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Iranian Embassy, Dublin

Political Observations

1. Such problems as arise from the desire of the Iranian authorities to open an embassy in Dublin relate not so much to Irish-Iranian relations as to the likely impact of the move on the vexed question of Middle Eastern diplomatic representation in Ireland.
2. While our diplomatic relations with Iran were established during the reign of the Shah, practical recognition was very soon afforded to the Government of the Islamic Republic after the revolution in February 1979. The chill on western relations with Iran following the taking of hostages at the US Embassy in November 1979 affected Ireland too and our embassy was reduced to a one-man mission, the Chargé being a First Secretary rather than a counsellor as previously. This, however, was not entirely attributable to the poor state of relations between Ireland and Iran; the possibility of Embassy Tehran being closed as an economy measure was being mooted at the same time.
3. The release of the hostages in January 1981 (they stopped at Shannon en route home) removed Iran from its status of international pariah and left western countries, which had imposed some sanctions, free to pursue normal relations with it.
4. Since then Ireland's relations with Iran have developed steadily in the commercial area, a trend given official recognition by Minister Deasy's recent visit. Bilateral political relations have not been particularly busy but Iran has been a frequent topic of discussion in EPC and has attracted attention at the UN. The reasons for this are (i) the harsh treatment meted out by the Islamic Republic to dissidents and certain minorities, notably members of the Baha'i religion and (ii) the war with Iraq which began in September 1980 and is a constant cause for concern because of its possible wider regional spread. Both questions have been the subjects of Ten demarches to the Iranian authorities. Exchanges on the Baha'i question have been sharp; on the war, the Ten have managed collectively to avoid tilting towards either Iran or Iraq (though individual states, such as France, have supported Iraq). Neither the Iranian treatment of dissidents and some minorities nor the Iran-Iraq war provide in themselves any reason for hesitating to accept the opening of an Iranian embassy here. Other countries with poor human rights records have offices in Dublin; other countries involved in wars are represented here.

5. There will of course be security considerations arising from the nature of the Iranian regime and its opponents and from the ongoing war. These are not strictly a matter for the Political Division but it may be useful to try to catalogue some aspects here:

- (i) interactions with existing embassies in Dublin. Relations between the French, US and Egyptian embassies and an Iranian embassy may be expected to be frosty. I think it would be useful to gather information from partners in the Ten who have Iranian embassies in their capitals on this point. Our starting point in regard to Dublin should be that we have no reason to assume that an Iranian Embassy here would instigate any action against another Embassy;
- (ii) interactions with the foreign community in Ireland. In practice the main group of interest here is students from Middle-Eastern countries, in particular Iraq, Libya, Egypt, the Gulf States and Iran itself. An Iranian embassy might try, in line with its government's precepts, to spread the gospel of Khomeini's revolutionary islam among this group. Problems might be foreseen in the event of normal, healthy debate becoming overheated. Again, accounts of relevant partners' experience would be of assistance. Other possible problems: Iraqis demonstrating outside the Iranian embassy; anti-government Iranians doing the same; Iranian embassy involvement in anti-Egyptian or anti-French demonstration;
- (iii) interactions with the Irish. The championing by Iran of Bobby Sands comes to mind here as does the reported contact in the aftermath of the revolution between a PIRA member and the then Foreign Minister, Ghotbzadeh. This potential problem area could probably be brought under control fairly quickly. The present stance is as much due to ignorance, or use of a convenient outlet for anti-Britishness, as it is to zeal for the Provo cause. Libya provides an example of a country once actively engaged in material support of the IRA which was successfully taken off that course;
- (iv) interactions in the common travel area. This is a matter for the relevant security authorities.

6. Mr. Holohan has already mentioned some of these points to the Iranian authorities. If our concerns are repeatedly made clear from the outset and also our unwillingness to tolerate any activities incompatible with a diplomat's status, I think that from what we know of the political outlook of the Iranian Government and its desire for good relations with countries like Ireland, the possibility of trouble in the areas listed above can be reduced to a low level.

7. Impact on Middle Eastern diplomatic representation

This will be felt in the context of

(a) the Iran-Iraq war

and (b) the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In the case of (a) it is logical to assume that Iraq, on hearing of Iranian representation in Dublin, will begin to press again the desire it has sometimes expressed for a presence here. We have successfully kept the Iraqis at bay in the past but might now run the risk of offending them politically with, possibly, consequent results in the commercial area. A factor not to be neglected here is the real possibility of domestic political controversy, given the good relations between some members of Fianna Fail and high-ranking Iraqi personalities. The Workers Party, for some reason or other, is attracted to Iraq and some of its members have been in Baghdad on fraternal visits.

As for (b) above, Iran is not an Arab state and thus is not strictly a party to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Post-revolutionary Iran however has aligned itself with the stand of the radical Arabs (Libya, Syria, PDRY) and is beginning to become enmeshed in the confusion of Lebanon where it seeks to influence Shiite moslems. Israel can justifiably portray Iran as one of its active foes (though not without cynicism - it is alleged to supply matériel to Iran) and thus strengthen its long-standing and awkward request to be allowed to open an embassy in Dublin (the Israeli case is already somewhat strengthened by President Herzog's election, though this has not yet been explicitly used).

In time one could foresee renewed pressure from Libya to be allowed to open here, perhaps also from Algeria which allowed double accreditation only with great reluctance.

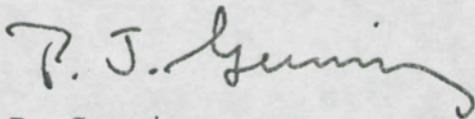
None of these consequences may flow immediately (Iraq and Israel have each got severe economic problems at present which may restrain them from pressing their cases) but we need to be fully aware of how an Iranian presence here will impinge on our usual line of defence to such requests. There remains of course the argument that we would wish in general to reciprocate any representation in Dublin and that as long as we are economically unable to open in, say,

Tel Aviv or Baghdad we regrettably cannot contemplate Israeli or Iraqi presences here. That argument will not go well with Iraq when there is Iranian representation here.

8. Recommendation

From a political point of view the best course is

- (i) to put no obstacle in the way of Iran opening an Embassy here
- (ii) to consult with partners about the problems arising from Iranian representation
- (iii) having listed our concerns, to be frank with the Iranians about them and about our unwillingness to tolerate undiplomatic activity
- (iv) to undertake urgently a review of policy on Middle Eastern representation in Dublin in anticipation of Iraqi and Israeli pressure in particular on the resident missions question.



P. Gunning
27 October 1983