

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2014/32/13
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	April 1976
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	3 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
<b>Access Conditions:</b>	Open
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Notes on Political Discussions during Maghreb visit

25-27 April, 1976

(Algeria)

On Monday I had a discussion with Bouteflika. He had refused to see Tomlinson, who was fobbed off with some other Minister, and I had some hesitation, having heard that, in raising the matter of a meeting with him, but in fact when I mentioned it tentatively to him after the signature ceremony he responded positively and sometime afterwards I was told that he would come to the hotel immediately after the meeting with the President. He did not in fact arrive at the hotel until about the time that we were meant to leave as a group for the airport and this placed a certain time constraint on our meeting, despite which we had a fairly extended discussion.

Tunisia

I explained as in / our position with regard to the Palestinians and our difficulties with regard to the PLO. He seemed particularly struck with the fact that we had problems with public opinion on this issue because of hostility to the IRA and after I had also spoken briefly about our position with regard to the North-South conference - our concern for its success and the fact that we would do what we could within the Community to secure progress on vital issues - he reverted again to the subject of the IRA and asked me for further information. It was clear that he was unfamiliar with the situation. He said that many governments in the Third World (and it was clear that he was including Algeria in this) understood the position to be that the Irish Government could not itself take any active part in hostilities against Britain but assumed that the IRA was broadly operating on behalf of the Irish Government and with its tacit support. The idea that the situation could be as I had stated it was not understood. He suggested that we should do more to explain this - visiting Third World countries to get this message across and sending Ambassadors to them. (I was not clear whether he meant sending an Ambassador on a special visit or whether he was trying to encourage us to open more embassies in these countries.)

He said that Algeria had been approached at one stage by the IRA for arms and the matter had of course come to him as Foreign Minister. His attitude

had been that even if the position was as stated by the IRA - viz. that they were fighting an anti-Colonial war against Britain - Algeria should think carefully before it involved itself in such a campaign. As a result no action was taken in response to the IRA request.

I asked him whether he thought that there was any way in which we could influence Colonel Gaddafi in this matter. His first reaction was that this would be very difficult indeed - he clearly shared the general view that Gaddafi is a very difficult person, extremely opinionated and not willing to listen to others. He thought that it would be very hard to persuade Gaddafi to change his policy. He said that he felt Gaddafi was quite sincere in his approach - he really thought that he was helping the Irish people in a liberation struggle against Colonialism.

He then made reference to the Palestinians. He said that, as I would be aware, the Palestinians and the IRA had "done jobs for each other from time to time". He thought that if I could convince the Palestinians that they were barking up the wrong tree and that the Provisional IRA are really a Right-Wing group who have no support amongst the Irish people, then it might be possible to influence Gaddafi through them as they are the only people that Gaddafi listens to.

I said that I noted and welcomed his advice on this matter and that perhaps my visit to the Financial Times Conference in Cairo in June might provide an opportunity to meet representatives of the PLO. I had not in fact done so during my very brief visit to the Middle East in May last year. He recommended that I meet the man who acts as Foreign Minister for the PLO - he mentioned his name but unfortunately I was not able to get a note of it. He said this man was frequently in Cairo and there could be a good chance that I would be able to see him there.

I formed the impression that in making this suggestion he was not seeking to boost the position of the PLO or to push us into direct contact with them. It seemed to me a quite genuine suggestion intended to be helpful to us with our problems.

I asked him whether he would do what he could to influence other Third World countries in the matter, explaining to them that the position in Ireland was not as they seemed to understand it to be. He said that he certainly would do what he could in this matter.

At this point he said that he felt we should conclude as otherwise the Moroccans would blame him for our late arrival there, saying that he had deliberately held up our departure.

I found him extremely friendly and co-operative throughout our discussion. He did not seek to raise any of the sensitive issues which are associated with Algeria. He seemed very impressed by a reference I made early in the discussion to our understanding of the position of the countries in the Third World because of our own experience of Colonialism and of neo-Colonialism in the 50 years after independence. He remarked that I was the first Minister from Europe who had ever spoken about neo-Colonialism in terms that showed that I knew what it meant.