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cc'd PSS  
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to T. Malby  
to P. ...  
to Kirby, Justice  
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# BRITISH INFORMATION SERVICES

February 20 1986

POLICY BACKGROUND

## 3/86 IRA ARMS FIND: POSSIBLE LIBYAN CONNECTION

Police in the Republic of Ireland arrested 5 men and seized over 100 guns and some 18,000 rounds of ammunition in Cos. Sligo and Roscommon on 26 January 1986. Some of the crates carried the words Libyan Armed Forces and Irish newspapers reported Garda sources as saying that the arms and ammunition might have come from Libya. The Irish authorities are pursuing their enquiries into the possibility of a direct link with the Libyan government although no conclusive evidence has yet come to light.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland sent a personal message of congratulations to Mr Michael Noonan, then Minister of Justice in the Republic of Ireland. In this message the Secretary of State said:

"I was delighted to hear of the successful operation which resulted in the seizure of weapons by the Gardai yesterday. It underlines clearly the importance of close co-operation between our security forces. No one can question the amount of suffering and human misery that these weapons could have caused and their seizure is most welcome news."

Press cuttings relating to the IRA arms seizure are attached together with a BIS Policy Background issued in May 1984 referring to various public statements by Libyan representatives at the time indicating that Libya might resume its support of the IRA.

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AEHlct

Ai-6, PSp l/a/c/d

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May 7 1984

POLICY BACKGROUND

3/84. LIBYA AND THE IRA

There have been several recent public statements by Libyan representatives indicating that Libya may resume its support of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). If these threats were carried out, it would be a serious step and would make the problem of deterring international terrorism that much more difficult. These threats have provoked a strong reaction, not only in the United Kingdom but also in the Republic of Ireland. The Irish Government issued two statements - the first on April 30 saying "The Libyan authorities are fully aware of the position of the Irish Government in relation to the IRA and other illegal organisations. Every appropriate opportunity is taken to restate its views"; and the second on May 2 expressing the Irish Government's "gravest concern" at Colonel Qaddafi's reported statement that he would provide support for the IRA.

Libyan comments have, in fact, varied in tone. The Voice of the Greater Arab Homeland, in a political commentary broadcast in Libya on April 22, said:

"The People's Committees will form an alliance with the secret IRA in view of the fact that it champions the cause of liberating the Irish nation from the tyranny of British colonialism. The People's Committees will open branches for the secret IRA in all Libyan towns, and if Britain tries to use any means to pressure and oppress Libyan Arabs, the Revolutionary Committees will enable the IRA to do whatever it wishes in Britain and retaliate twice as strongly."

A front-page article on April 23 in Green March, the organ of the Libyan Revolutionary Committee in Tripoli, said:

"The revolutionary forces will co-operate with the IRA for the liberation of Ireland ... If the British Government acts against the Libyans in Britain then the Libyan revolutionary forces will help the IRA to do the same in Britain ... If Great Britain does not surrender the criminals it is

/harbouring ...



harbouring, and who are wanted by Interpol, the revolutionary forces of the Jamahiriya will not abide by international law and will take revolutionary action."

Colonel Qaddafi, in an interview broadcast on French television on April 30, said that "Ireland has a right to its independence and is fighting in a just cause". He pledged his "complete support for its independence and unification". However, apparently equating the IRA with the security forces, he added "We condemn the methods used by the British Government, just as we do the methods used by the IRA".

### Background

In the early 1970s Libya provided tangible support for the Provisional IRA. In March 1973 a Libyan arms consignment on the Cypriot vessel Claudia was intercepted by the Irish Navy and Joe Cahill, a leading Provisional, was among six Irishmen arrested. These arms, mainly of Russian origin, had been loaded on board at Tripoli by Libyan soldiers.

Subsequent Libyan attitudes towards Irish extremism have been equivocal. In 1979, after the conviction in Dublin of Thomas McMahon for his part in the murder of Lord Mountbatten, there were allegations that in 1975 he had gone to Libya for training in the use of explosives. But in April 1975, an Irish parliamentary delegation reported, on its return from Libya, that the Libyan authorities had undertaken that in future "no aid would be given to any illegal organisation in Ireland". President Qaddafi said in September 1976: "...our relations with London and Dublin are improving rapidly ... the IRA chapter is behind us" (reported in Newsweek, 20 September 1976).

However, by 1980, Libyan radio broadcasts again began to refer to "aid to Ireland". In 1981, at the time of the Republican hunger strikes, Colonel Qaddafi sent a letter to the UN Secretary-General criticising the "British non-humanitarian code of conduct" in Ireland; his letter was circulated throughout the UN and distributed abroad by Libyan representatives.

In August 1982, after the Falklands conflict (in which Libya had supported Argentina), reports in the Libyan media indicated a more committed Libyan attitude. They included reporting of a speech by David O'Connell, described as "a leader of the IRA", which referred to the war against "British colonialism", and references to the IRA as "freedom fighters struggling against the British military presence".

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