to Libya this afternoon. A Libyan thought to be Baghdadi, against whom the Home Secretary has signed a notice of intention to deport, was arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions Act) at Heathrow Airport this afternoon. Police are trying to establish his identity for certain before involving the remainder of the deportation process.

REACTION AMONG THE LIBYANS IN THE PEOPLE'S BUREAU IN LONDON

4. There were two meetings between Fitouri and British officials today.
5. The impression given by the Libyans was that those in the LPB, the Consulate and student centre were prepared to move out by Sunday, and a number of practical matters were discussed, although the details remained to be settled. The idea of a move of personnel from the LPB to a "safe location" (Sunningdale) was mooted; Fitouri took note, but made clear that their preference was for a direct move from the LPB to the airport. He also said that some LPB staff

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might like to leave the United Kingdom in their private cars. News interviews over the telephone to the LPB by BBC and Independent Radio News had spokesmen for the Bureau saying that they would not leave before Sunday. Libyan radio reported that those in the LPB had been cabled by Tripoli to say that they were prepared to die in the process of defending their beliefs (there is no corroboration for this story from Security Service sources).

6. Secret sources indicated that the personnel in the LPB were relieved at the prospect of departure, and were continuing to make preparations for it. No firm instructions have been received from Tripoli but intelligence supports public statements that their departure from the Bureau will be delayed until Sunday.

LIBYA

7. Our decision to break relations appears to have surprised the Libyans and given us the initiative for a time. There has been no formal substantive reply to our decision to break relations, apparently because as Treiki has told us a decision on a break will be referred to the People's Congresses. But, in practical terms HM Ambassador's contacts with Treiki today and our dealings with the LPB here suggest that the Libyans may be ready to be reasonably co-operative over the departure of the LPB and our Embassy staff by the deadline. They are sending a senior figure, al Rahman Shaibi (of deputy Minister rank) to London to oversee the departure. He is expected to arrive tomorrow (probably on the Libyan arab airline flight arriving at 13.55 though this timing is not yet confirmed). But they clearly intend to apply their concept of reciprocity to the end and have imposed new restrictions on the movements of members of our Embassy in Tripoli. We have discussed with HMA Tripoli arrangements for evacuation of our staff and families. The Libyans may send a special aircraft. We are looking at the possibility of chartering an aircraft from British Caledonian to bring out staff and baggage.

8. We cannot be sure that Qaddafi will not follow up his tough words with action against our people in Libya. We can place little reliance on Treiki's assurance that the British community is welcome to remain in Libya. Treiki told HMA Tripoli again today that charges might be brought against the British Caledonian Station Manager, Ledingham, who has been detained since 19 April.

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9. Treiki's statement that our decision to break relations would be referred to the People's Congresses which alone had power decision on such questions was not reassuring. Some form of "rentacrowd" reaction can be expected, perhaps including further summary detentions. We have instructed a wide selection of posts to make urgent approaches to foreign governments to enlist their support and help in putting pressure on the Libyans to honour their international obligations. The Prime Minister's personal messages to Heads of State have elicited valuable expressions of sympathy and willingness to help. They have been followed up by the posts concerned, and if the going gets tougher it may be necessary to do so again. We shall be arranging a Community briefing on 24 April to mobilise support among the Ten. We have instructed our Embassy on Bonn to urge the Germans to hint to the Libyans that unless the Libyans co-operate with us Genscher may cancel his proposed visit to Libya on 30 April. The US has welcomed our decision to break relations, but as yet there has been little reaction from other countries, presumably because of the holiday period.

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ANNEX

Report from the Scene

There have been no significant developments at the Scene. Libyan Peoples Bureau contacts with negotiators confirm that they were unsettled by the decision to break off relations, but some of them evidently welcome the prospect of returning to Libya. Perhaps as a result of that, the first two meetings to negotiate exit arrangements have gone relatively easily and no major difficulties over such crucial points as freedom of movement and personal search procedures have emerged. The Libyans have been pressed to provide lists of the personnel in the various buildings involved. They confirmed their willingness to do so and stated that the families of those involved have already started packing. The Libyans also notified us of one or two compassionate cases, including for example a 12 year old girl, daughter of a member of staff who is undergoing treatment for leukaemia. They are providing full details of such cases, which we undertook to consider carefully.

Today's progress may be deceptive: we would expect it to be slowed or reversed by the intervention of the emissary from Tripoli who arrives tomorrow. But the next negotiating meeting on exit arrangements is at 10 am tomorrow and Fitouri and Zlitni appear to look forward to it quite happily.

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