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AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.



*Taoiseach
To see it
12/11*

17 Grosvenor Place
SW1X 7HR

*M. Keenan
M. J. Conboy
mk
16.11.87
This is a useful report*

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9 November 1987

- 1 EKSUND ✓
- 2 18805
- 3 25307 ✓

*PSM
PCE.
Mr Walker
Mr Maloney
Counselor A1
T504*

Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with John Houston, Political Adviser to Sir Geoffrey Howe

1. The Eksund arms seizure.

(I had been asked to take soundings as appropriate to establish the origin of the arms cargo.)

Houston confirmed that it was Libyan. They have not got all the details but he will keep an eye out for Howe's security box this week (the JIS reports from M15 and M16) and will brief me further, he said, on a strictly confidential basis. I said that our Minister for Industry and Commerce has already cancelled a visit to Libya, and that hard intelligence, of the sort the British could provide, would be very helpful to our Government in any further decisions (I also briefed him on our trade relations with Libya).

2. He said that last week's Cabinet Sub-Committee in fact led off with a discussion of the Convention problem. He had floated some ideas (as previously reported to you) in his own name to Howe beforehand, but these did not survive for long. Howe also decided at this meeting not to push the discussion over the threshold into the area of damage limitation. He decided, said Houston, to go along with the thrust of the discussion at that stage: to the effect that Dublin should deliver the Convention and there are no new elements to offer to make it easier to do. Howe felt, said Houston, that to try to bring the conversation further at this stage could have had a negative effect vis-a-vis the Prime Minister; that she might have dismissed him, and the damage limitation argument, as being typical Foreign Office wetsness.

.../

Howe intends, however, to play his full rôle on the damage limitation question as and when the threshold is crossed (i.e. if and when Dublin makes an announcement).

3. They then turned, he said, to King's handling of the Unionists in the "talks about talks". Here, he said, there was some very straight talking to King. King has, he said, over the past few weeks been talking about finding mechanisms to entice the Unionists forward. These included ideas about creating spaces in the rhythm of the Conference - in effect to create what the Unionists could represent as suspension for a period. Houston said that both the Prime Minister and Howe spoke strongly to King: she said that she continues to be rock-solid on the Agreement and does not intend to make any concessions to the Unionists at the expense of the Agreement. Houston stressed that she was very strong on this. The effect was that King is "roped in" and knows that his job is to stay steady in the Conference.
4. Houston said that he continues to be seriously worried about the effect of the Convention not going ahead: on the Government, on Parliament (particularly) and on the Unionists. Regarding the latter, he has been coming to feel that Unionist opposition to the Agreement has been crumbling badly, and that this could set that valuable process back badly. I used the political realities argument here, and he pretty well accepted it: there is no element of acrimony in his personal reaction to likely non-implementation. He just stressed what he thought the likely effects would be.

Yours sincerely

Richard Ryan
Richard Ryan
Counsellor