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Walking the line of death: U.S.-Libyan relations in the Reagan decade 1981-1989

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San Jose State University, 1991

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WALKING THE LINE OF DEATH

U.S.-Libyan Relations in the Reagan Decade 1981-1989

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Political Science

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

James K. Moore

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ABSTRACT

WALKING THE LINE OF DEATH U.S.-LIBYAN RELATIONS IN THE REAGAN DECADE 1981-1989

by James K. Moore
Dr. Charles Kunsman-Advisor

This thesis examines the Reagan Administration's relations with Muammar Qaddafi's Libya during the 1980's. It focuses on the Reagan Administration's concern that Libya was a center of Soviet-backed terrorism and intervention in the North African-Middle Eastern region. This paper chronicles and analyzes the extensive campaign of political, economic, and military pressure the Reagan Administration exerted upon Libya in an effort to suppress Qaddafi.

Research on the topic reveals that the Reagan Administration pressured Libya from the beginning. It attempted to isolate Libya politically and economically through the United Nations, our Western European allies, and Libya's pro-Western neighbors. To inflict the maximum pressure upon Libya, the Reagan Administration launched several highly provocative military maneuvers near Libya which resulted in military clashes between the two countries. All these actions marked the Reagan Administration's to reassert American power and influence in the world and especially in the Middle East.

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INTRODUCTION

"From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli" begins the Marine Corps Hymn. The reference to Tripoli concerns the conflicts in the last century between the Barbary Pirates of the Mediterranean and the United States. Today, Tripoli is the capital of Libya. Relations between the United States and Libya during the eight years of the Reagan presidency were much as they were during the years of the Barbary Pirates one hundred and thirty years ago.

In the 1980's, Libya and its leader, Muammar Qaddafi, was the chief villain in the Reagan's campaign against terrorism. Upon taking office in 1981, the Reagan Administration embarked on a concerted effort to control, coerce, and if necessary, bring down the government of Muammar Qaddafi. By singling out a weaker country headed by a despot, the Reagan Administration sought to make its Libyan policy an example of America's resolve and commitment against terrorism. This policy also sought to prevent the expansion of Soviet influence in the Middle East through Libya. From this effort, the President and his Administration effectively reasserted the power and independence of the Executive Branch, characteristics in increasing decline since the end of the Vietnam War.

This paper examines the decisions and actions of the Reagan Administration's campaign against Libya. From this, it will analyze the rationale for the White House's actions and strategies and assess its successes and failures. In studying the White House's Libya campaign, this paper serves as an assessment of the ability of the American Presidency to conduct sustained economic, political, and military policies against an international foe in the 1980's.

Chapter 1: The Path to Jamahiriya

The motivations of Libya and of Muammar Qaddafi are found in the history of Libya. Here are the events that caused a country as small and insignificant as Libya to become such an important and all-consuming part of the Reagan Administration's foreign policy. Libya did not exist as a sovereign country until after the Second World War. Modern Libya is a consolidation of three North African provinces: Tripolitania, the northeastern province that includes the capital city of Tripoli; Cyrenaica, the eastern province that borders Egypt; and Fezzan which includes the vast desert space in the interior of Libya.

Thinly populated by nomadic Bedouin tribes, the land mass known as Libya never had a strong government or even a national identity until the post-war years. Because of that, foreigners have nominally ruled Libya for most of its known history. Time and again, the area of modern Libya has formed provinces of empires ruled from Asia, Europe or other parts of Africa.¹ Surprisingly though, the peoples of these lands have successfully resisted the influences of invaders from the ancient Greeks and Romans to the Italian Fascists fifty years ago. The only lasting impression made upon the Libyans, aside from a deep distrust of foreigners, was their near complete absorption of the Islamic faith and the Arabic language brought by the Arab invaders in the seventh and eleventh centuries. Indeed, Cyrenaica is probably the most thoroughly Arabized country outside the Arabian peninsula. The Arabization of the rest of the country has been extensive, if not yet absolute.²

In the Nineteenth Century a native dynasty known as the Karamanli ruled the Libyan lands semi-autonomously under the Turkish Sultans in

¹ John L. Wright, *Libya, a Modern History*, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 1.

² *Ibid.*

Constantinople. The Turks reestablished direct rule under the Sultan in 1835 in the face of increased French expansion in North Africa.

At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, Libya was the last province of the Ottoman Empire. The territory suffered from constant internal upheavals that only subsided when Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1911 and invaded Libya. Italy's victory in that war and its subsequent decision to claim and colonize Libya led to a highly destructive pacification campaign against the indigenous population, fighting the Arabs kilometer by kilometer for control of the land. In the course of the decade-long war, the Italians interned large portions of the population in concentration camps and brutalized them at large.³

Following World War II, Libya was the poorest nation on Earth, with a per-capita annual income of around \$50. Its major export was scrap metal left over from the destructive battles that took place there during World War II. Backed by the United States and Great Britain, Libya gained its independence in 1957 under the rule of King Idris. His government was almost nonexistent. The locally prominent families or the King's immediate circle wielded the real political power. Upon the discovery of oil there in 1959, the country drastically changed. The per-capita income rose to \$1,500 in less than a decade, but the government was not prepared to cope with the influx of wealth. Soon corruption in the government flourished.⁴

As social problems increased from changes in both Libyan society and in the Arab world as a whole, a new breed of politically active Libyan citizens was coming of age. Having grown up observing foreign domination of their country and their own leader's corruption, they set out to create a new Libya. This new

³ Lisa Anderson, "Libya and American Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal*, 36 (Autumn, 1982), p. 517.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 518.

society would be based on socialism, Pan-Arabism, and Islam. The key member and leader of this new generation was a man named Muammar al-Qaddafi.

Born in a tent pitched along the open range of the Sirtica desert to a semi-nomadic family, Qaddafi benefited by coming from a frontier district of Libya, controlled by neither of the competing population centers of Tripolitania or Cyrenaica. This allowed him to preach unity among all parts and peoples of Libya without facing the suspicions of any particular group. Growing up in the austere life of the Bedouin, Qaddafi was fortunate in receiving a formal education. He and his family moved to Fezzan in 1956 where he attended the Sebha Preparatory School.

Qaddafi's feelings of Arab nationalism and distrust of the West intensified after the 1956 Suez crisis, where England, France and Israel jointly attacked Egypt. He became an admirer and follower of Egypt's President Gamal Abd-al Nasser as a result of listening to his speeches on Radio Cairo's "Voice of the Arabs" and reading Nasser's works. An ardent nationalist and supporter of pan-Arabism, Qaddafi became known as a militant, a trait which ultimately led to his expulsion from the prep school.

As he continued his education at a university in the Tripolitanian town of Misurata, he became committed to initiating a revolution which would overthrow the monarchy. Qaddafi saw the existing government as not only a puppet of the Western powers, but also guilty of gross nepotism and corruption. The increased national wealth of the country only underscored the corruption as the elite kept most of it for themselves.

Despite his well-known militant stance, Qaddafi obtained entry into the Libyan Military Academy in 1964, perhaps as a result of hopes that a position of

prestige within the Armed Forces would temper his revolutionary zeal. This had just the opposite effect, however, for Qaddafi had realized several years earlier that the best way to change the present system would be to infiltrate into it from the bottom with a new generation of reform-minded, nationalistic officers. Once safely seated in the structure of the Libyan military, Qaddafi started his Free Unionist Officers organization and recruited new officers to support him in his quest to lead a military coup of the Libyan government. Soon Qaddafi and the officers had enough strength and confidence to start preparing for the actual coup against the monarchy.

The humiliation of the Arab armies at the hands of Israel during the Six Day War intensified the feelings of Islamic unity and dissatisfaction with the existing Libyan government among Qaddafi and his followers. The monarchy made no meaningful contribution either militarily or politically to the Arab nations. The continued presence of British and American military facilities on Libyan soil was a further cause for embarrassment. Qaddafi, like many Libyans, saw the foreign bases as both a challenge to Libyan sovereignty and as a springboard for Western aggression into the Middle East.⁵

In August of 1969, a crazed Australian partially burned the third holiest shrine of Islam, the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem, greatly upsetting the Arabs. It also underscored their concerns over having infidels administer Islamic holy places. Qaddafi saw the emergence of Israel at the expense of the Palestinian people as just the latest example of European imperialism in the Middle East. He thus sympathized with groups such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization and other national liberation movements which used terrorist acts to further their political ambitions. He also felt a keen

⁵ Wright, p. 129.

distrust of the West and went to great lengths to support Third World nations against what he felt was continued Western imperialist policies.⁶

In 1969, Qaddafi and his Free Unionist officers rose up and overthrew the Libyan monarchy, leaving King Idris to find exile abroad. Qaddafi's speech to the Libyan people upon seizing power was indicative of his feelings for the old government.

People of Libya! In response to your own will, fulfilling your most heartfelt wishes, answering your incessant demands for change and regeneration and your longing to strive towards these ends; listening to your incitement to rebel, your armed forces have undertaken the overthrow of the reactionary and corrupt regime, the stench of which has sickened and horrified us all. At a single blow your gallant army has toppled these idols and has destroyed their images. By a single stroke it has lightened the long dark night in which the Turkish domination was followed first by Italian rule, then by this reactionary and decadent regime, which was no more than a hotbed of extortion, faction, treachery and treason.⁷

Upon assuming and consolidating power, Qaddafi went about restructuring Libyan society. He wanted to base the "new" Libya on Islam and Arab nationalism. Qaddafi wrote a manifesto he called the "Green Book," in which he describes a new social, economic and political order he calls the "Third Universal Theory." In this concept, representational government is rejected as being a failure.

Plebiscites are a fraud against democracy. Those who say 'yes' and those who say 'no' do not, in fact, express their will. They have been silenced through the conception of modern democracy. They have been allowed to utter only one word: either 'yes' or 'no.' This is the most cruel and oppressive dictatorial system.⁸

⁶ Anderson, pp. 519-520.

⁷ Wright, pp. 119-120.

⁸ Muammar Qaddafi, *Qaddafi's Green Book*. (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 49.

Instead, Qaddafi supported a form of direct political participation at the regional level where everyone is allowed their say and their vote. This system could best be compared to the town meetings that occur in rural New England. These "popular congresses" and "people's committees" are described as the final fruit of the people's struggle for democracy."⁹

Economically, the Third Economic Theory completely rejects the concept of private enterprise and the wage-worker.

The wage-worker is like a slave to the master who hires him. He is even a temporary slave, since his slavery lasts as long as he works for wages from the employer, whether the latter is an individual or a state. The worker's relationship with the owner of the productive establishment as regards their own interests is one and the same.¹⁰

Qaddafi believed the ultimate solution was the abolition of the wage system and a return to the "natural laws" by which man lived before the advent of government, classes, and man-made laws. He saw need as the basis for the economic exploitation of man, so he advocates that the job of government and society is to eliminate need from the Libyan people. A house, an income, and a vehicle were necessities for everyone. While no one had the right to own land, everyone had the right to use it.

The purpose of the new socialist society is to create a society which is happy because it is free. This can be achieved through satisfying the material and spiritual needs of man, and that, in turn, comes about through the liberation of these needs from outside domination and control.¹¹

Qaddafi attempted to take the power over the Libyan economy out of the hands of the foreign corporations and transfer it into the hands of the Libyan

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 51.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 66.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 73.

government. He nationalized the foreign banks and other interests, and served notice to the international oil companies of an impending confrontation over the price of oil and government participation in economic matters.¹²

Qaddafi also tried to increase the Libyans' control of their own country by oppressing and expelling the permanent "foreign communities" in Libya, such as the Jews and especially the Italians. The large Italian community in Libya slowly had been leaving the country since the start of the nationalist campaign against King Idris in the mid-1960's. Civil disturbances in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war took on a decidedly anti-Western tone which speeded up the exodus. Qaddafi himself declared, "we shall not accept the presence of a fascist or an intruder imperialist in our land" and announced, "the people want back the property which the Italian citizens usurped when their invading armies were in control and when terror of unjust Italian rule prevailed in the country." By this time the Italian community in Libya totaled barely thirteen thousand.¹³

Throughout the 1970's, Qaddafi continued to consolidate his power and implement his ideas amid an environment of attempted coups and governmental squabbling. In 1975, he established the General People's Congress as an umbrella organization for the popular committees. Two years later he resigned all his political positions to become "Philosopher of the Revolution." He declared himself the "authority of the people," and transformed Libya into the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamihiriya, a state of the masses or peopledom.¹⁴

Qaddafi's bravado managed to hide to the rest of the world just how untenable his position actually was. Dissent in the military and government to his policies, frequent student upheavals and demonstrations, and an unhealthy

¹² Wright, p. 147.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 148.

¹⁴ Anderson, p. 521.

Libyan reliance on foreign expertise and workers to run its oil economy and its civil service were all a constant threat to Qaddafi's power. In spite of this, according to Lisa Anderson,

Few outside Libya were aware of the weakness of his domestic position and numerous analysts and policy-makers in the West took him at his word when he claimed to lead world-wide opposition to Western influence at the helm of the vanguard of the Libyan revolution.¹⁵

The United States' relations with Libya both before and after the 1969 overthrow were varied. With the decline of the European empires and the rise of the Cold War following the end of World War II, the United States found itself becoming the preeminent military power in the Mediterranean. In an effort to stop Soviet expansion in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, the U.S. established a ring of military bases and facilities in the region. During World War II, the U.S. Air Force took over an airfield outside of Tripoli, expanded it, and named it Wheelus Field, after an American officer killed in Iran.¹⁶ This air base and several British military facilities located in Libya were a constant source of anger and frustration for Libyan nationalists. The presence of such bases served as a perpetual reminder of Libya's victimization at the hands of imperialists and invaders.

Throughout the 1970's, several successive U.S. presidents attempted to improve relations with Qaddafi's regime. The U.S. tried to accommodate the Libyans with the speedy withdrawal from Wheelus Field in 1970 and continued arms sales and deliveries to Libya. In spite of these actions, the U.S. found its advances rebuffed by Qaddafi. Libyans enthusiastically participated in the Arab oil boycott against the United States during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. In 1974,

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 523.

¹⁶ Wright, p. 49.

as the result of a U.S. attempt to create a petroleum consumers union, the Libyan government nationalized several U.S. oil companies. The increasingly warmer relationship between the U.S. and Egypt following the 1973 Yom Kippur war damaged relations between Libya and Egypt. This also marked the start of a bitter rivalry between these Arab neighbors which grew so intense that a small border war erupted between them in 1977. In 1979 a mob of angry Libyans sacked and burned the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli while Libyan police stood by and watched.

Despite occasional flare-ups, the first decade of Libyan rule under Qaddafi was one of general detente with the United States. A strong economic relationship between the two countries offset the political conflicts, with Libyan petroleum trading for American technology and goods. In the 1980's, this cooperation came to a rapid end as a new actor with a new agenda entered the international political arena.

Chapter 2: Setting the Stage

Following the 1973 Yom Kippur War between Israel and its major Arab antagonists Egypt and Syria, the United States began to view the Middle East and the North African countries as among its vital interests. The Arab oil embargo and its effect on the United States caused the American people and their government to reassess their strategic commitment to this area. U.S. oil dependency on this region, combined with the real possibility of a U.S.-Soviet military conflict during the Yom Kippur War, made the Middle East the focal point of American diplomacy and power projection in the 1970's. President Jimmy Carter made establishing a lasting peace between Egypt and Israel a top priority, and the U.S. pledge to defend the Middle East oil fields became known as the Carter Doctrine.

A dichotomy of political antagonism and extensive economic cooperation marked U.S.-Libyan relations throughout the 1970's. While Washington and Tripoli clashed over such topics as the Camp David Peace Accords and Libya's support of the Palestinian Liberation Army, Libya imported American goods and technology. The U.S. was Libya's largest oil customer. President Carter's brother Billy even became an agent for Libyan interests in the United States, enjoying a personal relationship with Qaddafi.

The election of Ronald Reagan to the White House in the Fall of 1980 marked a major change in U.S.-Libyan relations. Not long after assuming office, the Reagan Administration began a major military buildup in the United States and initiated a series of confrontational policies. The Administration began supporting anti-communist organizations all across the globe, from the *Mujahideen* fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan to the *Contras* opposing the

Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Collectively these actions became known as the "Reagan Doctrine," the doctrine of opposing anti-American and pro-communist groups and governments all across the world. A large part of this policy took place in the Middle East, where Reagan sought to reassert U.S. power and prestige in the Arab world. Reagan defeated President Carter in the 1980 election in large part because of Carter's perceived inability to manage U.S. interests in the Middle East. The takeover of the U.S. embassy in Iran and the holding of the diplomatic staff hostage had traumatized the country. President Reagan pledged never again would another country hold the U.S. hostage.

Through a combination of increased military power and the will to use it, Reagan wanted to create a new political environment where foreign countries, particularly those in the Middle East, never again would act against the United States with such impunity. Upon welcoming them back to the United States, Reagan stated, "Let terrorists beware that when the rules of international behavior are violated, our policy will be one of swift and effective retribution."¹⁷ Undersecretary of State Richard Kennedy enunciated the White House's view of dealing with terrorism to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

International terrorism is an assault on civilization itself. Governments such as the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Libya which directly or indirectly sponsor, train, finance, and arm the terrorists, must be clearly told their behavior is unacceptable. We will use all appropriate resources at our disposal, be they diplomatic, political, economic, or military to respond to such acts of international intimidation and extortion.¹⁸

The Reagan Administration saw the East-West conflict as pervasive in all diplomacy between the U.S. and Third World countries. Secretary of State

¹⁷ "Freed American Hostages," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 17 (Feb. 2, 1981), p. 50.

¹⁸ Richard Deutsch, "Dealing With Qaddafi," *Africa Report*, 27 (Mar./Apr. 1982), p. 49.

Alexander Haig outlined this strategy in early 1981:

In approaching the developing world we do not construct any false dichotomies between North-South and East-West issues, treating the former as economic and the latter as military. Rather we recognize that progress in our relations with many nations of the South is dependent in part on our success in dealing with East-West security problems.¹⁹

Reagan's policy makers viewed the Middle East and North Africa as a battleground for the U.S. and U.S.S.R. to conduct the Cold War while the individual countries' internal problems and aspirations were irrelevant. When commenting on the need to moderate the imperialism of Soviet surrogates to improve U.S.-Soviet relations, Reagan used the example of Qaddafi in Chad.²⁰ Secretary Haig said it more clearly when he said that Washington "now sees Libya as a Soviet satellite."²¹ This attitude was not limited strictly to members of the Reagan Administration. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who himself had to deal with Qaddafi during his tenure in office, said in a television interview,

Libya is in effect a Soviet outpost. It is armed by the Soviet Union. It conducts radical policies all over Africa and West Asia. It has taken over Chad. It is fomenting revolution in Sudan and Tunisia and is supporting a guerrilla group in Morocco and terrorists in the Philippines. If the Soviet Union had not given Libya arms beyond its needs, it would not do all that. One of the most important issues in relation to peace in West Asia is for the U.S. to tell moderate countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia that they are not at the mercy of their radical neighbors. For the past few years these countries have been disquieted by the fall of the pro-Western governments in the area.²²

¹⁹ Mahmoud ElWarfally, *Imagery and Ideology in U.S. Policy Toward Libya*. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988.), p. 154.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 155.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² Aftab Kamal Pasha, *Libya and the United States: Qadhafi's response to Reagan's challenge*. (New Delhi, India: Detente Publications, 1984.), p. 15.

Even well-known liberal and Reagan foe Senator Edward Kennedy did his part to fuel the flames against Libya. In joining a Senate vote to ban all imports of Libyan oil, Kennedy articulated his feelings.

It is immoral for the United States to pay billions of dollars a year for Libyan oil. The fact of the matter is, our dollar speaks much louder than words. Now is the time for the U.S. to take firm and clear action. Oil from Libya is tainted with the blood of Libyan terror, Libyan murder, and Libyan assassination. Unquestionably, Libya stands in violation of the most fundamental canons of decency and justice in the world.²³

Qaddafi himself did much to promote these feelings within the Reagan Administration and the American public. Once in control of his country and the billions of dollars in oil revenue Libya was producing annually, Qaddafi rapidly became known as a big spender on military weapons. He bought tanks from West Germany and fighter planes like the Mirage from France. The most impressive military purchase Qaddafi made was with the Soviet Union for a twelve-billion dollar weapons package including: several hundred modern MiG fighters and Tupolev B23 long-range supersonic bombers; 2,800 modern Soviet tanks and over 7,000 over armored vehicles; twenty-five missile-launching naval craft; a sophisticated surface-to-air missile system and the highly effective Scud surface-to-surface missile, a nuclear warhead-capable missile with a range of 190 miles.²⁴ This expenditure was the equivalent of six hundred dollars worth for every person in Libya or six thousand dollars worth for every member the of 22,000 troops in Libya's military.²⁵ This package included much more than just the weapons systems alone, however; twelve thousand Soviet

²³ Deutsch, p. 51.

²⁴ Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network*. (New York: Reader's Digest Press/Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981.), p. 268.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 258.

military advisors came with the deal. They alone would control and fly the MiG 25's. Over a hundred North Koreans piloted the two squadrons of MiG 21's based in Banbah. Only Russians were permitted to operate the missile systems. Three hundred Czech technicians flew into Libya for tank maintenance. Nine airstrips were built to accommodate the giant Soviet Antonov cargo planes transporting personnel and spare parts. Should the need arise, the Antonovs could fly in enough Soviet pilots and crews to man an impressive air force in a matter of days.²⁶

The U.S. was particularly concerned by the presence of Scud missiles. The international community had long suspected that Qaddafi was frantically trying to acquire a nuclear capability, the so-called "Islamic Bomb." In the Spring of 1980, several defectors from a team of atomic scientists working on an atomic bomb in Chasma, Pakistan, told the BBC that Qaddafi had sponsored \$100 million to the project. Reportedly, once the weapon was completed, Qaddafi would take possession of it. When that deal fell through, diplomats and the press reported that Qaddafi was desperately trying to purchase an atomic weapon.²⁷

All this stacked the deck against Libya in dealing with the Reagan Administration. Assistant Secretary of Defense Francis J. West, in speaking to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in mid-1981, stated that "Libya has been transferred, in effect, into a Soviet weapons depot and is able to promise and deliver Soviet-origin weapons to states and factions friendly with the Soviets and inimical to our interests."²⁸

In keeping with the State Department's policy of opposing Soviet expansion-

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 268-269.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 258.

²⁸ Deutsch, p. 47.

ism in the Middle East and by that of its proxies, such as Libya, the Reagan Administration started a series of hostile and provocative moves against the Tripoli government. Not long after taking office, Reagan began his campaign. Among his initial actions against Libya was to ask the new Mitterand Administration in France to maintain an arms embargo in effect against Libya. He tried to persuade the Italian government from selling Libya military spare parts. Additionally, he asked American oil companies to withdraw their employees from Libya and to stop importing Libyan crude oil into the U.S.²⁹

On March 6 1981, the Reagan Administration ordered the closure of the Libyan People's Bureau in Washington D.C. The closure was because a Libyan campaign to suppress Libyan dissidents living in the U.S. was allegedly operating out of this facility. The Reagan White House significantly changed the Carter Administration's policy of giving economic aid to friendly countries in the region to one of predominantly military assistance. Seeing Libya as the "subversive" force in the region, the U.S. lavished its pro-Western neighbors such as Egypt, Sudan, and Tunisia with military aid. In 1982 alone, the military aid package to friendly countries in the region, including Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, increased to \$900 million.

These countries themselves did much to "play the Libyan card" to get more military aid from the U.S. Gafaar al-Numeiry, president of Sudan, stated in March of 1981, "We would see no danger in either Libya or its leadership if the matter concerned them alone. But we see danger in the fact that the Libyan leadership has become subject to a greater strategy and with long-term objec-

²⁹ Claudia Wright, "Libya and the West: Headlong into Confrontation?," *International Affairs*, 58 (Winter 1981/82), pp. 13-14.

tives in Africa."³⁰ The following month the Egyptian defense minister argued that Qaddafi represented a real threat against Egypt because of the Libyan alliance with the Soviet Union.³¹

The White House and the American people readily accepted that the Soviet Union was hiding behind Qaddafi and his regional policies. The American public was in a vengeful mood against terrorists. The Iran embassy hostage ordeal made the Middle East the focal point of anti-American terrorism in the eyes of the American people. Thus, the most effective way to elicit public support for a prolonged campaign to oppose Libyan and, indirectly, Soviet expansionism in the Middle East, would be to portray it as a campaign against terrorism.

Key among the Administration's tactics was the start of an extensive diplomatic and public relations effort aimed at painting a threatening portrait of Libya and Qaddafi. One important aspect of this program would be to increase America's knowledge and awareness of the actions of Libya and Qaddafi. Thus, the Reagan Administration began a campaign aimed at changing or bringing down the regime of Qaddafi. Lisa Anderson observes why Libya was such an effective target for the Reagan Administration's attention.

[Libya] is not a particularly strong or important country--its high visibility being entirely a function of its strategic position and its oil reserves--and hence it was an easy target for American opposition. It had close ties with the Soviet Union and therefore any change in Libyan policies could have been interpreted as a loss for the Soviets. Insofar as Qaddafi's policies did constitute a threat to pro-Western governments in Africa and the Arab world, and to Western interests in the Middle East and Mediterranean, American opposition to his government was thought to illustrate the [Reagan] Administration's interest in being a reliable friend and ally.³²

³⁰ ElWarfally, p. 157.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Anderson, p. 532.

Accordingly, the Reagan Administration presented speeches and other actions designed to single out Libya and expose it as a terrorist nation. Administration officials and spokesmen began a lengthy effort based on portraying Qaddafi as,

An agent of the international Soviet-backed terrorist conspiracy. This conspiracy, or 'terror network', as it was called in a lurid account of Libyan and Soviet involvement in terrorism published not long after the Reagan administration took office, linked Qaddafi and Libyan funds, weapons, and training camps to Palestinian groups, the Saharan Polisario, and other national liberation groups, as well as to the Irish Republican Army, Baader-Meinhof gang, Italian Red Brigades, and Japan's Red Army.³³

Secretary of State Alexander Haig reportedly sent copies of a widely-circulated book by Claire Sterling called *The Terror Network* to each member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In the book, Sterling describes Qaddafi as the "Daddy Warbucks" of terrorism, a reference to his financial support of terrorist groups. She also makes a strong connection between the Soviet Union and the actions of Qaddafi and other terrorist groups. Another popular book was Robert Moss and Arnaud de Borchgrave's *The Spike*, which similarly portrayed the threat to the Western world by the Soviet Union and their proxies. The Administration became so supportive of both books that it tasked the International Communications Agency to promote the books to local leaders around the world. By the end of 1981, the authors of both books gave testimony before the newly established Judiciary Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism. The deputy U.S. representative to the United Nations presented *The Terror Network* to the General Assembly to indicate the alleged Libyan-Soviet terrorist connection.³⁴

³³ C. Wright, p. 17.

³⁴ ElWarfally, p. 161.

One of the most profound lessons that Americans in the field of political/military activities learned from the Vietnam War was the necessity of obtaining and maintaining public support for any long-term operation. Americans tend to have a short attention span and a particular aversion to military action where the objectives, and the sacrifice necessary to achieve them, are not clear. The Reagan Administration realized that the most effective way of building a case against Qaddafi was to portray him and his country as supporters of international terrorism.

By the 1980's, terrorist groups learned how to play to the media, especially television. Middle East hijackers would give television interviews while holding their hostages at gunpoint. Because many terrorist acts were directed against United States assets, the specter and fear of terrorism was abundantly clear to anyone who flew commercial airliners or had friends and relatives overseas. Therefore, exploiting Qaddafi's well-publicized links with Mid-East terrorist groups was a clear and effective way of garnering public support for almost any action against Libya. The Reagan Administration went to great lengths to portray Libya as a state which directly threatened the American public. This cleared the way for more direct measures.

Chapter 3: The Big Stick

In the summer of 1981, the war of words between the two countries and their leaders evolved into an even more serious conflict. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, under the the direction of President Reagan, sent a contingent of the U.S. Sixth fleet into the waters off Libya to conduct a two-day open ocean missile exercise in one of the less crowded parts of the Mediterranean.³⁵ The armada, lead by two aircraft carriers and codenamed Task Force 60, sailed into the Mediterranean in mid-August.

The most controversial aspect of this live-missile air and sea exercise was the crossing by U.S. forces into the Gulf of Sidra. Qaddafi and the rest of the world, especially the United States, had argued over this large body of water bordering the middle third of northern Libya ever since the Libyan government unilaterally declared it sovereign territory in 1973. The Libyan leader announced that all of the Gulf of Sidra up to 32 degrees 20 minutes north latitude was Libyan, giving the country territorial waters extending in some points over a hundred miles. Most countries claimed and recognized limits of three- to twelve miles. Four months later in early 1974, the U.S. government notified Libya that this claim was unacceptable as a violation of international law.³⁶ Though neither the United Nations nor any major country including the Soviet Union recognized this claim, President Carter did not dispute it during his term in office. Reagan, however, set out to demonstrate Qaddafi's lack of any real power or credibility to his boasts, and take the conflict into Qaddafi's own backyard.

Even before the exercise took place, Qaddafi foreshadowed Libya's impending clash with the U.S. as he asserted that the U.S. had "exposed world peace

³⁵ William E. Smith, "Shootout Over the Med," *Time*, 27 (Aug.31, 1981), p. 24.

³⁶ Warren Weaver, "International Dispute Is Centered On Status of Mediterranean Gulf," *New York Times*, 80 (Aug. 20, 1981), p. A8.

and security to danger" and that "Libya reserves the right to take all necessary measures to protect its legitimate rights in its territorial waters and airspace." He further stated that U.S. exercises "unmask the nature of America's intentions against the Libyan nation and its achievements."³⁷

In the course of the exercise two American naval ships crossed the line Qaddafi would later dub the "Line of Death" with no incidents occurring, despite repeated Libyan threats before and during the exercise. In the skies above the Gulf, however, this was not the case. Libyan planes often intercepted American aircraft operating in the airspace above the disputed waters. During one such encounter between two F-14 Tomcat fighters from the U.S.S. Nimitz and two Soviet-made Libyan Air Force Su-22's flying out of the Ghurbadiyah air base along the central coast of Libya, one of the Libyan fighters reportedly launched a missile at one of the American planes. A two-minute dogfight ensued where the U.S. Navy aircraft shot down both of the Su-22's.

Even as the American warplanes were heading safely back to their ship and the U.S. Navy was ending its exercises, the politicians on both sides were preparing to argue their respective versions of the incident. Qaddafi condemned the U.S. as being belligerent and, while admitting that his planes did fire first and were both shot down, he attempted to save face by claiming that an F-14 was shot down in the battle. Despite a mixed international reaction, the Reagan Administration was satisfied with the outcome of the incident. The White House had debated for months on how to neutralize Qaddafi, and an armed engagement with the militarily-limited Libyans had a much greater probability of success than continued diplomatic and economic pressure. The inci-

³⁷ John Kifner, "Tripoli in a Protest Note, Accuses U.S. of 'International Terrorism'," *New York Times*, 80 (Aug. 20, 1981), p. A12.

dent also had the bonus effect of justifying the Reagan Administration's large military build-up by showing the superiority of American aircraft and pilots over their Libyan counterparts. On board the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Constellation for a previously planned visit, Reagan asserted, "Now the world knows it doesn't pay to shoot at us...Let friend and foe alike know America has the muscle to back up its word."³⁸

The Gulf of Sidra clash was the first U.S. military action since the aborted Iranian hostage attempt a year before, an incident which to the Reagan Administration epitomized the military weakness under which the U.S. was suffering. Overall, the entire series of events proved to be an unqualified success. The U.S. effectively took the conflict to the shores of Libya, the U.S. military performed in combat and succeeded, and the American people supported it. This was not lost upon policy makers who were trying to gauge the public's acceptance towards the use of military force in U.S. foreign relations. After years of being a "paper tiger," the U.S. under Reagan would give the world a "stern neighborhood cop again," a reference to the days when the U.S. could act as a global policeman.³⁹ In analyzing the affair, one observer states,

There is no doubt that the site of the U.S. action was a challenge to Qaddafi's assertion that he controlled the Gulf of Sidra and that staging the exercise there had been intentional. When asked whether the naval exercise was meant as a lesson to Libya, one State Department official replied 'Look at a map'.⁴⁰

In response to this, Qaddafi boastfully claimed he would get his revenge against the U.S. and Reagan. Subsequently, stories of Libyan "hit squads" sent to the U.S. to assassinate American officials, including President Reagan,

³⁸ "U.S.S. Constellation," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 7 (Aug. 24, 1981), pp. 889, 891.

³⁹ "Containment of Qaddafi," *Economist*, 280 (Aug. 29, 1981), p. 11.

⁴⁰ Smith, "Shootout...", p. 25.

began circulating. Qaddafi had issued veiled threats against U.S. government officials in the wake of various U.S.-Libyan conflicts in the past. In the light of the March, 1981 assassination attempt against President Reagan, the government always took the threats seriously. After the dogfight over the Gulf of Sidra and in the wake of the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in October of 1981, both the U.S. government and the news media publicized specific threats against U.S. officials.

In mid-October, a story broke that the U.S. Ambassador to Italy, Maxwell Robb, was a specific target of a ten-man Libyan hit team. The Libyans were to have assassinated Robb, a Jew and a personal friend of President Reagan, ostensibly as revenge for the downing of the Libyan Air Force planes two months earlier. The Italian police broke the case and deported the Libyans.⁴¹ In early November, U.S. intelligence sources released to the news media a report that Qaddafi was planning attacks on four U.S. embassies in Western Europe. The attackers apparently had targeted the diplomatic compounds in London, Paris, Vienna, and Rome, again in revenge for the Gulf of Sidra incident. One American Libya-watcher stated, "He's gone from individuals to institutions."⁴²

Soon reports of the Libyan "hitmen" became a nightly occurrence in the news. The "Libyan connection" expanded to include the disclosure that former U.S. CIA agents and Green Berets were training Libyans in terrorism so that they could kill dissidents in Europe and even in the United States. The State Department soon found Libyan involvement behind any incident or action directed against the U.S. or its representatives. In one such case, an attacker shot at Christian Chapman, the U.S. *charges d' affaires* in Paris, in front of his

⁴¹ Michael Reese, "Uniting Against Libya," *Newsweek*, 98 (Oct. 19, 1981), p. 43.

⁴² "Kaddafi's Latest Plot," *Newsweek*, 98 (Nov. 9, 1981), p. 29.

apartment building. Unhurt by the shots, he described the assailant as "Mid-Eastern looking." Only hours later, Secretary of State Haig declared that Qaddafi was to blame for the attack, and later the story evolved into a conspiracy by Qaddafi to kill Chapman. The story claimed that the gunman was part of a three-man hit-team that entered France from Cyprus on false passports.⁴³ In actuality, the gunman was a Moroccan whom Chapman knew intimately and the shooting was a result of a personal dispute between the two. Chapman himself chose not to press charges.⁴⁴

The focus of the Libyan hit team story, however, was the threat against the President himself. By the end of November, U.S. intelligence sources were reporting that Qaddafi was serious about killing Reagan. The front page story of the *New York Times* on December 4 detailed the story of an unidentified informant who told the FBI, the CIA, and the Secret Service of a Libyan plan to kill Reagan and other top Administration officials. Five Libyan-trained terrorist who had already entered the country, were to carry out these plans. Their methods reportedly included shooting down Air Force One with a surface-to-air missile, blowing up the President's limousine with a rocket, and attacking the President at close range with small arms. The informant, reportedly not an American, claimed the plot was in retaliation for the Gulf of Sidra dogfight that occurred the previous August.⁴⁵

The Reagan Administration played upon this story to the fullest extent, both in the media and in Washington D.C. itself. The White House had Air Force One equipped with electronic missile-evading equipment while phony Presidential

⁴³ "The Kaddafi Squad at Large," *Newsweek*, 98 (Dec. 14, 1981), pp. 36-37.

⁴⁴ Claudia Wright, "G-Men, oil men and hit-men," *New Statesmen*, 102 (Dec.18/25, 1981), p. 14.

⁴⁵ Philip Taubman, "U.S. Officials Say FBI is Hunting Terrorists Seeking to Kill President," *New York Times*, 81 (Dec. 4, 1981), p. A1.

motorcades filled with security people wheeled through the capital waiting for an attack.⁴⁶ In response to a denial of any impending attack by Qaddafi himself on American television, the Administration responded by stating that while it hoped Colonel Qaddafi's statement meant he would abandon "the use of terrorism and assassination" in his foreign policy, the Administration had strong evidence that Qaddafi has been planning the murder of American officials both in the U.S. and abroad.⁴⁷

The intensity with which the Administration pursued the hit team story led many in the media and elsewhere to question just how credible the story really was. Though the White House maintained that they were completely convinced of the threat by the evidence they had obtained, they refused to make the evidence or the identity of the informant public.

Some in the government itself expressed skepticism about the legitimacy of the plot. In response to this skepticism, the White House tried to defend its credibility. When confronted with some disbelief over the story, White House communications director David Gergen responded, "I personally find it astonishing that people think we somehow would go through this exercise unless we took it seriously. We are not engaged in some public relations ploy here. It's specious to suggest that. We are not trying to blow up this whole story. This is a serious matter."⁴⁸ He further defended the White House from accusations that the Administration had instigated the entire assassination plot: "They are not deliberate. There is no orchestrated effort by this administration to orchestrate these leaks. The White House has made very clear to the heads of various depart-

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. A27.

⁴⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, "Reagan Weighs Economic Sanctions Against Libya," *New York Times*, 81 (Dec. 8, 1981), p. 7.

⁴⁸ Bernard Gwertzman, "Punitive Action Against Libya Deferred," *New York Times*, 81 (Dec. 9, 1981), p. 3.

ments and agencies that the Presidents personally condemns the leaks."⁴⁹

Nevertheless, there was a large amount of skepticism about the hit-team story, even in the American government. Senator Paul Tsongas, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said about the story, "There are doubts around here. It's not so much whether there is evidence, but why the Administration is making such a big deal about it." Senator Christopher Dodd commented, "If that's all there is, we're being bombarded with a lot of hype. I need more evidence."⁵⁰ Others remarked that Qaddafi had been making threats against the President and the United States for ten years, so what makes this threat any more credible.

Some observers expressed concern that the publicity given to Qaddafi would only feed his ego and build him up in the eyes of the other Arab nations unfriendly to the U.S. Roger Fisher, a professor of law at Harvard University, stated, "We built up Castro in the same way. Why do we do this for Qaddafi? Why make this guy equal to a superpower?"⁵¹ One report had the source coming from the Israeli intelligence agency, raising the question if it might be in Israel's interest to increase U.S.-Libyan tensions at the same time Israeli-Libyan tensions were increasing.⁵² With neither an attack nor the arrest of any suspects, the assassination story withered. No real action took place, except the fueling of anti-Libyan passions among the American people. Only much later did the U.S. government identify the would-be assassins as leaders of the Lebanese Amal. This group was passionately anti-Libyan due to their belief that Qaddafi had kidnapped and killed their spiritual leader, Imam Mousa Sadr,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ James Kelly, "Searching for the Hit Teams," *Time*, 118 (Dec. 21, 1981), p. 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Pasha, p. 14.

on a visit to Tripoli three years earlier.⁵³

While discounting assassinating the Libyan leader, Administration leaders were discussing their strategy for "tightening the noose around him." These efforts included a "long term strategy of sapping Qaddafi's influence and bank account;" such as evacuating American oil workers from Libya, limiting or eliminating all trade between the U.S. and Libya, and dispatching informational teams to brief Qaddafi's targets on Libya's efforts at penetration and subversion. Government officials also openly discussed the military option, such as imposing a naval blockade of Libyan ports to limit exports of oil and imports of food. Another proposal was to launch a B-52 raid on one or more of fourteen terrorist training camps identified within Libya. "That's the thing you do if they take a shot at Reagan" said one top official.⁵⁴

Ultimately the Administration settled on simply requesting that all Americans leave Libya immediately. The main effect of the order, which the U.S. government could not enforce beyond invalidating American passports to Libya, was that it would remove a large proportion of the skilled foreign technicians who run Libya's oil production. This would pose a potential threat to Libya's petroleum economy. More subtle but just as important, the removal of Americans from Libya would eliminate the possibility of them being taken hostage as in Iran, especially in the face of any further U.S. action against Libya.

The hit team scare illuminated the on-going strategy of containing and suppressing Qaddafi. The Reagan Administration had been following this policy since taking office the previous January. As early as July of 1981, Assistant

⁵³ Andrew Breslau, "Demonizing Qaddafi," *Africa Report*, 32 (Mar.-Apr., 1987), p. 46.

⁵⁴ John Brecher, "New Threats from Kaddafi," *Newsweek*, 98 (Nov. 30, 1981), p. 52.

Secretary of State Chester Crocker announced that the U.S. intended to funnel military aid to any of Qaddafi's neighbors "who see the problem as we see it."⁵⁵ Early on, the U.S. established a policy of supporting Libya's pro-West neighbors with arms. Egypt, with whom Libya had fought a brief war in 1977, and Sudan, where Qaddafi intensely supported opposition groups against President Numieri, both received large amounts of military aid. In an interview on the television show "Meet the Press," Egyptian President Anwar Sadat embarrassed the Reagan Administration when he said that two AWACS planes the White House had sent into the region were there to monitor the Egyptian and Sudanese borders to coordinate for the sending in of Egyptian military support with a planned coup d'etat within Libya.⁵⁶ In addition, U.S. military forces began a series of highly visible exercises in the region, including joint operations with Egypt code-named Bright Star. During the August, 1981, exercise in the Gulf of Sidra which led to the dogfight between Libyan and U.S. Navy aircraft, Egypt was conducting military maneuvers. Washington officials were eager to see how Qaddafi would react to the "coincidence" of Egyptian troops conducting maneuvers along the Libyan border at the same time as U.S. naval ships were steaming offshore.⁵⁷

In October, American newsmagazines reported that the Reagan Administration was trying to orchestrate an international response to Qaddafi's campaign against neighboring Sudan. As well as sending anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to the beleaguered country, the White House was also trying to put its "strategic consensus" doctrine to work by attempting to draw friendly Arab

⁵⁵ Bob Levin, "Kaddafi's Dangerous Game," *Newsweek*, 98 (Jul. 20, 1981), p. 41.

⁵⁶ *Meet the Press*, NBC News, Aug. 9, 1981.

⁵⁷ Bill Roeder, "The U.S. Challenges Libya's Kaddafi," *Newsweek*, 97 (Aug. 24, 1981), p. 13.

countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia into the conflict.⁵⁸

Even before the Gulf of Sidra clash, which spawned the Libyan assassination "plot" against the Reagan Administration, several stories surfaced about alleged Administration efforts to remove Qaddafi from power. In June of 1981, senior White House officials stated that they were searching for ways to bleed Qaddafi, preferably by drawing him into a protracted war. One possible scenario could have been in Chad where Libyan forces were supporting the government of President Goukouni Oeddei. American government officials were looking into the possibility of persuading France to send in troops to back the Chadian rebels.⁵⁹

In early August, a Central Intelligence Agency plan to remove Qaddafi from power also came to light. This plan followed a combination of efforts including initiating a disinformation program designed to embarrass Qaddafi and his government, the creation of a counter government to challenge his claim to national leadership, and starting an escalating paramilitary campaign. This would probably be conducted by disaffected Libyan nationals, who would blow up bridges, conduct small scale guerrilla operations and demonstrate that an indigenous political force opposed Qaddafi. The cost of this program was reportedly so high that the CIA and the Reagan Administration needed Congressional approval. Once the secrecy of this strategy dissolved, the White House backed away from it.⁶⁰

Another possible partner in a joint operation against Libya was Egypt. Relations between Qaddafi and President Anwar Sadat had grown worse ever

⁵⁸ Bill Roeder, "Washington's Plan to Help the Sudan," *Newsweek*, 98 (Oct. 12, 1981), p. 35.

⁵⁹ Bob Levin, "Striking Back at Kaddafi," *Newsweek*, 97 (Jun. 8, 1981), p. 60.

⁶⁰ "A Plan to Overthrow Kaddafi," *Newsweek*, 98 (Aug. 3, 1981), p. 19.

since the Camp David Peace Accords between Israel and Egypt were signed. Qaddafi regarded this as a complete sell-out of the Palestinians, and the Libyan leader took the lead in the formation of the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation States, an organization of mostly radical Arab states which rejected the peace accords. Sadat himself favored military action against Libya, and in 1977 he initiated a brief and inconclusive border war.

While Sadat found the Carter Administration unreceptive to military action against Libya, the opposite was true of the Reagan presidency. The White House developed several invasion plans including one put out by the Israelis, which would include flying Israeli F-16's in Egyptian markings to destroy Libyan rocket bases and missile centers in preparation for an Egyptian invasion.⁶¹ Other plans discussed included an Egyptian invasion into Libya supported by extensive U.S. air strikes. The likelihood of renewed Egyptian-Libyan hostilities appears to have been highly probable at the time of Anwar Sadat's assassination in October of 1981. His Vice-President, Hosni Mubarak, effectively vetoed any attack when he declared,

We have no intention to declare any war on any neighboring country after the October 1973 one. There are no concentrations of armed forces on the Egyptian-Libyan frontier, as some like to imagine. We will not declare war against any Arab country. I am not in favor of war.⁶²

In examining the Reagan Administration's early dealings with Qaddafi and Libya, this president differed greatly with his predecessors. Doing away completely with the pretense of trying to establish better relations with Libya, the Administration instead adopted a policy of confrontation and coercion designed to scare Qaddafi. The White House would accomplish this through economic,

⁶¹ Pasha, p. 29.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 31.

diplomatic, and if necessary, military means to force him to temper his radical policies. This strategy had two main goals: to modify Qaddafi's behavior in a way acceptable to U.S. standards and to demonstrate to the world that the United States has the power to do it.⁶³

To do this, the White House also attempted to influence Libya's neighboring countries into opposing Qaddafi's moves in Africa. This policy, often called the Strategic Consensus doctrine, in part led to the massive increases in military aid the White House granted to such countries as Egypt and Morocco. Even more serious were the discussions the Administration had with leaders of these Middle Eastern countries to plan military attacks against Libya.

While the Reagan Administration's dealings with Libya are the most extreme example of this policy of coercion against countries considered unfriendly to the U.S., it is but one example. All these actions were in keeping with the "Reagan Doctrine" of destabilizing anti-American governments. The great effort the White House gave to clandestine methods of toppling the Libyan government was in itself indicative of the emphasis the Reagan Administration put on covert action. Reagan and his supporters had many times complained about Congress's "shackling" of the CIA and other covert activities agencies in the 1970's. Under his Administration, and with longtime-friend William Casey as the director of the CIA, the Executive gave the green light for engaging in a host of undercover operations against Libya. The Administration was simultaneously directing similar policies against such countries as Nicaragua and Angola. Lisa Anderson states in writing about Libyan and American foreign policy,

The Administration argued that this new policy demonstrated that the United States would not tolerate lawlessness in the international arena. The relatively high profile the Libyan issue was ac-

⁶³ L. Anderson, *Middle East Journal*, p. 531.

corded by American officials was designed to suggest the increased resolve of the Reagan Administration not to tolerate what it viewed as repugnant behavior, particularly from Third World countries.⁶⁴

The Soviet Union, itself the target of inflammatory rhetoric from the Reagan Administration and faced with the prospect of a dramatically rearming U.S., saw American policy regarding Libya as blatantly aggressive.

The true aim of the U.S.-launched anti-Libyan campaign is to disguise the aggressive policies of the United States in the Middle East and in Africa. By advancing far-fetched pretexts, Washington attempts to mislead world opinion and justify an unprecedented buildup of U.S. overseas military presence in various parts of the world, including the Middle East and North Africa, the establishment of new military bases and blocs and its preparations toward direct aggression and military provocations. The anti-Libyan ballyhoo is seen as a diversion from domestic political problems of the White House and from Israeli "criminal" actions including announcing the annexation of Syria's Golan Heights.⁶⁵

The Reagan Administration's dealings with Libya in its first year reflected an attitude of containment and confrontation. The right-wing ideology of the Administration, bolstered by a decisive presidential victory and the regaining of a Republican majority in the U.S. Senate, dictated that the U.S. was not to negotiate with its foes, but rather to coerce them into following an acceptable political course. The U.S. did not have to wait for a provocative act from Qaddafi. Its anti-Libya policy went into effect from the moment the Reagan Administration took office. The closing of diplomatic missions, the imposing of sanctions, and the deploying of U.S. military forces near Libya were not isolated actions unto themselves but rather a consistent and on-going set of actions seeking the downfall of Libya's revolutionary government.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ V. Usov, "Anti-Libya Syndrom In Washington," *International Affairs* (Moscow), (March, 1982), p. 127.

That the Reagan Administration should embark on this course so soon after taking power should surprise no one because action against Libya was completely consistent with other actions aimed at suppressing left-wing and revolutionary governments around the world. At a time when Reagan was denouncing Qaddafi, he was also denouncing the Soviet Union on unprecedented terms, backing an anti-communist guerrilla force in Nicaragua, and presiding over the most dramatic military buildup in decades. The Reagan Administration saw the potential to reverse the left-ward course the world had taken since the end of World War II, and with Libya, the Administration sensed that they had a good chance of getting an early and dramatic win. The frontal approaches of economic sanctions and military conflict exhibited in the first year had drawn blood, but failed to complete the job. Given Libya's close relationship with Soviet Union, the U.S. would need allies to render Libya impotent. Soon the Reagan Administration would do its best to turn the U.S.-Libya conflict into a regional one.

Chapter 4: The African Campaign

As 1981 turned into 1982 and the scare and publicity of the Libyan hit team began to wither, the Reagan Administration began to take a more active interest in opposing Qaddafi's moves in the African continent. Qaddafi had long been interested in the affairs of his fellow African nations. After his initial failure at creating and leading a new wave of Arab nationalism and unity based on his model, Qaddafi began to put greater attention and effort into exporting his revolution. He felt that the Arabs might unify in certain cases only after the overthrow of the "reactionary Arab governments" such as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Sudan, countries he had decided were hopelessly anti-revolutionary.⁶⁶ Qaddafi's willingness to support opposition groups in these countries only added to the alarm and concern in both the countries themselves and in the Western countries having ties to them.

Having little luck in uniting or revolutionizing the Arab *Maghrib* countries to the west or the *Mashriq* countries to the east, Qaddafi directed his attentions southward. The North African Arabs traditionally had a patronizing attitude towards the Blacks in the south, and had been actively involved in their enslavement in previous centuries. During the battles occurring in northern Chad during that nation's civil war in 1987, the official media of the Habre administration made repeated reference to the "slave-driving Libyans."⁶⁷ This attitude continued into the Twentieth Century in the form of Arab, and especially Libyan, intervention in the newly independent African countries. Qaddafi's mentor, the late Egyptian president Nasser, once declared,

⁶⁶ Lisa Anderson, "Libya and American Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal*, 36 (Autumn, 1982), p. 523.

⁶⁷ John Wright, *Libya, Chad and the Central Sahara*. (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Nobel Books, 1989), p. 136.

It is not in vain that our country lies north of Africa, a position from which it overlooks the dark continent.... The people of Africa will look to us-we who are the guardians of the continent's northern gates, who constitute the connecting link between the continent and the outer world.... We certainly cannot, under any condition, relinquish our responsibility to help our utmost in spreading the lights of knowledge and civilization into the very depths of the virgin jungles of our continent.⁶⁸

Qaddafi had sent troops to support Idi Amin's forces against an invading Tanzanian army in 1979. He also reportedly offered assistance to coup leader Sgt. Samuel Doe after the toppling and murder of Liberian President William Tolbert.⁶⁹ Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker claimed that Libyan actions in Sub-Saharan Africa "strike at the heart of U.S. and Western objectives."⁷⁰ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Princeton Lyman characterized Libyan aims in Africa before the House Subcommittee.

It would appear that the Libyans have objectives in Africa that do not bode well for the region. These goals seem to include establishing, without regard for existing national boundaries, an Arab-Islamic bloc including Muslims of the Middle East and Africa. It would appear that Qaddafi envisions the elimination of these boundaries in the creation of a 'super Libya' with Qaddafi as its spokesman. He also appears ready to work actively against any country that resists his ambition.⁷¹

The presidents of Niger, Mali, and Sudan charged that Libya had attempted to overthrow their governments, while the Senegalese and Gambians accused the Libyans of imprisoning their nationals and putting them into military service against their wills. Senegal, Equatorial Guinea, and Gambia broke off diplomatic relations with Libya in 1980. Nigeria, Ghana, and Niger expelled Libyan

⁶⁸ Gamel Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, (Smith, Keynes and Marshall Publishers, Buffalo, 1959).

⁶⁹ Richard Deutsch, "Dealing with Qaddafi," *Africa Report*, 27 (Mar./Apr. 1982), p. 48.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

diplomats from their countries in 1980, followed by Liberia, Sudan, and the Central African Republic the next year. In 1980, Qaddafi expressed his support for a previously unknown group called the Front for the Liberation of East Sahara with the intention of promoting disorder in Egypt and Sudan. He also announced his concern and support for the nomadic Tuaregs, setting the stage for Libyan intervention on their behalf anywhere in Sudan and the extremes of West Africa.⁷²

In August of 1981, Secretary Crocker stated,

Libyan arms and cash are at the center of a sinister and skillful campaign of subversion that has become a major source of African instability. The activities of the Soviets and their partners threaten the security of Africa in every corner of the continent. In accordance with our objectives, the United States is working to frustrate these activities and to help African states resist them.⁷³

The focal point of Qaddafi's interventions in Africa and the Reagan Administration's efforts to oppose him was in the country of Chad. Unlike Libya, which was a federation of three distinct territories, Chad was described as,

An artificial by-product of French political and strategic priorities elsewhere, brought into being largely because its constituent territories filled the 'left-over spaces between the three wings of the French empire in Africa.' So long as the French were in control, Chad had a certain enforced cohesion; but the divisions and tensions between inherently incompatible peoples and cultures were still apparent.⁷⁴

Chad and Libya have had a long history of ethnic, tribal, commercial, religious and political interaction spanning many centuries. Not long after Chad gained its independence from French rule in 1960, bitter conflict erupted between the northern inhabitants, the Muslim Tebu, and the non-Muslim central

⁷² Wright, p. 91.

⁷³ Deutsch, p. 50.

⁷⁴ Wright, p. 126.

government. Much of the tensions in Chad stemmed from the long-simmering conflict between the Islamic Arab peoples in the north and the mostly Christian black Africans in the south. Once in power, Qaddafi supported this Muslim insurgency and its political and spiritual leader, Oueddei Kichidemi.

Much of Qaddafi's efforts at destabilizing his neighbors was through the revival of long-standing boundary disputes. Based on an unratified Franco-Italian treaty signed in 1935, unofficial maps produced in Libya in 1976 showed extended Libyan boundaries encompassing 96,000 square kilometers of Chad, 19,500 of Niger, and a similar amount of Algeria.⁷⁵ In particular, Qaddafi had his sights on a piece of land in northern Chad along the border between the two countries known as the Aozou strip. This strip of land was rumored to contain uranium deposits.

In 1972, in return for supporting the government of President Tombalbaye and ceasing support for the Muslim Tebu, Qaddafi's military forces entered and occupied the contested area. In 1978, Chadian President Goukouni Oueddei, son of Sultan Oueddei Kichidemi, invited Libyan forces into his country to fend off attacks by his chief rival, Hissene Habre. Habre, formerly the Defense Minister of Chad, and Goukouni had been waging a see-saw struggle for control of Chad for years. When one faction was in power, the other was fighting it. Only under pressure from the U.N. and neighboring African countries did Libyan forces withdraw in 1981.

The White House campaigned to build public support for opposing Qaddafi in Chad through speeches and the media. Secretary Haig said in St. Louis,

The resources received by Qaddafi from his oil are almost exclusively diverted to the purchase of armaments, the training of international terrorists, and the conduct of direct intervention in the neighboring states of North Africa, the most recent of which being

⁷⁵ Martin Sicker, *The Making of a Pariah State*. (New York: Praeger, 1987.), p. 91.

the invasion of Chad.⁷⁶

By the fall of 1983, the Reagan Administration was making the Libyan intervention in Chad a major foreign policy issue. Hissene Habre, the chief rival to the political faction of Goukouni Oueddei, was now in power. Goukouni, with Libyan support, had been leading a rebel campaign to remove Habre from office and regain control of the country. After Goukouni's forces lost the key oasis town of Faya Largeau in northern Chad to government forces, the rebels tried to retake the town with direct Libyan military support. Libya had directly intervened in this perpetual civil war on several previous occasions. In 1978, Qaddafi sent his army into Chad to help Goukouni attain power, and in 1980, Libyan troops saved the Goukouni government from Habre's forces. Only under extreme pressure from neighboring African states and the Organization of African Unity did Qaddafi pull his forces out in 1981.

In August of 1983, Libyan fighter and bomber aircraft began a series of highly destructive air raids on the government forces stationed in Faya Largeau. Libyan bombing raids destroyed the town and the Chadian government garrison stationed there, allowing Goukouni to capture the it. In response to this Libyan intervention, which Qaddafi incredulously denied, the United States and France began to send arms to the Chad government. Reagan further sent four AWACS planes capable of monitoring Libyan air activity, along with a fighter escort, to Egypt and Sudan. Washington also sent thirty Redeye anti-aircraft missiles and three U.S. advisors to instruct on using the weapons. Finally, Reagan sent the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier U.S.S. Eisenhower into the Mediterranean near the Gulf of Sidra. During this deployment, two F-14's from the Eisenhower intercepted two Libyan MiG 23's approaching the naval task

⁷⁶ Deutsch, p. 49.

force and nearly attacked them before the Libyans broke off and retreated. This almost caused a repeat of the 1981 Gulf of Sidra dogfight.⁷⁷

Though the Reagan Administration clearly wanted to intervene on behalf of Chad against Libya, it was not prepared to send in U.S. combat troops. Instead, the White House pressured France, Chad's former colonizer, to intervene. Pledging not to send in U.S. forces, Reagan said, "Chad is not our primary sphere of influence, it is that of France."⁷⁸ French President Francois Mitterand complained that Reagan had forced France to intervene in Chad and that Reagan had sent him a barrage of high pressure letters at the rate of one every two days.⁷⁹ France finally sent in a contingent of troops and supporting aircraft from the neighboring Central African Republic. While doing so, Mitterand complained that the situation in Chad would have been less complicated if the United States government had not placed such high stakes on the region. He implied that the White House's preoccupation with the ambitions of Colonel Qaddafi aggravated the situation there and that France had sent troops into Chad to prevent the civil war from escalating into an East-West conflict.⁸⁰

In examining the Reagan Administration's role in the Chad civil war, the real target of the U.S. effort was Libya. Chad, which one observer described as "an artificial creation of colonial map makers" which "has no sense of national unity and no economy to speak of; its principal industry is civil war," was of little concern to Washington policy-makers in the past. The country had suffered through civil war since France first granted it independence.⁸¹ By sending the

⁷⁷ Angus Deming, "Kaddafi: On the Move Again," *Newsweek*, 102 (Aug. 15, 1983), p. 24.

⁷⁸ "Foreign Issues," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 19 (Aug. 15, 1983), p. 1112.

⁷⁹ Russell Watson, "Mitterand Draws the Line," *Newsweek*, 102 (Aug. 29, 1983), p. 29.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Navy off Libya's coast and sending the Chadian military weapons capable of shooting down Libyan bombers, the White House used Chad as an excuse to pressure Qaddafi with the Reagan Administration's most favored policy tool, military force. Reagan's dealing with France in the issue also underscored the Administration's desire to inflict military punishment on Libya as a result of Libyan adventurism. Kim Rogal of *Newsweek* states,

Like Habre, Reagan had hoped France would send the Jaguars (French attack aircraft) to back the forces at Faya Largeau. The Administration's reason for dispatching AWACS to the Sudan was to assist the French jets as they attacked the Libyan and rebel forces.⁸²

Much of the Reagan Administration's concern about Libyan adventurism in Chad dealt with geopolitics. Geographically, the Libya-Chad axis served as a bridge between Arab North Africa and Sub-Saharan Black Africa. In Chad, Qaddafi could position Libyan forces along the borders of a number of countries. The Libya-Chad corridor ran parallel to the neighboring Egypt-Sudan corridor and thus exposed these borders, especially militarily-weak Sudan, to Libyan intervention. To the west of Chad lay Niger, another country with a history of Libyan intervention.⁸³

The Administration feared that ultimately Qaddafi would try to create a "United States of Sahel," an Islamic tribal entity stretching across central Africa. He would accomplish this by exploiting ethnic and religious conflicts in central African countries to unite populations hostile to their home governments. The Tuareg tribesmen in Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, and Niger and tribesmen in refugee camps located in Cameroon were special targets of Libyan activity.⁸⁴

⁸² Kim Rogal, "The Colonel Strikes South," *Newsweek*, 102 (Aug. 22, 1983), p. 26.

⁸³ John W. Amos, "Libya in Chad: Soviet Surrogate or Nomadic Imperialist," *Conflict*, 5 (1983), p. 4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

These factors together aggravated the White House's apprehension over Libya. The President and his advisors still saw Libya as a Soviet client state, intervening militarily in the affairs of its pro-Western neighbors to create a radical-Muslim empire with close ties to Moscow. This had occurred already in South Yemen, and Qaddafi was an early and close supporter of the coup led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings in Ghana. Many successive American presidencies feared the Soviet-Libyan connection. Both countries had supported the Arabs against the Israelis in the Middle East wars, and both believed that the Socialist world was a natural ally of the emerging ex-colonial countries. The Soviets were only too happy to promote this alliance. When Sadat broke with the Soviets after the 1973 Yom Kippur war and warmed relations with the United States, the Soviets saw Libya as another possible staging area for increasing its influence and blocking U.S. moves in the Mediterranean-North Africa region. The Soviets also viewed Qaddafi's appetite for advanced weapons, and his petroleum-based hard currency to pay for them, as a deal too valuable to pass up. Nevertheless, the Soviets were also often confused or frustrated with Qaddafi's inconsistency in his policies, as well as his public contempt for communism. In spite of his frequent threats against the West to allow Soviet access to Libyan ports, Qaddafi never did acquiesce on this long-desired goal of the Soviets.

Many African countries remained less than convinced of their impending danger. Because of African leader's sensitivity to secessionist conflicts and rebellions, the Organization of African Unity reluctantly endorsed Goukouni's invitation of the Libyan troops to help him fight off the rebel forces of Hissene Habre

in the early 1980's.⁸⁵ The Nairobi Weekly Review remarked, "The main reason for the acceptance of the Libyan presence in Chad was the calm which was restored through Libya's intervention. It was felt that it would have been pointless to undermine the peace in Chad regardless of the way it came."⁸⁶

Many on the continent saw Libya as the victim of the East-West conflict. They could not see how a country so small could be such a threat, especially to a country as powerful as the United States. Many Africans distrusted the U.S. and its actions as much and perhaps more than those of Libya.

Africans who take great care to sift facts from fiction noted the difference between the press reports on the "Qaddafi murder squad" that allegedly entered the United States in late November to assassinate President Reagan, and the plots to kill Qaddafi about which more evidence is available.⁸⁷

The American effort in Africa against Libya reflected one of the Reagan Administration's major goals and sources of frustration in pursuing its policy against Libya; the quest for international cooperation. Since taking office, the Administration had been pushing its European allies to take meaningful action against Libya and its state-sponsored terrorism. Reagan pressured France, West Germany, Italy, and other European countries to cut their economic ties that put billions of dollars into Qaddafi's coffers, allowing him to purchase Soviet weapons and bankroll international terrorist groups. The Reagan Administration had as little success persuading its African allies to take substantive action against Libya as it had with the European countries. Pro-U.S. countries like Egypt and Sudan were willing to accept American armaments to oppose Libyan aggression (as well as internal threats), but the pressures of

⁸⁵ Zdenek Cervenka, "The World of Muammar Qaddafi," *Africa Report*, 27 (Mar.-Apr., 1982), p. 13.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

African and Arab unity, political nonalignedness, and sensitivity to U.S. imperialism made a complete alliance with the U.S. against Libya politically impossible.

On the African continent, many countries discounted the U.S. portrayal of Qaddafi as an international scourge. On a continent where colonialism and apartheid have ravaged the people and the land, African leaders saw Qaddafi as a nationalist and a defender against imperialism, if also somewhat of an opportunist. Probably a broad view of Africa's perception of Qaddafi would be that,

Although many Africans do not subscribe to Qaddafi's puritanism which made Libya a country without alcohol, nightclubs, sex shows, and gambling, they prefer his austerity to the ostentatious wealth of oil princes and emirs.⁸⁸

Africa, like Europe, preferred to follow a *realpolitik* policy of tolerating Qaddafi in return for trade and the tacit insurance that he would not turn his disruptive energies towards their countries.

By 1984, the Reagan Administration had achieved about all it could expect in regards to building an African alliance against Libya. As American officials grew increasingly frustrated at their inability to develop an international consensus to stop Libyan activity, they realized that they would have to take action on their own.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 14.

Chapter 5: Walking the Line of Death

The confrontation between Qaddafi and Reagan over Libya's support of international terrorism escalated in the Spring of 1985. In early April, Qaddafi gained the attention of the Reagan Administration with his highly publicized creation of a Pan Arab command designed to carry out acts of violence against the U.S., Western Europe, and the moderate Arab states. Qaddafi said, "there is no alternative to confronting the enemy with violence" and encouraged suicide attacks against U.S. and other interests in the region. In response to this, the Reagan Administration announced it would hold Qaddafi fully responsible for Libyan terrorism against the United States.⁸⁹ Administration spokesman Bernard Kalb stated officially,

The world cannot tolerate the lawlessness and terrorism which Qaddafi so openly advocates. He should know this and be aware that Libya will be held accountable for its actions. Our own views on terrorism and Colonel Qaddafi are well known. We will hold Qaddafi fully responsible for Libyan terrorism against Americans and other U.S. interests whether they are carried out abroad or in the United States. Likewise, we will continue our consultations and cooperation to assist governments threatened by Libyan aggression.⁹⁰

Tensions further increased in the Fall when leaks in the U.S. government reported the Reagan Administration had approved a covert plan aimed at weakening the regime of Qaddafi. Secretary of State Shultz and Central Intelligence Agency Director William Casey, along with Reagan, authorized the plan to thwart Libyan support for terrorism. It sought to lure Qaddafi into a situation that would give his opponents in the Libyan military a chance to seize power or provide one of Libya's U.S.-backed neighbors with the justification for a military re-

⁸⁹ "Washington Warns Libya on Creation of Terrorist Group," *New York Times*, 84 (Apr. 3, 1985), p. A13.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

sponse.⁹¹

The most serious incident was a terrorist attack that took place just after Christmas. The Rome and Vienna Airport massacres in December, 1985 and Qaddafi's support and role it brought Qaddafi back into the world spotlight. These events created the circumstances allowing the Reagan Administration to intensify its policy of provocation and escalation. This ultimately led to the bombing of the Libyan mainland by U.S. military forces.

On December 27, 1985, a mere two days after the Christmas holiday, Palestinian gunmen launched coordinated terrorist attacks on the Rome and Vienna airports. In Leonardo da Vinci Airport in Rome, four Palestinians formed a semi-circle near the airline counters, hurling grenades and firing machine guns at people passengers waiting to board flights at the TWA, Pan Am, and El Al terminals, and at people eating at a nearby coffee shop. Three other Palestinian gunmen carried out a similar action in the Schwechat airport in Vienna minutes later. The total casualty toll for the acts was fifteen civilians killed, including five Americans. Bullets and shrapnel wounded another hundred people.

The responsibility for the massacre fell on a mysterious Palestinian terrorist leader named Abu Nidol. Nidol's well-known connections with Qaddafi prompted the Reagan Administration to declare it was prepared to work with other governments to "exert pressure" on Libya to halt the export of terrorism.⁹² Further blame fell on Libya, both because Libya's press agency initially described the airport attacks as "heroic operations" and because investigators traced the false Tunisian passports the terrorists carried to Libya. Apparently Libyan officials

⁹¹ "CIA Plan's Leak Probed," *Washington Post*, 108 (Nov. 4, 1985), p. A4.

⁹² William E. Smith, "An Eye for an Eye," *Time*, 127 (Jan. 13, 1986), p. 28.

had confiscated them from Tunisian guestworkers. "The evidence of Qaddafi's involvement in the Rome and Vienna attacks is irrefutable," quoted one American official.⁹³ The attacks, whose graphic pictures of dead bodies sprawled along the floor of the airports opened all the nightly newscasts, deeply disturbed Ronald Reagan. He referred to Qaddafi as "one of those fellas who think it's all right to shoot 11 year old girls," a reference to the killing of a young American girl in Rome.⁹⁴

Widespread speculation emerged in the days and weeks following the airport incidents on how the U.S. would respond. Many predicted that the U.S. would conduct military action, such as launching a retaliatory air strike. The Reagan Administration, undecided about what it could or would do in retaliation, did nothing to stop speculation on a military move against Qaddafi. On December 30, White House spokesman Larry Speakes responded to questions of an impending U.S. military strike by saying,

There are a number of ways the United States can take action to discourage terrorism. Certainly U.S. military options are always an option, as are many other areas, and we are always considering these options. As of the moment, we don't say.⁹⁵

Speakes went on to say that Abu Nidol's group had received a considerable amount of financial and other assistance from Libya and had an operational base in that country.⁹⁶ On the last day of the year, the State Department issued a report linking Abu Nidol's group with Libya. Of note in this report was its statement that the actions of this and similar terrorist groups were becoming

⁹³ Russell Watson, "A Warning to Libya," *Newsweek*, 107 (Jan. 13 1986), p. 21.

⁹⁴ Smith, p. 31.

⁹⁵ Gerald M. Boyd, "U.S. Accuses Libya of Aiding Gunmen Airport Raid," *New York Times*, 85 (Dec. 31, 1985), p. A1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. A4.

more concentrated in Western Europe, an apparent move designed to gain Western European support for U.S.-initiated anti-terrorist policies.⁹⁷

In spite of their concerns, the lack of a "smoking gun" prevented many in the Administration, including the President himself, from supporting offensive action. There was no real evidence that Qaddafi played a direct role in the operation beyond his initial support for the airport attacks. With a lack of any real commitment on the part of the European NATO allies to impose sanctions against Libya, White House strategists saw the military option as the only avenue of approach that the U.S. alone could follow that would make a sufficient impact on Qaddafi. The general unwillingness of Reagan and Weinberger to use force due to the lack of a clear-cut target caused considerable frustration within the Administration. One official stated,

My appraisal of the situation is that there is mounting frustration in the Administration. We have condemned and deplored terrorist activities, which have involved a number of fatalities of Americans. Up until now it has been only words. There is a mounting feeling that we have to put our money where our mouth is.⁹⁸

The frustration felt in the White House at the beginning of 1986 was certainly not a new feeling. Since the previous July, deputy National Security Advisor Admiral John Poindexter had been developing a plan of action designed to demonstrate America's resolve to punish Libya's support of terrorism through direct military action.⁹⁹ While Secretary of State George Shultz was in favor of striking Libya on any premise, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and his senior military leaders were much more cautious. They favored military ac-

⁹⁷ *Libya Under Qadhafi: A Pattern of Aggression*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, Jan., 1986).

⁹⁸ Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Puts Pressure on Allies to Join Libyan Sanctions," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 3, 1986), p. A6.

⁹⁹ Breslau, p. 47.

tion only as a last resort and only against targets specifically involved in a particular terrorist act. Reagan's personal criterion for retaliation was that the terrorist camps or other targets inside Libya must correlate directly with the atrocity being punished, and it must be possible to hit them without risking civilian casualties.¹⁰⁰

The Administration openly discussed the military option, if for no other reason than to make Qaddafi nervous. Not long after the airport massacres and the linkage of those attacks with Libya, the White House sent the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Coral Sea from Naples into the central Mediterranean. They described the movement as a "prudent precaution," so that the carrier would have its full complement of planes in the event of some military action.¹⁰¹ A few days later the aircraft carrier America and the battleship Iowa also left their ports to reinforce the Coral Sea.¹⁰² As a further step in U.S. preparation, the Pentagon ordered a flight of EA-6B electronic warfare planes dispatched from Whidby Island, Washington to the Mediterranean. These sophisticated electronic jamming aircraft were useful in what one official called a "high density communications environment," presumably meaning an assault on Libya.¹⁰³ Still, the Reagan Administration would not admit that they were putting overt pressure on Qaddafi. In response to a question on the buildup in the Mediterranean, President Reagan responded, "I'm not aware we are doing anything out of the ordinary at all. We've had various maneuvers and practices. That's all."¹⁰⁴

Qaddafi did not remain silent in the face of the U.S. accusations against him

¹⁰⁰ Watson, p. 21.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁰² Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Sends Libya Mixed Signals on Possibility of Military Action," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 4, 1986), p. A1.

¹⁰³ Smith, p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ Gwertzman, "U.S. Sends...", p. A4.

or of the naval buildup off his country. After receiving intense criticism from European leaders, he changed his initial support for the airport attacks to one of strong condemnation, distancing himself from the official Libyan news agency JANA, which described the terrorist raid as "heroic." In his typical bravado, Qaddafi announced the formation of suicide squads trained to attack American and Western European interests in Libya and the U.S. itself. He stated that retaliation against Libya would lead to a cycle of violence with Libyans harassing American citizens in their own streets.¹⁰⁵

In a nationally televised news conference, President Reagan sought to clarify the United States' argument against Qaddafi to the American people. In his speech he brought up the topic of the recent airport massacres.

Qaddafi calls them 'heroic actions,' I call them criminal outrages by an outlaw regime. By providing material support to terrorist groups which attack U.S. citizens, Libya has engaged in armed aggression against the United States under established principles of international law, just as if he had used his own armed forces.¹⁰⁶

He then announced that the United States would sever practically all economic ties with Libya and again called for U.S. citizens living in Libya to return home at once. He also called on the Western European countries and Japan to join the United States in these sanctions, reminding Europe that they have taken the brunt of Middle East-related terrorist acts.¹⁰⁷ The severing of all but humanitarian economic ties with Libya was more of a symbolic act than a really effective move. Over the years the Reagan Administration had already drastically reduced trade between the two countries. By the time the President made this announcement, U.S.-Libyan commerce was negligible. The following day

¹⁰⁵ "Libya Reports Demonstrations Against U.S.," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 4, 1986), p. A4.

¹⁰⁶ "The President's News Conference of January 7, 1986," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 22 (Jan. 13, 1986), p. 22.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 26.

that White House further announced that the government would freeze all Libyan assets in the United States. Even this move was symbolic because it only pertained to Libyan government assets in the United States and included neither private Libyan assets nor assets in U.S. subsidiaries overseas.¹⁰⁸

The State Department also issued a lengthy report compiled by various American intelligence agencies giving details to charges that Qaddafi supported terrorism around the world. The report described Qaddafi as someone who fancies himself a leader and agent of historic forces that will reorder Third World politics to his taste. It also accused Qaddafi of using terrorism to further his radical political goals and remove threats to his political power, particularly dissidents living abroad and officials of moderate Arab and African nations. The report further cited his extensive financial and material support of such radical Palestinian groups as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, Fatah, and Abu Nidol's organization.

Most dramatically, the report foreshadowed possible future Libyan terrorist attacks against the United States itself. It quoted Qaddafi as telling a Libyan audience in a June, 1984 speech that "we are capable of exporting terrorism to the heart of America." It also cited Libyan acts against United States interests such as the sacking of the U.S. embassy in Tripoli in 1979, the discovery by Sudanese authorities of a Libyan plot to blow up the American Embassy Club in Khartoum and a plot in 1977 to assassinate the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt in Cairo.¹⁰⁹

In spite of the drama of Reagan's measures against Libya, his major message was that the U.S. was not prepared to use military force at this time.

¹⁰⁸ Gerald M. Boyd, "President Freezes All Libyan Assets Held in the U.S.," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 9, 1986), p. A1.

¹⁰⁹ *Libya Under Qadhafi...*, p. 2.

Reasons not to attack Libya included: the danger that Qaddafi would make Americans residing in Libya hostages; the fear of harming Soviet advisors manning Libyan anti-aircraft defenses; and that a military response would further endanger the already shaky Middle East peace process and damage U.S. relations with moderate Arab countries. Imposing a trade embargo on Libya, ordering all Americans to leave Libya, and freezing the Libyan government's financial assets in the U.S. would not have any real effect on Libya's economy, but removing the Americans from Libya would make future military action more feasible. As former National Security Council official Geoffrey Schultz stated, "The U.S. trade cutoff and expected departure of most U.S. citizens from Libya will 'clear the decks' for whatever comes next."¹¹⁰

The Administration's calls for international sanctions against Libya were more a symbol of defiance than a concerted strategy. The Reagan Administration was cautious and wary of pressing Europe too hard to follow U.S. trade restrictions on Libya. Memories three years earlier of his failed embargo against the Soviet gas pipeline to Western Europe must have convinced the Administration that the Europeans would not support measures which would hurt their own economies. The Western European countries almost uniformly rejected the imposition of sanctions against Qaddafi. Italy, Libya's biggest trading partner, would only impose an arms embargo against Libya and promise that Italian firms would not replace departing American companies. Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher rejected economic sanctions as ineffective and also warned against a military strike against Libya, believing that it would "sow chaos in the Middle East."¹¹¹ In West Germany, enthusiasm for sanctions

¹¹⁰ William R. Dierner, "Slapping Back at Gaddafi," *Time*, 127 (Jan. 20, 1986), p.17.

¹¹¹ "Thatcher Asserts Strikes On Libya Could Sow Chaos," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 11, 1986), p. A1.

was minimal. Chancellor Hellmut Kohl rejected sanctions on the grounds that they would not be in the national interests of the country and that the estimated 1,500 German citizens in Libya might be in danger.¹¹²

The controversy over sanctions and military threats against Libya also played into East-West relations. An advisor to Kohl stated, "A careful analysis shows that the Soviet guarantees for Qaddafi have grown as the American unwillingness to use force against him becomes more apparent. The Soviets win a cheap propaganda victory."¹¹³ Qaddafi was always very conscious of playing the Soviet card in the face of U.S. economic and military pressure. In spite of Qaddafi's personal rejection of communism, he often threatened to build closer military ties with the Soviet Union. In one case he declared his intention to turn Libya communist and transform his country into another Cuba in the Arab world.¹¹⁴

In the White House, a battle was brewing between Defense Secretary Weinberger and Secretary of State Shultz for the "heart and mind" of the President over the kind of military response the U.S. should direct toward Libya. Ironically, the State Department was much more disposed to using force than the Defense Department. Shultz had always been a proponent of using military force to further the U.S.'s political goals, especially in retaliating against terrorism. He expressed particular concern that the U.S. did not appear "paralyzed" by insisting on an unambiguous target linked directly to terrorism.¹¹⁵ In answering a question on how to respond to Qaddafi's support for terrorism he said,

¹¹² "Allies Are Cool to Reagan Sanctions," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 9, 1986), p. A8.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Judith Miller, "Qaddafi Says the Sanctions Could Turn Libya to Soviets," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 10, 1986), p. A6.

¹¹⁵ Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Navy Starting Flights Off Libya," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 24, 1986), p. A8.

"when we identify the source [of terrorism] such as Qaddafi, who is clearly identified, then we have to go after it." He further argued that "we cannot wait for absolute certainty and clarity" before using force against terrorists and countries like Libya that support them.¹¹⁶ Others in the Administration, such as CIA Director William Casey, supported the Shultz "hard line." At a speech the previous April, Casey stated,

We should be prepared to direct a proportional military response against bona fide military targets on those which direct terrorist attacks against us. And we need not insist on absolute evidence that the targets were used solely to support terrorism. Nor should we need to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that a particular element or individual in that state is responsible for specific terrorist acts.¹¹⁷

While officials like Shultz and Casey were preaching an aggressive approach, Caspar Weinberger urged caution in using military force. The Secretary criticized those who sought "instant gratification from some kind of bombing attack without being too worried about the details."¹¹⁸ This reflected a post-Vietnam tendency to avoid using force except in clear-cut cases where the American public will support military action. While President Reagan initially appeared to take the Weinberger approach after the airport attacks by choosing economic sanctions over a military strike, this soon changed. In the face of an almost complete lack of cooperation from the European allies to support America's sanctions and the perception that economic sanctions would have little or no effect on Libya, the President started to lean more towards a military solution to the Libyan crisis. One Administration official confided, "We knew that

¹¹⁶ Bernard Gwertzman, "Shultz and Weinberger Disagree On Using Force Against Libyans," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 17, 1986), p. A1.

¹¹⁷ Gwertzman, "U.S. Navy...", p. A8.

¹¹⁸ Gwertzman, "Shultz and Weinberger...", p. A1.

the sanctions wouldn't work when we couldn't get everyone aboard."¹¹⁹ Shultz himself alluded to the eventuality of military action when he said,

No one contends that these actions [economic sanctions] by themselves are likely to have a decisive effect and I think by this time we're pretty much at the end of the road in that all of the things that one can think of economically have pretty much been done now. Force is not always the best means, but it may be necessary on occasion.¹²⁰

Though the Reagan Administration publicly presented using military force as a last option, elements within the White House had been planning and promoting military action against Libya for some time. In July 1985, National Security Advisor Robert MacFarlane won agreement that the diplomatic and economic measures then in effect were not working. He supported Secretary of State George Schulz's position that a military solution was the best way to deal with Qaddafi. A top CIA officer admits to writing many contingency plans against Libya including joint operations with such countries as France, Egypt, Chad, and even Israel. The results in all cases were disappointing, though, leading the officer to conclude that "if we want to settle the account of Qaddafi, we will have to do it ourselves."¹²¹

In February of 1986, President Reagan again sent a U.S. Naval Task Force for extended maneuvers into the Mediterranean off the coast of Libya. U.S. officials said these exercises were intended as a reminder to Libya of the American naval presence. Many observers also foresaw a repeat of the same circumstances that led to the 1981 dogfight over the Mediterranean in which Libya lost two jets. U.S. forces sailed and flew ever closer to the Libyan mainland, espe-

¹¹⁹ Gerald M. Boyd, "Reagan Based Mission Approval on Reports of Danger to Envoys," *New York Times*, 85 (Mar. 26, 1986), p. A8.

¹²⁰ Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Backs Away from Asking West for Curb on Libya," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 10, 1986), p. A7.

¹²¹ Richard Stengel, "Sailing into Harm's Way," *Time*, 127 (Apr. 7, 1986), p. 12.

cially Qaddafi's so-called "Line of Death" stretching along the northern boundary of the Gulf of Sidra. Serving as both a taunt and a warning to Qaddafi, the White House planners intended the operation to combat terrorism by forcing Qaddafi to back away from men like Abu Nidol.¹²² According to Geoffrey T. H. Kemp, former special assistant on Middle East affairs to President Reagan, sending the Navy into the Gulf of Sidra to challenge Libya's territorial claims would give Qaddafi an excellent excuse to attack, allowing the U.S. to respond militarily.¹²³ The Administration timed its decision for the end of Deputy Secretary of State John C. Whitehead's diplomatic mission. He went to Europe urging the Western allies to join in economic sanctions against Libya. The decision also coincided with the deadline for Americans living in Libya to leave. Now American citizens still in Libya would be in defiance of U.S. law.¹²⁴

In addition to the rhetoric on both sides, Libyan naval, air and air defense units reportedly began training using live ammunition. The Reagan Administration inflamed the situation by twice extending the maneuvers off Libya, though without bloodshed. However, Reagan again sent an armada of the Sixth Fleet into the Mediterranean off the coast of Libya after Qaddafi hosted a "terrorist's convention." Representatives of such groups as the Irish Republican Army, the Baader-Meinhof gang, the Basque ETA, and Abu Nidol's faction attended this highly publicized meeting, billed as an anti-imperialist symposium.¹²⁵ Unlike previous naval maneuvers of this sort, this time both Navy ships and aircraft would cross the "Line of Death" and assert the U.S.'s claim

¹²² Russell Watson, "A Show of Strength," *Newsweek*, 107 (Feb. 3, 1986), p. 12.

¹²³ David K. Shipler, "Trail of Mideast Terror: Seeking a Link to Libya," *New York Times*, 85 (Jan. 5, 1986), p. A8.

¹²⁴ Gwertzman, "U.S. Starting Flights...", p. A8.

¹²⁵ Roy Nordland, and Ray Wilkinson, "Inside Terror, Inc.," *Newsweek*, 107 (Apr. 7, 1986), p. 26.

that the Gulf of Sidra was in international waters. Privately, American officials admitted they designed their intrusion less to uphold international law than to provoke Qaddafi.¹²⁶

Operation Prairie Fire opened up on March 24, 1986, when three ships of the task force conducting the operation sailed back and forth across the Line of Death several times. During the course of these maneuvers, Libya fired its highly advanced Soviet-made SA-5 anti-aircraft missiles at U.S. reconnaissance planes flying over the ships. U.S. electronic warfare measures prevented the missiles from hitting the planes, and Libya's actions left the U.S. free to retaliate. In the course of the next two days, American ships and aircraft engaged Libyan naval vessels and shore anti-aircraft missile batteries. American naval power sank at least two Libyan boats and damaged several shore batteries. No U.S. forces were lost in the operation, which ended on March 27.¹²⁷ Immediately after the two-day clash, Reagan Administration officials publicly downplayed the significance of the skirmish. White House spokesman Larry Speakes said, "U.S. forces were intent upon only making the legal point that beyond the internationally recognized 12-mile limit, the Gulf of Sidra belongs to no one and that all nations were free to move through international waters and airspace."¹²⁸

Some question over just how much the U.S. had antagonized Qaddafi and his forces emerged soon after the battle ended. Pentagon officials disclosed that during the exercises U.S. ships sailed within 40 miles of the Libyan coast, more than halfway inside the Gulf of Sidra. In addition, none of the Libyan ves-

¹²⁶ Edward Schumacher, "The United States and Libya," *Foreign Affairs*, 65 (Winter, 1986), p. 335.

¹²⁷ Stengel, pp. 16-23.

¹²⁸ "Gulf of Sidra Incident," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 22 (Mar. 31, 1986), p. 412.

sels hit had actually fired on any American ship or plane and there was some confusion over just how many surface-to-air missiles Libyan had launched. The Administration justified the Navy's actions against the Libyan vessels as reacting against "hostile intentions," with Speakes adding, "All Libyan ships and planes moving towards the Sixth Fleet were considered dangerous."¹²⁹ Defense Secretary Weinberger further justified U.S. military action by stating,

What you have is the equivalent of an individual walking on a public road and getting shot at and then feeling that it is perfectly required under those circumstances for his safety to deal with other elements of the same group that fired the first shots at him. That is essentially what we are doing here.¹³⁰

The "Gulf of Sidra incident," as the press dubbed the skirmish off Libya, was a triumph of the Reagan agenda on many levels. On a purely military level, U.S. forces showed that they could engage a well-armed, if poorly trained, foe and come out without a scratch. In particular, the battle proved the worth of U.S. high-tech military equipment over its Soviet equivalent. The SA-5 missiles that Libya had recently installed represented the latest generation of Soviet anti-aircraft missile technology. The U.S. Navy's ability to completely defeat them through electronic counter-measures no doubt sent a shiver of insecurity to every country equipped with these missiles, from Syria to the Soviet Union.

Politically, the attack, as minor as it was, was another notch in the Reagan Administration's efforts to overcome the post-Vietnam reluctance to use military force as an instrument of policy. If U.S. forces could engage a modern adversary and emerge unscathed while inflicting heavy damage, then the American public would be more supportive of such operations in the future.

¹²⁹ Bernard Weinraub, "2 More Libyan Vessels Sunk And Base Hit Again, U.S. Says Vowing To Keep Up Patrols," *New York Times*, 85 (Mar. 26, 1986), p. A1.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. A8.

Domestically, members of Congress were generally supportive of the operation, at least of the military's handling of it once shots were fired. Most of the politicians muted whatever criticisms they had, knowing the political danger of criticizing successful military action right after it occurs. Privately, several congressional aides mused that the conflict with Libya appeared to be designed to divert attention from Nicaragua (a major military escalation along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border involving the U.S. military was happening at the same time) in the same way that the United States invasion of Grenada drew attention from the barracks explosion in Beirut.¹³¹

The main issue raised was that of the War Powers Act, which Reagan had not imposed despite the high probability of conflict with Libya. This act, passed by both houses of Congress over a Presidential veto in the waning days of the Vietnam War, limited the President's power to commit U.S. troops into combat abroad to no more than 60 days without Congressional support. The President also had to notify Congress of any deployment 48 hours after the introduction of American military forces into a prospective combat zone. Most importantly, Congress could vote to end such a commitment at any time with the passage of a concurrent resolution. Previous American presidents had never recognized the constitutionality of such an act, claiming that it usurped the President's authority as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Neither the Executive nor Legislative branches ever decided to test the War Powers Act's legitimacy in the Supreme Court, probably because neither side wanted to risk being on the losing side. Dante B. Fascell, Chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, stated deployment of naval forces "constituted from the outset a situ-

¹³¹ Robert Pear, "Lawmakers Back Actions On Libya," *New York Times*, 85 (Mar. 25, 1986), p. A1.

ation where imminent involvement in hostilities was a distinct possibility clearly indicated by the circumstances even prior to today's development" and that "the Administration's actions in the Gulf of Sidra have failed to adequately satisfy the requirements of the War Powers Resolution."¹³² Senator Jim Sasser of Tennessee gave a more tempered opinion.

I think we've made our point that we're not going to be intimidated and that we intend to operate in international waters, and perhaps now is the time to withdraw from those waters. I hope that when we return, we will return in company with some of our NATO allies, particularly the British, French and perhaps Germans.¹³³

The Reagan Administration, though, continued its policies toward Libya by itself, indifferent to the attitudes of either the Congress or the international community.

The European leaders reaction to the U.S.-Libya conflict was mixed. Britain and France both applauded Reagan's actions as a step to enforce freedom of passage in international waters. Spain deplored the clashes and called for moderation. Greece, never supportive of a heavy U.S. military presence in the Mediterranean, condemned American moves in the region. President Pappandrea's Socialist Party stated, "The peoples of the Mediterranean will not tolerate the armed enforcement of a new Pax Americana."¹³⁴ Italy, as Libya's biggest trading partner and closest European neighbor, probably had the strongest concern over these recent events. Prime Minister Bettino Craxi criticized the American naval activity off Libya by saying,

The repeated military exercises by the Government of the United States in the Gulf of Sidra, an area already shaken by serious tension, did not seem appropriate to the goal of reestablishing respect for the principal of international law...Italy does not want

¹³² *Ibid*, p. A11.

¹³³ *Ibid*.

¹³⁴ Bernard Gwertzman, "Shultz, In Athens, Condemns Terror," *New York Times*, 85 (Mar. 27, 1986), p. A11.

wars at its doorstep.¹³⁵

Qaddafi seemed to take the whole incident in stride, claiming he chased the American fleet away (Reagan ended the maneuvers early after the clash) from Libyan waters. He unleashed a torrent of rhetoric against the United States and its allies, declaring that Libya would turn the Mediterranean into a sea of fire. He also urged his allies to attack American oil workers and installations throughout the Arab world. Libyan radio declared America's "arrogance and the madness of its President made them think that the aggression against Libyan Arab people would be something like a picnic and would be an easy operation."¹³⁶ The Soviet Union also expressed strong disapproval of the U.S. actions, condemning American aggression against Libya but stopping short of threatening to intervene. TASS, the Soviet news agency, called the use of force against Libya an act of piracy that violated international law and "aggravated the explosive situation in the area and may lead to grave consequences going beyond its boundaries."¹³⁷

The White House viewed the naval maneuvers as a success. The engagement showed that if the proper pretext can be found for employing American military force, such as sending the Sixth Fleet into the Mediterranean to assert the international right of navigation, then the public will accept the consequences. President Reagan may have had enough firepower to flatten the globe, but to satisfy public relations both at home and abroad, the President was understandably loathe to use force except under the most tightly circum-

¹³⁵ E.J. Dionne Jr., "Allies' Support Tempered by Concern," *New York Times*, 85 (Mar. 26, 1986), p. A9.

¹³⁶ "Libya Threatens 'Sea of Fire'." *New York Times*, 85 (Mar. 25, 1986), p. A10.

¹³⁷ Philip Taubman, "Soviet Is Critical of U.S. on Libya," *New York Times*, 85 (Mar. 25, 1986), p. A9.

scribed conditions. Ronald Reagan, according to one journalist, became the "master of staging small shows of force, tidy little wars carefully calibrated to win public approval without costing too many American lives."¹³⁸

Further knowledge of the planning process behind the Sidra maneuvers reveal the White House clearly knew what they could expect out of Qaddafi. The White House sent the Naval task force into the Gulf of Sidra as a reaction to continued reports of impending terrorist attacks against American envoys directed by Qaddafi. Key White House officials cited reports from intelligence sources in the Middle East and southern Europe that Libya was trying to "pinpoint" American diplomats for possible terrorist attacks. This was a major reason why Reagan approved American naval maneuvers in the Gulf of Sidra.¹³⁹

The Reagan Administration felt that Qaddafi was not getting the message that the U.S. would not tolerate terrorist attacks. It seemed the only way to make him understand was through a demonstration of military toughness. The President gave official approval at a meeting of the National Security Policy group on March 14. At the meeting, also attended by the Vice President and key cabinet members, top aides told the President that they expected Qaddafi to fire missiles at the American ships and planes. "We expected him to come after us," said one senior Reagan advisor.¹⁴⁰ Administration officials further said that the "seeds were sown" for the clash with Libya after the airport attacks and that the planning for a possible battle began about the same time Reagan was planning the economic sanctions.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Evan Thomas, "Week of the Big Stick," *Time*, 127 (Apr. 7, 1986), p. 15.

¹³⁹ Gerald M. Boyd, "Reagan Based Mission Approval on Reports of Danger to Envoys," *New York Times*, 85 (Mar. 26, 1986), p. A1.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. A8.

Chapter 6: Tripoli and Beyond

The climactic event in the campaign against Qaddafi occurred the next month. After the Gulf of Sidra incident, the Reagan Administration and the rest of the world expected Qaddafi to retaliate. The U.S.'s defiance of the Line of Death humiliated the Libyan leader, and no one doubted he would respond beyond simply complaining to the United Nations. The following week two incidents occurred which the U.S. quickly blamed on Libya. On April 2, a bomb exploded aboard TWA Flight 840, a Rome-to-Athens shuttle that began in Cairo. The small explosion blew a hole in the side of the plane, killing four passengers, all of them Americans. An anonymous caller subsequently attributed the bombing to the Abu Nidol faction as retaliation to the U.S. clash with Libya. The true identity of the terrorists remained unclear, but given the time and circumstances of the blast, many people in the American public and in the White House were satisfied to blame Qaddafi.¹⁴²

Even more significant in the Reagan Administration's case against Qaddafi was a bombing incident occurring in a West Berlin disco frequented by American soldiers. The casualties included an American killed and over one hundred injured. Following the bombing, the Reagan Administration publicly pinned the attack on Libya. The President cited "indisputable evidence" of Libya's involvement. Most analysts thought the evidence was intercepted radio transmissions between Libya and its diplomatic mission in East Berlin ordering the attack and a subsequent message verifying that the bombing took place.¹⁴³

Responding to U.S. pressure, the French and West German governments expelled Libyan officials from their countries, but no one expected the Reagan

¹⁴² William E. Smith, "Explosion on Flight 840," *Time*, 127 (Apr. 14, 1986), pp. 34-37.

¹⁴³ Mark Whitaker, "Targeting a Mad Dog," *Newsweek*, 107 (Apr. 21, 1986), pp. 20-25.

Administration to limit its response to purely diplomatic measures. With a "smoking gun" and the support of Congress and the American people, Reagan felt free to retaliate any way he wished. He approved a plan submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a surgical air strike against Libya shortly after he returned from his Easter vacation in California on April 6. After weighing several military options, Reagan agreed to a bombing mission on the capital city of Tripoli and nearby military targets. Due to the lack of sufficient carrier power in the Mediterranean Sea, Reagan called upon Margaret Thatcher to allow U.S. F-111s based at British airfields to fly the mission. Some also saw this effort as an attempt to bring Europe directly into the military effort to fight terrorism and Qaddafi.¹⁴⁴

The U.S. government delayed the actual bombing attack until the Administration could build its case against Libya in the disco bombing. This delay also gave the U.S. military more time to prepare. Reagan also insisted on giving a "reconfirmation" before any planes left England, allowing a last-minute cancellation if either the Libyans or the European allies would make specific changes in their policies. Neither of these possibilities were likely since by now Reagan would have accepted nothing less than the imposition of strong economic sanctions against Libya by the European allies. Additionally, Reagan demanded that Qaddafi completely renounce terrorism, including making serious moves against the use of terrorism himself.¹⁴⁵ There was probably never any real alternative to unilateral U.S. military action. White House spokesman Larry Speakes said,

When we were able to, in the last several days, tie Qaddafi in very directly to the Berlin Disco bombing which resulted in the death of

¹⁴⁴ "We have been made into accomplices," *New Statesman*, 111 (Apr. 18, 1986), p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ "Genesis of a Decision: How the President Approved Retaliatory Strikes," *New York Times*, 85 (Apr. 15, 1986), p. 11.

an American citizen, then the President made the judgment that we should proceed with military action.¹⁴⁶

Another unidentified Administration official stated that the final decision to conduct the strikes reflected the Administration's firm belief that Libya was behind the latest terrorist attacks and the recognition that the Europeans would again resist United States calls to isolate Libya through harsh economic sanctions.¹⁴⁷

The raid took place on April 14, following over two weeks of speculation in the media and in other governments as to what the U.S. would do and how they would do it. President Reagan went on nation-wide television at 7:00 pm Eastern time to announce the raid. In the course of the speech, Reagan recounted the April 5 disco bombing and the solid basis the U.S. had to connect the act to Libya. Reagan also reminded the American public of Qaddafi's long record of support for terrorist groups and how it is the responsibility of the Western democracies not to let Qaddafi get away with his actions. He summed up his address by stating,

He counted on America to be passive. He counted wrong. I warned that there should be no place on earth where terrorists can rest and train and practice their deadly skills. I meant it. I said that we would act with others if possible and alone if necessary to insure that terrorists have no sanctuary anywhere.¹⁴⁸

Among the main targets was the Aziziyah Barracks and an intelligence center near the embassy area. Qaddafi spent quite a bit of his time in both these areas, prompting many to believe that the real intention of the raid was to kill the Libyan leader outright. If the official aim of the raid was to make Colonel Qaddafi change his ways, unofficially, it is accepted in Washington that the only

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ "United States Air Strike Against Libya," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 22 (Apr. 21, 1986), p. 492.

good Qaddafi is a dead, or at least overthrown, one.¹⁴⁹

Though the raid cost the U.S. one F-111 and its two-man crew, the White House deemed it an overall success. Anticipating possible public apprehension toward the raid, the Administration continued its public relations effort to build support for the military action. Addressing a meeting of lawyers following the attack, Reagan explained,

We tried quiet diplomacy. We tried public condemnation. We tried economic sanctions. And, yes, we tried a show of military might (the air-sea battle in the Gulf of Sidra in March). But Qaddafi intensified his terrorist war, sending his agents around the world to murder and maim innocents.¹⁵⁰

American public opinion solidly supported the raid, though. A Gallup poll recorded in the days that followed the raid recorded that nationally, 71% of the American public supported the raid versus only 21% disapproving. In addition, every sub-category, from age to political affiliation, supported the President's actions.¹⁵¹ The Reagan Administration used this reaction to ensure both political and media support in the United States. The orchestration of the entire raid prompted social commentator Noam Chomski to remark,

The American bombing raid was the first in history of modern warfare to be executed in time for the 7:00 p.m. nightly news...After the action shots ended, a press conference was called and the Reagan administration made its case to the American people. This monopoly on early public interpretations clearly set the tone for the rest of the coverage. The administration knew that it is in these first moments of a breaking story that our initial impressions and often final judgments are made.¹⁵²

Nevertheless, no one inside the Administration really believed that one

¹⁴⁹ "Reagan Decides It Has To Be Done," *Economist*, 299 (Apr. 19, 1986), p. 17.

¹⁵⁰ "Law Day U.S.A.," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 22 (Apr. 21, 1986), p. 497.

¹⁵¹ *Gallup Report*, no. 247 (Apr., 1986), p. 3.

¹⁵² Breslau, p. 49.

bombing raid would end Libyan terrorism. Instead, there was a sense in the capital that the U.S. had crossed a line in the ever-increasing fight between the civilized countries and the terrorists. No one could really predict what the consequences would be.¹⁵³

After the raid, spokesman Larry Speakes quickly contrasted the few Libyan casualties with the 938 victims of terrorism the Administration claimed to have died from terrorist acts in the last year. Privately though, the White House was hard pressed to say how many were victims of Libyan terrorism.¹⁵⁴ The Reagan Administration went to great lengths to portray the bombing as part of a new policy for reacting to terrorism and not the final chapter of the Libya affair. Talking to a group of businessmen the next day, Reagan said,

Yesterday the United States won but a single engagement in a long battle against terrorism. We will not end that struggle until the free and decent people of this planet unite to eradicate the scourge of terror from the modern world.¹⁵⁵

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger emphasized the need to hold nations accountable for the terrorists they support by saying, "Terrorism is now a state-practiced activity, a method of waging war."¹⁵⁶

In spite of the popular support that the bombing of Tripoli received in the U.S., foreign countries and their leaders regarded the raid as reckless and inappropriate. In Britain, public dissatisfaction with the bombing, and Britain's support of it, led to enormous demonstrations against the U.S. Demonstrations occurred in other Western European countries, and with the exception of Britain's

¹⁵³ George S. Church, "Hitting the Source," *Time*, 127 (Apr. 28, 1986), p. 17.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁵ "American Business Conference," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 22 (Apr. 21, 1986), p. 494.

¹⁵⁶ Church, p. 23.

Margaret Thatcher, the governments condemned the actions as well.

Part of the reason for the dissatisfaction of the NATO allies was their feeling that the White House did not take their interests into account when deciding to strike. Ironically, on the day that the American planes struck, the Western European leaders had just finished a conference on terrorism where they had agreed to crack down on suspected terrorists in their countries. The U.S. also ran into trouble with the Western allies through a diplomatic misunderstanding. In the days before the raid, Vernon Walters, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, quickly surveyed the attitudes of the European leaders towards a military strike against Libya. Though aware of the seriousness of the Reagan Administration's intention to attack Libya militarily, they did not know that the White House had already made the decision to strike by the time their opinion was solicited. This gave the Europeans a sense of being misled.¹⁵⁷

In spite of this, the Europeans finally took significant action against Libya. In the weeks that followed the attack, West Germany expelled more than half of the 41 representatives stationed at the Libyan People's bureau in Bonn. Britain deported 22 Libyan students suspected of activism and informed 300 others that they would be required to leave shortly. Italy, Spain, and France followed with similar actions.¹⁵⁸ The Europeans' horrific realization that the U.S. leadership was willing to engage in unilateral action regardless of what the Europeans thought or recommended must have prompted much of this sudden cooperation. The European allies needed to support the U.S. enough to allow them a say in the White House's anti-terrorist policy, or risk more independent American action. When Reagan told a group of businessmen "If necessary, we

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁸ Pico Iyer, "Nearly All Together Now," *Time*, 127 (May 5, 1986), pp. 28-29.

shall do it again" in regards to the air strike, the Europeans were listening very closely. As the Europeans reluctantly came on board the American's efforts against Libya, the White House saw this trend as a validation of its policies. Secretary of State George Shultz expressed this satisfaction when he said, "People have been coming to share our views on terrorism, and we see more and more actions put alongside the ideas. I personally take heart from the fact."¹⁵⁹

As Spring turned into Summer in 1986, the attention of the federal government, as well as the American press and public, shifted away from the Libyan conflict. The expected wave of terrorism following the Tripoli bombing never occurred, and the American public seemed satisfied that the Libyan affair was over. Domestic issues and the nuclear accident in Chernobyl in the Soviet Union drew most of their attention. The Reagan Administration itself, however, was not content to cease its campaign. According to spokesman Larry Speakes,

We certainly have reason to believe that the Libyan state...has not forsaken its desire to create terrorist activities world wide, and the capability is still there to do so. We will employ all appropriate measures to cause Libya to cease its terrorist policies.¹⁶⁰

This statement was more of an affirmation of the continuing policy toward Libya than a warning of imminent terrorism.

In July, Secretary of State Shultz ordered an assessment of Libyan terrorist activity since the American raid in April. At the same time Reagan privately warned Libya, through the Soviet Union and Syria, to desist from terrorism.¹⁶¹ By early September, rumors started circulating around Washington and foreign

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ "Shadowboxing with Gaddafi," *Time*, 128 (Sep. 8, 1986), p. 26.

¹⁶¹ Harry Anderson, "Kaddafi: A War of Leaks," *Newsweek*, 102 (Sep. 8, 1986), p. 29.

capitals that Libyan agents were infiltrating Europe for another round of attacks against Americans. While the information around this threat was at best shaky, Administration insiders anonymously leaked news of this possible attack to press, again building the political mood against Libya. Administration officials also went to great lengths to let the Libyan government know that the U.S. was watching it for any signs of terroristic action. Reportedly, in one foreign capital, a U.S. diplomat cornered a Libyan diplomat and informed him that the U.S. government believed that Libya was planning to kill innocent Americans. The American official informed the Libyan that if any Americans were harmed "we're going to pound the hell out of you."

Beyond rumor and diplomatic threats, the Reagan Administration maintained its efforts to keep the pressure on Libya. Increasing the Reagan Administration's threats against this latest Libyan threat, the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Forrestal, conducting joint exercises with Egypt, canceled its scheduled liberty in Israel and instead sailed into the waters off Libya. By coincidence, eighteen F-111s flew into Britain from the U.S., similar to American air activity before the strike against Libya the previous April. Ambassador Vernon Walters traveled to Europe to explore the effectiveness of present sanctions against Libya and possibly urge that stronger measures be taken.

Despite the harsh rhetoric and strong political measures, the existence of any tangible plot by Libya to target Americans seems at best questionable. Much of the controversy resulted from the media's willingness to accept Administration leaks as fact and report it as such without the existence of any real proof. This whole affair would later create a rift between the media and the Administration. The charges were that the government purposely engaged in a

disinformation campaign against Libya at the expense of the American press. Analysts saw the heightening of tensions in September as the result of the desire of some Reagan Administration members to bait Libya more aggressively. The "war of the leaks," according to terrorism expert Neil Livingston of Georgetown, also served as a reminder to the European allies that to leave the U.S. without any policy options is to risk the U.S. going back in and bombing Libya.¹⁶²

The final chapter of the U.S.-Libyan conflict occurred in the final weeks of the Reagan Administration. In the Fall of 1988, while most of the country was watching the presidential campaigns, the Reagan Administration attempted to raise public awareness over the apparent development of a chemical weapons plant in the small oasis town of Rabta, approximately 40 miles from Tripoli. The Administration made repeated statements on the dangers of the Libyans having chemical weapons, both to the American public and to foreign leaders. Reagan himself stated in a December 21 interview he was openly considering military action to take out the chemical weapons plant.

The mid-air bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland on December 21, further raised tensions as some Administration officials implied that Libya might have been connected with the tragedy. Furthermore, after the Pan Am disaster the American public had been openly thirsting for revenge at least as much as for justice. Still, this latest U.S.-Libyan skirmish went largely unnoticed until an incident that occurred over the Mediterranean skies in early January, 1989. Two U.S. Navy F-14's, flying on routine patrol from the U.S.S. John F. Kennedy, flew toward two Libyan MiG-23's approaching them from an airfield in Libya. As the two pairs of planes approached each other at high

¹⁶² "Shadowboxing...", p. 26.

speeds, they began a series of aerial maneuvers designed to put one plane in a position to shoot the other down. In the past, the inferior Libyan pilots usually broke off the engagement, but in this case they continued their highly provocative moves. The F-14 pilots viewed these maneuvers as so provocative that they shot down both Libyan MiG's.

The drama and excitement of a successful U.S. aerial dogfight suddenly put the spotlight on Libya and Muammar Qaddafi again. The Reagan Administration's active opposition to Libya's acquiring of chemical weapons became a much more significant story. An international conference on limiting chemical weapons was going on in Paris at this time. In making its case against Libya, one American official stated, "In Libya you have a leader who has overtly stated support for international terrorism, who has used chemical weapons [in his war with Chad] and who himself is unstable and erratic." The dogfight complicated U.S. efforts to portray Qaddafi as an international outlaw, and some in the Pentagon even speculated that Qaddafi provoked the clash so as to undermine the U.S.'s moral position.¹⁶³

The Reagan Administration continued to support rumors of possible military strikes against the plant, similar to the Israeli attack against the nuclear facility in Iraq several years earlier. The focus of their efforts, however, centered around pressuring European countries to stop their cooperation with the plant. Several European corporations, particularly the West European pharmaceutical firm Imhausen-Chemie, helped build and manage the plant, ostensibly to produce fertilizer. Although both the firms and their native governments initially denied the production of chemical weapons there, the Reagan Administration provided enough evidence to pressure the West German government to clamp down on

¹⁶³ Harry Anderson, "Showdown With Kaddafi," *Newsweek*, 113 (Jan. 16, 1989), p. 16.

its corporation's assistance.

With the ending of the Reagan Administration in late January, 1989, the campaign against Libya effectively ended. The succeeding Bush Administration set its own course of foreign policy which stressed diplomacy over confrontation. In addition, with the end of the Cold War and the friendly relations developed with the Soviets, the need and feasibility of containing Soviet expansionism lost much of its urgency.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

The bombing of Libya marked the culmination of the Reagan Administration's efforts to remove Muammar al-Qaddafi from the international spotlight. Reagan himself signed the continuation of an executive statute prohibiting the assassination of political leaders abroad. Therefore, legally prevented from simply murdering Qaddafi, the President's efforts to dislodge Qaddafi had to be through overt political, economic and military pressure. Not since the Vietnam war has the U.S. pursued such a focused and uncompromising foreign policy as it has against Qaddafi's Libya.

The raid seemed to accomplish what all the previous diplomatic maneuvering and saber rattling failed, to suppress Qaddafi and separate him from his support of terrorism. Though he survived in power, his status in the international arena dropped dramatically and he has not had the same level of influence since. The wave of terrorist acts directed at the U.S. and Britain he promised following the raid never materialized, making the much anticipated follow-up strikes against Libya by the U.S. unnecessary. Libya itself became the victim of the changing international environment. With the end of the adversarial relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the Reagan Administration had much more freedom to deal harshly with former Soviet client states like Libya without the worry of it escalating into a superpower conflict. Faced with opposing the might of the United States alone, Qaddafi assumed a much lower and less provocative profile.

The political climate of the times affected the Reagan Administration's analysis of the threat Libya actually posed. In the pre-*glasnost* era, the White House still viewed the Soviets as having hegemonic goals. As the Soviet threat in

Europe became less and less plausible, the Reagan Administration feared Soviet would expand in previously pro-U.S. or neutral areas of the world, such as the Middle East and Central America. The Middle East, traditionally an international hot spot and the source of most of the Free World's oil, seemed particularly vulnerable to Soviet expansion. Michael C. Hudson states,

Of course, it was not so many years ago that this region mattered relatively little to American policy makers and its problems elicited only routine attention, but those days are gone. Even without Washington's new sensitivities to the global Soviet Soviet competition, Northeast Africa has become an important ideological testing ground for the Third World, and developments there now have ramifications in at least two adjacent major tension areas, Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and the Arab-Israeli conflict zone.¹⁶⁴

The Reagan Administration believed the massive amount of high-quality Soviet arms bought by Libya and stockpiled in Libyan warehouses was a propositioning of weapons and supplies for a Soviet quick reaction force in the Middle East. The U.S. Government often thought Libyan actions and motives camouflaged Soviet intentions. President Reagan himself stated the Soviet Union invaded Chad using Libya as a proxy.¹⁶⁵ With Libya dabbling in the internal politics of almost every country in Northern Africa, Qaddafi's threat to regional stability seemed significant.

What the Reagan Administration failed to realize is that Qaddafi made moves in every country, whether there was any real chance for success or not. The Reagan Administration tended to perceive every Libyan intervention as requiring an immediate U.S. response. Therefore, the Administration portrayed Qaddafi as having much more power and influence than he actually had. Also,

¹⁶⁴ Michael C. Hudson, "Reagan's Policy in Northeast Africa," *Africa Report*, 27 (Mar.-Apr., 1982), pp. 4-5.

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, "Showdown...", p. 13.

the Reagan Administration failed to take the national and regional histories and motivations of these governments fully into account. The attitude of the African countries toward being "protected" by the U.S. was as distasteful as being undermined by Libya. Most of the Third World countries saw the U.S.-Libyan conflict as a battle between a newly independent countries and an imperial power. In the much of the world's eyes, North Africa had the choice between regional and international imperialism.

The American foreign policy apparatus became so engrossed in the actions of Libya's government, they lost sight of the needs and characteristics of the Libyan people. While the Administration made many attempts to separate the desires and actions of Qaddafi from the Libyan people, the White House never really understood what attracted the Libyan people to Qaddafi. One analyst states,

Qaddafi, by deposing the Idris monarch in 1969, transformed Libya from a rubber stamp of Anglo-American policy into a state with its own identity and national pride. In 1970 he broke the grip of the multinational oil companies over Libya's oil resources by compelling them to renegotiate the terms of their operations in Libya and by setting the price of oil himself.¹⁶⁶

As Americans who have never undergone the experience of colonization, it was nearly impossible for the policy makers to understand that in the face of foreign intervention and tyranny, people will support almost any leader who will build the national will to resist. Leaders such as Stalin and Ho Chi Minh, whose actions against their own citizens were ultimately much more brutal than those perpetrated by outsiders, were still supported and loved by their followers at the time. Because these leaders gave their citizens pride and self-esteem and a national identity outside the context of the colonizer or invader, they enjoyed broad

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 12.

support.

As this inquiry proceeded it became increasingly clear that part of the explanation of the portrayal of Qaddafi as Frankenstein's monster lay in a failure of cultural and political imagination in the West. In this failure lies the cause of the inability of the West, particularly the United States, to understand and anticipate major developments in the Middle East...There is, first of all, an unwillingness to treat Qaddafi and, more generally, the developing world, as really possessed of a valid history and cultural and religious tradition. Qaddafi and other leaders like him thus appear to be mutants, as historical outlaws, rather than genuine, representative figures thrown up by forces and aspirations long present in their societies, however foolish or malign they might be as individuals.¹⁶⁷

The campaign against Libya during the 1980's represents almost solely the efforts of the Executive of the United States. The President, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and as the formulator of U.S. foreign policy, used his power and personal abilities to initiate and sustain a policy that stretched over six years. While not avoiding or excluding the Congress or the American people in pursuing his goals, the President and his staff nevertheless completely dominated the entire process. The U.S. Congress itself chose to avoid the major issue of whether the Reagan policy was necessary or justified throughout the campaign. Public fear and outrage over Arab terrorism and fueled by the Administration's portrayal of Qaddafi as the mastermind behind most of these actions insured that no Congressman would go on record supporting Qaddafi. Instead of questioning the Reagan Administration's policies, the few members of Congress who took issue with the White House concentrated on the procedures rather than on the overall policy. Issues like invoking the War Powers Act and giving the Congress some say in the deployment of military power was never seen as a challenge to the overall effort to stop Libyan activities.

¹⁶⁷ Edward P. Haley, *Qaddafi and the United States Since 1969*, (New York: Praeger, 1984), pp. 12-13.

Much of the credit for the success and acceptance of the Libyan policy must go to Ronald Reagan himself. Elected to office at a time when popular and political support for the office of President was in major decline, President Reagan reestablished the ability of a strong individual leader with a confrontational, idealistic style to run the country. To be effective, the President had to make a strong case to both the Congress and the American people to support a concerted economic, political and military effort against Libya. The U.S. Congress never attempted to preempt any Administration action against Libya. Whatever criticism it might have had toward the White House's policies, Congress limited it to the Administration's enthusiastic use of military force and its reluctance to invoke or even acknowledge the War Powers Act. Congress as a whole seemed to prefer to keep out of the increasingly personal conflict between Reagan and Qaddafi.

Fortunately for the Reagan Administration, the American people were in a receptive mood for a crusade against Libya. Given the pro-Israel lobby in the Congress and the anti-Arab mood in the country, an Arab country like Libya would have few American supporters. The public had also shown an affinity for the quick, yet decisive, military engagements the U.S. had enjoyed. As long as no catastrophe occurred, any clash between the U.S. military and the Libyan forces would almost guarantee an American victory. In a Gallup poll taken shortly after the raid, 80% of those queried said that if Libyan terrorism continued, the U.S. should again use military force.¹⁶⁸ The legacy in the 1970's of increasing oil prices, the appearance that the Arabs were buying up the U.S., and recurring acts of Middle Eastern terrorism left a taste in American public's mouth that something had to be done. Jimmy Carter had tried mediation and a poorly

¹⁶⁸ Gallup Report, no. 247, (Apr., 1986), p. 9.

planned military operation and had paid the price. Ronald Reagan convinced the people that he could make America a country to be respected (and feared) and the people were willing to let him try.

Economically, Libya was a good choice. Although it was a major oil exporter, decreasing trade with her would not significantly affect the U.S. economy. The oil glut of the '80's greatly decreased the economic power of oil-producing countries and there was no shortage of alternative oil sources. Thus, the President could afford to put maximum economic pressure on Libya with little or no domestic repercussions.

The Reagan Administration centered much of the "teeth" of its policy against Libya around military power. In many ways the Reagan Administration represented a return to the "power politics" and military adventurism of pre-Vietnam America. A renewed emphasis on military power quickly replaced the political bargaining, detente, and isolationism of the pre-Reagan years. From Nicaragua to Angola, the White House introduced military assistance to anti-government forces. A string of small but successful military actions like the downing of the Libyan planes in the Summer of 1981 and the invasion of Grenada increased the confidence of the White House, both because of their military success and the positive public reaction that followed. The U.S. capture of the *Achille Lauro* terrorists in October 1985 showed U.S. officials the effectiveness of military force to combat terrorists. When Admiral John Poindexter, then Deputy Assistant for National Security, met Reagan after the terrorists' capture, the President reportedly leaped from his chair exclaiming "I salute the Navy!"¹⁶⁹

In spite of the large amount of modern Soviet-bloc arms that Libya possessed, there was never any question of who would win in a military clash be-

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 23.

tween Libya and the U.S. In the murky world of international politics, the White House could predict a military victory much easier than a political one.

Another important question in the analysis of the U.S.-Libyan conflict is just what kind of threat Libya posed. While there was little doubt that Libya supported terrorists and their activities, Libya was neither the only nor the strongest country to do so. Countries such as Iran and Syria were equally tied to anti-American terrorist activities, but they tended to be either much stronger militarily or had much closer ties to the Soviet Union. Though Reagan did state that the U.S. would strike them if given irrefutable proof of Iranian or Syrian terrorist activity, his officials later had to refute this claim, explaining that he was misquoted. Apparently the Reagan Administration had one standard for Libyan terrorism and another for atrocities committed by stronger and less isolated countries.¹⁷⁰ Equally questionable was what kind of response was appropriate. The fall in oil prices and the collapse of OPEC's economic power raised the question of just how important it was to stop Qaddafi. In one observer's opinion,

If the United States chose to 'bomb Libya back to the stone age,' to use the term favored by some U.S. generals, and wipe out its oil fields, gasoline would cost only a few cents more...and yet the world public [is] asked to accept that [Qaddafi] poses a serious threat to Western interests in Africa.¹⁷¹

Overall, the Reagan Administration's policy towards Libya was an experiment. After five years of isolationism and self-doubt, the Administration set out to see if the U.S. was ready to become a key actor in world power politics again. The Libya campaign was also a test to see if the United States government and people were ready for a strong, idealistic president, especially in foreign policy matters. By the end of the Vietnam War in the early '70's, the U.S. Congress as-

¹⁷⁰ Pico Iyer, "Nearly All Together Now," *Time*, 127 (May 5, 1986), pp. 28-29.

¹⁷¹ Cervenka, p. 12.

sumed much of what had previously been Executive-exclusive matters, such as negotiating foreign policy and deploying military force. Through its unilateral policies towards Libya, as well as its other interventions in places like Grenada and Beirut, the Reagan Administration wrestled back the right to conduct policy. While the Presidency does not have a monopoly on all political power in this country, in the arena of international power politics a strong Executive Branch led by a determined President can accomplish much through its own will and expertise.

Though both the Reagan Administration and the U.S.-Libyan conflict have faded away into yesterday's memories, the legacy of the Libyan campaign will continue to be evident in the actions of the U.S. Executive. The effort, in part, brought back an aggressive foreign policy. It also legitimized the use of American military force in the Arab world for the first time since World War II. From 1945 until this point, the U.S. only saw the Middle East as a possible site of a U.S.-Soviet conflict, and thus planned its tactics and positioned its forces accordingly. Because of Arab sensitivity to a Western military presence in the Arabian world and the strong position of Israel in the region, the U.S. historically did not want to get involved too directly with Arab conflicts. Third, the Administration's actions opened a new chapter in dealing with terrorism. From now on, attacking terrorists and their state sponsors with military force would be seen as an acceptable form of reaction by the American people. The effects of these factors have in many ways changed both the attitude of the Executive and the American people look at international relations and the use of power politics. Because history has deemed the Libyan campaign a success, observers look to future expeditions with the same optimism. How these actions turn out

will in many ways determine if the Reagan Administration's handling of Libya becomes the norm or the exception.

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