

DIPLOMACY IN AN AGE OF DICTATORSHIPS

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ULTIMATUM: "In diplomacy, a last demand before resorting to concessions."
Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

THE SIEGE IN ST JAMES'S SQUARE

The severing of diplomatic relations with Libya is not dramatic; it is a gesture, the precise political meaning of which is apparent only to those for whom diplomacy is valid. To the rest of us, this severing looks like a face-saving exercise for the Foreign Office. Perhaps "cover-up" would be more apt. The "dilemma" confronting Britain was represented by the FO as being between the demands of British justice and saving Qadhafi's face. The word "dilemma" is used on these occasions to persuade the public that the FO is a serious institution, instead of a haven for dreamers of Arabian empire. To the police and public it looked as though Qadhafi's front was slapping Britain's face, and — with apologetics from the FO — getting away with it. Indeed the FO has only been marginally less sycophantic than the odious Louis Eaks, Qadhafi's British publicist, editor of the monthly *Jamahiriya Review*, a veritable repository of romance, dreams of socialist utopias and Arab empires, laced with Islamic theology and preachments of jihad against the West.

QUESTIONS THE FO WON'T DISCUSS

In the first place, the FO knew all it needed to know fourteen years ago when Qadhafi took over in Libya. That is, they knew what military coups were like in the Arab world, even if no-one had heard then of Colonel Qadhafi.

More recently, Qadhafi has openly proclaimed his intentions to attack opponents of his regime abroad — and not only Libyans. He has proceeded to assassinate and bomb. He has supplied the PLO, and applauded their activities in Israel, Lebanon and Europe. Eaks joined with Qadhafi in praising the Munich Games massacres, proclaiming there would need to be many more Munichs. The FO has resolutely turned a blind eye to PLO atrocities and political ineptitudes, and all but officially recognises it.

When the Libyan Embassy became a People's Bureau, and staff were sent, transparently disguised as "students", with the full intention of conducting campaigns of terror, the FO not only did nothing against this move, but actively connived at the confusion over

diplomatic status that this change entailed. It has emerged since the shooting that not only did the bureau contain people who certainly had no diplomatic status, but that amongst the others were some whose exact diplomatic standing was unclear. Amongst bureau officials who did have diplomatic status was Qadhafi's personal representative. Abdul Ghadir Khalifa Baghdadi, a known hangman, purger of Libyan universities. It is also reported that Tripoli knows who the killer is — and he is not a diplomat.

The FO is, and has been since the days of the Palestine Mandate, a most resolute opponent of the idea of learning from history. Dictatorships usually invoke the will of a nebulously defined "people". The permitting of a so-called People's Bureau was an "oversight" tantamount to aiding and abetting the exercise of war by diplomatic terrorism.

What signs did the FO have? What did they do with them? On Sunday (April 15th 1984), Qadhafi strung up a few students to commemorate the revolution, demonstrating again that he is a man of his word. At midnight, Monday/Tuesday (16th/17th), two popular bureaucrats knocked at the FO door and warned of trouble unless the demonstration (on Tuesday) was called off. Given the kind of trouble that Libyan bombers had caused earlier this year, the FO was presumably meant to take the hint and pass it on. They didn't, for the police neither stopped the demonstration, nor deployed their officers nor positioned the protestors, in accordance with fears of expected trouble.

The FO's first public statement was to say that regrets had been expressed by the Libyans for the death of WPC Fletcher. It was made to sound as if those regrets had come from Tripoli, but on Tuesday evening it transpired that they had been expressed by the bureaucrats — who claimed that they hadn't done it, nullifying the "regrets". It was an American news report that disclosed the information about the intercepted intelligence signal. This report embarrassed the FO into being ambiguous instead of merely silent. That, again, was in the evening. Even if the signal had come too late, it still was not communicated to the police: the FO was stalling for time. At the first emergency meeting, both the Home Secretary and the police wanted to storm the bureau immediately; they were persuaded not to by ... the FO. Clearly, had the FO informed that meeting that they knew that orders had come from Tripoli, as ascertained by the midnight visit and the satellite intelligence, their persuasion against storming would not have gone down well.

None of this has been openly admitted by the FO: they employ the usual doublespeakers. One final confirmation of the bureaucrats' intentions has come from the demonstrators. On past occasions, pro-Qadhafi students have turned up and tried to disrupt proceedings by infiltrating. On Tuesday, they kept well on the other side of the road, out of the line of fire ...

CONTRADICTION

The FO advised no "precipitate" actions because Qadhafi is "unpredictable". They advised no immediate doing of justice, because if we do X, Qadhafi will do Y. That is, according to the FO, Qadhafi is predictable. The only guarantee against Qadhafi's unpre-



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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

dictability would have been an immediate storming, taking them all by surprise.

It is also said that getting the gunman would be difficult. That is true, but not the most relevant point. All in the building *and* those not in it on Tuesday, were engaged in gun-running. All were parties to Tuesday's crime and the earlier bombings. It is said that given our international obligations, we could only declare them *persona non grata* and expel them. This is fatuous, although it is what we have done. We should simply have stressed, as we arrested the whole pack of them, that whatever accreditations they *did* have (dubious), they had unequivocally forfeited.

Qadhafi has got what he wanted. Only equally strong action by us would have secured our interests. A gun-boat in Tripoli harbour, a call to the Americans (if we had the gall after our FO sponsored fiasco over Grenada) to back us with their two aircraft carriers permanently off the Libyan coast, and, if necessary a shell in Qadhafi's garden, would persuade the Libyans to think twice about hurting Britons in Libya. Such actions would not have lost us friends in the Arab world. Both Chad and Tunisia, for example, would have reason to feel gratitude for such a show of strength, having suffered directly from Qadhafi's provocations in recent years.

QADHAFI'S VERSION: THE THIRD WORLD'S WAR

For two days running, Qadhafi went on television telling the most fantastic fable about British air and land attacks against the bureau, the British police murdering each other in their enthusiasm to murder the bureaucrats. He knew he was lying. Why? He knew he could get away with it. The FO simply brushed these legends aside. The FO has demonstrated a consistent incapacity to understand the rhetoric and violence of Arab politics. Emotions are whipped up by demagogues, and goods must be delivered even if the orator intended no more than a display of verbal strength. For example, in 1967, although Nasser was the chief inspiration of the war, he knew the real strength of his army; but he spoke wildly for too long, and the Egyptians expected action, which Nasser was goaded into by Syria and the PLO. That a leader can lie fabulous lies in public means, to the FO nothing. Nothing is revealed about that leader's character, his methods of government — such is FO received wisdom.

This is all part of the "mea culpa" syndrome of western politics since, amongst others, Arnold Toynbee elaborated the doctrine while working at ... the FO. He went on to make it the hallmark of international analysis at the Royal Institute of International Affairs. The Third World, pristine and pure, was dragged into the mire by colonialist westerners, raped, exploited, exhausted. This rhetoric, having more in common with theology than history, has proved useful to Socialists here, and to the emerging socialism, wet-nursed by Christian missions, of the Third World. It is an easy ticket to a free lunch for the eloquent despots abroad, and provides employment for the hive of aid-industry in the West. Most Third Worlders, having unstable or limited armies, and having anyway so many good friends here, prefer to fight this war, against the wealth of the West and the interests of their own people, by economics. The front line is the offices of Christian Aid, War on Want, Oxfam, etc.. Such as Libya go in for the grand style, gun-bag diplomacy. They realise its appeal to romantics disguised as diplomats. Libya is the most volatile and possibly the most destructive area of this battlefield.

The tactic is simple. The Western nations are on the whole law abiding, having evolved political systems founded on debate and consensus. For newcomers to, and despisers of, the political conventions of the West, such respect for the word is a cover for violent acts — quite how much so is demonstrated by the FO's handling of the bureau.

The idea of diplomacy raises the same problems in relation to the Communist bloc and the Third World as does the problem of rights. That rests on a philosophy of rights worked out largely in the seventeenth century, though with roots in Periclean Athens and the exegesis of Judaic morality of the Talmudic rabbis. It is a large and complex debate over natural law, contract and individual inte-

grity. A debate, that is, that is lacking in those countries most vociferous in using the principle of "rights" against the West.

DIPLOMACY: AN ANTIQUATED PRACTICE

"I venture to say that the spirit of Munich is dominant in the twentieth century", said Solzhenitsyn in his Nobel Prize speech.

The FO is the single most expensive government department. It maintains embassies and residencies that are vast and useless, mausoleums to the glories of vanished privilege. Its ambassadors are highly paid stooges. It fails to do even the most elementary of the tasks it claims it is there to do. It should go.

In the days before massive statism, an individual ambassador might have had some role to play as a government agent, and may even have had some influence in the country in which he was stationed. In the days of bureaucracy, the personal influence of a diplomat is nullified.

But state diplomats have always been unnecessary. Look for a moment at the Empire before it was an Empire. It began as merchants extending their activities, negotiating their own interests wherever they could. As with other successful private enterprises, government soon got its hands on these activities, and the Empire became a political entity instead of an affiliation of trading partnerships. Now look at Libya. We break off diplomatic relations, and the ambassador leaves — but the businessmen remain, "unprotected".

Overseas interests are best in the hands of those engaged in them: let businessmen look after their own. If in troublesome places businessmen think that the benefits balance the risks, why should the public subsidise an expensive charade, when no-one except the businessmen are taking the risks? If the risks are great, the businessmen should be able (and permitted) to defend themselves.

There is also the theoretical problem of international law. The most blatant contradiction between its theory and practice, is that it is never practised. It is truer to say that there is no international law, merely legal provisions. They are not binding because there is no legal organisation, and no police force, except that of individual nation states, to interpret them. They are conventions, not laws. They can be flouted, not broken. There is much legal language, but the situation is just as it would be if none of it existed. Each government determines its own interests, and what to do about them if they are violated. For example, the Israelis treat all border raids as acts of war. If terrorists cross her borders, then the territory from which they came forfeit its "normal" peacetime status, and Israeli troops go over and retaliate. If, according to the conventions, the Libyan bureau is foreign territory, then firing into British territory from it constitutes, not a breach of the civil peace but an act of war.

The Vienna Convention is a late rationalisation of a dated practice. In an age of electronic surveillance, the privacy of governments as symbolised by the diplomatic bag is bogus. The convention of not searching diplomats' bags allows of two things only: (a) a courtesy to a foreign government official, allowing him to jump the queue (b) the conducting of supplies for the kind of war that Qadhafi and the PLO wage against the West. In other words, diplomats should be the first to have their bags searched, as intelligence gathering gives an accurate idea of what governments are up to, and who is likely to be gun-running. The FO knows this, and still cites conventions that the Libyans only respect because they provide the perfect cover. If we did not "respect" these conventions, and opened bags when we liked, WPC Fletcher might not now be dead, and eleven students hurt.

The United Nations fails as an agent of Universal Harmony for the reason that diplomacy fails: the central questions relating to any concept of international law — the philosophy that underpins it, the agencies that implement it — have never been faced, indeed attempts to do so have always been stymied by those for whom the conventions "work" — every national government in the world.

It is sometimes said that the advantage of international law is that it lays down consequences for the violators. What consequences? They are usually that the violated are blamed, and law is flouted with impunity, if not with praise.