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Conclusions

CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held at 10 Downing Street on
THURSDAY 17 APRIL 1986
at 10.30 am

P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw
Lord President of the Council

The Rt Hon Lord Hailsham of St Marylebone
Lord Chancellor

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Sir Keith Joseph MP
Secretary of State for Education and Science

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon George Younger MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon John Biffen MP
Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP
Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

The Rt Hon Tom King MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Michael Jopling MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Lord Young of Graffham
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Kenneth Baker MP
Secretary of State for the Environment

The Rt Hon John MacGregor MP
Chief Secretary, Treasury

The Rt Hon Malcolm Rifkind QC MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon Paul Channon MP
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon John Wakeham MP
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

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SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr C L G Mallaby (Items 3 and 4)
Mr A J Langdon (Items 1 and 2)
Mr M J Eland (Items 1 and 2)

C O N T E N T S

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BIRTHDAY OF
HER MAJESTY
THE QUEEN

1. The Cabinet invited the Prime Minister to convey to Her Majesty The Queen in the warmest terms their loyal congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of Her 60th birthday.

PARLIAMENTARY
AFFAIRS

The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons in the following week.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL said that it was clear that from the present until the end of the Session there would be considerable congestion of business in the House of Lords as they began to deal with the major part of the legislative programme. The difficulties were such that he had had to take the exceptional step of arranging an important debate on Libya for a Friday. Opposition Leaders in the House of Lords had agreed to that, and that there should not be a vote at the conclusion of the debate.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

FOREIGN
AFFAIRS

Libya

Previous

Reference:

CC(86) 15.1

3. THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that, since the debate in the House of Commons on the previous day about the United States military action against Libya on 14 April, there were several significant developments to report. The residence in West Beirut of the British Ambassador in Lebanon had that morning been attacked by rocket propelled grenades. The building had been damaged but none of the staff had been injured. There were reports, not yet definitely confirmed, that three bodies found in the hills above Beirut were those of the two British teachers, Mr Douglas and Mr Padfield, who had recently been kidnapped with Libyan involvement, and of an Irish hostage. There was a report that two British citizens had been detained in Benghazi. A girl had that morning been arrested at Heathrow Airport trying to smuggle explosives on to an Israeli aircraft bound for Tel Aviv. Following the various reports on the previous day of a military mutiny in Libya, the Head of State, Colonel Qadhafi, had appeared on television. Tripoli was quiet. The airport had reopened. The authorities had said that foreigners wishing to leave the country would receive exit visas.

The Italian Government, whose Embassy looked after British interests in Libya, was privately advising Italian citizens there to leave the country. The Government should consider whether to follow suit. The Government should also consider whether to allow the resumption of air traffic between Libya and the United Kingdom. The next Libyan Arab Airlines flight to London was due on the following day and a British Caledonian Airways flight to Libya was due on 19 April.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that he had that morning attended a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the 12 member countries of the European Community (EC) to discuss Libyan involvement in state-sponsored terrorism. At the meeting there had been implicit criticism of the United States military action against Libya but none of the use of United States bases in the United Kingdom. He had made clear that, when attending the previous meeting of EC Foreign Ministers on 14 April, he had not had confirmation of the United States decision to take military action. There was a growing feeling among EC Governments that they should take non-military steps, if possible with the support of moderate Arab Governments, against state-sponsored terrorism. While some EC Foreign Ministers still seemed to think it enough to make speeches on the subject, France and the Irish Republic were increasingly willing to agree with the United Kingdom that actual steps must be taken against Libyan involvement in terrorism. He had arranged for other Community Governments to receive more of the intelligence about Libyan involvement in terrorism. He had argued that Libyan People's Bureaux were command centres for terrorism and that action against them was essential. The Security Directors of EC Foreign Ministries had produced a helpful report on state-sponsored terrorism, identifying the countries that were involved and suggesting a graduated series of possible measures in response. EC Foreign Ministers would meet again on 21 April.

In discussion the following points were made -

- a. There was considerable unease in public opinion about the military action taken by the United States and the use of United States aircraft based in the United Kingdom. But the level of public protest would probably be manageable.
- b. Any aircraft flying to and from Libya would be subject to special security precautions at British airports. Additional precautions were already being applied in the case of flights to and from other places in the Middle East. One argument for resuming air services to Libya was to make transport available for British citizens there who wished to depart. Against that, there could be a risk that British aircraft could be detained by Libyan authorities or that British citizens travelling on Libyan flights might be maltreated. British citizens might be able to leave Libya on flights to other places in Western Europe. It might also be possible to lay on special flights from Egypt or Tunisia for British citizens who managed to cross the frontier from Libya into either country. The question of resuming flights to Libya should be seen in the wider context of the Government's policy on commercial links of all kinds with Libya.
- c. Urgent consideration was being given to the question of deporting to Libya a number of Libyans resident in the United Kingdom who were known to be active on behalf of the Libyan Government. Policy on Libyans resident in the United Kingdom had, since the St James's Square siege in 1984, been that each case should be handled on its individual merits.

d. The Libyans being trained in the United Kingdom in aircraft maintenance, of whom there were at least 280, and those being trained as pilots, numbering at least 25, formed a special category among Libyans resident in this country. Special precautions had been taken with regard to the aircraft maintenance trainees. The airlines which were training them believed that there was no risk of their tampering with aircraft. But it was difficult to be absolutely certain that there would be no tampering. It would be tragic if a terrorist incident resulted. In the case of the trainee pilots, the main risk was that they could become military pilots on return to Libya.

e. Following the United States action against Libya, there might be a better chance of persuading other countries to take non-military measures to deter Libya from sponsoring terrorism. A major United Kingdom initiative, suggesting a package of measures, would have prospects of producing some results. It would also be welcomed by public opinion in the United Kingdom. Such an initiative might comprise measures which the United Kingdom had taken, or was willing to take, provided that other countries did the same; and further measures which the United Kingdom would take in any case.

f. Such an initiative should be advanced not only at the meeting of EC Foreign Ministers on 21 April but also at the "Trevi" meeting of Ministers on Home Affairs of Community countries in the following week.

g. It was suggested that as much information as possible should be published on Libyan involvement in terrorism, subject to the need not to publish intelligence information, the disclosure of which could endanger lives or compromise sources. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would be making a speech about Libyan support for the terrorism of the Provisional Irish Republican Army. Copies would be circulated to colleagues. A note should also be prepared giving the number of deaths as a result of terrorist incidents, so that it could be compared with the number of casualties likely to have been caused by the United States military action against Libya. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary would be placing in the Whips' Office a letter giving a list of terrorist incidents in which Libya had been involved. Public statements by Colonel Qadhafi about support for terrorism should be quoted.

h. The American public reaction had been favourable, and the United States Administration probably did not realise the extent of the political difficulties which the Government was facing as a result of supporting the United States action against Libya. This difference needed to be made clear to the Administration. The opportunity should also be used to seek more United States support on issues of importance to the United Kingdom. One example might be the proposed Supplementary Extradition Treaty between the United Kingdom and the United States; but on this the Administration had been active in support and the difficulties lay among the

Democratic members of Congress. It was also necessary to continue to stress to the United States that the only legal justification for the action against Libya was the inherent right of self-defence. The Administration would undermine its case if it described the action as retribution or retaliation.

i. It was clearly understood between the Prime Minister and President Reagan that, if there were any question of using United States aircraft based in the United Kingdom in a further action, that would be the subject of a new United States approach to the Government under the Truman/Churchill understanding of 1952. It was not clear that the conditions for British acquiescence in another military action by the United States against Libya at present existed.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that everything possible should be done to minimise the risk of terrorist attacks against British interests in this period of greater threat. The Libyans undergoing training in aircraft maintenance in this country should immediately be removed from work on aircraft. Urgent consideration should be given to the position of the Libyans being given pilot training. It would be helpful both substantively and in public presentation if the United Kingdom made a major public initiative about non-military moves to deter Libya from further promotion of terrorism.

The Cabinet -

1. Took note, with approval of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.
2. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to arrange for the preparation of a new British initiative advocating non-military measures by the international community against state-sponsored terrorism.
3. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Transport to consider further whether airline services with Libya should be resumed.
4. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Home Secretary, in consultation as necessary with other colleagues, to consider policy towards Libyan nationals resident in the United Kingdom.
5. Invited the Secretary of State for Transport to arrange for Libyan trainees in aircraft maintenance to be removed immediately from work on aircraft; to review, with colleagues as appropriate, the future handling of those trainees; and to review the position of Libyan trainee pilots in the United Kingdom.

6. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to ensure that the United States Administration recognised the political difficulties which the Government faced as a result of their support for the United States action against Libya; and to urge the United States Administration to justify that action on the basis of self-defence.

Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to arrange for information for public use about the numbers of casualties from terrorism to be circulated urgently to colleagues.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Agriculture

Previous Reference:
CC(86) 8.3

4. THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD said that, following the realignment of currencies within the European Monetary System, the way was open for the French Government to allow their farmers higher prices in national currency terms even if there was no Community price rise in ecu terms. This might reduce the French determination to obtain a Community price rise. There would be pressure in the Community during the following week for a price settlement to be achieved quickly, possibly by the weekend of 26 April. There would be discussion of various aspects which could harm British interests and the Government would need to consider these very carefully. It would also be necessary to keep devaluation of green currencies in the wake of the realignment in the European Monetary System to the minimum; but it would be important to avoid the appearance of discrimination against British farmers.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

Cabinet Office

17 April 1986