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From the Principal Private Secretary

9 May 1984

LIBYA

Your Secretary of State raised with the Prime Minister this afternoon his concern over the steps which might be taken to protect the British community in Libya against possible reprisals by Colonel Qadhafi for actions for which Libyan dissidents in Britain had claimed responsibility. Your Secretary of State said that he had put in hand steps to update the contingency plans for evacuating British nationals, in consultation with the protecting power, but also wished to consider what advice should be given to the British community and what special steps might be open to the British Government, if for example, Colonel Qadhafi detained a number of British nationals. He had arranged for the Foreign Office to convey a meeting this afternoon of officials from the Home Office, Ministry of Defence, Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Transport; and he suggested that a similar group would need to meet at ministerial level under his Chairmanship. He was also considering what line should be taken with other European Foreign Ministers at the Foreign Affairs Council.

The Prime Minister agreed to the establishment of a ministerial and official group on the lines proposed by the Foreign Secretary; and asked Sir Robert Armstrong to constitute these as Cabinet Office Committees in the MISC series. I have asked Sir Robert Armstrong's office to be in touch with yours about the arrangements.

I am copying this letter to Hugh Taylor (Home Office), Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), Callum McCarthy (Department of Trade and Industry), Dinah Nichols (Department of Transport), and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

E. E. R. BUTLER

Len Appleyard Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

Sir Robert Armstrong

Inquiry into the events leading up to the incident outside
the Libyan People's Bureau

The Prime Minister discussed your minute of 4 May (AO84/1347) this afternoon with the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, yourself and Sir Antony Duff.

You said that the first part of the inquiry, covering a detailed narrative of intelligence of events in the period between 18 February and 17 April, was well advanced. The second part of the report would analyse failures or shortcomings in procedures and make proposals for remedies. The report would not attempt to allocate the blame but would concentrate on achieving the agreement and co-operation of all concerned in measures which would be effective for the future. It appeared likely that the recommendations would include both the establishment of a new assessment group within the JIC to co-ordinate intelligence and a new operational group under the Home Office to direct measures requiring to be adopted in the light of such intelligence. Both groups would incorporate the police, and thus raised difficult problems of reconciling the concern of the intelligence agencies with the protection of sources with the police requirement for direct access to information. These problems were likely to be solved by the nomination of a very limited number of Special Branch officers who would be given direct access to intelligence, on the basis of which they could frame instructions to other branches of the police. It would also probably be necessary to give the Metropolitan Police extended responsibility for measures against terrorism outside the Metropolis similar to those which they have in relation to Northern Ireland.

The Foreign Secretary said that the Foreign Office were separately organising a review to deal with irregular types of representation such as the People's Bureau and the treatment of people claiming diplomatic status who were suspected of handling firearms or promoting terrorism. This review would also cover the Vienna Convention. You added that a separate exercise, led by the Cabinet Office, was being conducted into the manning of key offices during the silent hours.

/ In discussion,

In discussion, these measures were thought to be satisfactory. It was essential that intelligence should not only be made available to those who have an operational need to see it, but that the new arrangements should leave no room for doubt about who was responsible for initiating action on it. It was also necessary to set up new arrangements to ensure that information about impending demonstrations outside diplomatic premises was made available to the Foreign Office. It was also agreed that recent events underlined the importance of attempting to re-establish the convention that the operations of GCHQ and other intelligence agencies were not discussed in public.

BF | Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that it was agreed that work should be carried forward as proposed by you and the Foreign Secretary, taking account of the points made in discussion. The aim should be to present the report of the internal inquiry into the events outside the People's Bureau by 15 June. In the meantime, arrangements should be put in hand for improved liaison between departments, the intelligence agencies, and the police on the lines already proposed, and the joint intelligence organisation should take steps to ensure that the intelligence agencies were put on the necessary alert to cover developments in Libya and Iran.

I am copying this minute to Mr Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), and Mr Taylor (Home Office).

F.R.B.

9 May 1984