

Libya's regional role

Libya's influence in Africa and the Middle East is extensive, supporting nationalist regimes and liberation movements in their confrontation of imperialism and reactionary regimes. Qaddafi's policy of 'calling a spade a spade', his political stands and the element of surprise woven into his tactics have not won the hearts of his pro-western neighbors, let alone their masters. His involvement in Chad and embarrassment of France on more than one occasion, his vehement opposition to the Camp David alliance and his opposition to the Tunisian regime have all contributed to his enemies' perturbation. Reagan's advisors are highly concerned about Libya's role in Africa. «He'll do all he can to get the Sudan to cut ties with us, condemn Egypt for seeking peace with Israel, and put people on trial for helping airlift the Falashas to Israel,» fretted one top Reagan advisor.

While dealing with hostile neighbors, Qaddafi has fortified Libya by contracting non-aggression pacts with neighboring states - Algeria, Sudan, Morocco, Malta. Nor does he limit his concern to the north. Qaddafi is a strong opponent of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and of Mobutu Sese Seko's regime in Zaire, as well as becoming involved in the ceasefire agreement between Mali and Bourkina Fasso.

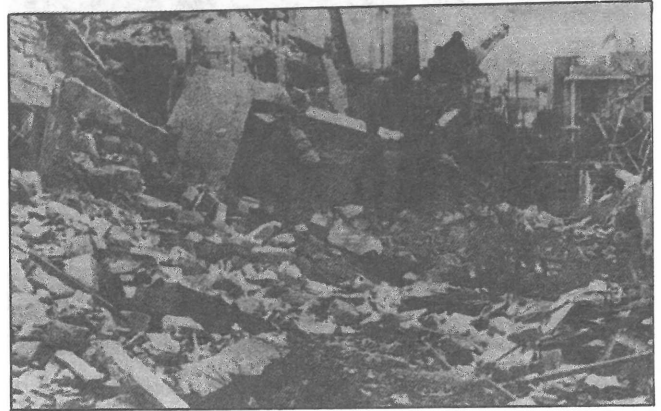
Qaddafi is well known for his bold diplomacy. He has on several occasions made surprise visits to Arab countries to propose unity plans. While the media has made Qaddafi's moves appear as eccentric gestures, they have always resulted in agreements that were beneficial to Libya, while offering the other side equal advantage. At other times, such moves were calculated to embarrass and expose. During a visit to Saudi Arabia, Qaddafi led a crowd of pilgrims chanting slogans such as «Down with the US, enemy of Islam» and others against King Hussein and Husni Mubarak.

The African Triangle

In US intelligence summaries, two key points repeatedly emerge: (1) During the past ten years, Qaddafi's main attacks have been aimed almost exclusively at dissident Libyans in exile or reactionary Arab and African states. (2) Rarely has an attack been launched directly at US interests. The last such attack was in December 1979, when the US embassy in Tripoli was burned. Considering the number of US embassies attacked all over the world, the Reagan Administration could hardly rely on that pretext to attack Libya.

The US's best bet seemed to be hitting Libya through neighboring states to avoid direct involvement. The Egypt-Tunisia-Chad triangle has been the main focus of US attention, especially because of the influence the US commands there. Egypt is of special interest due to its involvement in Camp David and normalization of relations with the Zionist entity. This caused Qaddafi to take a principled stand against Sadat and then Mubarak's regime, a fact which caused Egypt and its western allies deep consternation. Since 1977, Egypt has served as a launching pad for anti-Libyan activities. A brief border war provoked by Egypt in 1977, served as a pretext for permanent troop deployment along Egypt's western borders. US AWACS radar planes have frequently operated over Egyptian territory to observe activities in Kufra, Libya's main military staging area near the borders of Chad, Sudan and Egypt.

Britain is also involved, refurbishing old Soviet-made tanks and artillery, and contributing intelligence expertise. As



Destruction from US attack on Libya.

an example, the Libyan «hitmen» captured in Cairo after the attempted assassination of a dissident, were interrogated by Scotland Yard experts flown in especially for the purpose. The French intelligence service is also working in liaison with the Egyptian secret service, having wanted to destabilize Libya since 1974.

US envoys have been in constant contact with Egypt to discuss possible military options against Libya. However, joint action by the US and its Middle East allies would be undertaken only if Qaddafi attacks a neighboring country. This has not been the case, despite repeated Egyptian and Tunisian attempts to goad Libya into such a fight. The US began to see the futility of such a plan after three attempts to involve Egypt were abandoned. (Egypt, for its own image purposes, declared that it had rejected the US overtures.) At the same time, the US was frustrated by lack of concrete evidence about the Libyan involvement it had claimed in any of the attacks.

Egypt, through its national security advisor, Osama al Baz, is exploring the possibility of forming a 'confrontation front' with Tunisia against Libya, but so far nothing has developed. Egypt is diligently trying to prove Libya's complicity in so-called terrorist activities, particularly the hijacking Egypt itself bungled so badly, killing more passengers than the hijackers. The Egyptian regime, like the US, has been making constant assertions about «irrevocable evidence» and «clear connections», but the proof is yet to show. In any case, the Egyptian regime has latched upon a scapegoat which serves as a convenient 'exhibit A' to distract from Mubarak's domestic and foreign policy dilemmas. In the *Boston Globe*, December 1, 1985, some western diplomats had this to say about Egypt's intentions: «The Egyptians (are) trying to isolate Libya in the Arab world as a means of preparing public opinion at home and abroad for some future move.» After the conscripts' revolt and subsequent mass uprising in February, the deteriorating economic situation and the extension of emergency rule, Egypt does not seem a likely candidate for carrying out the US's dirty work against Libya at the moment.

Tunisia, Libya's western neighbor, is no less hostile to Qaddafi. Being one of the world's largest recipients of US aid, the regime is always careful to follow its western masters' instructions. The US, in return, has repeatedly confirmed its commitment to Bourguiba and would help any country 'threatened' by Libya. This scenario of Tunisia's anti-Qaddafi campaign is similar to that in Egypt: The army on alert at the borders, mudslinging, the expulsion of Libyan diplomats and closure of the consulate and cultural centers, access for anti-