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Title: Letter from Donal O’Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland in London, to HJ McCann, Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs, regarding reports of support for terrorist activity in Northern Ireland from Czechoslovakia and other Iron Curtain countries, and a meeting he had with the Czechoslovak Chargé d’Affaires regarding this issue.

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STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

26th October 1971

Dear Secretary

We had a telephone call just before lunch yesterday from the Czechoslovak Embassy asking if I could receive the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. during the afternoon "on a certain problem". I received him in the late afternoon and the purpose of his visit was to give me information about the arms cargo which had been intercepted at Amsterdam Airport.

He referred first of all to the reports on this matter which have appeared in British papers and particularly to the report in the Sunday Telegraph of the 16th October. He said he had been instructed by his Government to let me know for the information of my authorities that the Czech authorities regarded these reports as highly injurious. In particular, the Czech Government deplored the suggestions in the press that it and indeed other Iron Curtain Governments were lending support to terrorist activity in the North. He assured me that insofar as his country is concerned there is not the slightest evidence to support these allegations.

He went on to recall the replies given by Sir Alec Douglas-Home to questions concerning the incident in the House of Commons on 18th October. After Sir Alec's statements in the House the Chargé d'Affaires was called to the Foreign Office and was informed that, as of then, the British Government could be certain only on two points namely:-

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- (1) that the weapons were produced in Czechoslovakia and
- (2) that the plane carrying them started off from Prague.

On the 19th October the Czech Press Agency issued a statement denying that the arms were intended for Northern Ireland. The Chargé d'Affaires allowed me to copy his translation of the press statement which reads as follows:-

"The British press has carried reports indicating that the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic has been supplying arms to Ireland. The Czech Press Agency is authorised to declare that these are fabrications of no justification whatsoever and that this is a provocation against the CSSR construed by certain imperialist circles and aimed at discrediting the good relations of Czechoslovakia with other countries".

The Chargé d'Affaires then went on to tell me for the confidential information of my Government that the destination of the arms consignment in question was "a country in the Arabian peninsula". For commercial reasons he did not want to disclose the name of the country. He then continued by saying that the Czech arms firm had concluded an agreement with its client which required a written undertaking by the client that the arms should not be sold or delivered "to named countries including Northern Ireland". He stressed that the need for this undertaking reflected the firm desire of his Government to avoid giving any encouragement to violence.

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I asked the Chargé d'Affaires if he had any information as to the nationality of the client in question. He told me he had no information at all on the subject. I also asked if he had any information as to why the plane should have been routed via Amsterdam rather than take the more direct southward course to the Arab country concerned. His reply to this was that he is not an expert on air routes.

The Chargé d'Affaires said that his authorities in Prague had informed the British Embassy there at the week-end on the same lines as he had spoken to me. The reason why he had been instructed to come to see me was to make clear to my authorities that his Government is not in any way involved in the troubles in the North. He then mentioned that the Czech Trade Mission in Dublin is being pestered by the press and others about the arms cargo and he hoped that the explanations he had given me would enable my authorities to "do something to ease the situation for the Trade Mission". I made no comment on this.

Finally he told me that no representations have been made by the British Government to his authorities about the arms cargo incident. He added that he was informed in the course of a conversation earlier yesterday afternoon with two officers from the Eastern European Section of the Foreign Office that the British inquiries are continuing, but have up to now revealed nothing new.

Yours sincerely

DONAL O'SULLIVAN

Ambassador

H.J. McCann Esq.
Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs