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29 February 1996

Mr. Sean O hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr. McEnty } *file*
Ms Reeve } *file*
cc'd 1/3

PL.PA *CB SEC 7*
cc CB SEC 7-3

Dear Second Secretary

Michael Legge's visit to Secretariat

Michael Legge of the Northern Ireland Office came to lunch in the Secretariat today, accompanied by the British Joint Secretary Peter Bell.

During the course of a wide-ranging discussion, we stressed the difficulties which decommissioning would pose for the IRA pointing out that there was no precedent for such action. Legge responded to the effect that there was a very strong body of opinion within the Conservative Party, and among the general public in Britain, in favour of decommissioning. Legge claimed to know, through intelligence sources, exactly how many general purpose machine guns that the IRA had at their disposal. He went on to say that when it came to rifles and handguns, they would know to within 50 to 100 guns how many were available to the IRA.

We questioned how accurate British intelligence assessments could be, given that they were at least as surprised as we were about the 85/86 Libya shipments. We also raised the possibility of the IRA replacing decommissioned weapons with those available on the international market. In response Legge said that the IRA had attempted to purchase arms on the international market in the last year. This would indicate that they did not have much spare capacity that the British authorities did not know about.

Legge went on to say that from Garda and RUC analysis, the British authorities had an accurate account of how much semtex was available to the IRA. Given that the war-head in the mark 16 mortar was exclusively semtex, it underlined the necessity of decommissioning explosives.

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We pointed out the ready availability of Kalashnikov rifles on the international market, and instanced the make-to-order gunshops in places such as Pakistan, which could be availed of by the IRA in a post-decommissioning scenario. Legge pointed out the difficulty of getting these into the island of Ireland. We reminded him of Clogga Beach and the fact that there had been five shipments in the mid-80's which had come as a total surprise to the intelligence community, both in Britain and Ireland. His response was to the effect that the likelihood of such a repeat performance would be slight.

On the question of homemade explosives and the proposal to replace ammonium nitrate with filled Urea, we pointed out the ready availability of ammonium nitrate on the whole Western European seaboard.

We pointed out that Urea and nitric acid were the explosive components of the New York World Trade Centre Bomb and that any attempt to replace ammonium nitrate with urea should be considered in the context of the ease with which nitric acid could be manufactured on a homemade basis.

Legge was strongly of the view that the easy availability of ammonium nitrate in the farming community was of considerable assistance to the IRA. Anything which could deter the IRA, such as the use of urea instead of ammonium nitrate as a fertilizer, would be a huge benefit to the British security forces.

Yours sincerely



S. Magner