

Compelling Libya: Operation El Dorado Canyon as Coercive Diplomacy  
and Counterterrorism

Dissertation submitted in part fulfillment of the  
degree Doctor of Philosophy in History

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15 September 2023

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### Acknowledgements

The PhD process has been an illuminating experience. History has taught that it is important for historians to search for the truth and I would like to thank the faculty of the Department of History at Western Illinois University for ingraining this lesson in me. I would also like to thank the Department of History at Liberty University for reinforcing those lessons. I would like to thank the following people. First, I would like to thank my parents, George and Erlinda Boyd. To my mother for putting up with me during the writing process and to my late father for introducing me to history and encouraging my love for it.

To my advisor, Dr. Kevin Grimm and to my dissertation panel, Dr. David Crum, and Dr. Martin Catino. Thank you for your advice and encouragement. To the staff of the Leslie F. Malpass Library at Western Illinois University for their assistance. To the Press Library Staff at Chatham House for their help when I was researching for my MA dissertation during a visit in December 1990. And I would like to extend my thanks to the late Professor Paul Wilkinson for his advice and assistance and to the residents and staff of David Russell Hall of the University of St. Andrews during my visit in spring, 1991. I used the materials acquired during these visits for this dissertation. I would also like to thank God for His guidance and the Reedsburg Seventh Day Adventist Church for their support.

I would like to thank anyone else I have failed to mention.

## Abstract

On Tuesday morning, 11 September 2001, the United States was attacked by a small terrorist cell from a group called al-Qaeda. On that day, the United States was at war with terror. However, this was not the first time the United States dealt with terrorism. Thomas Jefferson sent a fleet of warships from the fledgling US Navy and a contingent of US Marines to deal with the Barbary Pirates operating on the “shores of Tripoli,” the terrorists of the day. It is interesting that another president, Ronald Reagan, also sent a contingent of US Air Force and US Navy aircraft to deal with terrorists sheltering in Tripoli and Benghazi in response to a Libyan-sponsored attack on a West Berlin disco. This dissertation will answer several questions. How effective was the bombing in deterring Libyan support of terrorism? What led to US retaliation? What were the three pillars of US counterterrorism policy? The second pillar of US counterterrorism policy will be spotlighted throughout the dissertation.

This dissertation will argue that the 1986 American bombing of Libya was effective in deterring the Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qadhafi’s support for terrorism for the short term. This dissertation will argue that the 1986 bombing of Libya (Operation El Dorado Canyon) was a coercive diplomacy exercise, which is designed to persuade the target to abide by the rules. Two policy options will be discussed: coercive diplomacy and decapitation operations. Decapitation operations is a very new concept within academia. It is essentially an operation to eliminate the leader of a state or an organization such as a terrorist or insurgent group. Decapitation operations are meant to disrupt the activities of such groups or cause their disintegration. Operation El Dorado Canyon failed as a decapitation operation because Qadhafi survived the airstrikes. However, the US government had banned assassination since the Ford administration and Reagan continued that ban; therefore, Operation El Dorado Canyon was not a decapitation operation.

## Chapter One: Introduction

On Tuesday morning, 11 September 2001, the United States was attacked by a small terrorist cell from a group called al-Qaeda. A total of four commercial flights were skyjacked. One flight believed to target the White House or the Capitol Building crashed in the Pennsylvania countryside, while the other three made it to their targets: the twin towers of the World Trade Center, and the Pentagon respectively. On that day, the United States was at war with terror. However, this was not the first time the United States dealt with terrorism. Thomas Jefferson sent a fleet of warships from the fledgling US Navy and a contingent of US Marines to deal with the Barbary Pirates operating on the “shores of Tripoli,” the terrorists of the day. In recent memory, the United States has been the target of terrorist attacks since 1968.

It is interesting that another president, Ronald Reagan, also sent a contingent of US Air Force and US Navy aircraft to deal with terrorists sheltering in Tripoli and Benghazi in response to a Libyan-sponsored attack on a disco in West Berlin. Reagan’s response to Libyan terrorism has raised several questions. How effective was the bombing in deterring Libyan support of terrorism? What led to the US retaliation? In regards to US counterterrorism policy of the period, what were the three pillars of US counterterrorism policy?

This dissertation will argue the 1986 American bombing of Libya was effective in deterring the Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qadhafi’s support for terrorism for the short term. Therefore, as an exercise in coercive diplomacy, it was successful. It was a signal toward other state-supporters of terrorism that the United States would no longer tolerate acts against American citizens and interests. If it was considered as a decapitation operation, it was obviously a failure. The bombing failed to eliminate Qadhafi, and although the Libyans reported that an adopted daughter of Qadhafi was killed, the reporting of the child’s death was most likely for

propaganda purposes. This dissertation will explore the counterterrorism policy of the Reagan administration with an emphasis on the 1986 bombing of Libya and briefly examine the aftermath of the bombing.

The Reagan administration's policies toward terrorism are an interesting study. There are many ways to approach it. One way to study it is through the *National Security Decision Directives* (NSDDs) drafted within the National Security Council (NSC). The NSDDs provide guidance on how policies should be implemented. Another way would be a study of published documents for public consumption. Documents like the *Patterns on Global Terrorism* were published every year and provided information on terrorist attacks and groups from the previous year. *The Reagan Diaries* will also be a useful source because it was his diary during his presidency. The entries were short and pithy. He wrote some mundane things, but he also discussed politics and issues that were occurring at the time. For example, his first entry was on 26 January 1981 and he wrote he had a meeting on terrorism with the heads of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Secret Service, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and Secretaries of State, Defense, and others.<sup>1</sup> The editor Douglas Brinkley also provided some information about events in some of the entries.

Another method could be an examination of Reagan's rhetoric toward terrorism. His rhetoric was tough and belligerent and yet he rarely acted after a terrorist attack. There are reasons why an administration does not act violently against a terrorist group. Intelligence may be faulty. It would reflect poorly on the United States if it attacked the wrong target and produced collateral damage. Such an attack would do tremendous harm to America's image and it would cause outrage within that community and fuel an ever-growing spiral of violence. How-

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, Douglas Brinkley, ed. (New York and London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 1.

ever, strong rhetoric gives the appearance of being steadfast against the terrorists for the public and at the same time serves as a warning to the terrorists. The main reason why Reagan did not act until 1986 was the fact that he wanted to have concrete evidence of Libyan-supported terrorism and he also wanted to impose gradual pressure through sanctions and give it a chance to work. Reagan preferred to convince Qadhafi to change his international conduct through persuasion rather than force. Reagan's preference was peace rather than conflict. Rhetoric can also be uplifting. On 27 December 1985, terrorists attacked the Rome and Vienna international airports. The National Security Council recommended the president call the American survivors to express his sympathy.<sup>2</sup> A few days later, on 29 December 1985, Reagan signed letters again expressing sympathy to the victims and reassured them that the government was doing their utmost to bring the terrorists to justice. In a draft letter to Victor and Daniela Simpson, Reagan expressed his heartfelt sympathy for the loss of their young daughter Natasha, when he wrote, "Our own government is stepping up its efforts to combat terrorism, and I can assure you that the dedicated men and women of the federal government will not rest until the murderers and responsible organizations are brought to justice."<sup>3</sup>

The literature on the Reagan presidency, like all leaders, is mixed. Reagan is reviled by some and celebrated by others as one of the greatest modern presidents. One book that certainly did not look favorably upon Reagan was *Mad Dogs: The US Raids on Libya*, edited by Mary Kaldor, and Paul Anderson. The book was a criticism of the bombing of Libya and the policy

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<sup>2</sup> "Action Memorandum from Oliver North to John M. Poindexter, "Presidential Telephone Call to Vic and Daniela Simpson," 27 December 1985, folder "Terrorist Attacks—Rome/Vienna 12/27/1985 (1)," Box 48, Oliver North Files, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-001-2017.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Ronald Reagan to Mr. & Mrs. Victor Simpson, 29 December 1985, folder "Terrorist Attacks—Rome/Vienna 12/27/1985 (2)," Box 48, Oliver North Files, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-001-2017.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2022.

developments during the Cold War that gave rise to Reagan's policies of peace through strength.<sup>4</sup> One submission by the well-respected historian E. P. Thompson was entitled "Letter to Americans." He was very critical of British and American actions and argued that America practiced terrorism itself. He claimed that sixty-three Libyans were killed during the bombing and he criticized American actions in Lebanon back in 1983-1984 as well. Thompson mentioned that scores were killed when the USS New Jersey lobbed 16-inch shells outside of Beirut, Lebanon.<sup>5</sup> Thompson argued that Americans should feel ashamed of their government's actions and they should realize that these actions and policies encouraged anti-American feelings abroad.<sup>6</sup> Sheena Phillips claimed that outrage and fear was the initial reaction of the Europeans when news of the US air raids were announced.<sup>7</sup> The British and West German publics were adamantly opposed to the raids while in a twist of irony the French public supported the raid.<sup>8</sup> Phillips argued that "US conduct after the attack has been a series of bids for political vindication, not a seriously planned campaign against terrorism."<sup>9</sup> Phillips suggested the bombing of Libya was just a feel-good exercise for US consumption rather than an actual response to Libyan-sponsored terrorist attacks.

Nicholas Laham's 2008 book on the bombing of Libya was very critical of Reagan's foreign policy. He argued that his order to bomb Libya was a miscalculation. It was a miscalcu-

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Kaldor and Paul Anderson, eds., *Mad Dogs: The US Raids on Libya* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> E. P. Thompson, "Letter to Americans," in *Mad Dogs: The US Raids on Libya*, Mary Kaldor and Paul Anderson, eds. (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Sheena Phillips, "The European Response," in *Mad Dogs: The US Raids on Libya*, Mary Kaldor and Paul Anderson, eds. (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 41.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.



lation because Laham considered it an act of desperation to rescue US credibility with the Arab world. An alliance with Israel was the reason for the loss of US credibility. He also argued that the bombing of Libya was a foreshadowing of events to come, i.e., war with Iraq.<sup>10</sup> However, his argument is unfounded. The raid on Libya was not an exercise to salvage credibility with the Arab world. Nor was it an act of desperation. The United States bombed Libya in retaliation for the bombing of a West Berlin disco that killed and injured American servicemen. The US had good relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other moderate Arab countries. Latham should have argued that the US lost credibility with the bombing of Libya because resorting to the use of force was a failure of diplomacy.

*Inside the National Security Council* is a useful book which provides an inside look at the workings of the NSC.<sup>11</sup> Written by Constantine C. Menges, an NSC staffer, he was originally brought into the CIA and was later recruited for a position in the NSC. Menges discusses some of the frustrations he endured while at the NSC. Throughout the book, he discusses how some of Reagan's foreign policy advisors would sabotage his policies. Menges argues that Reagan had a strong conservative viewpoint and his policies reflected that. However, several advisors within the NSC and in the State Department pursued their own agendas, thus sabotaging the president's foreign policy. Secretary of State George Shultz was notorious in the book for pursuing his own foreign policy. He was willing to make agreements with US adversaries that did not benefit the United States. Menges, with the help of Oliver North, intervened to make sure that the president's policy vision was fulfilled.

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Laham, *The American Bombing in Libya: A Study of the Force of Miscalculation in Reagan Foreign Policy* (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Constantine C. Menges, *Inside the National Security Council: The True Story of the Making and Unmaking of Reagan's Foreign Policy* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988).

Bob Woodward's 1987 book, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987* introduced some of the major players within the US intelligence community, such as Admiral Stansfield Turner, who was Jimmy Carter's Director of Central Intelligence (DCI). The first few chapters discussed Bill Casey and his Office of Strategic Services (OSS) background during the Second World War. Casey originally wanted to be Secretary of State and was disappointed when it was not offered to him. He was Reagan's campaign manager and many believed he could have had his choice of jobs in the new administration. However, Reagan wanted him to be his Director of Central Intelligence.<sup>12</sup> There were discussions about recruitment of other essential CIA officers as well.

Woodward discussed Reagan's first National Security Council meeting during his first week as president and the topic was terrorism. The State Department's expert on terrorism, Anthony Quainton, said the United States was vulnerable to a direct terrorist attack on its territory.<sup>13</sup> Casey received a twelve-page Secret National Intelligence Estimate or SNIE "Libya: Aims and Vulnerabilities." There were several key judgements: Libyan successes in Chad was sure to embolden Qadhafi to adopt "aggressive policies that would cause problems for the US and Western interests in the region; Qadhafi's opposition at home and abroad was disorganized and not effective. To be effective they required money, weapons, proper organization, and not to mention training; and Soviet objectives in the region were served by Qadhafi's anti-Western rhetoric and policies. The Soviets received hard currency from arms sales to Libya."<sup>14</sup> Woodward demonstrated that Libya was on the mind of the Reagan administration very early.

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<sup>12</sup> Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005, originally 1987)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-64.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

There are several books that offer insight on Reagan as a politician and diplomat. Sean Wilentz's *The Age of Reagan* argues that Reagan was extremely influential within the conservative movement and as a result the years between 1974-2008 was the Age of Reagan. Reagan took a movement that was on the margins of society and managed to take power. Wilentz argues that there were a few interludes, but this era of conservatism was interrupted during the late 1970s since Reagan did not gain the nomination in 1976 and it was briefly reversed during the Clinton administration, but it was able to make a comeback. The Age of Reagan ended with the election of Barack Obama in 2008.<sup>15</sup> Surprisingly, Wilentz had very little to say about the Reagan administration's relationship with Qadhafi. Essentially it was covered in two pages with one paragraph on the 1981 Gulf of Sidra confrontation when two US Navy F-14s shot down two Libyan fighters and the 1986 bombing of Libya. Wilentz did not offer any new insights on the bombing of Libya.<sup>16</sup>

In *The Triumph of Improvisation*, James Graham Wilson argues that Reagan and other statesmen, mainly Mikhail Gorbachev helped end the Cold War by using an old military saying of adapt, improvise, and overcome. However, in Wilson's words these statesmen used adaptation, improvisation, and engagement to ease the tensions which helped end the Cold War. Wilson argues that Secretary of State Alexander Haig was a thorn in the side of any agreement. Haig considered himself a realist and he liked Kissinger's idea of linkage with the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup> Haig also had the tendency of annoying others within the administration. He despised Ed Meese, who was one of the White House gatekeepers during the first administration, he believed they

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<sup>15</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York and London: Harper Perennial, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 158, 223-224.

<sup>17</sup> The United States would reward Soviet good behavior with important international agreements like the Strategic Armament Limitation Treaty (SALT).

limited his access to the president.<sup>18</sup> George Shultz was more pragmatic than Haig and he was able to reach agreements with the Soviets. Wilson did not discuss the Reagan administration's relationship with Qadhafi, he focused more on Cold War diplomacy. Wilson's book provides insight on Reagan as a diplomat.

More specific books on Reagan's foreign policy were specifically on tools used toward countering terrorism, on Reagan's counterterrorism apparatus and on Operation El Dorado Canyon will be particularly useful. One such book is *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies* by Marc A. Celmer.<sup>19</sup> There is plenty of information about the counterterrorism apparatus in the US government during the Reagan administration. Celmer provides useful charts to show how the counterterrorism institutions were organized. There are chapters on the US military establishment and intelligence community and their roles in combatting terrorism. The key document Celmer based his research was the *National Security Decision Directive Number 138*.<sup>20</sup>

Geoffrey M. Levitt provided an analysis of a unique tool for combatting terrorism and that was the annual meeting of the seven largest economies and democracies generally known as the Group of Seven (G-7), but he called it the Summit Seven.<sup>21</sup> This summit meeting by the seven heads of state and government was supposed to discuss economic issues; however, in 1978

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<sup>18</sup> James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Professor Paul Wilkinson, UK's foremost expert on terrorism and Professor of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews, loaned a copy to the writer during a visit to the University of St. Andrews in the Spring of 1991. He highly recommended the book.

<sup>20</sup> Marc A. Celmer, *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1987), 85.

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey M. Levitt, *Democracies Against Terror: The Western Response to State-Supported Terrorism* (New York, Westport, and London: Praeger, 1988).

during the Bonn meeting, the topics of skyjacking and kidnapping were discussed. At the end of the meeting the leaders issued a joint statement that punitive action would be taken on a state that refused to prosecute or extradite hijackers and return the affected aircraft to their home country.<sup>22</sup> At least seven of their meetings discussed terrorism and issued a joint statement after the meetings were over. The 1986 Tokyo statement specifically mentioned Libya as a state-sponsor of terrorism.<sup>23</sup> These meetings were unique because they did not have a permanent staff, yet the decisions made were significant because the meetings were held by the heads of state and government and not by lower ranked officials.

Joseph T. Stanik's *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War With Qaddafi* would suggest that it was critical of Reagan's bombing of Libya. However, it was a straightforward and detailed military history of the Reagan administration's conflict with Libya.<sup>24</sup> Stanik wrote highly detailed chapters on naval operations and on the freedom of navigation operations that took place in the Gulf of Sidra particularly Operations Attain Documents I-III and the bombing of Libya in April 1986. Stanik argued that Reagan imposed sanctions first to convince Qadhafi to change his behavior. When this failed Reagan resorted to the use of force as a last resort since all other efforts failed and yet the 14/15 April bombing of Libya "profoundly affected both Colonel Qaddafi and America's allies."<sup>25</sup> Stanik argued that Qadhafi received a message that the US would not allow him to support terrorism "with impunity" and American's European allies tried to "forestall further U.S. military action by implementing stronger counterterrorism measures

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<sup>22</sup> Levitt, *Democracies Against Terror*, 106.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph T. Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War With Qaddafi* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

and pledging to cooperate more closely with the United States in the fight against international terrorism.”<sup>26</sup>

This suggested that Reagan had to resort to the use of force in order to get the Europeans to act against Libya and persuade Qadhafi to quit supporting terrorism. While most studies of Reagan’s counterterrorism policy argues that Reagan struggled to formulate a coherent policy this dissertation will argue that Reagan had developed a well thought out policy and will enhance Stanik’s argument in the realm of policymaking. When perceived as a coercive diplomacy strategy Reagan’s counterterrorism policy toward Libya reveals a concrete policy with achievable goals. When the target state refused to comply, Reagan’s strategy was to increase the pressure with more sanctions. Because Reagan’s strategy required time for it to work, critics considered his nonaction as a sign of weakness and these critics failed to see the brilliance of his strategy. Reagan’s strategy was simple and yet effective, every time he ratcheted up the pressure, he increased the disruption of the target state’s economy, and increased its isolation. Therefore, this dissertation will be unique because it will examine his counterterrorism policy as a coercive diplomacy strategy and with a brief examination of Operation Ed Dorado Canyon as a decapitation operation and it will argue that Reagan’s counterterrorism policy must be seen in the context of the Cold War. It will trace the origins of US counterterrorism policy to 1972, because major portions of his policy were formulated during the Nixon administration and it will argue that Reagan’s use of force against Libya was effective over the short term through the policy options discussed below and through the three pillars of US counterterrorism policy. The second pillar of US counterterrorism policy will be emphasized throughout the dissertation, because it was the most effective pillar in a coercive diplomacy strategy.

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<sup>26</sup> Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, xii.

The methodology of this dissertation will be qualitative, and the analysis will borrow from diplomatic, political, and military history. It will also borrow from political science, international relations, security studies and terrorism studies. Terrorism studies is a relatively new field and it borrows heavily from political science, international relations, and security studies.<sup>27</sup> Diplomatic history will help interpret the diplomacy of the United States during the Reagan administration and military history and security studies will provide insight on the military aspects of counterterrorism policy. It will be useful in providing insight on military tactics used against terrorism and the military formations and jargon used. Terrorism studies will provide insight on current research in the field. Responding to terrorism has been a challenge to liberal democracies because these governments must create a balance between law and order and civil liberties. Civil liberties can be seen as a liability because they protect people against government intrusion and police misbehavior. Terrorists can hide behind civil liberties. At the same time, governments could pass draconian laws which may appear commonsensical, but, are fascistic and an overreach. The passage of the Patriot Act was seen as necessary to combat terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11, but it quickly became under fire because of the extralegal nature of it. It allowed the government to arrest citizen and non-citizen alike and hold them for a two-or three-day period without charge. This may be government overreach and demonstrated the importance of terrorism and counterterrorism studies, which is to find that right balance of law and order and civil liberties.

There will be two policy options discussed to explain the bombing of Libya in 1986: decapitation operations and coercive diplomacy. Coercive diplomacy offers options that are not military in nature. Essentially coercive diplomacy provides carrots and stick options. Carrots

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<sup>27</sup> Alex P. Schmid, J. F. Forest, and Timothy Lowe, "Terrorism Studies: A Glimpse at the Current State of Research (2020/21)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15 (2021): 142-143.

are offered to change the target state's behavior and if that behavioral change is not forthcoming, coercive diplomacy provides other options which offers some form of punishment for noncompliance. In his 1991 book, *Forceful Persuasion: coercive diplomacy as an alternative to war*, Alexander L. George argues that coercive diplomacy differs from compellence because compellence suggests that only military options are available. Coercive diplomacy is an alternative to military action because the purpose is to persuade the target state to act in the desired manner without having to pummel them into submission. However, this does not mean that military options are off the table, there are a few cases when a surgical strike was needed. This is not a failure in coercive diplomacy. The surgical strike was necessary because it was the right amount of pain to shock the target state into compliance.<sup>28</sup>

Decapitation has been debated for a considerable time. While at the RAND Corporation, Brian M. Jenkins pondered if assassination should be included as a response to terrorism.<sup>29</sup> His conclusion was no, because it was morally wrong and it was considered as murder which is illegal. A question arose on assassinating state-supporters of terrorism which meant targeting heads of state and government. Targeting state leaders would possibly place a target on our own leaders. In addition, the replacement of the assassinated leader may be worse. The replacement may feel he has something to prove and may be more bloodthirsty than the previous leader.<sup>30</sup> Or another alternative would be the leadership is so weak that undesirable elements find a safe haven within the borders, something akin to Afghanistan during the 1990s and today.

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<sup>28</sup> Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: coercive diplomacy as an alternative to war* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Studies, 1991) 5.

<sup>29</sup> Brian M. Jenkins, "Should Our Arsenal Against Terrorism Include Assassination?" *RAND Paper P-7303*, January 1987 (Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 1987).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



Despite these objections, President George W. Bush removed the ban on assassination and proceeded to use drones to strike at terrorist leaders. Keith Patrick Dear, a squadron leader in the British Royal Air Force, found that decapitation operations may be counterproductive. In his article, “Beheading the Hydra? Does Killing Terrorist or Insurgent Leaders Work?”, he found that decapitation is effective in the short-term, because it does disrupt terrorist activity, but their attacks increased after a short time.<sup>31</sup> Dear noticed that sometimes terrorist attacks exceeded the pre-decapitation levels. The effect of the loss of a leader’s skill set or knowledge soon ebbed because the terrorist organization would choose another leader, but train more individuals as replacements. Therefore, if one is assassinated there is another replacement fully trained.<sup>32</sup> This dissertation argues that Reagan’s counterterrorism policy toward Libya was a coercive diplomacy strategy and Operation El Dorado Canyon was the ultimate expression of this strategy and not a decapitation operation.

Chapter two will examine terrorism and Reagan’s national security policy and apparatus. It is important to have a brief discussion on the history of terrorism and the dilemmas of defining it. Terrorism is an ancient form of political violence. The examination of Reagan’s national security policy and apparatus will provide insight on how decisions were made. Chapter three will examine the three pillars of US counterterrorism policy. The United States will not negotiate with terrorists. The US is willing to talk to anyone about the welfare of hostages and when they will be released, but the US government is not willing to make deals or give into blackmail. The other two pillars are pressuring states that sponsor terrorism and applying the rule of law to terrorists. Another pillar was adopted by the Clinton administration which is offering financial

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<sup>31</sup> Keith Patrick Dear, “Beheading the Hydra? Does Killing Terrorist or Insurgent Leaders Work?”, *Defence Studies* 13 (2013): 293-337.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

rewards for information on terrorists that lead to their capture. However, this should be considered part of pillar three because law enforcement often offers cash rewards for information on criminals that lead to their arrest. The bombing of Libya falls under the second pillar. Chapter four will examine Qadhafi and Libya. This chapter will provide some historical background on Qadhafi and Libya, particularly after the 1969 coup that brought Qadhafi to power and provide insight on the government organization of the country.

The next two chapters will be on Reagan's counterterrorism efforts during his first administration. Chapter five will examine his counterterrorism efforts during 1981-1982. The Reagan administration confronted Libya on terrorism very early, Reagan ordered US Navy vessels into the Gulf of Sidra, a body of water Libya claimed as territorial waters. On at least two separate occasions these confrontations between the US and Libya resorted to actual exchanges of gunfire. Chapter six will examine US efforts to countering terrorism during 1983-1984, the Reagan administration still struggled with responding to terrorism, but was developing a coherent policy. Chapter seven will examine 1985 as a year of terror and will discuss three terrorist attacks that helped Reagan to decide on using force against Libya. Those terrorist attacks were: the hijacking of TWA Flight 847, the Achille Lauro hijacking and the nearly simultaneous attacks on the Vienna and Rome international airports.

Chapter eight will examine Operation Attain Document I and US counterterrorism efforts in early 1986, mainly the month of January. Operation Attain Document I was a freedom of navigation operation designed to apply pressure on Qadhafi to change his international conduct. This chapter will also examine US efforts to impose comprehensive economic sanctions on Libya to increase the pressure on Qadhafi. Chapter nine will examine Operations Attain Document II-III, the April 1986 bombing of Libya and its aftermath. Operations Attain Document II-

III were freedom of navigation operations launched in February 1986 and March 1986 respectively. These operations were designed to demonstrate US military power to persuade Qadhafi to renounce terrorism. Operation Attain Document III resulted in a confrontation between Libyan naval assets and the US Sixth Fleet. The US Navy sank at least three Libyan missile boats during the confrontation. This chapter will also discuss the bombing of the West Berlin disco which led to the decision to launch Operation El Dorado Canyon. The chapter will also examine its aftermath. How the media and other countries reacted to the bombing will be discussed. The chapter ten will be the dissertation's conclusion. The conclusion will provide an overview of US counterterrorism policy during the Reagan administration and how effective it was in the fight against terrorism. It will also argue that Reagan provided a blueprint on how to deal with terrorism without fighting a ground war like Afghanistan and Iraq.

## Chapter Two: Defining Terrorism and Reagan's National Security Policy

Terrorism has a long history. As Steven McCollum, an instructor in social science at Kemper Military School and College, once noted in a lecture, "terrorism is not new, it is news."<sup>33</sup> This chapter will provide some background on terrorism, discuss defining terrorism and conclude with a discussion on Reagan's foreign and national security policy. How Reagan set up his foreign and national security policy will be useful in determining how he formulated policy and how he reacted to certain world leaders and crises.

The very first terrorist group was the Sicarii or the Zealots of ancient Israel (A.D. 69-73). They used a dagger to dispatch their targets in a busy marketplace and melt back into the crowd. Their targets were usually Roman or Jewish collaborators. Their tactics were meant to terrorize their target audience, something modern terrorists do today, which made the Sicarii surprisingly modern. The Zealots met their demise during the famous siege of Masada. Some terrorist groups of the past made history. The anarchist group Narodnaya Volya of Russia were successful in assassinating the Tsar Reformer, Alexander II. It was truly ironic they assassinated him when he was preparing to introduce a constitution which limited his power. Tsar Alexander III ascended the throne and crushed the Narodniki, a pattern which often repeated itself during the Twentieth Century, Alexander III was a believer of autocracy and he had no desire to limit his power, a liberal Russian constitution died with his father. The Serbian Black Hand managed to spark a world war with the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

The study of terrorism is wide-ranging, although there are several history books on terrorism, most books fall under the fields of political science and international relations with the sub-

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<sup>33</sup> Kemper Military School and College in Boonville, Missouri was the oldest military school west of the Mississippi River, but it closed in 2002 due to bad management. Steven McCollum was one of two instructors in social science. The above remark was made during a lecture in Introduction to International Relations. The writer attended Kemper during the 1985-86 academic year.

field of security studies. Terrorism studies is a developing field like international studies; it borrows from other fields like history, political science, international relations, security studies, psychology, sociology and possibly economics and psychiatry. The books and journal articles of interest are diplomatic, military, and political history, along with political science, international relations, security studies and the emerging field of terrorism studies. This section of the chapter will discuss defining terrorism followed by a brief discussion of terrorism of the 1970s and 1980s, because to understand a topic or avenue of study, there needs to be a concise definition that is acceptable by the experts in the field. This historical background will provide insight on Reagan's policies toward combatting terrorism and his policy toward Libya. Although it may not be essential to define terrorism, such an exercise will be beneficial because it can provide new insights or understanding and lead to new avenues of research. This dissertation will contribute to the debate on the definition of terrorism by offering a definition and attempt to apply concepts found in terrorism studies to the events of the US-Libyan relationship.

Terrorist groups of the past used similar tactics, but today's terrorism is slightly different. It is more international in nature. Terrorists can strike a foreign country and target people from a third state. In addition, terrorists cooperate with each other or have state-support or sponsorship. Libya was known to sponsor different terrorist groups which made Colonel Muammar Qadhafi so dangerous. He sponsored mainly rogue Palestinian groups like the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) because of his hatred for the State of Israel, but he also supported groups which had nothing to do with the plight of the Palestinians like the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) or the Provos.

Terrorists can gain publicity from the mass media, generally newspapers and television news. Today terrorists can have a presence on social media which was not available during the

1980s. People can witness their attacks on live broadcasts into living room throughout the country or the world. In addition, state-sponsors can deny any involvement with the attack and yet reap the benefits of embarrassing or weakening their enemy. Terrorists have access to more powerful weapons which were in this case supplied by regimes such as Qadhafi's Libya. A few pounds of plastic explosives like Semtex can down a commercial airliner and can be concealed in a cassette player like the one that destroyed Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in December 1988. Terrorists also have access to shoulder-fired anti-aircraft rocket launchers capable of shooting down an airplane during takeoff or landing.

Literature is also a factor, as terrorists have access to the works of Karl Marx, Carlos Marighella and Vladimir Lenin. These books discuss tactics and how to organize an effective terrorist organization. Publishers like Paladin Press have offered unique titles like the *African Merc Combat Manual*, *How Terrorists Kill*, and *Disruptive Terrorism* to name a few.<sup>34</sup> Paladin Press is now defunct, but their books are still available for purchase on used book websites or on eBay. In addition, today individuals can find digital copies of the *Anarchist Cookbook* or similar titles that offer recipes on how to make plastic explosives, nitro glycerin or how to make a silencer. The internet was not available during the 1980s, but hard copies of the *Anarchist Cookbook* or similar titles were available for purchase.

The wave of modern terrorism can be traced back to two dramatic events in 1967: the death of Che Guevara and the humiliating defeat of the Arab nations during the Six Days War. Che Guevara was a firm believer in rural guerrilla warfare. He believed that it was the primary means of overthrowing a state. However, his convictions led him to his demise in the jungle

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<sup>34</sup> Paladin Press Advertisement, *Terrorism* (a *Soldier of Fortune* publication), September 1986, 96.

covered mountains of Bolivia. Guevara failed to realize that most of the population of Latin America lived in the cities and Bolivia was ruled by the leftist National Revolutionary Movement which instituted many popular reforms.<sup>35</sup>

After Guevara's death, the revolutionaries left the jungles and moved their armed struggle into the cities. The urban guerrillas quickly learned the value of gunning down a judge in the streets of Buenos Aires than wiping out an isolated army column in a ravine. Rural guerrillas usually followed the accepted laws of war while the urban guerrillas did not. Walter Laqueur, an eminent scholar of terrorism, once remarked that "(u)rban guerrilla is indeed urban, but it is not 'guerrilla' in any meaningful sense of the term; the difference between guerrilla and terrorism is not one of semantics but of quality."<sup>36</sup> Although terrorism has ancient origins, the term is very modern. It was first used during the French Revolution and it had a positive connotation. Terrorism was used by the revolutionary state to evoke fear upon their enemies, primarily the aristocracy and the clergy, those who represented the ancien regime. However, the Committee of Public Safety eventually came for its own. The Great Terror ended with the death of Robespierre, the chief architect of the terror. Thereafter, the word terrorism became a pejorative.

On the other side of the world, the Arab armies were defeated by Israel in a pre-emptive strike in a matter of six days. The Israelis impressively defeated Egypt and Syria militarily, while Jordan capitulated, but Israel attacked them anyway. As a result, Israel captured the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai. The Israelis eventually withdrew from the Sinai to the Gaza Strip. The defeat of the Arab states deflated the morale of the Palestinians who invested

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen Goode, *Guerrilla Warfare and Terrorism* (New York and London: Franklin Watts, 1977), 64-65.

<sup>36</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism: A Completely Revised and Expanded Study of National and International Political Violence, Based on the Author's Classic, Terrorism* (Boston, Toronto, and London: Little, Brown, and Company, 1987), 5.

their hope for a homeland on the Arab armies. The Arab defeat convinced the Palestinians to turn toward terrorism to gain publicity for their cause. In 1969, the Palestinians gained the support of Libya after a group of young army officers led by Lieutenant Muammar al-Qadhafi overthrew their monarch.

Arab nationalism became an important element within Qadhafi's ideology. He believed that it was "a glorification of Arab history and culture" and Qadhafi considered all the Arab-speaking countries as part of an Arab nation. Libya was to become the main leader of the Arab World, this was Qadhafi's desire, but none of the other Arab nations fell in line.<sup>37</sup> Qadhafi considered the plight of the Palestinians as a threat to Arab nationalism and to Islam. The main enemy was "Zionism" and by extension the United States because of its support for Israel; he was one of the few Arab leaders who was opposed to a negotiated settlement for the Palestinian issue.<sup>38</sup>

Most terrorist organizations name themselves after military formations like Italy's Red Brigades and West Germany's Red Army Faction or have names of the national liberation flair like the Palestinian National Liberation Front (PNLF), anything to make them sound legitimate. The fact that the word terrorism is such a value-laden term makes it difficult to define. Scholars cannot agree on a definition, the same is true among states and governments. Two scholars from the Netherlands, Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman surveyed scholars of terrorism and asked their opinion on a definition of terrorism they developed.<sup>39</sup> Their definition was extremely broad

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<sup>37</sup> Ronald Bruce St. John, "Terrorism and Libyan foreign policy, 1981-1986," *The World Today* 42 (1986): 111.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>39</sup> Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, et. al., *Political Terrorism: A new guide to actors, authors, concepts, data bases, theories, and literature*, revised, extended and updated edition (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988).



and a paragraph long. Most scholars felt it was too broad, some believed it was very comprehensive, some not comprehensive enough and others rejected it and offered their own. Schmid and Jongman acknowledged there were 109 different definitions of terrorism and this was in 1984.<sup>40</sup> There are many more since then.

Of the identified definitions of terrorism, there were twenty-two definitional elements within them. Some of these elements included violence, fear or terror emphasized, publicity aspects, and many more concepts. Despite the lack of agreement of defining terrorism, there are a few characteristics that are recognized:

1. Terrorism is the use or threat of violence usually associated with political, social, or religious factors.
2. it is aimed at a wider audience.
3. It is coercive. It wishes to force change whether it is a government, an organization or an individual. It could be a change in policy or a downfall of a government.
4. It ignores boundaries.
5. The violence is arbitrary or indiscriminate.
6. Terrorism can be the weapon of the weak as well as the strong.<sup>41</sup>

To clarify characteristic number five, the violence appears to be indiscriminate. The terrorist attack gives the impression that anyone can fall victim to it, including children like 11-year-old Natasha Simpson in the 27 December 1985 Libyan-sponsored attack on the Rome international airport. Complicating matters further there are more than one kind of terrorism: international terrorism, transnational terrorism and state or regime terrorism. State or non-state actors may

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<sup>40</sup> Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism*, 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

conduct international terrorism. Non-state actors are dependent upon the support of a state like Libya for resources. This form of terrorism is used to further the interests of the state. It is foreign policy by proxy. Transnational terrorism is conducted by non-state actors who do not rely on support from any state. They would gladly accept state support, but they are not beholden to that state. These terrorist groups may operate legitimate businesses to help fund their activities or they may rob banks or kidnap for ransom. State terrorism is used within a state against its own citizens. It is a form of social control and the Soviet Union and the Third Reich are excellent examples.

The United States government (USG) has several departments and agencies dealing with terrorism. Each one has a definition of terrorism. Congresses passes legislation on countering terrorism and their definitions can run a paragraph or more. Because of the legal implications, these definitions must be very specific. The definition must list every action or potential action that could be construed as a terrorist act. It also must list every treaty or previous law passed involving terrorism within the definition. The Senate provides advice on treaties and other diplomatic conventions. Once the Senate approves a treaty, both houses are required to write bills to make the treaty the law of the land. An early example of Congressional attempt to define terrorism can be found in “An Act to Combat International Terrorism.”<sup>42</sup> According to this bill an act of international terrorism was considered a crime or an offense under several conventions like the Hague Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft of 1970.<sup>43</sup> Of interest for this dissertation was their definition of state support of international terrorism:

(b) “State support of international terrorism” shall consist of any of the following acts

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<sup>42</sup> U.S. Senate, “S. 2236—An Act to Combat International Terrorism, October 1977,” *Terrorism: Documents of International and Local Control*, Volume II, Robert A. Friedlander, ed. (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1979), 520-542.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 529.

when committed deliberately by a state:

- (1) furnishing arms, explosives, or lethal substances to individuals, groups, or organizations with the likelihood that they will be used in the commission of any act of international terrorism;
- (2) planning, directing, providing training for, or assisting in the execution of any act of international terrorism;
- (3) providing direct financial support for the commission of any act of international terrorism;
- (4) providing diplomatic facilities intended to aid or abet the commission of any act of international terrorism; or
- (5) allowing the use of its territory as a sanctuary from extradition or prosecution for any act of international terrorism.<sup>44</sup>

Libya was certainly guilty of all five items listed above. The Libyan government provided passports to the Abu Nidal Organization and Qadhafi offered to help extremist groups as early as 1972. Some of the groups he helped were the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Black Power groups in the United States.<sup>45</sup>

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the US Department of State had similar definitions of terrorism in a document published each year for public consumption. Originally the CIA published it as *Patterns of International Terrorism*. When the State Department took over the publication, it was eventually renamed *Patterns of Global Terrorism*. The 1981 publication, retained the CIA's original title. These documents had two definitions of terrorism on the inside cover of the document. One was a definition of terrorism and the other was a definition of international terrorism.<sup>46</sup> The CIA defined terrorism and international terrorism as the following:

Terrorism: The threat or use of violence for political purposes by individuals or groups, whether acting for, or in opposition to, established governmental authority, when such

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<sup>44</sup> U.S. Senate, "An Act to Combat International Terrorism," 530.

<sup>45</sup> United States Department of State, *Libya's Continuing Responsibility for Terrorism*, November 1991, 1. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP96-00789R001001430004-9.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Patterns of International Terrorism: 1980, A Research Paper, June 1981," *Terrorism: Documents of International and Local Control, Volume IV: A World on Fire*, Robert A. Friedlander, ed. (London, Rome, and New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1984), 3-26 and US Department of State, "Patterns of International Terrorism: 1981, July 1982," *Terrorism: Documents of International and Local Control, Volume IV: A World on Fire*, Robert a. Friedlander, ed. (London, Rome, and New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1984), 63-90.

actions are intended to shock or intimidate a target group wider than the immediate victims.

International Terrorism: Terrorism conducted with the support of a foreign government or organization and/or directed against foreign nationals, institutions, or governments. Terrorism has involved groups seeking to overthrow specific regimes (for example, Yugoslavia and El Salvador), to rectify national or group grievances (for example, the Palestinians), or to undermine international order as an end in itself (for example, the Japanese Red Army).

The definitions elaborate and clarify the definition of international terrorism used in our previous studies of the phenomenon, but they do not change in any way the criteria used for selecting incidents included in the data base for these studies.<sup>47</sup>

According to the US government, international terrorism required the support of a foreign government.

There is also confusion about the terms, counterterrorism and anti-terrorism not only during the 1980s, but even today. Counterterrorism is offensive action against terrorists such as a hostage rescue operation. Excellent examples are the British SAS storming the Iranian Embassy in London and the Israeli raid at Entebbe. Anti-terrorism is purely defensive action such as the hardening of an embassy and security measures taken at an airport such as x-raying luggage. As part of the chapter illustrates, to understand any subject there needs to be a concise definition that is acceptable by the experts in the field. The field of terrorism studies demonstrates that an acceptable definition is hard to come by. Not everyone agrees on what terrorism happens to be. However, scholars agree on some of the characteristics of terrorism as illustrated above. For the purpose of this dissertation, the definition of terrorism was borrowed from Ronald T. Boyd, *U.S. Government and Counterterrorism*:

Terrorism is the threat or use of indiscriminate violence to achieve political, social, and/or religious goals. The violence can take the form of murder, maiming, destruction of property, and denial of freedom. It is intended to influence a much wider audience other than the victims. The act is usually criminal in nature and is to instill fear or create an atmosphere of terror. It should be noted that terrorism is like intervention in that it attempts to force the target audience to act in such a way that is not in their interest or to

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<sup>47</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Patterns of International Terrorism: 1980," 4.

act against their will.<sup>48</sup>

This chapter will examine Reagan's foreign and national security policy next; it will be necessary because it will provide insight on how Reagan formulated his foreign policy and what his priorities were and how international terrorism fitted into his foreign policy.

When Reagan took office the focus of his foreign policy was US-Soviet relations and US strategic thought because he was concerned about nuclear weapons stockpiles; at the same time his concern over terrorism ran parallel to relations with the Soviet Union. The Reagan administration had a widely held view that the Soviets had a terror network. This conviction was reinforced by Claire Sterling's seminal 1981 work *The Terror Network*.<sup>49</sup> Acceptance of a Soviet terror network coincided with the administration's interest in low-intensity conflict (LIC), because low intensity conflict was a catchall concept of warfare that was not on the scale of a war in Europe or the Korean War. LIC covered a wide range of conflict which included terrorism, guerilla warfare, riots and even domestic abuse and dueling. Military and political objectives were limited and escalation was to be avoided because of the fear of nuclear weapons being introduced.

Low-intensity conflict usually referred to guerrilla wars, terrorist attacks and insurrections, but it can also include riots, domestic disturbances (i.e., spousal abuse) and even duels as noted above. A reasoning for the administration's interest in LIC was the belief that the Defense Department was preparing for a war in Europe which was unlikely and the real war would occur in the Third World because of supposed Soviet aggression.<sup>50</sup> At a National Defense University

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<sup>48</sup> Ronald T. Boyd, *U.S. Government and Counterterrorism* (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Leeds, 1991). Slight modification has been made to the definition.

<sup>49</sup> Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981).

<sup>50</sup> Michael T. Klare and Peter Kornbluh, "The New Interventionism: Low-Intensity Warfare in the 1980s

(NDU) conference, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, J. Michael Kelly said, “I think the most critical special operations mission we have today is to persuade the American public that the Communists are out to get us. If we win the war of ideas(s), we will win everywhere else.”<sup>51</sup> Such rhetoric is a reminder that the Reagan administration was serving during the Cold War and it was reminiscent of the rhetoric during the early days of the Cold War when there was fear of it turning hot.

The United States initially lacked a national security apparatus or a system to coordinate policy. During World War II the British were dismayed by the “lack of orderly procedures” within the American military establishment or government; during the war the Americans were exposed to the British Combined Chiefs of Staff and their system of coordinating wartime policy.<sup>52</sup> The US Congress wanted to correct this and passed the National Security Act of 1947.<sup>53</sup> The act reorganized the Department of War into the Department of Defense, created departments for the armed services, and created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).<sup>54</sup>

Congress wanted to make policy formulation and coordination easier for the president. To that end, the National Security Act created the National Security Council (NSC), a forum for the president’s chief foreign policy advisors, which met at the president’s discretion. The president was free to name additional members to the NSC the structure of the council was based

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and Beyond,” *Low Intensity Warfare: Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency and Antiterrorism in the Eighties*, Michael T. Klare & Peter Kornbluh, eds. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 14.

<sup>51</sup> Klare and Kornbluh, “The New Interventionism,” 14-15.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Schott Stevens, “The National Security Council: Past and Prologue,” *Strategic Review* 17 (1989): 56.

<sup>53</sup> 80<sup>th</sup> Congress, *Public Law 253: The National Security Act of 1947*, 26 July 1947, <http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195385168/chapter10/nsa/ns...>, accessed on 7 January 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

on the president's preference. Over time the position of national security advisor became very powerful and had the tendency to usurping the position of secretary of state.<sup>55</sup>

Ronald Reagan wanted to avoid these kinds of problems. The secretary of state was to be his primary foreign policy advisor.<sup>56</sup> The national security advisor was charged with "developing, coordinating and implementing national security policy" as approved by Reagan.<sup>57</sup> The role of the national security advisor was more administrative during the first few years of Reagan's first administration. This arrangement would have worked well if Reagan had a capable national security advisor. His first choice Richard Allen was not a very good administrator and he was not able to give Secretary of State Alexander Haig the desired access to the president because of "the Troika," three men (James Baker, Michael Deaver and Ed Meese) who acted as the president's gatekeepers.<sup>58</sup>

The Reagan administration released its first national security directive on 25 February 1981, which explained the types of directives the National Security Council would issue. There were two types: the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) and the National Security Study Directive (NSSD). The NSDD was a series of documents that would promulgate presidential national security decisions. These types of directives may provide guidance or instructions on a particular policy/issue or actions toward a country such as Libya. The NSSD would be issued if there was a problem or issue that required further study before Reagan decided on a

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<sup>55</sup> William P. Bundy, "The National Security Process: Plus Ca Change...?", *International Security* 7 (1982-1983): 102 and Joseph G. Bock and Duncan L. Clarke, "The National Security Assistant and the White House Staff: National Security Policymaking and Domestic Political Considerations, 1947-1984," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 81 (1986): 267.

<sup>56</sup> The White House, "National Security Structure: Statement on the Issuance of a Presidential Directive," 12 January 1982, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 18 (1982): 21.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>58</sup> Bock and Clarke, "The National Security Assistant and the White House Staff," 269.

policy.<sup>59</sup> However, the structure of the National Security Council was not announced until January 1982.<sup>60</sup> The reason for the delay was the chaos of the foreign policy team during the first year of the administration. Secretary of Haig pronounced that he was going to be the “vicar of foreign policy” and he desired to protect his turf. Because National Security Advisor Allen was unable to grant Haig unfettered access to the president, there was tension between the two advisors. Tensions were so bad on 5 November 1981; President Reagan wrote in his diary that he “(c)alled in Dick Allen & Al Haig and ordered a halt to the sniping—wherever it’s coming from so we can stop this press obsession that we are having chaos & feuding in the admin.”<sup>61</sup>

Haig’s temperament did not help matters and he could easily become upset over a situation. However, Haig was known to be well versed in the politics of the White House. Haig was a deputy assistant to the president for national security affairs during the Nixon administration. He served under Henry Kissinger, the assistant to the president for national security affairs and later secretary of state and while assigned to the NSC he rose from the rank of colonel to major general. Under President Gerald Ford, he was promoted to general and appointed Supreme Commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>62</sup>

Because of Allen’s incompetence he was replaced as national security advisor. Reagan moved William Clark from the State Department to become the new national security advisor.

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<sup>59</sup> The White House, “National Security Council Directives,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 1*, 25 February 1981, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scaned-nsdds/nsdd1.pdf>, accessed on 21 September 2022 and Vicki Gordon, “‘The Law’: Unilaterally Shaping U.S. National Security Policy: The Role of National Security Directives,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37 (2007): 353-361.

<sup>60</sup> The White House, “National Security Structure,” 21-24.

<sup>61</sup> Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, Douglas Brinkley, ed. (New York and London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 47.

<sup>62</sup> Kevin V. Mulcahy, “The Secretary of State and The National Security Adviser: Foreign Policymaking in the Carter and Reagan Administrations,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 16 (1986): 286.



Haig was not pleased with the move since Clark was his deputy secretary of state. Eventually Haig resigned as secretary of state and George Shultz was Reagan's new appointment. Reagan's foreign policy team finally became stable enough to operate smoothly. What helped to insulate Reagan from the chaos around him during his first administration was a small group of three men who were popularly known as "the Troika." The White House was controlled by James Baker as White House chief of staff, Ed Meese as Counselor to the President for Policy and Michael Deaver as deputy White House chief of staff. All three worked well together and acted as gatekeepers, but they did not deny the principal foreign policy advisors' access to the president.<sup>63</sup> Despite this fact, Haig believed he was denied access to the president during his tenure as secretary of state.

By the second term, the troika was gone. Donald Regan switched positions with Baker. Baker became the new treasury secretary and Regan the White House chief of staff. Clark also took on a cabinet position and Robert McFarlane became the national security advisor. Others left for the private sector like Michael Deaver. Regan proved disastrous as chief of staff because he wanted to be involved in national security matters and attended the NSC meetings. As chief of staff, he helped orchestrate the Iran-Contra Affair. He also insisted on being the sole gatekeeper to the president which certainly caused annoyance among Reagan's foreign policy establishment. Limiting access to the president helped shield him from staff conflicts which were rife in the White House.<sup>64</sup> Reagan was known to be a hands-off administrator, he relied on his foreign policy team to implement policy. He relied on his foreign policy team to deal with the details of policy implementation, when there was a disagreement between his foreign policy ad-

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<sup>63</sup> James P. Pfiffner, "The Paradox of President Reagan's Leadership," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43 (2013): 87-88.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

visors, Reagan chose the course to be taken, but his decisions did not please anybody. President Reagan “rarely imposed his views,” so no-one would know what he really wanted, thus, giving the impression that he was a hands-off administrator; because he relied on his advisors to provide the best course to any problem helped allow an individual or small group to “impose their own solution without consulting” or ignoring other advisors.<sup>65</sup> This improper method helped bring about the Iran-Contra Affair. Although Reagan may not have been aware of the NSC’s Iran-Contra scheme, one National Security Council staffer confirmed (as mentioned above) that some of his foreign policy team were initiating their own foreign policy agendas that were detrimental to Reagan’s policies.<sup>66</sup> While these anecdotes suggest that Reagan was completely hands-off on policy implementation, there is evidence to suggest that he was hands-off on the details of how the policy would be implemented. Reagan was not hands-off on the formulation of policy and this was the case when it came to US-Soviet relations, Libya, and international terrorism in general. He was involved in directing US policy toward Libya and as Menges made clear, Reagan had a policy vision and he expected his foreign policy team to implement it as envisioned. Reagan placed a lot of trust in his advisors to conduct his policy and not violate his trust by pursuing their own agendas.

At the beginning of his second term, Reagan delivered his State of the Union Address which covered mostly domestic issues. However, toward the end of his speech he declared that supporting “freedom fighters” was self-defense.<sup>67</sup> Reagan did not name his doctrine, it was the

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<sup>65</sup> David C. Wills, *The First War on Terrorism: Counter-Terrorism Policy During the Reagan Administration* (Latham, Boulder, New York & Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), xiii.

<sup>66</sup> Constantine C. Menges, *Inside the National Security Council: The True Story of the Making and Unmaking of Reagan’s Foreign Policy* (London and New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988).

<sup>67</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Reagan Doctrine, 6 February 1985,” *Documents of American Diplomacy: From the American Revolution to the Present*, Michael D. Gambone, ed. (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2002), Document 146.

columnist Charles Krauthammer in an opinion piece in the 1 April edition of *Time Magazine*, who coined it as the Reagan Doctrine. Krauthammer believed he stumbled upon a new doctrine, a doctrine of supporting anti-communist insurgencies. He argued that Reagan was showing modesty by tucking it deep inside his 1985 State of the Union Address which had domestic policy items like a balanced budget amendment and school prayer among other things.<sup>68</sup>

The Reagan Doctrine was applied to only four insurgencies: Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua. Cambodia only received humanitarian aid; military aid was off the table because American policymakers feared that it would find its way into the hands of the Khmer Rouge which made up most of the Cambodian resistance.<sup>69</sup> The Vietnamese put an end to the genocidal Pol Pot regime in 1979 when it invaded Cambodia. The Reagan administration tried to provide aid to the two small nationalist groups, but there was a fear that aid would filter to the Khmer Rouge anyway.<sup>70</sup>

The purpose of the doctrine was to challenge the Soviet periphery, since countries like Angola, Afghanistan, and Grenada were recent Soviet acquisitions and the communist regimes there were not well established compared to Eastern Europe. The Soviets tenaciously defended their East-ern European empire since it was instrumental to their nation's survival. In addition, the Soviets had a long history of supporting national liberation movements. The Reagan Doctrine was only following the Soviet example. However, unlike the Soviet example, the United States was not seeking control or domination. On the contrary, the United States was supporting pro-democracy

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<sup>68</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "The Reagan Doctrine," *Time Magazine*, 1 April 1985, 54 and Chester Pach, "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36 (2006): 76-78.

<sup>69</sup> John M. Scott, "Reagan Doctrine? The Formulation of an American Foreign Policy Strategy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36 (2006): 1047-1061.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

insurgencies, insurgents who wished to throw off the yoke of Soviet domination and chart their own course. However, the four countries chosen for the Reagan Doctrine did not have well established pro-democratic credentials. Regardless, the Afghans were resisting an alien regime and the Reagan Doctrine was meant to increase the cost of Soviet hegemony throughout the world. Therefore, it was morally acceptable to support these indigenous insurgencies against Soviet dominated regimes.<sup>71</sup>

While these acquisitions were new for the Soviets, Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, US Representative to the United Nations, pointed out the Soviets were determined to keep these newly acquired states because they were “strategically valuable asset(s).”<sup>72</sup> Each state was “protected by its own praetorian guard” which prevented the population “from changing its mind or orientation” and the Soviets secured basing rights within those countries.<sup>73</sup> Kirkpatrick argued that the praetorian guard were troops from Cuba and “(t)he role of foreign troops, so called ‘internationalists,’” was to maintain the power of the new communist governments.<sup>74</sup> Only Afghanistan had the distinction of having Soviet troops introduced to protect the communist regime. Kirkpatrick stated that Ethiopia had 20,000 Cuban troops; “in Angola with its approximately 40,000 Cuban troops; in Mozambique with its 6000 to 7000 Cuban troops and advisors, 1500 East Germans, 2000 Russians, and 8000 Africans from sympathetic African socialist states.”<sup>75</sup> These numbers demonstrated the willingness of the Soviets to protect their overseas empire.

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<sup>71</sup> Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, “Anti-Communist Insurgency and American Policy,” *The National Interest* 1 (1985): 91-96.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

In each of these countries, communism sought to transform the country away from tradition, which included religious beliefs, the educational system, land ownership and other customs. The revolutionary government wanted to impose a socialist command economy and other goals reinforcing the sense of alien rule. The quest to destroy traditional customs of the land had a catastrophic effect on the economy and created scarcity. Kirkpatrick asked “(i)s it morally and legally acceptable for the United States to support armed indigenous movements against these governments?”<sup>76</sup> According to Kirkpatrick, the answer was yes, but there were questions if the Reagan Doctrine would violate the UN Charter. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, clearly states, “(a)ll Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, in any other manner inconsistent with the Purpose of the United Nations.”<sup>77</sup>

Kirkpatrick argued that the Charter ignored “intimidation, subversion short of war, and coercive control of one state by another” and the United States should not turn a blind eye and pretend that a sovereign state lost its sovereignty because it was dominated by another state and she argued that “if the client ruler” had the “right to ask for external assistance to maintain their rule, citizen deprived of rights have the right to ask for external aid in reclaiming them.”<sup>78</sup> The Reagan Doctrine was to be the answer to the Brezhnev Doctrine which introduced the concept of limited sovereignty. The Soviet Union had the right to intervene in the socialist world to prevent any deviancy from the true party line. Only the Soviet Union had absolute sovereignty.<sup>79</sup> While

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<sup>76</sup> Kirkpatrick, “Anti-Communist Insurgency and American Policy,” 92.

<sup>77</sup> *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 3.

<sup>78</sup> *Op. Cit.*, 93.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

this does not have any connection to Reagan's counterterrorism policy, the Reagan Doctrine opened the way for supporting Qadhafi's opposition groups. The Reagan administration could charge the CIA to fund, organize, arm and train Libyans who wanted to overthrow Qadhafi.

As stated above, Reagan argued that support of pro-democracy insurgencies was self-defense. He borrowed this notion from Article 51 of the UN Charter which states: "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to maintain international peace and security...."<sup>80</sup> The Reagan Doctrine could be deemed as collective self-defense. The United States military or humanitarian aid to a pro-democracy insurgency to help overthrow a communist dictatorship increased US security because a successful insurgency would roll back the Soviet empire. A weakened Soviet Union would not be a threat.

How the Reagan Doctrine could be applied to Libya requires further research as a separate project. For the purpose of this dissertation, it is worth noting that the purpose of the Reagan Doctrine was to roll back communist regimes in the Third World, but it certainly, could be applied to other authoritarian regimes like Iran and Libya or a particular movement like militant Islam. There were covert efforts to destabilize Qadhafi's regime.<sup>81</sup> These covert actions included organizing Libya opposition groups and military plans for a joint US-Egyptian invasion of Libya. Qadhafi certainly had designs on his neighbors, he supported plots against the heads of

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<sup>80</sup> *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 10-11.

<sup>81</sup> Stephen Engelberg, "Reagan Approval Reported on Plan to Weaken Libya," *The New York Times*, 4 November 1985, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00552R0005052500054-7.pdf>, accessed on 2 May 2022 and John Walcott, "CIA Boosting Covert Efforts Against Qadhafi: Plan Approved by Reagan Calls for Rise in Support For Libya Leader's Foes," *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00965R000707060054-6.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

state and government of Egypt, Sudan, Zaire, Chad, and the former President of Tunisia.<sup>82</sup>

Libyan aircraft and forces intervened on behalf of anti-government insurgents in Chad and Qadhafi provided financial support and arms to help Thomas Sankara to overthrow a pro-Western government in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso). Libya also sent an expeditionary force to Lebanon in November 1983 to participate in the fighting around Beirut.<sup>83</sup>

Reagan's foreign policy focused mainly on US-Soviet relations and Reagan still thought in Cold War terms, his rhetoric reflected this and the Reagan Doctrine was meant to rollback Soviet advances in the Third World. One of Reagan's main concerns were nuclear weapons stockpiles. Which was understandable considering the tremendous destructive power these weapons have and any miscalculation or misinterpretation could descend into a nuclear strike. There was concern over nuclear proliferation, in addition, to potential nuclear war with the Soviet Union. The potential of a rogue state like Libya or Iran crossing the nuclear threshold was a nightmare scenario for the United States, because someone like Qadhafi had no qualms about giving a nuclear weapon to a terrorist group.

The concern over terrorism complemented Reagan's Cold War thinking because the administration was convinced the Soviets had a terror network. Terrorists were known to destabilize well established democracies like Uruguay in the 1970s. Groups like Italy's Red Brigades and the West German Red Army Faction caused all kinds of mischief during the 1970s and 1980s. Fortunately, Western Europe had a strong democratic tradition that allowed it to tolerate their domestic terrorist activities. These groups received some military aid from the

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<sup>82</sup> *Libya's Continuing Responsibility for Terrorism*, 1.

<sup>83</sup> National Security Council, Memo, "Libyan Troublemaking—1979-1984," 5 September 1984, folder "Libya: Terrorism (2)," Box 54, Oliver North Files, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-054/40-633-1201554-054-002-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

Soviets or from their proxies, so it was only natural for the United States to be alarmed at these developments, but the terrorists did not have the numbers to really affect the stable democracies of Western Europe.

In conclusion, a brief study of Reagan's foreign policy and national security structure provides insight on how his foreign policy was developed and observing it through the lens of the Cold War provides an understanding on how foreign policy was made during the Reagan administration. His concern over US-Soviet relations was understandable considering the tremendous power of nuclear weapons and both countries had tens of thousands of warheads. Reagan's concern over terrorism was also understandable considering his administration was convinced that the Soviet Union controlled a vast terror network. In addition, as history has demonstrated, an act of terrorism could start wars and in the contemporary world such wars had the danger of escalating into nuclear conflagrations. Reagan was alarmed by Libyan terrorism because of the dangers it represented. Libya could destabilize much of Africa, Qadhafi had influence among the most dangerous terrorist groups like the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) and it was viewed by the Reagan administration as a Soviet client. Such a combination was bound to draw the attention of the United States.



### Chapter Three: The Three Pillars of US Counterterrorism Policy

The 1970s was a turbulent decade: Vietnam, Watergate, oil embargoes, high inflation, and a hostage crisis in Iran. International terrorism was also on the rise. Beginning in 1968, terrorist groups began popping up in Latin America and the Middle East. Even in Western Europe disaffected upper middle-class youth started to form terrorist groups of the ideological variety. There were a few ethnic terrorist groups like the Basque ETA, which operated in Spain and France. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) or the Provos started their terror campaign in 1969. A few ideological terrorist groups formed in the United States like the Weatherman later the Weather Underground to sound more inclusive, and the ethnic Black Liberation Army. None of these groups were particularly effective. They were more of a nuisance to law enforcement. The reason for this were many: their incompetency as terrorists, their rhetoric did not appeal to the public or the effectiveness of law enforcement practices. Most of the terrorist attacks were bank robberies to raise funds and bombings. For the most part they tried to avoid producing casualties which made them ineffective terrorists.

Terrorism became a nuisance, particularly to international travel and business. Between 1970 to 1978, there were 4899 terrorist incidents. Most of the attacks occurred in the last thirty-three months over the eight-year period.<sup>84</sup> Latin America pioneered political kidnapping which included diplomats and businessmen alike. Diplomats were usually kidnapped for either publicity or for the release of imprisoned comrades. Businessmen were kidnapped for ransom. For example, an American executive Victor Samuelson of Esso Argentina was ransomed for \$14.2 million in 1974.<sup>85</sup> The United States did not have a policy to cope with this upsurge of political

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<sup>84</sup> Risks International, Inc., "Terrorism: An Overview 1970-1978," *Executive Risk Assessment* 1 (1978): 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

violence at the time. Events would force the Nixon administration to act against international terrorism.

This chapter will discuss the three pillars of US counterterrorism policy which became the cornerstone of Reagan's policies toward terrorism. The first section will discuss the oldest pillar, the United States would not negotiate with terrorism for the payment of ransom or make any deals for the release of hostages; this policy was important to the Reagan administration and their reasoning was if "terrorists can gain their objectives through terror one time, they will be encouraged to repeat terror in the future."<sup>86</sup> The second section will discuss the application of pressure to convince states to stop supporting terrorism and the third section will discuss the application of the rule of law to punish terrorists. Reagan made use of all three pillars during his eight years as president. The second pillar, the application of pressure to convince states to stop supporting terrorism, was particularly important in regards to Libya. Reagan's decision to bomb Libya in April 1986 was an excellent example of the second pillar in action and played an important role in the coercive diplomacy strategy Reagan used to convince Qadhafi to end his support for international terrorism.

By the early 1970s, the Nixon administration grew alarmed at the rash of kidnappings of US officials abroad which pushed Nixon to develop policies to counter it. The Nixon administration determined the current alert control system designed to protect US diplomatic staff needed to be improved. The State Department recommended that a standard phased plan tailor-made for each embassy "to suit its peculiar circumstances" be developed and these plans would offer a "program of actions" to be taken for each level of danger.<sup>87</sup> Deputy Secretary of State for

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<sup>86</sup> L. Paul Bremer, III, "Terrorism and the Rule of Law," *Current Policy Number 947* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, US Department of State, 1987), 1. (Government Publications and Legal Reference Library, Leslie F. Malpass Library, Western Illinois University)

Inter-American Affairs Robert A. Hurwitch and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State G. Marvin Gentile recommended “the creation of a mobile reserve of equipment.”<sup>88</sup> This mobile reserve included communications equipment and armored cars for responding to kidnapping risks in a particular area. Part of this recommendation included temporary assignment of additional security personnel to help protect key members of a US mission and Hurwitch and Gentile recommended funds to purchase armored vehicles for the Rio de Janeiro, Caracas, Santo Domingo, La Paz, and Lima missions.<sup>89</sup> This equipment and the additional personnel were necessary in these foreign cities because of the security concerns the State Department had on their missions abroad. Specialized equipment and personnel were critical for anti-terrorism measures for the US missions.

A policy toward hostage taking began to develop during the 1970s. It was a flexible response policy, and depending on the circumstances ransom payments were allowed. However, President Nixon decided against continuing this policy and it was scrapped for the more rigid no deal policy which eventually became the first pillar of US counterterrorism policy. The argument for the change in policy was simple, if terrorists knew that their demands would not be met, they would be discouraged from kidnapping US citizens for ransom or the release of their comrades. Before the policy change, the US applied pressure on a host government to comply completely with the kidnapper’s demands. The US expressed expectations that the host government do what was reasonable to obtain the release of US officials, but at the same time deny pub-

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<sup>87</sup> “Memorandum from Deputy Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Hurwitch) and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (Gentile) to Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration (Macomber),” 2 April 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 37)

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

licly the kidnapper's demands.<sup>90</sup> The public refusal to avoid any publicity for the kidnappers or give the appearance of not complying to the kidnapper's demands. It also bolstered the US position and it had to be embarrassing for the US to appear helpless in this kind of situation. In addition, giving into the kidnapper's demands was seen as a sign of weakness.

Early in April 1970, the US State Department discussed a political program to reduce political kidnapping. The program acknowledged the sanctity of human life, denied public support or sympathy for the kidnappers, reinforced the feeling of "repugnance at the use of terror to achieve political aims," and that the "inviolability of diplomats" is a universally accepted principle and it is "essential to international peace and order."<sup>91</sup> William B. Macomber, Jr., the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration, discussed options regarding conventions directed at political kidnapping of diplomats and consular officials. One of the forums best suited for these conventions was the Organization of American States (OAS) because it was considered more than the United Nations. The Soviets and later the People's Republic of China, which took over the permanent seat from the Republic of China or Taiwan after the formalization of relations with the US during the Carter administration, were seen by the US as barriers for any useful convention against kidnapping and various acts of terrorism.<sup>92</sup> In addition, there were many Third World countries that supported national liberation movements and might look upon terrorism in a favorable light.

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<sup>90</sup> "Action Memorandum from Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration (Macomber) to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson)," 2 April 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 38)

<sup>91</sup> "Action Memorandum from Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration (Macomber) to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson)," 3 April 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 39)

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

The State Department was seeking at least two conventions. One was to establish the kidnapping of diplomatic and consular agents as an international crime and that would be subject to prosecution by any state. This convention would draw upon piracy and war crimes as precedent. The second convention was on extradition. Political kidnapping of diplomats and consular agents would not be exempted from extradition as a political crime and kidnappers would be denied political asylum.<sup>93</sup> The State Department stated that press reports were reporting that Argentina was going to recommend to OAS to adopt an agreement that would deny political asylum to kidnappers in any of the member states. The State Department also believed there would be push back on the denial of political asylum by France and other countries that had a long tradition of granting it.<sup>94</sup>

Secretary of State William Rogers believed that the US government (USG) should adopt an ad hoc policy toward kidnapping. Policy would change on a case-by-case basis rather than having a strict policy. The problem with this concept would be the lack of standard operating procedures (SOP) when a kidnapping occurred. Standard operating procedures required a strict policy because the government would know how to react during a kidnapping. The State Department was exploring the possibility of providing assistance to local police forces in various Latin American countries. A select few OAS ambassadors were approached and the European section of the State Department made inquiries with the Soviets to influence Cuba away from supporting kidnappers.<sup>95</sup> This concept of providing anti-terrorism assistance and training would become an

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<sup>93</sup> *FRUS, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 2.* (Document 39)

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. The memorandum read “Press reports indicate that the Argentine Government intends to propose that the OAS adopt an agreement declaring that persons would not be granted asylum by any member state.”

<sup>95</sup> “Memorandum for the Record,” 15 April 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. MacAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 40)

important program during the Reagan administration, particularly for the Central American country of El Salvador because of an ongoing insurgency. The anti-terrorism assistance and training would help train El Salvadoran police on crowd control, interrogation techniques, and hostage rescue.

On 30 June 1970, the OAS General Assembly adopted a resolution on the “kidnapping persons and extortion connection with that crime.”<sup>96</sup> The member states condemned “acts of terrorism and especially kidnapping of persons and extortion in connection with that crime as ‘crime against humanity;’” they also condemned the crime if perpetrated by agents of a foreign state.<sup>97</sup> Such crimes violated human rights and it was also a violation of the “norms that govern international relations.”<sup>98</sup> The OAS also recommended that the member states adopt measures “to prevent” and punish perpetrators of kidnapping, and to facilitate the exchange of information among the member states to help prevent these crimes.<sup>99</sup> The Inter-American Juridical Committee was charged with “preparing an option on the procedures and measures necessary to make effective the purposes of the resolution;” it was also charged with drafting conventions on kidnapping, extortion, and assaults against persons, especially if they have “repercussions on international relations.”<sup>100</sup> A request was made for a report on the work of the Inter-American Juridical Committee to the Permanent Council of the Organization.<sup>101</sup> The United States was suc-

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<sup>96</sup> “Organization of American States Resolution,” 30 June 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 42)

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

successful with inserting specific language in the OAS conventions. It appeared the European section in the State Department was successful in their inquiries about the Soviets influencing Cuba from supporting kidnapers. On 28 May 1970, Henry Kissinger, Nixon's assistant for national security affairs sent the president a memorandum about Secretary of State Rogers' approach to the Cubans about presenting a draft memorandum of understanding on kidnapping with the Cuban government. The memorandum of understanding would be an agreement of "reciprocal return of hijackers."<sup>102</sup> The Cubans expressed their interest in signing such a document, but Kissinger said that Rogers was not convinced about the seriousness of the Cubans. The State Department believed that it was a ploy by the Cubans, if the United States backed away from the agreement, the US government could "charge Castro" as insincere.<sup>103</sup> The Nixon administration slowly developed a policy on dealing with certain aspects of terrorism, mainly kidnapping. Latin American revolutionaries pioneered political kidnapping and it started to become a problem for the United States because US businessmen and diplomats were targeted. The Nixon administration started with a flexible response policy but gradually moved toward a strict no deals policy because the US government believed it would reduce the number of kidnappings if the terrorists understood there was no benefit involved. The Nixon administration turned to international organizations to pass and implement diplomatic instruments in reducing kidnappings and to punish the perpetrators. The US looked to regional international organizations for these diplomatic instruments because the United Nations was seen as inefficient since the Soviets and the People's Republic of China (PRC) would block any conventions critical of

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<sup>102</sup> "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon," 28 May 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 130)

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

terrorism.

One of the first major terrorist events of the 1970s, occurred in early September 1970 which demonstrated the urgency of developing a policy on international terrorism. George Habash, the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), had his group carry out a series of hijackings that took a TWA 707, a Swissair DC-8, and a BOAC VC-10. These three planes were flown to Dawson airfield, a disused British Royal Air Force (RAF) airfield of World War II, located in northern Jordan. An additional Pan Am 747 was hijacked and flown to Cairo.<sup>104</sup>

The US embassy in Bonn, West Germany informed the State Department about the series of skyjackings by cable. The US embassy in Bonn was also informed of another Pan Am flight leaving Southend, England speculated of being skyjacked and an El Al flight from Tel Aviv landing in London with “three (3) confirmed dead and three more (one woman and two men) being held by the hijacker(s).”<sup>105</sup> The cable noted the skyjacked planes were given new call signs by the skyjackers. For example, TWA Flight 741 was changed to “Gaza Strip” and Swissair Flight 100 was changed to “Haifi.”<sup>106</sup> The new call signs were significant to the Palestinian terrorists. They were designed to inform the public of the plight of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, territories acquired by the Israelis after the 1967 Six Days War which proved disastrous for Israel’s neighbors.

The president was informed that three foreign governments agreed to release a total of

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<sup>104</sup> Ernest Evans, *Calling a Truce to Terror: The American Response to International Terrorism* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1979), 26.

<sup>105</sup> “Telegram 10203 from the Embassy in the Federal Republic of Germany to the Department of State,” 6 September 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 45)

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.



seven terrorists they held prisoner.<sup>107</sup> The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and Switzerland each held three and the United Kingdom agreed to release the single surviving hijacker from the El Al flight from Tel Aviv with the body of her partner. The United Kingdom agreed to release Leila Khaled in exchange for the passengers and crew held captive in Jordan. Secretary of State Rogers reported to President Nixon that he called all the Arab Chiefs-of-Mission in Washington to make a humanitarian appeal regarding the safety of the passengers and crew held captive in Jordan and Cairo. The Kuwaiti ambassador spoke on behalf of the Arab missions and expressed their concern over the skyjackings and reassured the US that the Arab governments would do their utmost to convey the American humanitarian appeal.<sup>108</sup>

The President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger informed Nixon of the developments regarding the events in Jordan. Some of the passengers had been released. The PFLP agreed to the Swiss offer to release their three prisoners in return for the Swiss plane and passengers. The British were prepared to release Khaled and the body of her male partner. By 9 September, a 72-hour deadline to meet the terrorists' demands lapsed, but the deadline was extended because the European governments were acceding to their demands and an envoy from the International Red Cross was handling the negotiations.<sup>109</sup>

The situation in Jordan was deteriorating because the State Department reported there

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<sup>107</sup> "Memorandum from the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to President Nixon," 7 September 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 47)

<sup>108</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon," 8 September 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 48)

<sup>109</sup> "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon," 8 September 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 50)

was artillery and rocket fire close to the royal palace in Amman, Jordan. The US was concerned about King Hussein's grip on power because if Jordan collapsed, this would have emboldened the Palestinians and may have caused another war in the Middle East.<sup>110</sup> What was at stake was the security of Israel and the stability of the entire region. The PFLP gave the International Red Cross envoy a list of 300 fedayeen held in Israeli prisons they wanted released. Kissinger reported that the release of these prisoners became a precondition for the release of the passengers still held by the skyjackers. This was one of the reasons why the flexible response policy toward hostages was dropped because once the skyjackers realized they could get seven comrades released, they could make additional demands.

The Dawson airfield incident was resolved with the release of fedayeen prisoners in Israel. Israel was pressured to give up the fedayeen prisoners because the US was fearful of the Europeans making a separate deal with the PFLP. The Americans wanted to have a united front when negotiating with the fedayeen.<sup>111</sup> The Dawson airfield incident ended in dramatic fashion when the PFLP blew up all three airplanes after releasing the passengers and crew. The one airliner in Cairo was also blown up after the passengers and crew were released. King Hussein of Jordan ordered his army to expel the Palestinians soon afterwards because the Dawson airfield incident was an embarrassment and Hussein believed the fedayeen was a threat to his power. They were a threat because of the civil war they launched in September 1970. The collapse of Jordan could have sparked a broader war in the Middle East. The Israelis would be clamoring to

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<sup>110</sup> "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon," 9 September 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 52)

<sup>111</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1977776, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), Documents 54-68.

deny the Palestinians their own state and it could have drawn in the Iraqis and the Syrians to either stop the Israelis or carve out their own piece of Jordan. Egypt was reeling from the death of their own president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the conflict would have drawn the Egyptians who desired vengeance for their embarrassing defeat in 1967. Libya's Qadhafi might have contributed troops to the Egyptian cause because of his idolization of Nasser. The threat of a collapsing Israel would have drawn the United States into the conflict and the Soviets would have intervened on behalf of the Arab countries. When Reagan entered the White House, he wanted to avoid this kind of conflict in the Middle East, thus his peace initiatives in the Middle East and his strict counterterrorism policy of no negotiating with terrorists.

The events at Dawson airfield spurred the US to seek a convention against hijacking. A conference at The Hague by the Legal Committee of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) was scheduled to meet on 1 December 1970. As early as 18 September 1970, the United States proposed to the ICAO that concerted "action to suspend air services to States which for international blackmail purposes detain passengers, crew and aircraft after a hijacking or failed to extradite or prosecute hijackers."<sup>112</sup> The conference beginning on 1 December 1970 was to consider a draft convention on the unlawful seizure of aircraft.<sup>113</sup> While the Legal Committee of the ICAO was scheduled to begin negotiating a convention on hijacking, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) passed a resolution on hijacking aircraft. The UN General Assembly condemned the act of hijacking and called upon states to take appropriate measures

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<sup>112</sup> "Telegram from the Department of State to all Diplomatic Posts except Gaborone, Maseru, Mbabane, and Moscow," 21 September 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 75)

<sup>113</sup> "Information Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State," 12 September 1970," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. The Hague Convention on the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft was signed in 1971. (Document 63)

against hijacking. These measures were to deter, prevent or suppress acts of hijacking in their jurisdictions. States were to prosecute and punish hijackers if captured on their territory or extradite the perpetrators if they were not prosecuted. The UNGA also urged for the states to provide care to the passengers and crew and allow them to continue their journey and to return the aircraft and cargo to the lawful possessor.<sup>114</sup>

The US sought a special meeting with the ICAO Council over an agreement on aircraft hijacking. President Nixon described “air piracy” as an “international menace” and it was a threat to international air travel; the United States requested that a session of the Council be made “public to demonstrate to the world that ICAO will now generate an international response to air piracy,” and provide “swift and clean surgery” to this “cancer.”<sup>115</sup> President Nixon also announced he planned on placing specially trained and armed government agents on US Flag carriers and the placement of “electronic surveillance equipment on other surveillance techniques at US gateway airports.”<sup>116</sup> These are excellent examples of anti-terrorism measures to dissuade terrorists from attacking US Flag aircraft and airports, but these measures are also examples of all three pillars of US counterterrorism policy in action. The US placed the air marshals on board planes to dissuade terrorists from hijacking aircraft, this action demonstrated that terrorists would not gain any concessions because the air marshals were armed and trained to disarm or eliminate the hijackers. The air marshals could use force to convince the terrorists to surrender and enter into US custody and the force of the US justice system would punish the terrorists ap-

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<sup>114</sup> The United Nations General Assembly, “United Nations: General Assembly Resolution on Hijacking,” 30 November 1970, *International Legal Materials* 9 (1970): 1289.

<sup>115</sup> “Telegram 153122 From the Department of State to the Embassy in Lebanon and Other Posts,” 17 September 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 71)

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

appropriately, demonstrating pillars two and three in action. It was clear that the Nixon administration was taking the threat of terrorism seriously and desired international instruments to suppress such tactics like hijacking and kidnapping. The ICAO Council adopted a resolution on 19 June 1972. The resolution urged contracting states to adopt effective security measures and urged states to become parties to the convention on aircraft safety like the Hague Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft.<sup>117</sup>

The spring of 1972 saw the next terrorist tragedy. On 31 May 1972, three Japanese terrorists from the Japanese Red Army on loan to the PFLP sprayed the airport terminal at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv with rifle fire and threw at least five hand grenades. At least twenty-five people were killed including two of the terrorists. At least 72 were wounded. Among the dead were eleven Puerto Ricans on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.<sup>118</sup> The Israelis were surprised that Japanese terrorists were involved considering they had nothing to do with the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The attack was extremely shocking and it was no surprise that the surviving Japanese terrorist Kozo Okamoto was sentenced to life in prison. He was found guilty by a three-man military court. In Israel a life sentence meant a sentence for life, there were no possibility of parole or early release. The court president Lieutenant Colonel Abraham Frisch addressed Okamoto during sentencing, “You have spilled the blood of the pure. It is characteristic of you and those who sent you. You have excommunicated yourself from human society. This crime is a mark of Cain upon you and your comrades.”<sup>119</sup> Okamoto was spared the death penalty because

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<sup>117</sup> International Civil Aviation Organization, “International Civil Aviation Council: Council Resolution on Hijacking,” *International Legal Materials* 11 (1972): 898.

<sup>118</sup> United Press International, “25 Die at Israeli Airport as 3 Gunmen from Plane Fire on 250 in a Terminal: 72 are Wounded: Attackers Identified as Japanese—2 Dead, One Captured,” *The New York Times*, 31 May 1972. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

Israel did not want to turn him into a martyr.<sup>120</sup> This and the next terrorist attack compelled the Nixon administration to formulate a policy on terrorism which included the formation of a new cabinet committee to formulate that policy and the establishment of the first pillar of US counter-terrorism policy, the no concession policy.

The world was shocked on 5 September 1972 at the Munich Olympic Games when members of the Black September Organization stormed the building housing the Israeli Olympic team. Gunfire was heard at 4:37 am which killed one Israeli weightlifter and fatally injured another.<sup>121</sup> The terrorists demanded the release of 200 prisoners which the Israelis promptly refused.<sup>122</sup> The Germans allowed the terrorists to leave the Olympic Village with their hostages to a military airfield where they would be taken to a safe haven. However, the German police snipers were ordered to take out the terrorists, but botched the execution of the operation and the surviving terrorists threw a grenade into a helicopter carrying the surviving Israeli athletes, killing them. The debacle at the German military airfield led to the formation of specialized military units to perform rescue operations and other counterterrorism operations like the British SAS, Germany's GSG-9, and the US Delta Force.

Black September's claim of having no intention of killing the Israeli athletes appeared fallacious because they could have released them at any time and they could have surrendered at any time. When the German police open fired on them, they could have responded by dropping their weapons and surrendered instead of tossing grenades and shooting the athletes. In addition, the terrorists named their group after the Jordanian expulsion of the PLO in September 1970.

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<sup>120</sup> United Press International, *NYT*, 31 May 1972.

<sup>121</sup> "Gunpoint ordeal hour-by-hour," *The Daily Express*, 6 September 1972. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>122</sup> Norman Crossland, "Munich: the unavoidable tragedy," *The Guardian*, 21 September 1972. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and the Observer, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

The PLO sought sanctuary in Lebanon and may have played a role in the destructive civil war that started in 1975. These attacks during the early 1970s had a devastating effect on the region. It ushered a civil war in Lebanon and possibly helped urge another war between the Arab countries and Israel in 1973. The PLO presence in Lebanon sparked an Israeli invasion in 1982.

President Nixon was informed about the Munich attack when the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs Alexander Haig called him at 10:35 pm on 5 September 1972.<sup>123</sup> Kissinger was fearful that a war like World War I would break out and he mentioned the Austrians were frustrated for fifteen years and the heir was assassinated in 1914, this frustration stemmed from growing Serbian nationalism and the Pan-Slavic movement, the Germans and the whole world were outraged by the assassination and the Austrians thought they had a free shot to attack Serbia.<sup>124</sup> He failed to mention how such a war would start in 1972, but the United States feared the Soviet Union would intervene on the side of the Arabs. The Soviets were constantly seeking a way to establish a presence in the Middle East.

There was a discussion whether Israel would demand that the Olympic Games should be cancelled. Nixon believed that was what the terrorists wanted, they wanted Israel to react in that fashion. Kissinger said that Haig was on the phone pleading with the Israelis not to appeal to the International Olympic Committee to cancel the games.<sup>125</sup> Kissinger mentioned that Secretary of State Rogers wanted the flag to be lowered for a national day of mourning, but Kissinger disa-

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<sup>123</sup> "Editorial Note," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 91)

<sup>124</sup> "Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)," 6 September 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972*, Susan K. Holly and William B. McAllister, eds. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1. (Document 93)

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

greed because it was not an American national day of mourning and it would appear to be grandstanding. Nixon agreed that it was not appropriate. Kissinger suggested that the US go to the United Nations and get some kind of international agreement on rules on harboring guerrillas, because it was a statesman thing to do. Nixon thought they could send Rogers to the UN in order to keep him busy and not interfere with the making of foreign policy. He preferred to make foreign policy in the White House with the assistance of Kissinger. Nixon also suggested taking this up with the Soviet ambassador to see if the Soviets would join the US in making an international agreement Kissinger was considering.<sup>126</sup>

The Munich attacks influenced Nixon on forming a Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism as a means to developing a policy toward it. He sent a memorandum to Secretary of State Rogers to establish the committee to be chaired by him and it included the Treasury Secretary, Secretary of Defense, the Attorney General, Secretary of Transportation, the US Ambassador to the UN, Director of Central Intelligence, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, the Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs, and the Acting Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).<sup>127</sup> The committee was to consider the most effective measures to prevent terrorism at home and abroad. It was to take the lead in developing swift and effective responses to terrorist acts and the Secretary of State would stay in touch with foreign governments and international organizations toward the goal of responding to terrorism effectively.<sup>128</sup> Nixon ordered that the committee would coordinate with other government de-

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<sup>126</sup> "Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)," 6 September 1972, *FRUS*, 2-3. (Document 93)

<sup>127</sup> Richard Nixon, "Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism: The President's Memorandum to the Secretary of State on the Establishment of the Committee," 25 September 1972, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 8 (1972): 1452.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 1452.



partments and agencies activities and make recommendations to improve efficiency in implementing policy. It would devise procedures to respond to terrorist acts swiftly and efficiently as they occur, and make recommendations to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regarding funding of programs, and report to the president upon occasion.<sup>129</sup> The Cabinet Committee did not achieve very much, it met a few times and was quietly discontinued in 1977.

The Secretary of State visited the United Nations and urged the UN to act on three measures to combat terrorism. Nixon in a statement said, “(t)he use of terror is indefensible. It eliminates in one stroke those safeguards of civilization which mankind has painstakingly erected over the centuries.”<sup>130</sup> The president also established a Working Group on Terrorism which was subordinate to the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism. It was also chaired by the Secretary of State and it was charged to coordinate intelligence, tighten “up precautionary measures against terrorism,” prepare contingency plans and intensify “efforts to increase international cooperation.”<sup>131</sup> President Nixon declared that the US would not submit to terrorist blackmail on 7 March 1972, this was the first policy pronouncement of the first pillar of US counterterrorism policy.<sup>132</sup> The slew of kidnappings in Latin America and the Dawson airfield incident convinced Nixon to implement this policy.

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<sup>129</sup> *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 8 (1972): 1452.

<sup>130</sup> The White House, “Action to Combat Terrorism: Statement by the President,” 27 September 1972, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 8 (1972): 1459.

<sup>131</sup> “International Terrorism,” *United States Foreign Policy 1972: A Report of the Secretary of State* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1973), 91-92.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, and United States Department of State, “No Concession Policy, Planning and Coordination; and Statistics for 1981 with Special Emphasis on American Targets, State Department Bulletin, August, 1982,” *Terrorism: Documents of International and Local Control, Volume IV: A World on Fire*, Robert A. Friedlander, ed. (London, Rome, and New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1984), 485.

Every president after Nixon endorsed this policy, but none other endorsed it as enthusiastically as Reagan. In 1982, the State Department declared that “(t)he basic philosophy underlying this policy is that concessions to terrorists only serve to encourage them to resort to more terror to obtain their political objectives, thereby endangering still more innocent lives.”<sup>133</sup> The basic philosophy of the no concession policy was a strategy of deterrence, but the RAND Corporation, a think tank closely associated with the Defense Department, in a report argued that the no concession policy provided clear guidelines, but questioned if it was an effective deterrent.<sup>134</sup> Concern for hostage-taking was understandable since one-third of all international terrorist incidents were this tactic which included “kidnapping, embassy seizures,” and skyjackings.<sup>135</sup> RAND argued there were three policy options toward kidnapping and hostage-taking the United States could pursue: a flexible-response, a safe release, and the strict no-concession policies. The flexible-response policy provided the “least clear guidelines” and made “the greatest demands on those responding to the situation.”<sup>136</sup> However, it did provide greater opportunities to negotiate and it allowed for the responder to make minor concessions. It also provided the opportunity to increase public pressure on the terrorists to release the hostages.<sup>137</sup> The idea was like the flexible-response strategy on the use of nuclear weapons during the height of the Cold War. It provided other strategies and tactics in order to avoid the ultimate form of violence, i.e.,

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<sup>133</sup> United States Department of State, “No Concessions Policy,” *Terrorism: Documents of International and Local Control, Volume IV: A World on Fire*, 485.

<sup>134</sup> Gail Bass, Brian M. Jenkins, Konrad Kellen, David Ronfeldt with the assistance of Joyce Peterson, “Options for U.S. Policy on Terrorism,” *RAND Report R-2784-RC*, July 1981 (Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 1981), 5.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

the use of nuclear weapons. The flexible-response strategy which was the brainchild of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara during the Kennedy administration helped reduce nuclear escalation between the Soviet Union and the United States.

The safe-release policy provided “clear policy guidelines and a humanitarian image but could encourage future political kidnappings.”<sup>138</sup> This policy tried to gain the release of the hostage(s) quickly and it allowed a government to make “extensive concessions” such as the guarantee of “safe passage out of the country, in lieu of other demands, in exchange for the safe release of the hostages. This policy became known as the “Bangkok solution.”<sup>139</sup> On 28 December 1972, a small band of four terrorists from the Black September Organization seized the Israeli embassy in Bangkok and demanded the release of imprisoned comrades in Israel. There was an 18-hour standoff, but Thai government officials and the Egyptian ambassador convinced the terrorists to release the hostages on the promise of safe passage out of the country.<sup>140</sup>

The strict no-concession policy did not provide any clear evidence of its effectiveness. The US changed from a safe-release policy to the no-concession one. RAND argued that despite changing policy several times in the early 1970s, the number of US officials kidnapped did not decrease, it followed international terrorist trends and the number of terrorist incidents in Latin America and the Middle East showed that the no-concession policy had no discernable effect on their attacks.<sup>141</sup> In other words, the no-concession policy did not deter terrorists from kidnapping. RAND argued that the “strongest deterrent” was the “government’s demonstrated will and

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<sup>138</sup> *RAND Report R-2764-RC*, 5.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* For the account of the Bangkok incident, see footnote 10 in the RAND Report.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

ability to capture and kill terrorists and destroy their organization.”<sup>142</sup>

Therefore, the no-concessions strategy was flawed. Terrorists generally do not kidnap Americans for financial gain. Americans are high-profile targets. Terrorists gain publicity for their cause because the kidnapping of a vacationing New York cab driver will garner more front-page news than the kidnapping of the Brazilian foreign minister. Being American was reason enough to kidnap the cab driver. Kidnapping could also be considered a form of protest. For example, in late 1981, the Italian Red Brigades kidnapped an American general in protest of the American military presence in Europe. Kidnapping an important official gave the impression the government was weak and can not protect citizens and visitors alike. Italy was embarrassed by the kidnapping.

In addition, people sometimes do not comply with the no-concession policy. Private citizens and corporations were known to pay ransoms despite the policy. In 1978, a minimum of \$290,180,000 was demanded as ransom according to available information, this amount did not include the \$1 billion demanded for the release of Aldo Moro, the former Italian prime minister.<sup>143</sup> The kidnapping of Americans in Beirut, Lebanon was another example of how ineffective the no-concession policy might be. Terrorists understood their demands would not be met, and yet they still kidnapped Americans in Beirut.

The Reagan administration stressed the US government was willing to talk to the terrorists or their representatives, but no concessions would be offered. The US government would “make every effort, including contact with representatives of the captors, to obtain the release of the hostages without paying ransoms, exchanging prisoners, etc.”<sup>144</sup> The American government

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<sup>142</sup> *RAND Report R-2764-RC*, 5.

<sup>143</sup> *Executive Risk Assessment*, 3.

“is concerned for the welfare of its citizens but cannot support requests that host governments violate their own laws or abdicate their normal law enforcement responsibilities.”<sup>145</sup> The Reagan administration adhered to the strict no-concessions policy because it was “(b)ased upon past experience, the U.S. Government concluded that paying ransom or making other concessions to terrorists in exchange for the release of hostages increases the danger that other will be taken hostage,” according to the State Department pamphlet.<sup>146</sup>

The Nixon administration was forced to respond after several tragic terrorist attacks that were either hostage situations or resulted in death such as the attack on Lod Airport in Israel. In at least two of those attacks, American citizens were affected and in all three that were discussed Dawson airfield, Lod Airport and the Munich Olympics, Israelis were subjected to the attacks. During the 1970s, the world saw a rise international terrorism, mainly in Latin America and the Middle East. The increasing lethality of these attacks were a cause of the concern and helped spur the United Nations into action. President Nixon adopted the no-concession policy and has continued to be US policy. Because of the terrorist attacks against Americans, Nixon attempted to create a policy mechanism to combat terrorism which did not amount to much, but his no-concession policy carried over to the future administration including the Reagan administration. In the next part of the chapter, the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy will be discussed.

The Reagan administration recognized Libya as a chief state-supporter of terrorism. Much of Libyan-supported terrorism targeted Libyan dissidents. One of the most famous attacks on Libyan dissident occurred outside the Libyan People’s Bureau (Embassy) in St. James’ Square

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<sup>144</sup> US Department of State, *International Terrorism: U.S. Policy on Taking American Hostages* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State, 1986). (United States Government Documents Center, Polk Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh)

<sup>145</sup> US Department of State, *International Terrorism: U.S. Policy on Taking American Hostages*.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

in London, UK in April 1984.<sup>147</sup> Someone fired a machinegun into a crowd of masked students peacefully assembled to protest the Qadhafi regime from a second-floor window. The result was the murder of Woman Police Constable Yvonne Fletcher and the wounding of a few students.<sup>148</sup> The Metropolitan Police quickly surrounded the Libyan People's Bureau, but really could not do anything because the Libyans enjoyed diplomatic immunity. The Libyans denied any involvement in the attack; however, the British broke diplomatic relations prompting the closing and evacuation of the Libyan People's Bureau. The United States also broke diplomatic relations as a sign of solidarity with the British government.

The United States developed a strategy to deal with international terrorism during the 1980s. The previous section dealt with the first pillar of that strategy. In this part, the second pillar will be explored which was the application of pressure to persuade a state-supporter of terrorism to end that support. Much of this dissertation will cover this second pillar of US counterterrorism policy because it will discuss the United States bombing of Libya on 14/15 April 1986 as a response to a Libyan-sponsored attack of a West Berlin disco known as the La Belle Club earlier that month. This bombing and the previous efforts of the Reagan administration to persuade Qadhafi to forego terrorism were a prime example of the second pillar in action. An example of Reagan trying to persuade Qadhafi was joining the UK in breaking diplomatic relations. Breaking diplomatic relations could be considered as applying pressure on another state because it demonstrated a country's displeasure over policies and actions of the target state. Traditionally, breaking diplomatic relations was a signal that war was going to be declared. In

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<sup>147</sup> Narrative taken from Ronald Boyd, *U.S. Government and Counterterrorism* (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Leeds, 1991), 31-37.

<sup>148</sup> Woman Police Constable (WPC) was Yvonne Fletcher's official rank within London's Metropolitan Police.

this case, war was not forthcoming, but the British signaled their displeasure as well as the United States.

Breaking diplomatic relations was part of the tool kit in dealing with rogue states. Diplomatic efforts are the first step in a coercive diplomatic strategy. This kind of effort could be done bilaterally or multilaterally. Bilateral negotiations can easily breakdown and nothing is accomplished. Multilateral negotiations may have a better chance of succeeding especially if the mediator is neutral. An example of this kind of mediation occurred in October 1925 between Greece and Bulgaria.<sup>149</sup> The Bulgarians seized a border post after an exchange of gunfire and the Greeks responded by sending 1000 troops across the border. The League of Nations threatened to act, but the Romanians offered to mediate. The Romanians suggested the Bulgarians withdraw from the border post and the Greeks withdraw from Bulgarian territory. Both parties agreed immediately and the situation was settled peacefully.<sup>150</sup>

In the example above, the threat of economic sanctions was being considered by the League of Nations. Economic sanctions are another tool to use against state-supporters of terrorism. However, the usefulness of economic sanctions has come into question. One study concluded that five out of 115 cases of imposed economic sanctions succeeded.<sup>151</sup> Economic sanctions by themselves are rarely successful. The reason the states suffering from economic sanctions find ways to lessen the impact. Some states may not observe the sanctions. It can provide economic opportunities for corporations to take advantage of the economic situation by establishing a presence.

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<sup>149</sup> Robert A. Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Still Do Not Work," *International Security* 23 (1998): 74-76.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

Economic sanctions are designed to cause disruption among the civilian population. The people would start to question the legitimacy of their government and revolt against it and overthrow it. It is true that economic sanctions provide pain to the people, but it does little to cause the government to tumble. Cuba has endured US economic sanctions for roughly sixty-three years, and yet the Cuban government still exists. Countries like Cuba could withstand economic sanctions because they are authoritarian governments and are able to squash any dissent forcefully. At the same time, they had the Soviet Union as a patron for help and they attempted to lessen the impact of the economic sanctions. However, Third World countries with one or few exportable raw materials do not fare well because they are subject to the volatility of the commodity market. The imposition of economic sanctions has a devastating effect on their economies if the state does not have a patron like the Soviet Union.

Besides using diplomatic efforts to apply pressure to persuade states to end supporting terrorism, according to L. Paul Bremer III, ambassador at large on counterterrorism during the Reagan administration, the Secretary of State has the power to place these rogue states on a list of state-sponsors of terrorism. On this list during the 1980s was the rogue's gallery of Iran, Libya, Syria, Cuba, and South Yemen.<sup>152</sup> Iraq and North Korea eventually made the list. The list was not developed to embarrass these states, since they were more than likely not embarrassed by the revelation of their support for terrorism. Bremer stated that the aim of the list of state-supporters of terrorism was "to raise the economic, diplomatic, and—if necessary—military costs" on these states to change their ways.<sup>153</sup>

Using force implied taking risks, for example, the United States was a new country dur-

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<sup>152</sup> Bremer, *Current Policy Number 947*.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*



ing the early nineteenth century. However, even as a fledgling state the US government recognized that the country's trade interests rested on the freedom of navigation. The United States realized it needed to establish a navy to protect its ability to navigate the seas without harassment by another power. This was the basis of US foreign policy during this period. According to Michael H. Armacost, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs during the Reagan administration, "(f)rom the earliest years of our country, America's leaders recognized the relationship between an effective diplomacy and the possession of adequate military strength."<sup>154</sup> Moreover, enjoying the freedom of navigation required taking risks to exercise force if it became necessary.<sup>155</sup> Thomas Jefferson dispatched a naval squadron and a force of US Marines to guarantee America's freedom of navigation rights when the Barbary pirates off the coast of Tripoli threatened that right. In this case, the use of force became necessary to persuade the Barbary pirates to refrain from attacking US shipping, Reagan would do something similar in the same region of the world, but he was trying to dissuade Qadhafi from supporting terrorism.

The use of force is just one aspect of an effective diplomacy, but a nation must be willing to use it for their diplomacy to be effective. An effective foreign policy required "skill, intelligence, patience and the right policies" as well as a strong economy, according to Armacost.<sup>156</sup> A strong economy allows a state to pursue a vigorous defense buildup to maintain military forces and have the strength to back up diplomatic initiatives. The one thing that history

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<sup>154</sup> Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Michael H. Armacost, "Military Power and Diplomacy: The Reagan Legacy," *Current Policy Number 1108* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, US Department of State, 1988), 1. (Government Publications/Legal Reference Library, Leslie F. Malpass Library, Western Illinois University)

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

has taught all nations that an “effective diplomacy depends on strength.”<sup>157</sup> No nation has prospered with a weak military and no state respects a country negotiating from weakness. If weakness is a danger in foreign policy, it is more so if the nation is at war, Sun Tzu said that “(o)ne who has few must prepare against the enemy; one who has many make the enemy prepare against him.”<sup>158</sup> Secretary of State George Shultz argued this point when he remarked “(a)s your Secretary of State I can tell you from experience that no diplomacy can succeed in an environment of fear or from a position of weakness. No negotiation can succeed when one side believes that it pays no price for intransigence and the other side believes it has to make dangerous concessions to reach agreement.”<sup>159</sup> The use of force is a necessary component of a coercive diplomatic strategy. The target state must believe that force will be used if compliance is not forthcoming.

Regarding the use of force, the civilian advisors are generally the hawks, while the military leadership are not. In fact, according to David H. Petraeus, “(n)o military leader argued for the use of force as vehemently as did Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, or a number of Reagan administration officials.”<sup>160</sup> This was the pattern the foreign policy establishment followed during the post-Vietnam period. The same was true during the escalation during the Vietnam conflict in 1964. Most of the civilian leadership pushed for war, George Ball in the State Department was one of the voices of reason. However, Caspar Weinberger as Reagan’s

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<sup>157</sup> Secretary of State George Shultz, “Power and Diplomacy,” *Current Policy Number 606* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, US Department of State, 1984), 1. (Government Publications/Legal Reference Library, Leslie F. Malpass Library, Western Illinois University)

<sup>158</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Samuel B. Griffith, trans. (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, originally 1963), 99.

<sup>159</sup> Shultz, *op. cit.*

<sup>160</sup> David H. Petraeus, “Military Influence and the Post-Vietnam Use of Force,” *Armed Forces & Society* 15 (1989): 490-491.

Secretary of Defense was one civilian leader who argued against using force compared to Secretary of State Shultz who was a champion on using it. The military resisted any potential deployments like those proposed to the Horn of Africa in 1978 and the Persian Gulf in 1984.<sup>161</sup> The use of force was the last resort in a coercive diplomatic strategy as well as in the second pillar framework of US counterterrorism policy.

The second pillar entailed several options: diplomatic measures such as limiting the number of diplomatic staff and limiting travel rights within the country, closing of embassy and other diplomatic posts, and breaking diplomatic relations. Economic and political sanctions were the next step if breaking diplomatic relations did not convince the offending country to change its behavior. These sanctions include harsh tariffs on imports, reducing trade or a complete ban and sanctions on air travel. When economic and political sanctions do not work, the next step would be the deployment of military forces for freedom of navigation or power projection exercises. These exercises were a demonstration of the military capabilities of the United States. When these exercises fail to convince the target state to change its behavior, the use of force is exercised. Reagan followed these steps. He warned Qadhafi that there would be consequences if he continued to support terrorism. When the warnings went unheeded, Reagan reduced the number of Libyan diplomatic staff. In 1984, Reagan broke diplomatic relations with Libya. By 1986, a complete trade ban was implemented and a number of freedom of navigation operations demonstrated US military power. When Libya refused to change its behavior, Reagan finally authorized the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi.

The second pillar of US counterterrorism included what was popularly known as the final option.<sup>162</sup> The final option was the deployment of special operations units to rescue hostages or

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<sup>161</sup> Petraeus, "Military Influence and the Post-Vietnam Use of Force," 491.

eliminate terrorists to put an end to a situation. After the 1972 Munich Olympics, European countries responded by forming specialized units to fight terrorists, units like the West German border police GSG-9 and the British SAS. The counterterrorist operations that was the gold standard was the Israeli raid on Entebbe, Uganda on 4 July 1976.<sup>163</sup> Air France Flight 139 from Tel Aviv to Paris was hijacked by terrorists from the PLO and the Baader-Meinhof Gang of West Germany on 27 June 1976.<sup>164</sup> After failed negotiations the Israeli government approved a hostage rescue operation and it was a spectacular success which bolstered Israeli morale. The “final option” is part of any counterterrorism policy. It is a concise application of force compared to the deployment of the US Marines or an airborne division. The use of a scalpel instead of a sledgehammer. The Entebbe raid or Operation Nimrod by the British SAS demonstrated the appropriate use of force against terrorists. However, dealing with an actual state that supports terrorism requires a greater amount of force. Reagan’s Operation El Dorado Canyon provided a blueprint for the use of force against a rogue state through the economy of force, i.e., using the minimal number of military units necessary to accomplish the political objective. The next portion of the chapter will examine the final pillar of US counterterrorism policy.

The third pillar of US counterterrorism policy is according the rule of law to terrorists to punish them for their actions in the court of law. During the Clinton administration, a fourth pillar was added, paying cash rewards for information that led to the apprehension of terrorists. However, this should be considered part of the third pillar since cash rewards for information is

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<sup>162</sup> The term final option was popularized by stories of counterterrorism units in action and feature films such as *The Final Option* (1982) also known as “Who Dares Wins” which was a fictionalized story of the British SAS Operation Nimrod in London in 1980.

<sup>163</sup> Leroy Thompson, “The Final Option in Action: Lessons learned in terrorist warfare,” *Terrorism*, September 1986, 85-86. (A *Soldier of Fortune* publication)

<sup>164</sup> The Baader-Meinhof Gang later became known as the Red Army Faction.

a tool of law enforcement at all levels. The third pillar is important because the US government does its utmost in punishing captured terrorists, hampering their ability to enter the country, and restricting the travel of diplomats of governments that sponsor terrorism. International agreements like *The Hague Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft* are important because the international community set a standard of safety for international travel and the signatories are required to prosecute or extradite the perpetrators of the prohibited behavior. The signatories would do their utmost to return seized property and aircraft to the proper owners and allow the passengers and crew to return to their journey. Any failure to do so would subject the country to sanctions and other actions.<sup>165</sup>

However, Abraham D. Sofaer, Legal Adviser to the State Department, in an article in the summer 1986 issue of the journal *Foreign Affairs*, had argued that the law can also be a detriment in dealing with terrorism.<sup>166</sup> Terrorist events during the 1980s led to an effort to use the law in combatting terrorism, but he argued that these efforts failed; the law had a “poor record in dealing with international terrorism.”<sup>167</sup> One of the reasons for the law’s inability to deal with terrorism was that it left “political violence unregulated” or it was “ambivalent;” whatever the deficiencies in the law, Sofaer believed it was intentional.<sup>168</sup> Part of the reason for the poor record in dealing with international terrorism lay with the Third World. Third World countries were afraid that any resolutions against terrorist acts would be detrimental to national liberation movements. Often terrorism was attributed to people who were denied dignity, civil rights or

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<sup>165</sup> “The Hague Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft,” December 1970, *Terrorism: Documents on International and Local Control*, Volume II, Robert A. Friedlander, ed. (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1979), 102-103.

<sup>166</sup> Abraham D. Sofaer, “Terrorism and the Law,” *Foreign Affairs* 64 (1986): 901-922.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 901.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 902-903.

lived in alien, racist, or colonial regimes.<sup>169</sup> The resistance of the Third World countries would suggest that UN efforts to deal with terrorism was not serious.

Another problem with international agreements on countering terrorism had the “political offense” exception: “ordinary crimes committed in a political context or with political motivation” would be exempt from extradition.<sup>170</sup> An editorial comment in *The American Journal of International Law* said, “(w)hether an act is political or not is therefore largely a matter of interpretation and must be considered in the light of facts and circumstances attending its commission.”<sup>171</sup> Sofaer mentioned a few landmark cases in the British courts regarding the political offense exemption such as the 1894 case *In Re Meunier*.<sup>172</sup> The prisoner Theodule Meunier was a French citizen accused of bombing the Café Very in Paris which killed two people and he bombed a French army barracks, Meunier freely admitted that he was an anarchist and there were witnesses which verified his identity.<sup>173</sup>

The court ruling was a denial of writ of habeas corpus for Meunier. There was ample evidence such as testimony from an accomplice and the fact Meunier admitted he was an anarchist did not help his case. The court argued that anarchism was the enemy of not only the government, but “(t)heir efforts are directed against private citizens.”<sup>174</sup> Since anarchism does not believe in government, Meunier’s crimes were not political in nature. Therefore, his appli-

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<sup>169</sup> Sofaer, “Terrorism and the Law,” 903-906.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 907.

<sup>171</sup> “‘Political Offence’ in Extradition Treaties,” *The American Journal of International Law* 3 (1909): 460.

<sup>172</sup> Sofaer, “Terrorism and the Law,” 907-908.

<sup>173</sup> “In Re Meunier,” *Terrorism: Documents on International and Local Control*, Volume II, Robert A. Friedlander, ed. (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1979), 339.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

cation for writ of habeas corpus was refused and he was liable to extradition.<sup>175</sup> *The American Journal of International Law* argued, “(t)he exclusion of assassins of heads of state and anarchists from the benefit of political offences leads to the conclusion that some limitations must be imposed upon the immunity previously granted and it may be that a reexamination of political limitations so as to separate ordinary crimes from the pretence of political activity.”<sup>176</sup>

According to Sofaer, the Reagan administration was renegotiating the removal of the political offense exemption from bilateral extradition treaties like the Supplemental Extradition Treaty with the United Kingdom. However, it ran into stiff opposition in the Senate because of “emotional concern” about the Irish.<sup>177</sup> The United Kingdom was still dealing with the Provisional IRA terrorist campaigns; Boston and New York City have large Irish communities. Despite the limitations of international law, the international community has made useful agreements against terrorism like the conventions against hijacking and kidnapping, which include political exemption clauses, but states are required to prosecute perpetrators of terrorism if they cannot be extradited.

In addition, agreements can be made between countries that lack diplomatic relations. In 1973, Cuba and the United States signed a *Memorandum of Understanding on the Hijacking of Aircraft and Vessels*.<sup>178</sup> Negotiated by the Embassy of Switzerland in Havana on behalf of the United States and the Charge d’Affaires ad Interim of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in Washington, DC on behalf of Cuba, the agreement stated that hijackers would be prosecuted and

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<sup>175</sup> “In Re Meunier,” 341-343.

<sup>176</sup> “‘Political Offence’ in Extradition Treaties,” 461.

<sup>177</sup> Sofaer, “Terrorism and the Law,” 910.

<sup>178</sup> “Cuba—United States: Memorandum of Understanding on the Hijacking of Aircraft and Vessels,” *International Legal Materials* 12 (1973): 370-376.

the aircraft, vessels with their belongings, crew and passengers would be returned or allowed to continue their journey.<sup>179</sup> The clauses on the return of the aircraft and property to the proper owner and/or allowing the aircraft, passengers, and crew to continue their journey are generally found in most agreements on hijacking of aircraft and vessels; this agreement between the United States and Cuba reflected the international standard and it remained in effect until 1976.

US court cases are an interesting aspect of the third pillar of US counterterrorism policy. The most important aspect of a court case is the opinion of the court. The opinion offers the court's interpretation of the law and whether the defendant is guilty or a previous decision was affirmed. In some cases, there are questions regarding the constitutionality of a law or whether a law can be applied. In *United States v. Palestinian Liberation Organization*, a question regarding the applicability of the *Antiterrorism Act of 1987* was considered. The act called for the closure of the PLO office in the United Nations. The PLO claimed they had the right to maintain an office in the UN because they were invited to attend as Permanent Observers and sought a motion of dismissal.<sup>180</sup>

The United Nations Headquarters was established in New York City in the United States through an agreement. The *Agreement Between the United States and the United Nations Regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations* allowed it to invite non-members, nongovernmental organizations to maintain a permanent observer missions in New York. The PLO was invited to open such an office in 1974. The US challenged the establishment of the PLO office in the courts. However, the courts upheld the opening of the PLO office under certain conditions. The PLO representative had "limited personal movement to a radius of 25 miles from

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<sup>179</sup> "Cuba—United States: Memorandum of Understanding on the Hijacking of Aircraft and Vessels."

<sup>180</sup> "U.S. v. Palestinian Liberation Organization," *American International Law Cases, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, 1986-1988*, Vol. 12, Bernard D. Reams, Jr., ed. (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1990), 380.



Columbus Circle in Manhattan.<sup>181</sup>

In October 1986, Congress made another attempt to close all PLO offices within the United States. However, the State Department was unable to close the offices of the PLO. Which prompted Congress to propose and pass a law giving the secretary of state the authority to close the offices of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. In *U.S. v. Palestinian Liberation Organization*, the court had to determine whether the State Department was given the authority to close the offices of the PLO. The court determined that it had both personal and subject matter jurisdiction over the issue.<sup>182</sup> Under the US Constitutional system “statutes and treaties are both the supreme law of the land, and the Constitution sets forth no order of precedence between the two.”<sup>183</sup> Congress failed to mention if the *Antiterrorism Act of 1987* was to take precedence over the UN agreement. The court ruled in favor of the PLO and dismissed the case.<sup>184</sup> This example demonstrated Congress failing to use the rule of law against a known terrorist organization because of an oversight on their part. According to the court’s opinion if Congress had specific language stating the *Antiterrorism Act of 1987* was to take precedence over the UN agreement, the secretary of state could have forced the closure of the PLO permanent observer office.

*United States v. Yunis* is a very interesting case because it had several hearings. There were several hearings in the district court and an appeal case. Fawaz Yunis was a terrorist, he and four other men boarded Royal Jordanian Airlines Flight 402 on 11 June 1985 and hijacked the plane to Beirut. The five terrorists wore civilian clothes and were armed with assault rifles,

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<sup>181</sup> “U.S. v. Palestinian Liberation Organization,” 381.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 383, 386.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

bandoleers of ammunition and hand grenades.<sup>185</sup> There were at least two American citizens on board the plane. After unsuccessfully trying to fly to Tunis and then Damascus, the plane was returned to Beirut. The terrorists released the passengers and crew before blowing up the plane.<sup>186</sup>

After an American investigation, Yunis was identified and the Federal Bureau of Investigation obtained an arrest warrant and launched “Operation Goldenrod” in September 1987. FBI agents lured Yunis onto a yacht off the coast of Cyprus in international waters and promptly arrested him. He was transferred to a US Navy munitions ship which rendezvoused with a US aircraft carrier. Yunis was flown to the United States.<sup>187</sup> In *United States v. Yunis*, 681 F. Supp. 891 (D.D.C. 1988), Yunis claimed that the United States violated the Posse Comitatus Act by using the US Navy “as a posse comitatus, or otherwise to execute the laws of the United States.”<sup>188</sup> The defendant’s motion to dismiss was denied because the United States did not violate the Posse Comitatus Act which proscribed the use of the US Army and US Air Force in discharging law enforcement duties. The US Navy was not mentioned in the Posse Comitatus Act although there was an understanding within the Defense Department that the Navy would not be used in such a fashion, but Yunis was constantly in the custody of the FBI. The Navy was just a means of transport in his case.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> United States, “United States: Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit Opinion in *United States v. Fawaz Yunis* (Hostage Taking: Hijacking: Extraterritorial Jurisdiction: Laws of War),” *International Legal Materials* 30 (1991): 405.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> United States, “United States v. Yunis, 681 F. Supp. 891 (D.D.C. 1988),” <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp681/891/179996>, accessed on 7 September 2022.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

In *United States v. Yunis*, F. Supp. 896, Yunis moved to dismiss the indictment because “under general principles of international law, the court lacked subject matter and personal jurisdiction over a crime committed by a nonresident alien on foreign soil and that federal law provided no independent basis for such jurisdiction.”<sup>190</sup> He argued that universal and passive personality principles which may be the only principles in international law to bring his case forward did not apply. The government disagreed and the court concurred with the government. The court found that air piracy and hijacked were subject to international conventions, “which demonstrates the international community’s strong commitment to punish these crimes irrespectively of where they occurred;” in addition, Congress had the power to “legislate overseas and define and punish offenses committed on foreign soil.”<sup>191</sup> The court did agree that Section 32(a) of the Aircraft Piracy Act was improper, but the court ruled that it had jurisdiction in this case.<sup>192</sup> Yunis also lost his appeal case for the same reason in the court cases above. The appeals court ruled that his convictions were affirmed.<sup>193</sup>

The above cases demonstrated the importance the law is in the fight against terrorism. Some cases were not successful such as *US v. Palestinian Liberation Organization*, but in the Yunis cases the law successfully convicted a dangerous terrorist. These cases also demonstrated how useful international law can be in prosecuting terrorists despite Sofaer’s misgivings. Many of the conventions that were against illegal acts against air travel has helped to quell skyjackings. Skyjackings are now a rare occurrence and it would appear the destruction of aircraft in flight are

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<sup>190</sup> Lynda M. Clarizio, “United States v. Yunis, 681 F. Supp. 896,” *The American Journal of International Law* 83 (1989): 94.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, 97.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>193</sup> United States, “United States: Court of Appeals,” 414.

also, rare. This discussion on the three pillars of US counterterrorism policy is important in regards to Reagan's policies toward Libya. Much of his policies toward Libya were a demonstration of the second pillar. Reagan attempted to pressure Libya in ending its support of terrorism, when political and economic pressures failed, he resorted to the use of force. The third pillar is important because the United States pursued legal means to prosecute two Libyan intelligence agents who were implicated in the December 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie. The United States borrowed from the second pillar by pressuring Libya politically and economically into surrendering the two agents for prosecution. The sanctions imposed on Libya over the Lockerbie incident were more effective because the United Kingdom and France were involved as well as the United Nations, suggesting that Reagan was right when similar thinking nations impose sanctions the target nation would eventually succumb to international pressure, which Libya eventually did. The War Powers Resolution of 1973 will also become progressively important during the discussion on the use of force against Libya. The next chapter will discuss Libya and Qadhafi. The chapter will discuss how Qadhafi gained power in Libya. This brief historical background on Libya and Qadhafi will be useful in understanding him, his ideas and why Libya followed the path it took. The chapter will also provide insight on the policy implications the United States took in dealing with Libya.

## Chapter Four: Qadhafi and Libya

On 1 September 1969, very early in the morning a group of junior officers from the extremely small Libyan army overthrew the aging King Idris I in a bloodless coup.<sup>194</sup> The coup came as a surprise to most of the world. The US Department of State commented that it “was a surprise in terms of timing and the secrecy enveloping the identity of its leadership.”<sup>195</sup> There were rumors of a coup by a group of disaffected army officers known as “the Black Boots” and the “Black Boots” was a group of company-grade army officers who were “dissatisfied with the corrupt state of the Libyan Government” and they believed it was time to “assume control” of the country.<sup>196</sup> However, an unknown group of junior-grade officers with a few company-grade officers seized control of the country before the “Black Boots.” This chapter will briefly discuss this coup and the policy implications the US faced such as the status of Wheelus Airbase. It will also discuss Qadhafi, his ideas and his role in governing Libya which was always changing and sometimes confusing, this is important because it will provide insight on Qadhafi’s motivations and why he acted the way he did. It is also important to observe this background in a Cold War lens because the revolution and the rise of Qadhafi occurred during the height of the Cold War. The United States was concerned about the Third World granting the Soviet Union the oppor-

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<sup>194</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, ““Situation in Libya as of 0830 Hours 1 September 1969,”” *Intelligence Information Cable 34465*, 1 September 1969, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/SITUATION%20AS%20%5B15708344%5.pdf>, accessed on 3 November 2022, 1; Anthony McDermott, “Qaddafi and Libya,” *The World Today* 29 (1973): 399, Edward Mitchell, “Islam in Colonel Qadhafi’s Thought,” *The World Today* 38 (1982): 319, Douglas Little, “To the Shores of Tripoli: America, Qaddafi, and Libyan Revolution, 1969-1989,” *The International History Review* 35 (2013): 35 (2013): 70; and Farah Arbab, “Engaging Libya: From Confrontation to Compliance,” *Strategic Studies* 25 (2005): 141.

<sup>195</sup> Memorandum for Henry Kissinger from Theodore I. Eliot, Jr., Executive Secretary, Department of State, “The Fall of the Libyan Monarchy,” 9 September 1969, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/MEMO%20TO%20HENRY%20KISSINGER%20%5B15708390%5.pdf>, accessed on 2 November 2022.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. For clarification, junior-grade officers are usually lieutenants and company-grade officers are usually the rank of captain, possibly major. Junior officers usually command platoon-sized units (around 50-60 men more or less) or smaller. Company-grade officers command company-sized units (100+) or assigned to battalion staff.

tunity to penetrate unstable countries and spreading their influence, especially if that country had strategic resources like uranium, titanium or in the case of Libya, oil.

This unknown group of junior officers apparently called itself “the Committee of Sovereignty for the Revolution” and when it seized power, they asked a 34-year-old retired lieutenant colonel, Sa’d al-Din Abu Shuwayrib to be the leader, according to the CIA.<sup>197</sup> The Libyan radio announced a curfew, which started at 0800 hours, no movement was allowed, no entry or exit from the country was permitted and all the airports and seaports were closed.<sup>198</sup> A prominent opponent of the Idris regime claimed to have had no knowledge of the coup. He became aware when his uncle informed him by telephone “to warn him” that troops were “taking over the city.”<sup>199</sup> For reasons unexplained, CIA analysts did not mention why it was important to quote a prominent Idris opponent unless this Libyan dissident was an important asset who provided useful information on the political situation in Libya and on potential adversaries to Idris during his reign.

Harold Saunders, an NSC staffer, provided an appraisal of the coup to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger. Saunders stated that it was difficult to assess the “impact of the coup” because of the lack of information about the military junta that took over. What the NSC knew about Lieutenant Colonel Shuwayrib was relatively basic. He was apparently pro-US, he “received his basic military education” from the United Arab Republic (UAR) Cadet College.<sup>200</sup> He also attended US military schools; in 1964-65, he attended the

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<sup>197</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Intelligence Information Cable 34465*, 1 September 1969.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> “Memorandum from Harold Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the Special Assistant to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Lake) for the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” 2 September 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-5, Part 2*,

Command and General Staff Officer Course.<sup>201</sup> The United States was watching signs for any action to reverse the coup, but no one rallied for the aging king who was vacationing in Turkey at the time. The Crown Prince Hasan al-Rida renounced his position and urged support for the new governing body, known as the Revolutionary Command Council.<sup>202</sup> The United States Government had concerns over the status of Wheelus Airbase, located outside Tripoli, but the RCC assured the charge at the US embassy that they were concerned about removing “internal corruption” and they would protect foreign interests including oil; they did proclaim to be a socialist government, they “would seek solidarity with the third world and would be based on the *Koran*,” according to Saunder’s memorandum.<sup>203</sup>

The collapse of the gendarme guaranteed the coup’s success.<sup>204</sup> The gendarme was twice the size of the army and was generally better equipped, but they “were either unable or unwilling to act unless given direct orders from the King,” according to US intelligence analysts.<sup>205</sup> The King was essentially the government. He had ministers, but all decision-making power was concentrated in the hands of the king. The coup plotters took advantage of his absence. If the king was in the country, the coup most likely would have failed.<sup>206</sup> The gendarme, therefore, failed to

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*Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 37)

<sup>201</sup> *FRUS, Volume E-5, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, 1. (Document 37) The Command and General Staff Officer Course is a 44-week course offered once a year at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It currently “offers more than 170 elective courses.” <https://www.usacac.army.mil>, accessed on 11 November 2022.

<sup>202</sup> *FRUS, Volume E-5, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, 1. (Document 37)

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> Gendarme also known as gendarmerie is a French word for an armed police officer.

<sup>205</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Weekly Summary*, 5 September 1969, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/EXCERPT%20OF%20WEEKLY%20SUMMARY%5B15708342%5.pdf>, accessed on 2 November 2022, 21.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

crush the coup because it did not have leadership capable of taking independent action without the king's permission. It also apparently needed the presence of the king to receive orders before acting against the coup.

The CIA was unable to determine the political orientation of the Revolutionary Command Council. The RCC announced the government would be socialist, but the CIA believed the government would not be militant right away because intelligence analysts believed the RCC was made up of "various factions" which represented "a wide spectrum of political ideologies" and these factions were "jockeying for control."<sup>207</sup> In other words, it would take time for a dominant faction to take the reins of power and develop a coherent policy toward the outside world. In addition, it could be argued that the RCC took a pragmatic view toward political rhetoric. Wildly militant rhetoric would have raised red flags with the US and West European governments and most likely would have done something to quash the coup. Assuring the West that their interests would not be harmed in any way would reduce the likelihood of any counter coup activity occurring. While the RCC was consolidating their position, the prospects of King Idris gaining control of Libya was slipping by the day, especially when Crown Prince Hasan al-Rida essentially abandoned his birthright by renouncing his title and position, US intelligence analysts argued. The CIA believed that a resistance against the coup could have rallied around the Crown Prince, but even Idris' own tribe or the religious organization he led did not raise arms against the coup convinced the CIA the chances of the monarchy being restored had waned, although the CIA analysts believed some isolated resistance to the coup might appear.<sup>208</sup>

US officials including Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs David D. Newsom

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<sup>207</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Weekly Summary*, 5 September 1969, 21.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.



had to decide on what policy options were available in the wake of the coup. Assistant Secretary Newsom recommended that the US government recognize the new government as soon as control of the country was assured and recognition would take three steps: a statement in response to a RCC statement requesting all nations with diplomatic relations with Libya recognize the new government; instruct the charge in Tripoli or an alternative officer located in Benghazi, “to present themselves officially ‘to the RCC,’ bearing a copy of our statement;” and ask “confirmation of the agreement for our ambassador” when the opportunity presented itself.<sup>209</sup> Since the British were moving quickly to recognize the RCC government, the United States should “coordinate the timing of the issuance of our statement with the British.”<sup>210</sup> Newsom did not clarify why it was necessary to coordinate with the British in recognizing the new Libyan government. Possible reasons demonstrations of good will from the West, nations that recognize new governments first generally have better relations, ease any tensions between the two countries, and possibly entice the Libyans away from the Soviet Union. Whatever the reasons Newsom did not mention them in his memorandum.

Sixteen days after the coup, the identity of Libya’s new rulers was still a mystery to the Central Intelligence Agency. Apparently the RCC did not issue any “authoritative statements” about their “objectives and priorities.”<sup>211</sup> US intelligence analysts were suggesting that forming a new government and formulating new policy was a time-consuming endeavor. The CIA

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<sup>209</sup> “Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (Newsom) to the Acting Secretary of State (Richardson), 4 September 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 38)

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum,” 16 September 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 39)

believed that the Revolutionary Command Council appeared to be moderate in tone despite their declaration of being a socialist government. The new Libyan government stressed “social reform” more than actual socialism, promised to protect foreign property and residents and they sought closer diplomatic relations with the United States, according to the CIA.<sup>212</sup> The CIA believed that moderation in the new government was only temporary and their rhetoric would eventually move to the left. This judgment was based on “the general tendency of Arab politics over the past two decades,” according to CIA observation.<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, according to past experience, the CIA shown that “other military-dominant revolutionary regimes” tended “to become more leftist and extreme with the passage of time.”<sup>214</sup> This was certainly true of many African countries that gained their independence through armed struggle and established one party political systems. An excellent example was Kwame Nkrumah who established a leftist government in Ghana after independence was granted. Nkrumah in his 1968 book, *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* stressed that socialism “organically complimented” African unity; he believed only through socialism would Africans “reliably accumulate the capital” they needed for their development needs.<sup>215</sup>

The CIA developed an interest in the Libyan army. the CIA might have wanted to know the composition of this small army because, at the time of the coup, the Libyan army was 8000 strong with 200-300 officers and was severely outnumbered by the civilian police forces. The gendarme was twice the size of the army and had better weapons and equipment because the

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<sup>212</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum,” 16 September 1969, 1. (Document 39)

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare: A Guide to the Armed Phase of the African Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1969, originally published in 1968), 28-29.

king distrusted his army officers. The army lacked tanks which the CIA considered a vital instrument for Arab revolutions.<sup>216</sup> However, US intelligence analysts determined the army officers who organized the coup managed to overthrow the king with a few armored cars and the size of the coup plotters was unknown, but US intelligence analysts believed it was around fifty to sixty officers. The CIA believed it was large enough to provide “adequate direction and command” for the coup and “small enough to maintain secrecy.”<sup>217</sup> The CIA could not determine how “cohesive” the group was and if it was able to avoid intrigue or unwanted influence from neighboring countries.<sup>218</sup> If the coup plotters were not cohesive, the coup could have collapsed and Libya would have descended into chaos. This would have been a major concern for the US and the West since Libya had important oil reserves and Western corporations were extracting it out of the ground, a chaotic Libya would have been an attraction for Soviet meddling. Therefore, it was believed by the CIA that the Libyan army would increase in number.<sup>219</sup> A larger army would help maintain order, protect the new government from potential counter-revolutionary plots and discourage foreign intervention against the country. The main concern for the US was the status of Wheelus Airbase and petroleum policy of the new government. Would the RCC threaten to nationalize the oil industry or would it honor foreign agreements and maintain current production?

American fears over the status of Wheelus Airbase were realized a month later. The new Libyan government wanted to terminate all foreign base agreements. The British agreed to withdraw their personnel. The British prompted the United States to negotiate a termination agree-

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<sup>216</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum,” 16 September 1969, 1-2. (Document 39)

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

ment for Wheelus Airbase with the Libyan government. A cable sent from the embassy office in Benghazi informed the State Department on the negotiations. Ambassador Joseph Palmer met with Libyan Arab Republic Government (LARG) Foreign Minister Sa-lih Mas'ud Buwaysir in Benghazi on 30 October 1969. Foreign Minister Buwaysir stated that Tripoli was hoping that US and Libya could work together successfully, but the only thing that troubled US-Libyan relations was the "presence of our military base."<sup>220</sup> Palmer, in the telegram, agreed that "(m)ilitary bases do not help create good relations between countries and US had many good friends on whose territories it did not have installations."<sup>221</sup> During their discussion Palmer sought clarification over the termination agreement. The foreign minister stated Libya wanted an early termination agreement.<sup>222</sup> The United States could have refused to turn Wheelus Airbase to the Libyan government since there were several years left on the basing agreement. However, such a refusal would have caused tension and may have led to conflict. It certainly would have reinforced Qadhafi's conviction that foreign bases were a vestige of colonialism. The United States was stretched militarily with their security commitments with Europe, Japan, and other parts of Asia and not to mention the conflict in Vietnam. It was prudent to negotiate a termination agreement. In addition, with the creation of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine launched nuclear missiles, Wheelus Airbase lost its importance as a strategic bomber base. Early in the Cold War, Wheelus Airbase was important because it was used for staging strategic bombers for attacks on the Soviet Union. With the development of the ICBM and mid-flight refueling

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<sup>220</sup> "Telegram 1134 from the Embassy Office in Benghazi to the Department of State and the Embassy in Libya," 30 October 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 42)

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

capability for bombers, the need for Wheelus Airbase was no longer necessary and the United States could relinquish it back to the Libyans.

The United States sent Ambassador Palmer instructions for the termination of Wheelus Airbase. Both the State and Defense Departments cleared a note sent to Palmer. The United States was prepared to begin negotiations on 15 December on withdrawing from Wheelus and other military facilities in Libya, the US trusted training could resume during the negotiations and Palmer was “authorized to say the talks could cover the possibility of our evacuating the base before the termination of the agreement (December 1972).”<sup>223</sup> The original termination agreement would roughly end in three years (1972), but the Libyans wanted to terminate the agreement as early as possible.

Officials at the NSC believed the Libyan people were considered xenophobic and this may have been one reason for early termination of Wheelus Airbase. A memo within the National Security Council argued “the new Libyan government as insecure, inexperienced, xenophobic (sic), perhaps divided but as yet without visible opposition.”<sup>224</sup> The new Libyan government was most likely insecure because their control of the country was not consolidated yet and with such a small army it would have been difficult to protect the borders. They were inexperienced because Libya’s new rulers were all junior-grade or company-grade officers. They were trained for military service and not for government service. In addition, these officers did not have experience commanding medium to large military formations. This is reminiscent of the

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<sup>223</sup> “Memorandum from Harold Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” 17 November 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1972, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 43)

<sup>224</sup> “Memorandum from Robert Behr and Harold Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” 20 November 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1972, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 44)

experience of the United States during the Civil War. The Union Army would promote officers without experience in commanding large formations. This often proved disastrous during military campaigns. Qadhafi, for example, was a first lieutenant during the coup, soon after he was promoted to captain and months later to colonel. As mentioned above, the US regarded Wheelus Airbase as no longer important and from the Libyan perspective, particularly Qadhafi's, the US and British military presence in Libya was considered some form of neocolonialism. They were there to protect the interests of their corporations and any imperialistic designs they had on the country.

During the negotiations for the termination of Wheelus Airbase, the future of US military programs was considered. Libya was still interested in purchasing weapons from the United States. The king had ordered F-5 fighter jets before he was dethroned and Qadhafi was still interested in receiving them. Eight F-5s were scheduled for delivery and Qadhafi inquired about the status of the F-5s through Ambassador Palmer. Palmer stated the "general atmosphere" of the meeting was cordial, but it was "less than satisfactory" because Qadhafi did not prepare for a number of subjects and Palmer was received late "with other appointments" still waiting to see the chairman of the RCC.<sup>225</sup>

Qadhafi raised the matter of the delivery schedule and he "expressed pleasure" about receiving the new fighter jets. He also stated that the US refused to provide the Libyan Arab Republic Air Force (LARAF) ammunition from the "stocks at Wheelus" and he believed that it "was an obstacle to completion of this deal. Military aircraft without ammunition useless."<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> "Telegram 169 from the Embassy in Libya to the Departments of State and Defense," 26 January 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 51)

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

Palmer explained that there was some kind of mistake and that the US would consider requests for ammunition through the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). In fact, MAAG was waiting for normal Libyan air force requests for ammunition for several months. Palmer assured Qadhafi that the US did not say it would not “honor requests for ammunition.”<sup>227</sup> The US asked that requests for ammunition would go “through normal channels for supply from normal supply sources.”<sup>228</sup> Qadhafi wanted to use fiery speech to illustrate his frustration with the West over weapons purchases and the RCC wanted him to reduce his invective speech because of Libya’s desire to purchase weapons from the West as the F-5 fighters illustrated could have been ruined. For example, the Central Intelligence Agency reported that the Libyan army wanted to “purchase tanks and other basic military equipment from the British,” but sophisticated military weapons like “missile systems, radar and other frills” would not be sold to the country.<sup>229</sup> In addition, the CIA reported that the Libyans refused to standardize their military’s “supplies and equipment with those of” Egypt, because the Egyptian military was supplied by the Soviets and Libya wanted to remain a Western client.<sup>230</sup> Even as a Western client, Libya did not want to standardize their weapons systems. The problem with diversification of weapons is supply. Different weapons require different supply sources. For example, arming army formations with Soviet-made AK-47s and Belgian FN-FALs require ammunition of two different calibers.<sup>231</sup> The North

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<sup>227</sup> *FRUS, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972.* (Document 51)

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Intentions and Attitudes of Libyan Revolutionary Command Council Towards the West, Arab Unity, and the Government of Libya,” *Intelligence Information Cable*, 30 October 1969, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/INTENTIONS%20AND%20ATTITUDES%20%5B15708335%5.pdf>, accessed on 2 November 2022, 4.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>231</sup> Both rifles take a 7.62mm round, but the AK-47s takes the 7.62x39 round, while the FN-FAL takes the 7.62x51 NATO round.

Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) standardized their weapons and equipment which made supply much easier. The same was true of the Warsaw Pact countries as they adopted Soviet weapon systems. Qadhafi did not want to rely on a single supplier. He wanted the best that oil money could buy. If the United States or other Western countries did not want to sell him certain weapons systems, he was willing to buy it from the Soviets. The Soviets had no qualms about selling sophisticated weapons systems to Qadhafi because Libya was a vital source of hard currency. The Revolutionary Command Council believed it could station five to six thousand personnel at Wheelus Airbase, but they realized very early that a termination agreement was necessary before the conversion could begin. The Libyans realized that the negotiations and an “orderly transfer” would take time and the RCC still intended on adhering “to its treaty obligations with respect to the timing of the Wheelus phaseout,” according to analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>232</sup> The slow pace of negotiating the transfer of Wheelus and the lack of urgency for the delivery of the F-5 fighters suggested that the US government did not trust the RCC completely. Besides the status of Wheelus, the US government worried about the status of US oil corporation holdings within Libya. Most revolutionary governments tend to nationalize important industries and considering most of the oil was extracted by US oil corporations it was understandable Nixon’s concerns about Libya’s petroleum policy.

The US government was debating their options regarding Libya. The choices in formulating a strategy toward the new government in Libya were a policy of confrontation or a policy of compromise. These were the options the NSC staff brought forward for debate and consideration. The US government was searching for leverage against the new Libyan government and

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<sup>232</sup> *Intelligence Information Cable*, 30 October 1969, 3 and Central Intelligence Agency, *Central Intelligence Bulletin*, 1 November 1969, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CENTRAL%20INTELLIGENCE%20BULL%5B15708333%5D.pdf>, accessed on 2 November 2022.



were considering their options with economic pressure and military action.<sup>233</sup> The CIA determined that US economic interests in Libya were “\$5 billion (replacement value) private oil investments and \$500 million in annual profits to US corporations.”<sup>234</sup> Western Europe was moderately dependent on Libyan oil, twenty-five percent of their oil consumption was from Libya while the United States imported eight percent of their petroleum needs from Libya.<sup>235</sup> Their military options were dropped except a “plan for a military supported evacuation of U.S. citizens from Libya.”<sup>236</sup> These options were discussed during a meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) which was created on 3 July 1969. The WSAG was a top-level crisis management team and it was charged with coordinating the government’s activities during a crisis.<sup>237</sup> This dissertation argues there were many reasons for the US government to drop the military options: the US did not want to provide ammunition to Soviet propaganda of US in league with capitalist forces securing oil profits, exercising the military options would have damaged US relations with other Arab states and most importantly, the United States did not want to get drawn into another conflict with an already overstretched military. The US also did not want to give the impression the United States was attempting to reinstall an unpopular pro-American monarch back on the throne. Such an action would have been a violation of the

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<sup>233</sup> *FRUS, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, 1-2. (Document 44)

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> “Minutes of the Washington Special Actions Group Meeting,” 24 November 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 45)

<sup>237</sup> The White House, “Washington Special Actions Group,” *National Security Decision Memorandum 19*, 3 July 1969, [https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/virtuallibrary/documents/nsdm/nsdm\\_19.pdf](https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/virtuallibrary/documents/nsdm/nsdm_19.pdf), accessed on 28 November 2022.

United Nations Charter, particularly Article 2(4) which required all chartered members of the UN to refrain from using force as a foreign policy tool.

While US officials deliberated policy options, Qadhafi was pursuing his own goals. Qadhafi as chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) made a secret trip to the United Arab Republic (Egypt) to visit President Jamal Abd al-Nasser from 30 November to 4 December 1969.<sup>238</sup> This secret trip sparked interest within the CIA and therefore, they monitored the meetings between Qadhafi and his idol Nasser. Qadhafi stayed at Nasser's residence during the entire visit to avoid unwanted publicity.<sup>239</sup> Why he wanted to avoid publicity was never determined since US intelligence information cables were information reports and not actual intelligence analysis. The cable did provide some elements of a discussion between Nasser and Qadhafi. Nasser counseled Qadhafi not to rely on the Soviet Union because "you will find yourself inevitable entrapped into commitments which you would have preferred to avoid."<sup>240</sup> Nasser was speaking from experience since Egypt was closely aligned with the Soviet Union during his tenure as UAR president. In essence if Qadhafi wanted to be a leader within the non-aligned movement, his leadership had to be just that, not aligned with the West or the Soviets. Nasser further counseled Qadhafi not to "nationalize the private sector of the Libyan economy."<sup>241</sup> According to the CIA, he was advising Qadhafi to avoid confrontation with the West since much of the Libyan economy was held by foreign interests particularly oil. Most of the oil production

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<sup>238</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Visit of Libyan Revolutionary Command Council Chairman Qadhafi to Cairo," *Intelligence Information Cable*, 24 December 1969, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/VISIT%20OF%20LIBYAN%20REVOUTIO%5B15708350%5D.pdf>, accessed on 2 November 2022.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

in Libya was held by British and American oil corporations. Nationalizing these companies might trigger an armed response by the UK and US which would mark an end of the Libyan Revolution. This meeting appeared to be a crash course on governance for the inexperienced Qadhafi, he could not have had a better mentor than the UAR president whom he admired so much.

In regards to responding with force against Libyan nationalization, the US determined not to use force according to the minutes of the WSAG meeting on 24 November 1969. Whether the British would use force was not mentioned in the *Intelligence Information Cable* of 24 December 1969. The cable mentioned one more bit of advice from Nasser to Qadhafi. Nasser also suggested that Qadhafi replace two of his ministers because he had intelligence that they were communists.<sup>242</sup> Most of Qadhafi's ministers were civilian, only the defense and interior ministers were military officers from the RCC. Why this mattered the cable did not mention. Perhaps Nasser was suggesting the Soviet Union might have considerable influence on his government through these ministers or he knew these ministers were plotting against Qadhafi. However, as a revolutionary, Qadhafi was vehemently against communism and did not fully embrace socialism either.<sup>243</sup> He considered the Soviet Union as an imperialist power as much as the United States or Great Britain. To him socialism meant that no one owned "a lot of capital and be very rich and be able to exploit the people. Socialism does not mean the final elimination of class differences."<sup>244</sup> It was social justice not the state owning the means of production. People were able

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<sup>242</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Intelligence Information Cable*, 24 December 1969.

<sup>243</sup> Mitchell, "Islam in Colonel Qaddafi's Thought," 319; Arbab, "Engaging Libya: From Confrontation to Compliance," 141; and Yahia H. Zoubir, "Libya in US Foreign Policy: From Rogue State to Good Fellow?" *Third World Quarterly* 23 (2002): 32.

<sup>244</sup> Mitchell, "Islam in Colonel Qaddafi's Thought," 319.

to own private property and own and operate their own small businesses. His inherent “aversion to international communism” helped to avert any US concerns about the Libyan Revolution.<sup>245</sup> All this suggested Qadhafi’s political ideology was very confusing and seemed to be lukewarm regarding which economic system to pursue.

The Revolutionary Command Council had their first challenge to their rule within a few months of their establishment. Before Qadhafi’s stay in Egypt, Libyan students were expressing their dissatisfaction over the RCC’s attitude toward the student community as well as the press and the pro-Egyptian policies of the Libyan government.<sup>246</sup> According to the CIA, the students were upset over a 6 November 1969 speech by Qadhafi delivered in Benghazi. Qadhafi apparently brushed students’ concerns aside, telling them they did not need to form a student union for mediation. The CIA further reported that the students should address the RCC directly for any concerns they had. The CIA stated that “his admonition that the students should pay attention to their studies and let the government run things” did not go very well and “(t)he students found Qadhafi superficial in his approach and resented his efforts to joke about serious matters.”<sup>247</sup>

The Revolutionary Command Council sent two members to calm the students, they tried to assure them that the government were only aligned with Egypt in foreign policy and ““ideology,”” but the students did not believe them.<sup>248</sup> The RCC officers became agitated when the students demanded answers about freedom of press when the newspaper *al-Maidan* was closed.

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<sup>245</sup> Zoubir, “Libya in US Foreign Policy: From Rogue State to Good Fellow?,” 32.

<sup>246</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Dissatisfaction of Libyan Students with Attitude of Revolutionary Command Council Towards Student Community and Press with Pro-Egyptian Policies of Government,” *Intelligence Information Cable*, 2 December 1969, 1, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DISSATISFACTION%200F%20LIBYAN%5B15708339%5D.pdf>, accessed on 2 November 2022.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

The RCC officers replied that they were not there to discuss politics, the two officers had to endure the verbal of the students. The two officers finally said the students' questions would be answered by Qadhafi himself, so they demanded Qadhafi to appear.<sup>249</sup> However, Qadhafi decided not to talk to the students, but to their teachers instead in a televised program on 24 November 1969. The public's reaction was immediate, according to the CIA, many believed that Qadhafi “made a fool of himself” while attempting to manage student concerns; “(h)is personal behavior before the cameras” drew criticism.<sup>250</sup> This episode showed Qadhafi's cavalier attitude toward governance and suggested that he did not learn anything from his mentor Nasser. It also suggested that the RCC did not have complete control over the population and this might have been the beginning of the opposition movement against Qadhafi.

While not related to the students' impatience with the government, a morning cable summary from the CIA for 11 December 1969 reported an attempted coup in Libya. According to the CIA's morning cable, the RCC reported there was a coup “attempt by pro-Western military officers led by the Defense and Interior ministers.”<sup>251</sup> These were the same officers Nasser warned Qadhafi to have removed because he had intelligence suggesting they were communists.<sup>252</sup> The CIA reported that the coup was crushed and the chairman (Qadhafi) of the RCC “accused the British of supporting the plotters;” he also “commented that the visits with the US ambassador to the defense ministry, ostensibly regarding contract negotiations with an American firm,

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<sup>249</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Intelligence Information Cable*, 2 December 1969, 3-4.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>251</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Memorandum from Dave Clark to Dave McMahan, “Morning Cable Summary for 11 December 1969,” <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/MORNING%20CABLEEEEE%20SUMMARY%20%5B15708346%5D.pdf>, accessed on 2 November 2022.

<sup>252</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Intelligence Information Cable*, 24 December 1969.

occurred with such frequency as to cause wonderment.”<sup>253</sup> This attempt to remove him from power certainly reinforced Qadhafi’s belief that the foreign military bases were a vestige of colonialism and Libya would be better off without them. However, the CIA noted that Qadhafi’s views of the West as imperialist powers striving to regain days gone by when they were able to dominate countries like Libya through colonialist means did not “represent the views of the entire RCC.”<sup>254</sup> In fact, the CIA reported that much of the RCC were embarrassed by Qadhafi’s rhetoric. They were “ashamed of the insult of Libya’s Western friends. These members of the RCC plan to take steps to prevent further needless inflammation of Libya’s relations with Western countries,” according to the CIA.<sup>255</sup> The cable never mentioned what those plans were, but clearly those plans to reduce Qadhafi’s inflammatory rhetoric failed.

The CIA was not convinced that Libya would moderate its policies toward the West nor would US-Libyan relations improve. Toward the end of the year, the CIA produced *National Intelligence Estimate 36.5-69 (NIE 36.5-69)* which assessed the “short-term prospects for Libya.”<sup>256</sup> The CIA concluded that the removal of US personnel and the hand-over of Wheelus Airbase would not “guarantee good relations between Libya and the US” even if the withdrawal was to Libya’s satisfaction.<sup>257</sup> However, failure to evacuate the airbase could “seriously prejudice US interests.”<sup>258</sup> The Revolution Command Council would adopt “the Arab militant line

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<sup>253</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Morning Cable Summary for 11 December 1969.”

<sup>254</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Intelligence Information Cable*, 30 October 1969, 3.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>256</sup> “National Intelligence Estimate 36.5-69, Short-Term Prospects for Libya,” 30 December 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 50)

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

toward Israel,” and this reflected the general viewpoint of the Libyan population.<sup>259</sup> The CIA argued that Libya would seek to increase their oil revenues and Libyan largesse would help various Arab causes financially. *NIE 36.5-69* pointed out if Egypt so desired to station some of their aircraft on Libyan airfields, the RCC would have obliged.<sup>260</sup> There was doubt over Libyan willingness to provide access to the Soviets any of their military facilities.<sup>261</sup> Many of the RCC members certainly would have offered Egypt the use of their military facilities since some Egyptian troops were already there patrolling the streets of Tripoli to help keep order, but there were some members of the Revolutionary Command Council who did not idolize Nasser and were vocal in their opposition to Libya’s closeness to Egypt. Over time those members would be removed when Qadhafi felt secure in his position.

The CIA noted that the United Kingdom of Libya lasted almost two decades. The RCC overthrew the kingdom during the eighteenth year of Idris’ reign. While on the throne Idris saw “the value of British support since” they freed them from the Italian yoke.<sup>262</sup> In addition, US foreign aid kept Libya solvent until the discovery of oil, but the kingdom still relied on Western technology to extract the oil. The CIA thought it was remarkable that King Idris managed to hold “fast against the growing tide of Libyan enthusiasm for the Arab cause against Israel and risk the opprobrium as-sociated with foreign military installations on Libyan soil.”<sup>263</sup> Intelligence analysts recognized that the real power in Libya was found in the Revolutionary Command Council. The RCC was entirely made up of military officers ranging in age from 25 to 30

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<sup>259</sup> *FRUS, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, NIE 36.5-69, 1.* (Document 50)

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

years old. Most graduated from the Libyan Royal Military Academy in 1965 or 1966, meaning all of them were practically starting their military careers. Qadhafi was considered the “most powerful individual,” according to US intelligence, but he was “not the sole source of authority.”<sup>264</sup> However, calling him the most powerful individual was not accurate. This dissertation argues that he should have been labeled the most influential individual in the RCC. This was how he became so powerful in Libya; he had the ability to convince people of the validity of his argument or position on an issue. History has shown that the inexperienced in power politics are usually overthrown. This was the case during the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Mensheviks blundered during their rule; they refused to end an unpopular war with the Central Powers and they did not solve the food shortages and economic problems. Their incompetence brought the Bolshevik Coup in November 1917. By all accounts, Libya should have experienced something similar or at least incurred the wrath of a Western country which would have put an end to the RCC and possibly restore the monarchy. However, unlike Tsar Nicholas II, there were no counterrevolutionary forces fighting to restore Idris back to his throne.

The CIA sought to explain the success of the Libyan Revolution and the possible future political developments in Libya. In an intelligence memorandum dated 13 February 1970, the CIA noted that the political developments that occurred in Libya should be seen within an Arab context or the “general trends in the Middle East;” primarily “the growing involvement of all Arab states in the Palestinian issue.”<sup>265</sup> Anti-Israel sentiment increased during the Six Days War and US influence among the Arab states dramatically decreased after the sale of F-4 Phantoms to

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<sup>264</sup> *FRUS, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, NIE 35.6-69, 2.* (Document 50)

<sup>265</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum 490/70, An Intelligence Assessment of Libya,” 13 February 1970,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 53)



Israel. The CIA remarked that even the seven moderate Arab countries found it necessary to denounce the US arms sales to Israel for political expediency.<sup>266</sup> Most if not all the Arab states were hostile toward Israel. All of them claim to support the Palestinian issue, but, none of them really cared to unite against Israel and destroyed it. History shown that most tried in 1948, but their attacks were not coordinated to defeat Israel. In 1967, Israel launched a preemptive attack on Egypt, Jordan, and Syria and managed to defeat all three within six days. The CIA believed Libya would eventually become virulently hostile to Israel. Libya's oil revenue would allow it to build an adequate military to possibly defend their borders and purchase more than enough weapons. The CIA also believed that Libya would not take part in a new war against Israel because of the distance from the Jewish state, but Libya could provide money, weapons, and other supplies to the various Palestinian terrorist groups as their contribution to the struggle against Israel. This dissertation argues that this was the main motivation for Libya to sponsor terrorism, the possible destruction of Israel and the creation of a Palestinian state. The West particularly the United States would also be a target because they supported Israel's existence. This was the origin of the US's concern for Libyan-sponsored terrorism.

US intelligence analysts noted that the military officers banded together for one common purpose to overthrow King Idris because he represented "a symbol of corruption, the presence of foreign bases, and too strong pro-West stance."<sup>267</sup> According to Douglas Little, a Middle East scholar, Idris led the Sanussi brotherhood which helped the Allies to defeat the Italians during World War II. It would seem natural for Idris to have a pro-Western attitude since the British and Americans helped throw out the Italians and prepared Libya for independence which came on

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<sup>266</sup> "Intelligence Memorandum 490/70, An Intelligence Assessment of Libya", 13 February 1970, 1.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

Christmas Eve, 1951 and the 61-year-old Idris was rewarded for his assistance in defeating the Italians by making him the head of a hereditary monarchy.<sup>268</sup> There was a lack of national identity within the new country, so Islam became the glue that kept it together. Despite signing a 17-year basing agreement with Libya to maintain a strategic bomber base on the Mediterranean, the fledgling kingdom was not a priority for the United States.<sup>269</sup> Libya was becoming “a favorite target of Nasser’s Pan-Arabism or ‘Super-Arabism,’” which alarmed President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964; however, despite any problems Libya was facing, the key problem was the king himself, he surrounded himself with “fleckless cronies and fast-talking oil profiteers,” US officials had the impression Idris “did not want to be king, and did not like Libya.”<sup>270</sup> Nasser’s super-Arabism certainly attracted Qadhafi and he wanted to emulate him once in power. The fact that Nasser was his idol made the introduction of Egyptian troops into Tripoli and Benghazi to protect the Libyan Revolution easier.

In fact, Idris had no sons and he refused to “anoint his nephew Crown Prince Hasan” as the clear successor; the lack of a clear successor was bound to create a succession crisis, according to Little.<sup>271</sup> Such a crisis would spark turmoil within the country. The coup solved that problem, but raised others as the intelligence memorandum of 13 February 1970 pointed out. The RCC was full of young, inexperienced officers who lacked political or leadership skills. These officers had “vague ties to various pan-Arab ideological movements” nor had they developed a clear and agreed upon political programs.<sup>272</sup> The power structure within the Revolution-

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<sup>268</sup> Little, “To the Shores of Tripoli,” 72.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>272</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum 490/70, An Intelligence Assessment of Libya,” 13 February 1970, 1.

ary Command Council was unknown, but Qadhafi held three key offices: the RCC president, prime minister, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces; however, Qadhafi did “not appear to be all powerful.”<sup>273</sup> However, on paper he appeared to be the most powerful person in the Libyan government. He held three key positions in the government. He was the head of state and government and he commanded the Libyan military. Assuming the military was loyal to him or at the very least the officer corps, he could rule by decree and no one in the government would have been able to challenge him short of a bloody coup.

The CIA determined that the RCC operated as a collegial organization and it had both pro-and anti-Egyptian cliques within, but the pro-Egyptian clique was gaining more influence.<sup>274</sup> This dissertation argues this was due to Qadhafi’s influence, he was an adherent of Nasser’s political thought, particularly his pan-Arab ideas. Although Qadhafi did not appear all that powerful as stated above, the key position as mentioned above was his position as commander-in-chief of the Libyan armed forces. As indicated from this position he could quietly garner his power and gain the loyalty of key military officers. His patronage of those key officers and his largesse toward the defense budget would gain him loyalty within the military. One of the key ways to maintaining and retaining power within the Third World was to keep the generals happy and one of the best ways was to purchase weapons, particularly coveted weapons systems like tanks, missile systems and the latest fighter aircraft. Maintaining the loyalty of the military was the best defense against coup plotters. However, during this early period, the RCC felt Libya was vulnerable to either Western intervention or a counterrevolutionary movement within the country.

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<sup>273</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum 490/70, An Intelligence Assessment of Libya,” 13 February 1970, 1.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

In order to safeguard against either possibility, the RCC requested Egypt to station some of their troops in potential trouble spots. Nasser sent between 1500 to 2000 troops to Tripoli and Benghazi to help maintain order. In addition, the RCC sent “units of the armed forces” that may “become troublesome,” primarily the Cyrenaicans to Egypt for training or guard duty along the Suez Canal; some 2600 soldiers were already sent with another 1900 slated to depart for Egypt in late February 1970.<sup>275</sup> The CIA determined that Libya would provide financial support to the Palestinian militant groups. One of the first policy statements by the RCC was a condemnation of King Idris’ lack of support for the Palestinian cause and one of Qadhafi’s demands was that wealthy Arab states to increase financial assistance in the Palestinian struggle against Israel.<sup>276</sup> Whether this meant that Qadhafi was already supporting terrorism was not determined in *Intelligence Memorandum 490/70*. Qadhafi might have been appealing to the Muslim duty of helping other Muslims who were in need.

By March 1970, the US was considering possible action regarding Libya, suggesting that the situation in Libya or the actions of the new Libyan government required the president’s attention, or attracted the attention of senior-level officials within the US government. In a memorandum to President Nixon, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger recommended that Nixon approve a redacted option to intensify US influence within the Libyan government. Kissinger suggested four objectives in US policy toward Libya: maintenance of normal diplomatic and commercial relations, “influence Libya to maintain its independence” with a strong connection with Western Europe and “a balance rapport with the Maghreb and Libya’s eastern neighbors, including Egypt,” deny intolerable Soviet presence and “(t)o use the U.S.

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<sup>275</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum 490/70, An Intelligence Assessment of Libya,” 13 February 1970, 2.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

position in Libya to support the development of regional stability in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.”<sup>277</sup> All of the options Nixon was to consider were redacted, but they were designed to “support U.S. policies and interests in Libya.”<sup>278</sup> However, most of these objectives were doomed for failure. Libya did not need US influence to maintain its independence nor influence to deny an intolerable Soviet presence. Qadhafi was wary of the West in general and the US and he also distrusted the Soviet Union. In Qadhafi’s eyes the West was rooted in colonialism or imperialism and he feared that the West wished to reestablish colonial dominance of Libya. Libya was willing to have normal diplomatic and commercial ties to the United States if it was not to America’s advantage. Trade was to be fair or at least favorable to Libya. Nor did Libya need the US for development of regional stability. If anything, Qadhafi wished to foster instability within Israel and the moderate Arab countries because he viewed them as traitors to the Arab cause. During the immediate aftermath of the Libyan coup, the United States maintained cordial relations with the new government. However, within months the relationship soured. There are a few factors to account for this. One was America’s support for Israel. The Arab nations were angered by the sale of the F-4 Phantoms to Israel. Nixon eventually decided not to sell the F-5 fighters Idris bought before the coup, to Qadhafi’s disappointment and this renegeing of the arms sale in addition to US support for Israel, combined with Qadhafi’s anti-colonial views were the origin of Libya’s animus toward the United States.

This chapter has provided a brief historical background of US-Libyan relations after the 1 September 1969 coup. It discussed the coup itself and its aftermath and how US-Libyan

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<sup>277</sup> “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon,” 20 March 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969-1972*, Monica L. Belmonte, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 1. (Document 54)

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

relations soured because of the renegeing of an arms deal, US support for Israel and Qadhafi's anti-colonialism. The young Libyan army officers of the military junta were surprisingly successful despite their lack of experience in governing a country. The lack of leadership skill did not stop them from forming a stable government and their oil wealth allowed them to purchase weapons from mainly the Soviet Union. The RCC was also able to spread their largesse to various Palestinian radical groups and several moderate Arab countries including Egypt. The next few chapters will examine US counterterrorism efforts during the first Reagan administration. The chapters will stress that Reagan's efforts to counter terrorism should be viewed in a Cold War lens because of the close association terrorism had with the Soviet Union. Early in the first Reagan administration, the US government believed that the Soviet Union was the mastermind of a shadowy international terrorist network very much influenced by Claire Sterling's seminal 1981 book, *The Terror Network*.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981).

## Chapter Five: US Counterterrorism Efforts During the First Reagan Administration, 1981-1982

Ronald Reagan entered the presidency during a time of great turmoil. There was high inflation and unemployment. Credit was tight and interest rates were high for those eligible to borrow. The United States was in a deep recession and it was recovering from an international crisis which started fourteen months earlier in Tehran, Iran. Iran had an Islamic revolution and overthrew their reigning monarch. Students full of revolutionary zeal violated international norms by storming the US embassy and took the diplomatic and consular staff hostage. For 444 days the American people stood by helpless and watched as a ragtag group of students made the United States impotent. What made the ordeal worse was the revolutionary government of Iran endorsed this violation of international law and did nothing to help resolve the situation.

When he took the oath of office, Reagan exemplified a new hope for the country. The United States would be renewed despite the economic woes the country was enduring. His inaugural speech was full of hopeful rhetoric. The best days were still ahead but as a nation we needed to “renew our determination, our courage, and our strength. And let us renew our faith and our hope.”<sup>280</sup> The United States has prospered because it has something many nations did not have: “it was because here in this land we unleashed the energy and individual genius of man to a greater extent than has ever been done before.”<sup>281</sup> Furthermore, “(f)reedom and the dignity of the individual have been more available and assured here than in any other place on Earth.”<sup>282</sup> The main reason why the United States enjoyed such liberty, because “(w)e are a nation under God, and I believe God intended for us to be free.”<sup>283</sup> Reagan enjoyed invoking the belief that

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<sup>280</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Inaugural Address of President Ronald Reagan,” 20 January 1981, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 17 (1981): 3.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

God wanted Americans to be free, but as a nation, we were not to rest on our laurels, because freedom required diligence. Although “peace is the highest aspiration of the American people” and “(w)e will negotiate for it, sacrifice for it; we will not surrender for it now or ever.”<sup>284</sup> There were states and organizations who wished to take peace and freedom away.

Relations with the Soviet Union, an extensive defense buildup, and a response to international terrorism became the major issues for Reagan’s foreign policy. This chapter will examine Reagan’s early efforts on countering terrorism in general and specifically toward Libyan sponsored terrorism during the first Reagan administration also known as Reagan I in US foreign policy literature. These early efforts were the second pillar in action because Reagan was pressuring Qadhafi to change his behavior. Reagan started to use limited sanctions and brief military maneuvers to pressure Qadhafi. Reagan’s approach to combatting terrorism should be seen through the lens of the Cold War. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, guerrilla wars erupted throughout the Third World, many were legitimate wars of national liberation, while some were not, but one of the common factors was Soviet or Warsaw Pact support. While the United States attempted to prop up the Third World regimes under assault, with the most famous example being South Vietnam, Nixon tried to improve US-Soviet relations with the policy of *détente*. While the US negotiated the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) with the Soviets, the Nixon administration tried to link Soviet behavior with various concessions. Soviet bad behavior would have been met with a hard line, but appropriate Soviet behavior would have been awarded with a concession. When this tactic failed, Nixon flew to Beijing and met with Mao Tse-tung. The opening of China to the West alarmed the Soviets enough to make concessions and finalize

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<sup>283</sup> Reagan, “Inaugural Address of President Ronald Reagan,” 20 January 1981, 4.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



the SALT I treaty. However, détente eventually failed under Jimmy Carter. The Soviets invaded Afghanistan and caused a new Cold War.

It is under this context that Reagan's efforts to combat terrorism should be seen. US counterterrorism efforts were an extension of US Cold War policies. Reagan came into office during this period of heightened tensions and he believed that the Soviets not only supported guerrilla wars, but also terrorism. There was a popular notion that the Soviet Union was the mastermind of international terrorism. Popularized by Claire Sterling's 1981 book *The Terror Network*, according to Sterling, the Soviets were the head of a shadowy terrorist network.<sup>285</sup> The takeaway from the book for many people was that the Soviets organized, equipped, provided intelligence, targets, and orders for this amorphous terrorist network, but despite the lack of available evidence of the Soviets being the mastermind of a terrorist network, her book impressed the new Secretary of State Alexander Haig.<sup>286</sup>

The first National Security Council meeting of the Reagan administration was on terrorism and it was determined during this meeting that the United States was vulnerable.<sup>287</sup> Edwin Meese, the new Counselor for the White House argued that President Jimmy Carter and his Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner placed "to(o) much restraint" on the intelligence community to be effective on investigating terrorist groups, but FBI Director William H. Webster disagreed.<sup>288</sup> He argued that the intelligence agencies had to be careful on the proce-

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<sup>285</sup> Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981).

<sup>286</sup> Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005, originally 1987), 65.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

dures of catching spies and terrorists.<sup>289</sup> He might have been mindful of the Church Committee hearings on the activities of the CIA. The Church Committee investigated charges of abuse by the CIA such as sanctioned assassination attempts on world leaders like Fidel Castro and potential allegations of torture. The CIA could no longer operate within the United States, the FBI and the Department of Justice was charged with taking the lead during a terrorist attack within the country.<sup>290</sup> The FBI helped train several Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams, the very first was organized within the Los Angeles Police Department, and formed a 50-man Hostage Rescue Teams (HRT) to conduct counterterrorism operations similar to the British Special Air Service (SAS) Operation Nimrod at Prince's Gate in London in 1980.<sup>291</sup>

Shortly after his inauguration, Reagan announced the release of the American hostages in Tehran. The last official act of President Jimmy Carter was the order to restring the National Community Christmas Tree to greet the freed American hostages home. Reagan held several White House events to celebrate the return of the freed American hostages. During one of his remarks, Reagan warned not only terrorists but also countries that had been sponsoring terrorism: “(l)et terrorists be aware that when the rules of international behavior are violated, our policy will be one of swift and effective retribution. We hear it said that we live in an era of limited powers. Well, let it also be understood, there are limits to our patience.”<sup>292</sup> This was a powerful

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<sup>289</sup> Woodward, *Veil*, 64.

<sup>290</sup> The White House, “Managing Terrorist Incidents,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 30*, 10 April 1982, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/scanned-nsdds/nsdd30.pdf>, accessed on 30 June 2022.

<sup>291</sup> Marc A. Celmer, *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1987), 42-43, Jane Rippeteau, “Police Plan Special Units: Area SWAT Units Trained for Emergencies,” *The Washington Post*, 7 April 1975, (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University), “SWAT teams, no longer a secret, now must deal with criticism,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 July 1975, (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University), and Eitan Meyr, “Special Report I: SWAT, Tactical Response to Terrorism: The Concept and Application,” *Law and Order* 47 (1999): 44-47. (ProQuest search, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>292</sup> The White House, “Freed American Hostages: Remarks at a White House Ceremony,” 27 January 1981,

warning to the terrorists and their state-supporters that the United States would not tolerate their attacks. However, despite the rhetoric, the United States did not seek retribution on Iran.

Reagan later said, “I’m certainly not thinking of revenge, I don’t think revenge is worthy of us” and Secretary of State Alexander Haig had “acknowledged that Reagan’s retribution warning was ‘consciously ambiguous,’ apparently to avoid limiting potential U.S. responses to terrorism.”<sup>293</sup>

This was smart policymaking, the US did not want to be forced into an ill-advised position which may lead to either a backlash or a response from the other superpower. The United States wanted to avoid a confrontation with the Soviet Union since Reagan was convinced the Soviets were in a better strategic position than the United States. At the same time, this was a powerful warning to states like Libya that supported terrorism. The United States would use their second pillar of US counterterrorism policy to pressure them from sponsoring terrorism; if the pressure did not persuade them to stop, using force would have given them pause, but this would have been a last resort in a coercive diplomacy strategy.

Haig held his first news conference on 28 January 1981. While discussing Soviet conduct in the Western Hemisphere and in Africa, Haig said, “We have seen in that process the exploitation of the Cuban proxy, and I can assure you that this is the subject of utmost concern for this Administration, it is a subject which will be high on the priority of our national security and foreign policy agenda.”<sup>294</sup> He stipulated further, “I would suggest also that on additional subject related intimately to this, in the conduct of Soviet activity and in terms of training, funding, and

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*Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 17 (1981): 49.

<sup>293</sup> Richard Whittle, “Reagan Promises Retribution Against Future Terrorists, But Not Revenge Against Iran,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 39 (1981): 220.

<sup>294</sup> “Editorial Note,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983*, James Graham Wilson, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2016), 1. (Document 7)

equipping, is international terrorism.”<sup>295</sup> Haig declared that ““international terrorism will take the place of human rights’ as the priority” in American foreign policy.<sup>296</sup> The possible reason for replacing human rights as the main concern in foreign policy was the record of Carter’s foreign policy. Human rights were the main concern in Carter’s foreign policy and he gauged rewarding foreign assistance, particularly military assistance on the human rights record of the recipient, Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua was a prime example. Carter cut all aid to Nicaragua and the result was the collapse of the Somoza regime in 1979. The Sandinistas replaced Somoza and started a communist regime. Carter was also critical of the Shah of Iran, but he still supported his government because of the geopolitical position of his country. Iran was a major bulwark against Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf region. However, the United States was clueless about the political stability of the country. The CIA was caught flat-footed when the revolution in Iran occurred.

Haig’s tone during the press conference gave the impression of an administration that would be more assertive in foreign policymaking. He carefully made it clear that any foreign policy decisions were made by the president, but the cabinet-level secretaries would have the opportunity to consult with the president within the National Security Council, suggesting that his advisors would have an equal voice during the policymaking process.<sup>297</sup> Haig accused the Soviets of supporting terrorism, he said the Soviets consciously pursued a “policy of ‘training, funding and equipping’” terrorists.<sup>298</sup> He also stated that the Soviets should not do anything

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<sup>295</sup> “Editorial Note,” *FRUS, Volume III, January 1981-January 1983*, 1. (Document 7)

<sup>296</sup> Don Oberdorfer, “Haig Calls Terrorism Top Priority: Human Rights Goals Demoted as Concern of Foreign Policy,” *The Washington Post*, 29 January 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

controversial since the administration was conducting a thorough foreign policy review and would not commit itself to any initiatives.<sup>299</sup>

The news media was surprised by Haig's announcement about the deemphasis of human rights and that anti-terrorism was taking priority. Haig justified the new foreign policy by saying that "terrorism 'is the ultimate in abuse of human rights.'"<sup>300</sup> This might have been a dig at Carter's lackluster foreign policy performance. Carter wanted to emphasize human rights and placed such high moral standards on countries that did not have the same cultural background as the United States. What might be considered a human right in the United States might have been considered a luxury that did not reflect realities of life for others. The secretary of state was suggesting that the activities of terrorists like kidnapping, skyjacking, and bombings were just as bad as the extralegal activities of some Third World police and military forces. It was not lost on Haig that these extralegal activities were the result of left-wing terrorism, for example, the military responses in Uruguay in the 1970s. He announced that military assistance to El Salvador, a Central American country suffering through a guerrilla war, would not be cut and might see an increase and the US was concerned about the military activities of Libya in Chad. "A grave turn of events" in Chad were being carefully watched by the United States according to Haig.<sup>301</sup> Overall, Haig had a successful press conference, he was able to answer questions from the press without any notes. Haig reinforced the notion that the Reagan administration was focusing on terrorism from the very beginning. From the celebration of the returning Iranian hostages to Haig's press conference, there were references of terrorism being the scourge of civilized dis-

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<sup>299</sup> Oberdorfer, *WP*, 29 January 1981.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

course and it should be eradicated.

Haig wrote a memorandum to Reagan about a discussion with the Soviet ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin which occurred about a week after his first press conference. He informed the ambassador that the United States did not want to return to a Cold War atmosphere and the US would like to see some form of restraint by the Soviets and “the first order of business would be the need to establish criteria for standards of international conduct.”<sup>302</sup> Haig pressed the Soviets on their support of terrorism and to rein in Cuban subversive activities.<sup>303</sup> The Soviets, in turn, were ‘extraordinarily’ sensitive to the charge of being a “worldwide sponsor of terrorism,” Haig reported in his memorandum.<sup>304</sup> Richard Pipes of the National Security Council Staff reported that the Soviets feared his accusations because it would “pave the way for identifying so-called ‘national liberation movements’” as terrorist groups and be “universally condemned” despite “considerable European and Third World sympathy.”<sup>305</sup> However, the US ambassador to the Soviet Union Jack Matlock doubted there was evidence available on Soviet support for terrorism, but he believed it was “unwise to accept either the Soviet definition of ‘national liberation’ movements or the right the Soviets have arrogated to themselves to determine whether a particular group fits the definition.”<sup>306</sup> He believed that any group that actively promoted terrorism for political ends was a terrorist group and providing such groups with aid,

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<sup>302</sup> “Memorandum from Secretary of State Haig to President Reagan,” 6 February 1981, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983*, James Graham Wilson, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2016), 1. (Document 16)

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> “Memorandum from Richard Pipes of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Allen),” 24 February 1981, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983*, James Graham Wilson, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2016), 1. (Document 21)

financial or otherwise, was aiding terrorism and the ambassador believed that the Soviets were “clearly guilty of aiding terrorism.”<sup>307</sup>

The accusation of sponsoring terrorism drew Soviet protests, but Matlock believed the Soviets “tolerated” training of terrorists in countries such as North Korea.<sup>308</sup> North Korea allowed the “transit of ‘students’ and instructors through the USSR;” in other words, the Soviets may be guilty of “passive support.”<sup>309</sup> Matlock also argued that “covert propaganda” could also be considered as support of terrorism.<sup>310</sup> Why was this propaganda covert? Would it not be better if the propaganda was overt? The idea of propaganda is to convince people to support a certain cause or policy. Possibly what Matlock meant by “covert propaganda” was the dissemination of print materials to terrorist groups for training purposes and indoctrination. These materials may be in the form of military manuals on how to set up ambushes or conduct a raid on a military post or on the use of explosives. It should be noted that these materials can be typed, photocopied, and handed out in secret, there was no need for a publisher since the information within these materials were secret. For example, the major publisher of unique titles at the time, Paladin Press, offered the Australian Military Forces, *Patrolling and Tracking* and the US Army published the *Ranger Handbook* which provided information on demolitions, survival, and combat intelligence. The *Ranger Handbook* was available for purchase or could be obtained by

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<sup>306</sup> “Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State,” 17 February 1981, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988. Volume III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983*, James Graham Wilson, ed. (Washington, DC: United State Government Printing Office, 2016), 1. (Document 20)

<sup>307</sup> “Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State,” 17 February 1981, *FRUS*, 1. (Document 20)

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

any cadet in any university that offered the Army Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC) program.<sup>311</sup> While these materials listed above are available for purchase, the materials the Soviets or Warsaw Pact were providing were secret and if they were uncovered would expose their support for terrorism.<sup>312</sup>

The propaganda Matlock was referring would have been spread by the print media and through television and the film industry. For example, Costa-Gavras, a Greek-French film director, directed the 1973 French language film *State of Siege* which dramatized the kidnapping and execution by the Tupamaros of the fictional Paul Michael Santore who worked for the Agency for International Development as an expert in communications and traffic control. The Tupamaros was seen in a favorable light while Santore, who was the fictionalized version of Dan Mitrone, was accused of teaching torture techniques to the Uruguayan police.<sup>313</sup> The film did not show the aftermath of the Tupamaros killing Mitrone. There was a public backlash against the

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<sup>311</sup> Australian Military Forces, *Patrolling and Tracking* (Boulder: Paladin Press, nd) and United States Army, *ST 21-75-2 Ranger Handbook* (Ft. Benning: Ranger Department, United States Army Infantry School, 1980). Most Army ROTC battalions generally have a Ranger platoon and the *Ranger Handbook* is generally distributed among the cadet Rangers.

<sup>312</sup> The writer purchased the Paladin Press publication in the 1980s and was a member of the Raider Platoon, Yellow Jacket Brigade at Kemper Military School and College during the 1985-1986 academic year and a candidate for the Ranger Platoon, Titan Battalion at University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh during the 1986-1987 academic year.

<sup>313</sup> Memo, From Gene Methvin to Dick Allen, "A Needed USG Response to International Terrorism," 18 February 1981, folder "Terrorism February-March 1981," Executive Secretariat, NSC: Subject Files: Records, 1981-1985, Box 110, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/execsecsubject/box-110/40-753-12026-365-110-010-2018.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2022, 5; Ernest W. Lefever, "Murder in Montevideo: the AID/Mitrone story," *Freedom at Issue*, September/October 1973, folder "Terrorism February-March 1981," Executive Secretariat, NSC: Subject Files: Records, 1981-1985, Box 110, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/execsecsubject/box-110/40-753-12026365-110-010-2018.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2022; A. J. Langguth, "American Resist Evidence U.S. Taught Torture Methods Abroad," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 17 June 1979, "Terrorism February-March 1981," Executive Secretariat, NSC: Subject Files: Records, 1981-1985, Box 110, <https://www.reagan.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/execsecsubject/box-110/40-753-12026365-110-010-2018.pdf>, accessed 14 June 2022; and A. J. Langguth, "Torture's Teachers," *The New York Times*, 11 June 1979, folder "Terrorism February-March 1981," Executive Secretariat, NSC: Subject Files: Records, 1981-1985, Box 110, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/execsecsubject/box-110/40-753-12026365-110-010-2018.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2022.



Tupamaros and the only liberal democratic government in South America collapsed. The military took over the government and crushed the Tupamaros.<sup>314</sup>

The film was the overt kind of influence or propaganda, telling the audience that the Tupamaro cause was just and the United States was an imperialist nation teaching Uruguayan police torture. This accusation of teaching torture was by A. J. Langguth, the author of *Hidden Terrors*, a book about CIA activity throughout Latin America.<sup>315</sup> Langguth argued that an American operative named Jesse Leaf claimed the CIA sent operatives to Iran to teach SAVAK, Iranian secret police, interrogation methods which included the use of torture.<sup>316</sup> Langguth also claimed that the CIA was teaching torture techniques in Uruguay and Mitriane was “notorious throughout Latin America.”<sup>317</sup> He came by this claim through a manuscript written by a Cuban double agent, Manuel Hevia Cosculluela. Langguth tried to locate him in Havana, but he was conveniently out of the country. However, his publisher loaned him the manuscript which accused Mitriane of teaching torture and Langguth took what he read as truthful rather than finding it suspect since he was unable to confirm the allegations with other sources.<sup>318</sup> The United States also conducting propaganda especially during the height of Cold War. There were many news reels discussing the issues of the time and how dangerous the spread of communism was. Hollywood also did their part. One of the most pro-war films produced during the 1960s was the feature film *The Green Berets* starring John Wayne. The film followed the exploits of a US

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<sup>314</sup> Stephen Goode, *Guerrilla Warfare and Terrorism* (New York and London: Franklin Watts, 1977) and Costa-Gavras, *State of Siege*, feature film, 1973.

<sup>315</sup> Langguth, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 17 June 1979 and *NYT*, 11 June 1979.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

Army Special Forces A-team during the Vietnam Conflict. Propaganda films against terrorism did not occur until the 1980s, the major broadcast news outlets produced shows on terrorism and how danger it was to US citizens. The content of these shows was designed to frighten the public.

The Reagan administration was moving to form the Working Group on Terrorism which was designed to help reduce inefficiency on terrorism reaction. The administration established four additional working groups on technical support, exercises, training assistance and public diplomacy. The Working Group on Exercises was a training tool for the crisis management team. The Working Group on Exercises was to create crisis management exercises which involved interagency interaction.<sup>319</sup> The Reagan administration was hard pressed to provide evidence of Soviet support of terrorism. Haig did not provide any direct evidence like Soviet internal documents to link them to sponsoring terrorism; however, since the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union itself, the national archives of Russia and the former Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) or popularly known as the Warsaw Pact countries have opened to Western scholars. For example, there is an East German document on a meeting in Tripoli on 16 February 1979 between Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi and the East German Chairman of the State Council or head of the government, Erich Honecker. In his meeting with the East German leader, the geopolitical position of Libya was discussed and it was determined that Qadhafi was surrounded by enemies. Egypt alone built three new military bases along the Libyan-Egyptian border and had stationed 250,000 soldiers there which dwarfed the roughly 40,000 of the Libyan military. Egypt also had “an additional 750,000” soldiers “in the hinterland.”<sup>320</sup> In addition to

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<sup>319</sup> Marc A. Celmer, *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1987), 23.

Egypt, Sudan was hostile to Libya and had similar policies as Egypt. In Chad, there were two guerilla groups that were hostile to FROLINAT which was supported by Libya. Niger was not hostile, but it was under French influence and the only peaceful border was with Algeria. The US 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet patrolled the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>321</sup> The East Germans concluded that Libya was surrounded by enemies and had relatively few friends in the region. This conclusion suggested that Libya was extremely vulnerable to attack especially by a combined force of Egyptians and Sudanese with air support by the US 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet. The Egyptians would have supplied the main force for an invasion of Libya and the two aircraft carriers the US 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet had would have eliminated the Libyan air force and any surface threats posed by the Libyan navy.

The East Germans concluded that Libya needed heavy weapons to defend itself because Egypt was receiving arms from the US, UK, France, but also from China, Yugoslavia and Romania, a Warsaw Pact member state. The East German Ministry of National Defense discussed certain issues which included water infiltration plants, transportable container filling stations and Strela (surface-to-air) missile launchers. Qadhafi explained that Hungary was supplying Libya with field hospitals and informed Honecker that relations existed with Iran, but he did not know Khomeini personally; however, Libya provided considerable sums of money to the Iranian Revolution.<sup>322</sup> He also asked Honecker to ask the presidents of Angola, Mozambique, and Zambia to send their “‘people’s forces’ for military training to Libya and Libya would cover the

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<sup>320</sup> “Note about the Meeting between Comrades Erich Honecker and Muammar al-Qadhafi on 16 February 1979 in Tripoli,” February 16, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAPMO-BA J IV/857. Contributed by Stefan Meining and translated by Bernd Schaefer. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110280>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>321</sup> “Note about the Meeting between Comrades Erich Honecker and Muammar al-Qadhafi on 16 February 1979 in Tripoli.”

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

costs for the training.”<sup>323</sup> The Libyans “agreed in principle to form such units” and these units could be deployed where needed, but these units were not considered regular army formations.<sup>324</sup> It was not specified if these units were guerrilla formations or terrorist organizations. This was an interesting document showing a former Warsaw Pact nation discussing the distribution of supplies to Libya. Some of these supplies were dangerous weapons and the document suggested that Libya was actively involved in the training and supporting of terrorist organizations or at least the potential of supporting such activities.

Another document that tied the Eastern bloc to terrorism was the minutes of a meeting between a representative of the Hungarian Interior Ministry and officials from the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry in Prague on 25 April 1981. This document showed Romanian collusion with terrorists and the concern of the Hungarians and the Czechoslovaks regarding Romanian support of terrorism and the affect it would have on their image to the rest of the world. The Romanians were supporting the activities of the infamous Carlos the Jackal (Illich Ramirez Sanchez) and his terrorist group “Hands of the World Revolution.”<sup>325</sup> The Romanians provided Carlos’ terrorist group with weapons, explosives, training, and passports of Warsaw Pact member countries.<sup>326</sup> Carlos repaid Romanian largesse with the bombing Romanian emigrants in Western Europe including the writer Nicolas Penescu in Paris on 5 February 1981.<sup>327</sup> The Hands of the World

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> “Minutes of Meeting between Czechoslovak and Hungarian Interior Ministry Officials on the Carlos Terrorist Group and Radio Free Europe Bomb Attack,” April 25, 1981, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AMV C, H-720/svazek c. 4, listy 281-285. Obtained by Prokop Tomek. Translated by Blanka Pasternak. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121525>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

Revolution, Carlos' group, bombed the Czechoslovak broadcasting service of Radio Free Europe in Munich on 21 February 1981 and the Romanian Interior Ministry expressed their satisfaction with the bombing results.<sup>328</sup> The Hungarians and the Czechoslovaks were concerned about the bombing because the Swiss authorities arrested a known associate of Carlos who had knowledge of his (Carlos') activities and had knowledge of the Romanians sponsoring the attack. The Hungarians and Czechs feared this would put a negative light on the socialist countries.<sup>329</sup> The Hungarians informed the Soviets and the entire Warsaw Pact that the Carlos was no longer welcome in Hungary. Carlos was staying in Budapest; the Hungarian authorities asked him to leave and not come back. According to the document, "Libya's and Syria's favorable approach to the Carlos group will be taken into consideration" since Carlos was planning an operation against President Sadat of Egypt for Libya.<sup>330</sup> This document was very interesting because it illustrated the concern Warsaw Pact nations had over international terrorism, but at the same time it was proof that the Warsaw Pact was providing weapons, training, sanctuary, and other supplies to terrorist organizations. This document suggested that these two Warsaw Pact countries were also conscious of Libya and Syria's dealings with Carlos. He provided important services to Qadhafi and Assad and he allowed them to have plausible deniability, especially considering the Reagan administration's rhetoric about terrorism. Libya was clearly discussing issues with several Warsaw Pact countries that were related to terrorist activities. The fact that these Warsaw Pact nations were colluding with Libya in the training, supplying, and equipping terrorists and providing these groups with sanctuary was a very real threat to the Reagan administration. These

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> "Minutes of Meeting between Czechoslovak and Hungarian Interior Ministry Officials."

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

documents also vindicated the Reagan administration's belief that the Soviets were secretly supporting terrorism.

Meanwhile, in the US government apparatus, the administration had a meeting to discuss several subjects like Soviet weapons shipments to Nicaragua, Japanese auto imports and other issues. Defense Secretary Weinberger asked if the administration should inform the Soviets about the comprehensive policy review that was underway. Haig replied that it would be a mistake speaking with Dobrynin until the administration developed a plan of action. Haig was going to meet with the Soviet ambassador to discuss subjects like terrorism and Cuban behavior, but he did not clarify in the memorandum of conversation on 19 March 1981. Weinberger concurred with Haig, saying Dobrynin was extremely clever and "he did not want to talk to him until the Administration had a policy."<sup>331</sup> There was no clarification by Haig that this memorandum was a conversation between Dobrynin and himself or if it was a National Security Council briefing the president received every day. Reagan used these briefings to help formulate policy. This document stressed a discussion on Cuba and Haig believed "the United States had to play 'two balancing games'—dealing with Cuba and helping the Egyptians against Libya."<sup>332</sup> Again Haig did not clarify what he meant. Both Cuba and Libya were not substantial countries and despite the rhetoric coming from the Reagan administration, they really were not major threats to the United States. Both countries were relatively weak compared to the United States. Libya was politically isolated and much maligned by its neighbors and Cuba had a stagnate economy and it was propped up by the Soviet Union. Libya was a clear supporter of terrorism and Cuba was

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<sup>331</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation," 19 March 1981, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983*, James Graham Wilson, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2016), 2. (Document 31)

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

suspected of supporting terrorism. Cuba was eventually added to the Secretary of State's list of state supporters of terrorism. The reason for Cuba's inclusion on this list was Castro's penchant for supporting national liberation movements. During the 1960s, Cuba wanted to export their revolution to the rest of Latin America and sent some of their veteran revolutionaries to organize guerrilla movements throughout Latin America. The most famous veteran was Che Guevara, who died in Bolivia in 1967.

A few weeks later Haig did meet with Dobrynin to discuss several topics which included Poland, arms control, and the Middle East. When Cuba came up in the conversation, Haig reminded Dobrynin that the US was determined that the Soviet influence Cuba to change their behavior in the Western Hemisphere and elsewhere (possibly alluding to a Cuban military presence in Africa) and he also asked the Soviets to work with others to change Libyan policies. Apparently Dobrynin was "unconcerned about Libya" and he called Qadhafi "a mad man."<sup>333</sup> The Soviets wanted to keep their distance from Qadhafi because of his behavior appeared irrational at times. As Dobrynin was alluding to, only a mad man could barely muster enough troops to take on the US Marine Corps would pick a fight with a superpower. The Soviets enjoyed the hard currency Qadhafi used to purchase weapons, but that was the extent of the Libyan-Soviet relationship at this point.

As the Reagan administration was coming up with new policies, Libyan-sponsored terrorism reached American shores late in March 1981. *The Washington Post* reported Americans teaching terrorism in Libyan camps.<sup>334</sup> Haig requested an investigation regarding Ameri-

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<sup>333</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary of State Haig to President Reagan," 3 April 1981, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume III, Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983*, James Graham Wilson, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2016), 1. (Document 38)

<sup>334</sup> "Haig Asks Probes of Report of American Teaching Terrorism: Account Describing Sale of Skills, Knowledge to Libyans," *The Washington Post*, 24 March 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

cans selling their knowledge and skill to train Libyans in terrorist practices. *The Washington Post* in the 24 March 1981 edition reported that between 1976 to 1979, there were Americans teaching this kind of training and these trainers believed the US government knew about their activities.<sup>335</sup> However, knowing about these activities was not the same as endorsing or supporting them. These Americans trained eleven Libyans who were responsible for assassinating Libyan dissidents in Europe in 1980.<sup>336</sup> The Americans who were selling their skills to Libya were former CIA agents, special forces operators, and US corporations willing to sell their products.<sup>337</sup> During the 1980s, it was not uncommon to find advertisements in the back of *Gung Ho!* and *Soldier of Fortune* magazines offering civilians military training for a price. Training could be over a weekend or as much as a month. Training included jungle warfare, commando-type training, weapons training, how to conduct ambushes and raids. One company offered airborne jump training and students jumped out of a C-47 transport. One American connected to Libyan terrorism was a 25-year veteran of the US Marine and US Army Special Forces, Eugene A. Tafoya who was arrested on 22 April 1981 for the attempted murder of Colorado State University graduate student Faisal Zagallai.<sup>338</sup> Tafoya was recruited by Francis Edward Terpil, a former Central Intelligence Agency officer. Terpil was fired from the CIA for boasting and boorish behavior.<sup>339</sup> This incident demonstrated Qadhafi's reach and how Libyan money could

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> *WP*, 24 March 1981.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Bernard D. Nossiter, "Qadhafi Tied to Shooting of Libyan in U.S.," *The New York Times*, 24 May 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.



influence an American citizen to conduct acts of terrorism within the borders of his country which made the Libyan leader extremely dangerous.

This attack and many others like it around the world prompted the Reagan administration to consider closing the Libyan People's Bureau in Washington and expelling the Libyan diplomatic staff out of the country as well. It was not decided to take this sort of action, but the US government was still deliberating. The president was very close to a decision.<sup>340</sup> Michael Gelter and Joe Pichirallo of the *Washington Post* reported on the 6 May 1981 edition that the FBI might play a role in the expulsion of the Libyan diplomats like the role it played during the expulsion of the Iranians during the hostage crisis in 1979, once the president made the decision.<sup>341</sup> However, Qadhafi was interested in improving relations with the United States, but the administration objected because of his support for international terrorism. The closing of the People's Bureau would have been a way for the US to show their displeasure toward Libya's foreign policy and their army's foray into Chad. In an interview with CBS News correspondent Walter Cronkite, Reagan "mentioned Qadhafi by name in conjunction with communist-bloc nations attempting to export terrorism to El Salvador."<sup>342</sup> The Libyan ambassador Ali Ahmed Houderi feigned ignorance of any US move to expel them. He said, "We're not anticipating anything, but if anything should happen we would abide by it."<sup>343</sup> He did take issue with the US accusation of Libyan support of terrorism. Houderi said that Libya condemned terrorism and that the American critics were confusing support for national liberation movements as terrorism.<sup>344</sup> There were several

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<sup>340</sup> Michael Getler and Joe Pichirallo, "U.S. Weighing Expulsion of Libyan Aides," *The Washington Post*, 6 May 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>341</sup> Getler and Pichirallo, *NYT*, 6 May 1981.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*

guerrilla movements still operating during the 1980s like the Khmer Rouge, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) of El Salvador. Some of these national liberation movements used terrorism, particularly the guerrilla movements in Rhodesia. US critics understood the difference between a guerrilla and a terrorist. Therefore, the Libyan ambassador was clearly avoiding facts or lying to portray Libya as a victim of US aggression.

The decision to close the Libyan People's Bureau came on 6 May 1981. The United States cited "unacceptable" international behavior which ran counter to "international accepted standards of diplomatic" practice.<sup>345</sup> Among the list of complaints were the murder of Qadhafi's opponents and "Libyan activities in Chad, the Sudan and Egypt."<sup>346</sup> The Libyan mission at the United Nations would not be affected by the expulsion of the Libyan diplomats of the Washington People's Bureau. The US embassy in Tripoli had been closed since 1980, because it was ransacked and burned in December 1979 by a mob in support of the Iranian revolutionaries.<sup>347</sup> There were concerns over the 2000 Americans living and working in Libya. Despite US concerns, Qadhafi had good relations with the US oil companies because he relied on their expertise and American technology. Regardless of Qadhafi's good relations with US oil companies, the Reagan administration wanted American employees working in Libya to leave.<sup>348</sup> The US government wanted the US workers to leave Libya because Reagan worried that they

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Expels Libyans and Closes Mission, Charging Terrorism: Washington Cites 'Unacceptable' Behavior, Including Murders and African Intervention," *The New York Times*, 7 May 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

could become potential hostages for Qadhafi and US diplomatic facilities were closed which made protecting US citizens extremely difficult. Diplomatic relations between the US and Libya were not disrupted as the result of the expulsion of the Libyan diplomats, but it made diplomatic communications very difficult. However, the closing of the People's Bureau and the expulsion of its diplomatic staff was a warning to Qadhafi to change his policies on supporting terrorism and follow the accepted norms of international behavior. Failure to do so would cause harsher measures to have been implemented, but the presence of American workers in Libya complicated US efforts to curb Libyan-sponsored terrorism.

Every year during the 1980s, the United States Government (USG) published a short document called *Gist* and many different topics were published under this title. One of the topics discussed was international terrorism. In the June 1981 edition, the US listed Libya as a country that "have directly supported or condoned" terrorist acts and international terrorism "has resulted in fear and suffering throughout the world" and just importantly it has disrupted diplomatic activities and international business practices.<sup>349</sup> The document has a telephone number for the State Department's Office of Security for businesses to call for information on terrorist threats to American businesses and there was a telephone number for private citizens to call for travel information. The document also had a brief section on the "no concession" policy of the US government.<sup>350</sup> This document and Reagan's comments on Libya showed that Libya was attracting more and more attention by mid-1981.

In fact, Reagan wrote about his concerns in his diary, he included policy deliberations, conversations with staff, world leaders and his cabinet secretaries, and any complaints he had.

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<sup>349</sup> US Department of State, "International Terrorism," *Gist*, June 1981. (U.S. Federal Documents, Depository Copy, Polk Library, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh)

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

He wrote in his diary that he ordered naval maneuvers in the southern Mediterranean Sea in the area Qadhafi declared as Libyan territorial waters. Reagan wrote, “I’m not being foolhardy, but he’s a madman.”<sup>351</sup> There was no event to spark the decision to launch this military maneuver, but Reagan did complain about Libya harassing US planes over international waters and it was “time to show the other nations there Egypt, Morocco, et al that there is different management here.”<sup>352</sup> The last time the US conducted maneuvers in the south Mediterranean was during the Carter administration and Reagan believed it was time to conduct maneuvers again. The United States routinely held maneuvers in the Gulf of Sidra since Qadhafi’s declaration of the gulf being Libyan territorial waters in 1973. These maneuvers played two roles, as a training exercise and a freedom of navigation operation. The Department of Defense had to plan the operation and made sure the naval task force was in position in the Mediterranean Sea and adequate supplies were in place before the maneuvers could begin. This could have been part of the training exercise, testing the Defense Department’s ability to plan and execute a military operation, an operation that might be necessary in the near future. These maneuvers were the August 1981 freedom of navigation operations which resulted in Libya’s first military challenge against the US military.

On 31 July 1981, Reagan had a NSC briefing discussing what he called the “naval games” that were to take place in the Gulf of Sidra. He wrote in his diary, “We’ll find out how serious Khaddaffi is about claiming half in Mediterranean for himself.”<sup>353</sup> About a week later he met with Anwar al-Sadat, the President of Egypt. Reagan informed him about the upcoming

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<sup>351</sup> Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, Douglas Brinkley, ed. (New York and London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 22.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>353</sup> Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 34.

naval maneuvers in the Mediterranean and the fleet was going to cross the “Khaddaffi line into the Gulf of Sidra.”<sup>354</sup> Essentially telling Sadat that he was going to antagonize Qadhafi. Apparently, Sadat could not contain his enthusiasm because he nearly shouted “magnificent!”<sup>355</sup>

During naval maneuvers, it was common practice for the US Navy to launch several combat air patrols (CAPs) some distance from the task force. The purpose of these CAPs was to protect the fleet from naval and air threats. The CAPs would intercept any threats approaching the fleet and at the same time provide the fleet the opportunity to launch reinforcements to help drive the threat away or eliminate it. On 19 August 1981, there were reports of two Libyan SU-22 fighters firing ATOLL missiles at two US Navy F-14s, sixty miles from the Libyan coast. The two pilots of the F-14s witnessed the lead Libyan fighter launch a missile at them. The two Navy jets took evasive action and proceeded to shoot down both Libyan fighters with one Sidewinder missile each.<sup>356</sup> The Pentagon called the incident an “unprovoked attack” since the American jets were in international waters and this was the first exercise in the Gulf of Sidra since 1979. However, this was not the first time Libyan’s shot at US aircraft. The first time occurred in 1973 when two Libyan fighters shot at an American C-130 transport. Fortunately, the US plane escaped, suffering no damage.

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<sup>354</sup> Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 34.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, “U.S. Reports Shooting Down 2 Libya Jets That Attacked F-14s over Mediterranean: Warning Is Issued: Washington Asserts Any New Assaults Will Be Resisted by Force,” *The New York Times*, 20 August 1981, (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University), Don Oberdorfer, “U.S. Has Sought to Pressure Qaddafi: Opposition to Libyan Leader Planned by Reagan Administration,” *The Washington Post*, 20 August 1981, (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University), and Howel Raines, “President Defends Libyan Encounter As ‘Impressive’ Act: First Public Comments: Reagan Vows to Press Policy of Prompt Retaliation for Attacks on Americans,” *The New York Times*, 21 August 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

Egypt denied any troop maneuvers on the Egyptian-Libyan border.<sup>357</sup> Qadhafi might have thought the US and Egypt were plotting to remove him with a joint invasion. Sadat wanted to dispel that notion. There were no plans to eliminate Qadhafi; however, it could have been an effective plan to use troops from Egypt, Sudan, and Chad with naval air support from the United States and possible off-shore naval gun support from one of the Iowa-class battleships. Such an action was never considered by the Reagan administration because Qadhafi would have gained sympathy from the Arab world and US officials believed that the moderate Arab countries would have rallied to his side and made Egypt a target for terrorist attacks.

Libya did pass a protest note over the US maneuvers to the Belgian embassy in Tripoli. Belgium represented US diplomatic interests in Libya and the US passed a protest note to the Libyans also over the unprovoked dogfight. One State Department official essentially said the Libyans proceeded to reject the US protest note and the US rejected theirs.<sup>358</sup> Haig stated to reporters that the incident showed US deterrent policy against terrorism in practice. The destruction of the Libyan jets was “a demonstration of U.S. policy to deter the Soviet Union and its clients from military adventures.”<sup>359</sup> Deterrence was usually regarded as a policy to guarantee neither side would launch nuclear weapons because enough nuclear weapons would survive to launch a retaliatory strike causing unacceptable losses for both sides. Conventional weapons normally did not deter the Soviets from military adventures; the Cuban Missile Crisis bears witness to this fact. What should have alarmed the Soviets was the ease the F-14s had in shoot-

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<sup>357</sup> “Egyptians Deny Maneuvers,” *The New York Times*, 20 August 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>358</sup> John Kifner, “Tripoli, in a Protest Note, Accuses U.S. of ‘International Terrorism,’” *The New York Times*, 20 August 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>359</sup> Henry Trewbitt, “Haig says Libyan incident showed deterrence policy,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 August 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

ing down the Soviet-made SU-22s. The United States claimed to have evidence of Libyan malfeasance. The US claimed to have audio recordings of the Libyan pilots. The lead Libyan pilot was heard saying in Arabic, “I am preparing to fire,” followed by the remark, “I have fired.”<sup>360</sup> The US Navy had an EC-2 communications plane in the air. The EC-2 is the Navy’s version of the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) turboprop planes of the US Air Force.<sup>361</sup>

Apparently, the American public held a positive opinion regarding the incident if the opinion pieces in the newspapers were a guide. For example, George F. Will, an American columnist, equated the incidents as “swatting a fly.”<sup>362</sup> The incident was of little consequence and shooting down two fighter jets had to be embarrassing for Qadhafi. An opinion piece by James R. Schlesinger, a former Defense Secretary under Nixon and Ford, argued it was sometimes necessary to use force without apologizing and Senator J. William Fulbright was the only critic on the opinion page. Fulbright was worried that the incident in the Gulf of Sidra was going to be another Gulf of Tonkin. He feared Congress would give Reagan carte blanche in using force and have the United States embroiled in another quagmire like Vietnam.<sup>363</sup> However, Libya did not have the military strength to stand up against the US military. In addition, Libya relied on technical advisors from the Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact, and other countries in the

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<sup>360</sup> Robert Reinhold, “U.S. Asserts Tape from Dogfight Has Libyan Saying: ‘I Have Fired,’” *The New York Times*, 22 August 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>361</sup> Reinhold, *NYT*, 22 August 1981.

<sup>362</sup> George F. Will, “Swatting a Fly,” *The Washington Post*, 23 August 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>363</sup> J. William Fulbright, “Another Gulf of Tonkin?” *The Washington Post*, 23 August 1981, and James R. Schlesinger, “The Use of Force, Without Apology,” *The Washington Post*, 23 August 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

socialist camp to operate some of their weapon systems or fly their planes. It was unclear if the Soviets would withdraw these technicians as a punishment for Qadhafi's adventurism. It was unlikely considering the Soviets desire for hard currency from Tripoli. Moreover, Reagan did not go to Congress and asked for a Gulf of Tonkin-type authorization to use force. The US Navy completed their maneuvers and withdrew from the Gulf of Sidra. Once the maneuvers were completed there was no reason for the US fleet to linger in the gulf and provide Libya a reason to launch further attacks as retribution for the embarrassing confrontation that occurred a few days earlier. In addition, remaining in the gulf might have reinforced Fulbright's fears of a Gulf of Tonkin-type situation which would have led to a potential conflict like Vietnam. The United States was still suffering from the Vietnam Syndrome in the early 1980s and Congress was leery about using force because of it. Reagan's bellicose rhetoric toward the Soviet Union and Libya would have certainly caused alarm with Fulbright and his fellow anti-interventionists. However, they failed to realize that Reagan's rhetoric was just that, rhetoric. Reagan's rhetoric was designed to convince the Soviets and Libya that the United States was willing to fight to protect its interests around the world, if necessary, but the US really wanted to live in peace with all nations.

As part of Reagan's coercive diplomacy strategy to persuade Qadhafi in changing his behavior was to apply diplomatic pressure on Libya. Reagan turned to the Summit Seven to assist in this goal. Toward the end of July, Reagan went to Ottawa, Canada to attend the Summit Seven group. This group consisted of seven of the largest capitalist countries in the world: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, and Italy. Every year the heads of state and government would meet to discuss economic issues. Beginning in 1978, the Summit Seven started discussing political issues including terrorism. Reagan was going to



attend his first Summit Seven meeting in Canada and request that the Ottawa Economic Summit Conference release a statement on terrorism. On 20 July 1981, the Ottawa conference released a statement on terrorism and the seven leaders were “seriously concerned about the active support given to international terrorism.”<sup>364</sup> The support came in the guise of money, training, weapons, and sanctuary. They also reaffirmed the declarations and statements on terrorism or terrorist acts made in the previous summit conferences.<sup>365</sup> During the summer of 1981, the Summit Seven for the first time released a joint statement on state-support of terrorism.

There was only one time when the Bonn Declaration of 1978 was enforced. The Ottawa Summit during the summer of 1981 determined that action should be taken against the Afghan government for providing refuge to the hijackers of a Pakistan International Airlines plane which was a “fragrant breach of their obligations as a signatory of the Hague Convention” against hijacking and the Summit Seven proposed to implement the Bonn Declaration of 1978 which suspended all flights to and from Afghanistan until the Afghans complied with their Hague Convention obligations. The Statement on Terrorism ended with the agreement for “continued cooperation in the event of attacks on diplomatic and consular establishments or personnel of any of their governments.”<sup>366</sup> The Summit Seven is a unique tool in the US toolbox against international terrorism and the Bonn Declaration sanctions could be seen as an implied threat to Libya to refrain from supporting terrorism or these sanctions would be imposed. The summit conference allowed the United States to meet with the other powerhouse economies of the world which were demo-

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<sup>364</sup> The White House, “Ottawa Economic Summit Conference: Statement on Terrorism,” 20 July 1981, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 17 (1981): 780.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 780. The previous three summits that issued a statement or declaration on terrorism were the Joint Statement on International Terrorism at Bonn, 17 July 1978; Joint Statement on Hijacking at Tokyo, 29 June 1979; and Joint Statement on Hijacking and on Diplomatic Hostages at Venice, 22 June 1980, Levitt, *Democracies Against Terror*, 106-111.

<sup>366</sup> The White House, “Ottawa Economic Summit Conference Statement on Terrorism,” 780.

cracies and flesh out particular economic weapons against states that support terrorism. The Ottawa statement was the only time the Summit Seven implemented the sanctions of the Bonn Declaration. Unfortunately, it did not have the effect the United States wanted. Afghanistan was either too weak of a country or lacked government control for the sanctions to have any effect. The denial of flight to and from a country would have a tremendous effect on a country like Italy because much of their tourist income comes from flights into the country and international business practice would also suffer. Italian airlines would also go bankrupt if they were not allowed to operate. These sanctions were to create crippling damage to the economic. These were the kinds of effects the United States wanted because it would demonstrate that the Bonn Declaration was a powerful weapon against states that support terrorism or violate international norms in general. Just the mere threat of imposing the Bonn Declaration sanctions would be a powerful deterrent.

On 6 October 1981, Reagan was awakened in the morning by Alexander Haig. Haig called him to tell him that Sadat had been assassinated and Reagan was extremely saddened by the news. He was disgusted by media reports of Libyans celebrating in the streets over Sadat's death. He wrote in his diary: "I'm trying not to feel hatred for those who did this foul deed but I can't make it. Qadhafi gloating on TV, his people jubilantly celebrating in the streets. He is beneath contempt."<sup>367</sup> He continued: "He goes on radio (clandestine) and began broadcasting propaganda, calling for a holy war, etc. before Sadat's death was confirmed. This material had to have been already prepared. In other words, he knew it was going to happen."<sup>368</sup> From his diary entry it would appear that he was convinced that Qadhafi had a hand in the assassination of

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<sup>367</sup> Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 42.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

Sadat. It certainly was possible since Qadhafi was known to interfere with the sovereignty of many African countries. He had provided financial support and weapons to insurgent groups throughout Africa and he had intervened in Chad. He also sent troops to help the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin Dada repel an invasion from Tanzania.

Considering the US already believed that Libya was supporting terrorism and causing trouble throughout Africa, the assassination of Sadat might have convinced Reagan to consider imposing an embargo on Libyan oil. *The Baltimore Sun* suggested that imposing an embargo on Libyan oil would boost Reagan's credibility with Qadhafi's opponents, mainly "Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Sudan."<sup>369</sup> One unnamed US official said, "Our rhetoric against Kadafi has been two-fisted, but our policy has been business as usual."<sup>370</sup> The US would consult their West European allies over the embargo, but the Europeans might balk at the proposition. *The Baltimore Sun* argued that "the West objected when the oil weapon was used by Arab" oil producers during the Yom Kippur War in 1973 to voice their opposition to Western, mainly US support of Israel.<sup>371</sup>

In addition to banning oil, the US also considered the banning of spare parts, oil equipment and having the American oil companies, pullout their over 2000 employees and ban travel to Libya.<sup>372</sup> However, the US would have to worry about competitors coming in to take up the slack and supply Libyan in the short-term. The decision to impose an embargo was not forthcoming because Reagan wanted to deliberate a little longer before making the final decision.

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<sup>369</sup> "U.S. weighs embargo of Libyan oil: May end purchases to raise credibility with Kadafi foes," *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 October 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>370</sup> *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 October 1981.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

The US was undergoing a deep recession and Reagan worried about the impact the oil embargo would have on the economy. He also worried about the 2000 US workers residing in Libya and what Qadhafi might do to them. Despite these worries, the United States was developing a strategy to combat international terrorism. The Reagan administration was developing measures to prevent terrorist attacks by placing an “emphasis on improving our intelligence on terrorist groups.”<sup>373</sup> Measures on an effective response to terrorist attacks were developed, they included improving security of diplomatic missions. The US stressed defenses against mob attacks in order to provide security for the diplomatic staff and other personnel. The United States was also “seeking an international consensus against terrorism.”<sup>374</sup> By seeking a consensus against terrorism, it would make it easier to negotiate international instruments in combatting it.

The final few months of 1981 saw a flurry of activity, top officials of the US government were receiving a greater security presence. The media were reporting rumors of Libyan hit squads had entered the United States. The media reported they were going to enter the United States via the Canadian border and US surveillance along the border between Detroit and Windsor, Ontario was increased. The trial of Eugene A. Tafoya helped provide credence to this story. In addition, neither Reagan nor Vice President George H. W. Bush attended the state funeral of Anwar al-Sadat. However, Justice officials commented that “the heightened security was a precaution, not a reaction to specific information” suggesting that it was routine to elevate security around American top officials.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Frank H. Perez, “The Impact of International Terrorism,” 29 October 1981, *Current Policy Number 340* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State, 1981), 1. (Government Publications/ Legal Reference Library, Leslie F. Malpass Library, Western Illinois University)

<sup>374</sup> Perez, “The Impact of International Terrorism,” 29 October 1981, *Current Policy Number 340*.

<sup>375</sup> Charles R. Babcock, “U.S. Tightens Security of Top Officials,” *The Washington Post*, 28 November 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

Reagan was still considering economic sanctions against Libya while the US was abuzz about Libyan assassination squads roaming the countryside and the State Department spokesman, Dean Fischer said that a decision was coming soon.<sup>376</sup> Several months prior, the administration started a policy review concerning Libya's support for radical groups particularly in other countries to destabilize their political atmosphere. Reporters asked Reagan what his thoughts about Qadhafi sending hit squads to the United States and his reply, "I wouldn't believe a word he says if I were you."<sup>377</sup> While considering economic sanctions against Libya, Reagan did tell reporters that the US had evidence that Qadhafi had sent assassination teams to kill American officials. One of the ideas the administration was pondering was requesting their allies not to purchase Libyan oil. Senator Gary Hart (D-Colorado) proposed a Senate resolution supporting an embargo on importing Libyan oil. However, the Senate Majority Leader Howard H. Baker, Jr. (R-Tennessee) cautioned him not to proceed, asking him to give the president a little more time to deliberate. Hart was persuaded to wait, but did tell reporters that, "We are paying for Libyan terrorism, period."<sup>378</sup>

Most interviews and press conferences with the president were more concerned with the assassination squad story than the deliberations over sanctions with Libya. In one interview, Reagan told the reporter that they were "studying right now our economic relations with them."<sup>379</sup> He believed that Qadhafi was against US peace initiatives in the Middle East and then

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<sup>376</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, "Reagan Weighs Economic Steps Against Libyans," *The New York Times*, 8 December 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> George Lardner, Jr. and Lee Lescaze, "Economic Sanctions Planned Against Libya," *The Washington Post*, 9 December 1981. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>379</sup> The White House, "Interview with the President: Question-and-Answer Session with Joseph Rice of the Cleveland Plain Dealer," 30 November 1981, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 17 (1981): 1324.

he said, “As to his threats personal against me, I think in view of the record, you can’t dismiss them out of hand. On the other hand, they’re not going to change my life much.”<sup>380</sup> During a press conference, he was asked if his dialogue with Qadhafi had “resulted largely in enhancing his stature in the World?”<sup>381</sup> Reagan told the reporters that he did not have a dialog with Qadhafi and he felt that the United States would have a better chance of apprehending terrorists if they made the assassination squad story public.<sup>382</sup> Although not mentioned, the possible reason for making the assassination squad story public was to alert the US citizens to inform law enforcement of any suspicious behavior. Despite the seriousness of the assassination squad story, Reagan tried to downplay it. However, the possibility of Qadhafi attempting to assassinate him or other high US officials had to have an influence on making the decision to impose economic sanctions on Libya. A state attempting to assassinate another country’s leader was considered an act of war and such an action required his attention.

As the year was beginning to wind down and after many attempts to persuade Libya to refrain from supporting terrorism and after several months of deliberating, Reagan decided to step up his coercive diplomacy strategy and impose economic sanctions against Libya. He ordered Secretary of State Haig to send a “demarche to Libya reemphasizing an earlier warning concerning its plotting terrorist actions against U.S. citizens and facilities.”<sup>383</sup> He also authorized the secretary of state to request US corporations with US citizens working in Libya to voluntarily

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<sup>380</sup> The White House, “Interview with the President,” 30 November 1981, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 1324-1325.

<sup>381</sup> The White House, “The President’s News Conference of December 17, 1981,” *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 17 (1981): 1381.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 1381.

<sup>383</sup> The White House, “Economic and Security Decisions for Libya,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 16*, 10 December 1981, <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/Scanned%20NSDD/NSDD16.P...>, accessed on 16 September 2016.

withdraw those Americans and to minimize “sales and purchases from Libya.”<sup>384</sup> US passports would be invalidated for travel to Libya, the treasury secretary was to “initiate and coordinate preparation for” an embargo of imports of Libyan oil and an embargo of exports to Libya.<sup>385</sup> The secretary of defense and the joint chiefs of staff were to make contingency plans for using force if Libya conducted terrorist targets against Americans withdrawing from Libya, or if an American was taken hostage. The secretary of defense would coordinate with the secretary of state to make sure the use of force was proportional and in accordance with international law.<sup>386</sup> Considering there were several departments playing a role in the implementation of sanctions, it took the Reagan administration time to craft *National Security Decision Directive Number 16*. It was a complicated document and in addition, the Reagan administration wanted to devise a carefully crafted sanctions scheme. If the Reagan administration went with a soft sanctions scheme, it would not cause Libya sufficient discomfort. If the sanctions scheme was too extreme, the Reagan administration would have faced an international outcry. Reagan was hoping that this level of sanctions would have convinced Qadhafi to change his behavior.

The Reagan administration was still pondering its national security structure, but the president decided to create a crisis management team to streamline the White House’s response to an emergency. Crisis management would be the responsibility of a Special Situation Group (SSG) consisting of the secretary of state, secretary of defense, the counselor to the president, director of central intelligence, the chief of staff to the president, the deputy chief of staff to the president, the national security adviser, the joint chiefs of staff and it was chaired by the vice

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<sup>384</sup> *NSDD 16*.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid*.

president.<sup>387</sup> They were to monitor crises and made sure that the president's decisions were communicated to the various agencies and departments of the federal government. The formation of a crisis management team was the result of the Reagan administration's growing concern about terrorism, especially state-supported terrorism. The creation of the crisis management team coincided with the restructuring of the National Security Council found in *National Security Decision Directive Number 2* signed on 12 January 1982.<sup>388</sup> *NSDD 2* provided guidance toward the functions and responsibilities of the statutory members of the NSC and the creation of working groups within it.

In late February, the administration announced the decision to impose an embargo on Libyan oil. Newspaper reports announced the decision occurred during a National Security Council meeting on 25 February 1982, but the newspapers were inaccurate because Reagan made the decision for the embargo when he signed a NSDD in December 1981 imposing the sanctions against Libya.<sup>389</sup> According to Secretary of State Haig, the embargo was "phase two" of the anti-Libyan policy.<sup>390</sup> The first phase was requesting American workers to leave Libya.<sup>391</sup> The State Department wanted to stress that the action taken against Libya "was not the result of any particular action by Qadhafi's regime."<sup>392</sup> The State Department spokesman, Dean Fischer,

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<sup>387</sup> The White House, "Crisis Management," *National Security Decision Directive Number 3*, 14 December 1981, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd3.pdf>, accessed on 21 September 2021.

<sup>388</sup> The White House, "National Security Council Structure," *National Security Decision Directive Number 2*, 12 January 1982, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd2.pdf>, accessed on 21 September 2021.

<sup>389</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Decision to Embargo Libyan Oil is Reported," *The New York Times*, 26 February 1982. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.



said that “it was ‘in response to a continuing pattern of Libyan activity which violates accepted international norms of behavior.’”<sup>393</sup> The White House also wanted to stress that the embargo decision was to correct a major inconsistency in policy. As one official remarked: “It did not make policy sense to criticize international terrorism and on the other hand to provide as much as \$10 billion a year to his (Qadhafi’s) coffers to fund this kind of thing.”<sup>394</sup> The administration decided not to seek support for the action from European allies or Japan because the US did not receive substantial support from them. Egypt’s new president Hosni Mubarak was the “most enthusiastic” in his support after speaking with Reagan “about the Libyan problem.”<sup>395</sup>

In order to streamline and make responding to terrorist attacks more efficient, Reagan signed *National Security Decision Directive Number 30*. This NSDD authorized the “lead agency” concept. One of the major departments would become the lead agency during a terrorist incident, the lead agency would coordinate the federal response during the incident. The State Department was authorized to take the lead during an international terrorist attack overseas while the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice taking the lead role during a domestic terrorist attack.<sup>396</sup> The Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) took the lead during a hijacking within the special jurisdiction of the United States and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) would be responsible for “planning for and managing the public health aspects

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<sup>392</sup> Michael Getler and Lou Cannon, “U.S. Bans Imports of Libyan Oil: Qadhafi Accused of Plotting to Kill Americans in Sudan,” *The Washington Post*, 11 March 1982. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> The White House, “Managing Terrorist Incidents,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 30*, 10 April 1982, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archive/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd30.pdf>, accessed on 21 September 2021.

of a terrorist incident and recovery from the consequences of such incidents.”<sup>397</sup> This management system would help reduce interagency conflict during a terrorist attack. All the departments and agencies were notoriously jealous about their turf and usually refused to share information amongst themselves. Reagan wanted to reduce agency infighting and the lead agency concept was to assist in that endeavor.

Reagan’s State of the Union Addresses were usually about domestic issues, but toward the end of them he briefly covered foreign policy. During his first State of the Union address, he discussed the importance of the Caribbean Basin to the United States and it was here he declared, “(t)oward those who would export terrorism and subversion in the Caribbean and elsewhere especially Cuba and Libya, we will act with firmness.”<sup>398</sup> He stated that American foreign policy was “a policy of strength, fairness, and balance.”<sup>399</sup> Furthermore, “(b)y restoring America’s military credibility, by pursuing peace at the negotiating table wherever both sides are willing to sit down in good faith, and by regaining the respect of America’s allies and adversaries alike, we have strengthened our country’s position as a force of peace and progress in the world.”<sup>400</sup> The United States desired a more peaceful world, but “(w)hen radical forces threatened our friends, when economic misfortune creates condition of instability, when strategically vital parts of the world fall under the shadow of Soviet power,” Reagan declared that “our responses can make the difference between peaceful change or disorder and violence.”<sup>401</sup> Reagan did not speak at length

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<sup>397</sup> *NSDD 30*.

<sup>398</sup> Ronald Reagan, “The State of the Union: Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress,” 26 January 1982, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 18 (1982): 81.

<sup>399</sup> Reagan, “The State of the Union,” 81.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

on foreign policy issues, but he made great use of the limited space dedicated to it. This State of the Union address was a defense of Reagan's defense spending and increase in the US military's capabilities which included counterterrorism operations.

During the first two years of the Reagan administration, the president and his chief foreign policy advisers worked to formulate a coherent policy on terrorism, particularly Libyan-sponsored terrorism. At the beginning of the administration, many of the US officials believed that the Soviets were behind international terrorism, but evidence was not forthcoming. Sterling's 1981 book *The Terror Network* certainly influenced Secretary of State Alexander Haig's thinking about terrorism. However, it was not until the fall of the Soviet Union was evidence found about Soviet or Warsaw Pact support of terrorism. These documents showed that the Eastern Bloc were colluding with Libya and actively supporting radical terrorist groups. The administration did not move away from believing that the Soviets were state supporters, but they took a different approach. That approach was identifying Soviet clients which supported terrorism. Libya was believed by the administration to be a Soviet client state and Qadhafi clearly supported various radical groups throughout the world.

Much of Qadhafi's supported terrorist attacks were against his opponents abroad and other threats like sending hit squads to assassinate Reagan or one of his chief officials. Qadhafi was also involved in causing instability in various African countries and he sent troops to Chad to overthrow the government there. Reagan's rhetoric was tough, but there were some inconsistencies like purchasing oil from Libya. However, these inconsistencies were corrected over time. Another criticism by the media and political opponents of the time was his lack of military action against state-supporters of terrorism. He did not seek retribution against Iran, because he felt that was not appropriate for the United States to act in such a fashion. Once the

hostages were back home there was no reason to deal with Iran. In addition, finding evidence that proved a particular country sponsored a terrorist attack was extremely difficult. Attacking the wrong country would have detrimental effects on America's image.

The Reagan administration were taking small steps toward a policy on terrorism. The president attempted to use diplomacy to change Libya's behavior. Reagan closed the Libyan People's Bureau because they were known to abuse diplomatic privileges to smuggle weapons, cash, and explosives for terrorists. He attempted to convince American allies to act against Libya such as imposing an embargo. The United States also conducted naval maneuvers to demonstrate American power, but also demonstrated every nation's right to navigate the Gulf of Sidra. The United States did not recognize the gulf as Libyan territorial waters. The first military clash against Libya occurred during this right of navigation exercise and the US responded to Libyan aggression. All these little steps were designed to apply graduated pressure on Libya to change their behavior. Most of the actions taken by the Reagan administration fell under the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy, except for the Tafoya case. The actions taken were designed to pressure Libya to change its behavior. The Tafoya case fell under the third pillar of US counterterrorism policy, which is bringing terrorists to justice. The next chapter will discuss US counterterrorism efforts during the second half of Reagan's first administration and 1985 as the year of terror. The section on 1985 will discuss three significant terrorist attacks that compelled Reagan to act against Qadhafi's support for international terrorism.

## Chapter Six: US Counterterrorism Efforts, 1983-1984 and 1985: The Year of Terror

This chapter will explore US counterterrorism efforts of the second half of Reagan's first administration. This chapter will cover Qadhafi's attempted coup in Sudan, Qadhafi's views on Islam, and a brief discussion on a debate on using force within the Reagan administration. The material covered demonstrated a growing tension between the United States and Libya as Reagan's first administration went along. Qadhafi's meddling in Africa convinced Reagan that more forceful action was needed, but the required smoking gun was not forthcoming which stayed Reagan's hand for the time being. However, the Reagan administration wanted to increase diplomatic pressure on Qadhafi to change his behavior and impose additional sanctions which was part of the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy. Therefore, this chapter will discuss applying pressure on Libya to quit supporting terrorism and using the rule of law to bring terrorists to justice.

However, there was change within the Reagan administration. There was a shake up in Reagan's cabinet in 1982 when George Shultz replaced Alexander Haig as secretary of state. The fiery tempered Haig offered his resignation one time too many and Reagan accepted it. Shultz was more moderate in temperament and was willing to compromise when it was needed. Shultz helped stabilize Reagan's foreign policy team. There were no recorded Libyan-sponsored terrorist attacks in 1982, but Qadhafi did warn Libyan dissidents living abroad to return home or face the consequences, which mean Libyan agents would hunt them down and kill them. However, he did moderate his rhetoric and behavior because he wanted to be selected as the next chair-man for the Organization for African Unity (OAU). He was concerned that the 1980-81

assassination campaign might be held against him for the next selection for OAU chair and damage Libya's standing internationally.<sup>402</sup>

For Qadhafi winning the chairmanship of the OAU would have given him the prestige he always wanted. It would have also recognized his self-aggrandizement, he always considered himself the self-appointed leader of the Arab and/or African world. Qadhafi had some friends in Africa and as Idi Amin of Uganda and Jean-Bedel Bokassa, the president of the Central African Republic. However, Qadhafi lost both his friends in 1979 when they were forced out of power.<sup>403</sup> He also had other African countries that voted with Libya in international organizations like the United Nations (UN): Angola, Madagascar, Mozambique, Congo, and Guinea-Bissau.<sup>404</sup> However, he failed to gain the OAU chairmanship at the 1982 Tripoli OAU summit and he was rebuffed again at the summit in Addis Ababa in 1983.<sup>405</sup> Libya renewed their subversive efforts again in 1983.

As previously stated, Reagan's approach to combatting terrorism should be seen through the lens of the Cold War. The Reagan administration believed that Libya was a potential Soviet proxy, using terrorism to further Libya's foreign policy goals as well as the Soviet Union. There was a tangible fear that Qadhafi would grant the Soviet Union basing rights and the large weapons stockpile in Libya would become a forward supply depot for the Soviet military. This

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<sup>402</sup> The White House, Memorandum, Libyan Troublemaking—1979-1984, 5 September 1984, folder "Libyan: Terrorism (2)," Oliver North Files, Box 54, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-054/40-633-1201554-054-002-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>403</sup> US Department of State, "The Libyan Problem, October 1983," *Special Report No. 111* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State, 1983), 6. (Government Publications and Legal Reference Library, Leslie F. Malpass Library, Western Illinois University)

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

nightmare scenario would drastically change the strategic balance in the Mediterranean. Both Italy and Greece would have been vulnerable to Soviet attacks because of Libya's proximity to both countries if war with the Soviet Union erupted. The Reagan administration was strongly anti-communist and believed the Soviets were major supporters of terrorism. Libya was a major concern because their use of terrorism furthered Soviet foreign policy goals. In addition, if Libya allowed the Soviets to base troops, it would not only be a threat to Greece and Italy, but the Soviets could have interfered with freedom of navigation in the Mediterranean Sea, disrupting trade routes as a result, particularly oil which would have crippled Western economies. Because of the punitive effects on the Libyan economy, the Reagan administration hoped the use of sanctions within the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy provide Qadhafi the incentive to change his behavior.

Fuming over the humiliation of being rebuffed twice, Qadhafi attempted to overthrow President Nimeiri of Sudan in February 1983, but was thwarted by Egypt and the United States.<sup>406</sup> President Reagan ordered the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz and her carrier task force into the Gulf of Sidra and four Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft to Egypt.<sup>407</sup> Reagan wrote in his diary about news reports of Qadhafi sending bombers into Sudan. During a NSC meeting there were questions about the validity of those reports but an order for the AWACS to fly to Egypt was given.<sup>408</sup> A few days later, Reagan suggested the United States was tipped off about Qadhafi's planned coup in Sudan. News outlets

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<sup>406</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>407</sup> Harold Jackson, "American counter Libyan 'threat,'" *The Guardian*, 17 February 1983 (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and the Observer, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University) and "Libyan Congress Announces 'Suicide Squads,'" *The New York Times*, 21 February 1983. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>408</sup> Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, Douglas Brinkley, ed. (New York and London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 131.

were informed the AWACS were sent to Egypt for training exercises, but Reagan wrote these planes were to help direct Egyptian fighters where to go if Libya sent aircraft to attack Sudan.<sup>409</sup>

The failed coup exacerbated the fragile peace in Sudan which President Nimeiri negotiated in 1972. Rising crime and questionable government decisions had threatened the peace between the Islamic north and Christian south.<sup>410</sup> Qadhafi's hostility toward the Nimeiri regime stemmed from Sudan's good relations with President Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt, after signing a peace deal with Israel in 1979.<sup>411</sup> In addition, Sudan was a pro-West country. Libya's meddling threatened the territorial integrity of Sudan, something that is almost sacred among African nations to this day. Prior to the coup, the US State Department concluded that Qadhafi tried to make "conciliatory gestures toward Sudan and Egypt" to provide cover for the coup.<sup>412</sup> State also argued that the conciliatory gestures were to "attempt to lull Nimeiri and his Egyptian allies" into a false sense of security.<sup>413</sup>

Qadhafi hoped to launch a surprise attack on Sudan and overthrow Nimeiri. With Nimeiri gone, Qadhafi could choose a new president for Sudan and rule the country through him. However, evidence of a military buildup along the Libyan-Sudanese border was discovered by Sudan, because Nimeiri accused Libya of moving troops and equipment to the border.<sup>414</sup> At least three Tu-22 bombers and a squadron of MiG-23 fighters were transferred to the Kufra Oasis in southeastern Libya, and Qadhafi planned on bombing Sudanese military barracks and key gov-

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>410</sup> Jackson, *The Guardian*, 17 February 1983.

<sup>411</sup> *NYT*, 21 February 1983.

<sup>412</sup> US Department of State, *Special Report No. III*, 5.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>414</sup> *NYT*, 21 February 1983.



ernment buildings while Sudanese dissidents capture the city center of Khartoum. As soon as the dissidents capture an airbase, Libyan troops would be airlifted by military transports to the captured airbase according to the State Department.<sup>415</sup>

Speed and secrecy were essential for this plan to work. Qadhafi lost both and the coup had to be scrapped. The Libyan military high command issued a statement through Jana, Libya's official news agency, that an American flotilla was approaching the country's territorial waters to attack or force a landing on their coast, strategic thought dictates one reinforces their coastline to prevent a beachhead from forming. The United States flatly rejected their statement. Jana also reported demonstrations in the streets of Tripoli. They were protesting the American naval presence and tore up pictures of Ronald Reagan and Presidents Mubarak and Nimeiri.<sup>416</sup>

Jeanne Kirkpatrick, US Ambassador to the UN, quickly condemned Libyan accusations of US aggression toward Tripoli as falsehoods. She accused Qadhafi of "conducting a 'virulent hostile foreign policy' through the use of terrorism and assassination to overthrow rival governments."<sup>417</sup> The accusations from Libya and the United States were aired in a Security Council meeting. Libya wanted to voice their concerns over "provocative" air and naval movements by the US. Kirkpatrick countered that the movements of the Nimitz task force were necessary because of military movements by Libya along the Sudanese border and the AWACS planes were scheduled to arrive in Egypt for a training exercise in March. Their arrival was moved a month earlier because of the dangerous situation threatening Sudan and Egypt.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> US Department of State, *Special Report No. 111*, 5.

<sup>416</sup> *NYT*, 21 February 1983.

<sup>417</sup> Michael J. Berlin, "Kirkpatrick Says Libyan Charges of U.S. Aggression Are 'Lies,'" *The Washington Post*, 23 February 1983. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*

To counter Libyan charges of US aggression dating back to the US Marines landing of 1805, Kirkpatrick responded with a litany of Libyan actions including the support of many insurgent movements throughout the world, subversive campaigns to overthrow the governments of Sudan, Somalia, Chad, and other African countries, providing sanctuary of the Black September terrorists after the 1972 Munich Olympics attack, and the 1975 attack of the OPEC ministers meeting in Vienna and allowing “the infamous Carlos” to base his operations out of Libya.<sup>419</sup> This litany of Libyan actions demonstrated Qadhafi’s meddling and it also showed how strained US-Libyan relations were. Kirkpatrick clearly showed US concerns over Libya’s violent actions. If the US operated their navy in the Gulf of Sidra and Libya continued its support for terrorism, US-Libyan relations would continue to be tense.

Abdel-Rahman Abdella, the Sudanese Ambassador to the UN, accused Libya of not only attempting to overthrow his government, but tried to “impose a Libyan hegemony on Sudan” and he also defended his government’s decision to seek US assistance to counter Libyan aggression.<sup>420</sup> He said his country had to use whatever means available to defend itself and the Egyptian ambassador Ahmed Khalil said his country was “fully committed to defending fraternal Sudan” and Egypt wished that Libya would work toward peaceful resolutions of any dispute.<sup>421</sup>

Hosni Mubarak, president of Egypt, made a one-day visit to Sudan during the Security Council meeting. In a joint press conference with President Jaafar Nimeiri, Mubarak said that Libya violated Egyptian airspace and two Egyptian fighters were “dispatched to intercept the intruding Libyan aircraft.”<sup>422</sup> Egypt warned Libya by telephone not to violate Egyptian airspace

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<sup>419</sup> Berlin, *WP*, 23 February 1983.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*

again. Mubarak was not forthcoming when this incident took place. Nimeiri stated that Qadhafi clearly attempted to overthrow his government because of Libyan military movements along the border with his country and a more damning piece of information were the instructions Qadhafi sent to his supporters in Sudan. Qadhafi's coup plot was uncovered when a telex instructing his supporters that the coup would be delayed one or two months was discovered.<sup>423</sup> How the telex was discovered was not mentioned by the media, but it had to be embarrassing for Tripoli that the plot was uncovered in this manner. It was direct evidence of Libyan subversion.

Early in 1983 the Central Intelligence Agency produced a paper explaining Qadhafi's position domestically and internationally. The CIA believed that Qadhafi desired a Libyan state that could rival Israel economically, therefore, he attempted to "transform" Libya socially and economically.<sup>424</sup> The CIA also believed he was "genuinely committed to the spread of Islam" and the "promotion" of his revolutionary philosophy found in his *Green Book*.<sup>425</sup> However, the CIA missed that Qadhafi's genuine commitment to spreading Islam must be seen in the context of his *Green Book*. Qadhafi was only interested in spreading Islam if it benefitted him. He wanted to be seen as the inheritor of Nasser's Pan-Arabism, leader of the next Pan-Arab state which encompassed most, if not all, of the Arab world. Most Muslims found his form of Islam anathema to the teachings of their prophet Mohammed.

The CIA also believed that while Qadhafi's actions served Soviet interests, he was not a Soviet surrogate "because" he was "fiercely independent and extremely nationalistic and because

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<sup>422</sup> "Libya Violated Egypt's Airspace, Mubarak Charges in Khartoum," *The Washington Post*, 21 February 1983. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Libya: Qadhafi's Domestic and International Position*, 17 January 1983. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00287R000700160001-9.pdf>, accessed on 3 November 2022.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

he” considered “himself a good muslim who must necessarily be uncomfortable with the ‘god-less’ Soviets.”<sup>426</sup> In addition, the CIA did not believe Libya would become the next Cuba because Qadhafi had too much money to be relegated to “a dependent role” like Cuba.<sup>427</sup> The CIA argued that Qadhafi was not a “madman.” The CIA attributed his unpredictability stemmed from his Bedouin upbringing because Bedouins were naturally suspicious of foreigners and foreign ideas and from “his intellectual development as an admirer of Egypt’s Nasser during the height of Arab nationalism.”<sup>428</sup> The last two conclusions ran counter to the Reagan administration’s impression of Qadhafi. He was considered a possible Soviet surrogate because Libyan subversion which caused political instability throughout Africa and Libyan financial and material support of many insurgent groups throughout the Third World and Europe furthered Soviet objectives of undermining America’s position in the world. Reagan often labeled Qadhafi as a madman or someone who was mentally unstable because he either considered the dictator was mad or he used such rhetoric as an insult. Reagan had access to other intelligence assessments if he disagreed with the CIA. Reagan could turn to the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and other agencies for intelligence assessments. Reagan liked to keep his options open and he rarely openly criticized his foreign policy team. If anything, he preferred harmony rather than conflict within the policy-making community.

The CIA believed that Qadhafi was placed “in an uncertain position” because of several domestic and international factors. Domestically his revolution lost popularity and there was

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<sup>426</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Libya: Qadhafi’s Domestic and International Position*, 17 January 1983.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

economic “dissatisfaction” throughout the country because of a lack of opportunity associated with Qadhafi’s form of socialism.<sup>429</sup> Qadhafi relied heavily on repression to maintain order within the country. He also distrusted his military officers and dissatisfaction within the officer corps had sparked several coups and assassination attempts. The Libyan intelligence service had been successful in thwarting these plots but the CIA believed the Qadhafi regime had developed a “siege mentality.”<sup>430</sup> This argument by the CIA analysts suggested that Libya was preparing for an attack by the United States or one of its allies like Egypt. It also suggested that Qadhafi was wary of coup attempts.

However, the CIA argued that the Qadhafi regime was secure because his opposition was fragmented and they lacked anyone of talent who was capable of “organizing a serious challenge to the regime;” moreover, most of the Libyan exiles were from the now “discredited classes that flourished under the monarchy.”<sup>431</sup> While dissident propaganda flustered Qadhafi, his assassination teams were deployed abroad according to the CIA. It was noted by intelligence analysts how successful these teams were during 1980-81. These hit squads had limited success in Europe, but this activity had to have a chilling effect on Qadhafi’s opposition. Just being an exile living abroad was enough to garner a death sentence. In order to avoid assassination his opponents either went underground or were constantly on the move.

International factors, according to the CIA, including Libya’s “proclivity” for subversion on their neighbors and providing financial and material support to insurgent groups worldwide. Because of a lack of success internationally it “would not be” a surprise if Qadhafi resorted to

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<sup>429</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Libya: Qadhafi’s Domestic and International Position*, 17 January 1983.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

supporting international terrorism again.<sup>432</sup> There were a few failures and problems Qadhafi faced, these included Libya's isolation in the Arab world, a "soft oil market" coupled with US economic sanctions "caused temporary dislocations in the Libyan economy," and his failure to achieve OAU chairmanship twice was a humiliation for him.<sup>433</sup> The CIA believed there was little to encourage him not to cause trouble internationally and he would attempt "to buy sympathy or allegiance from governments," support dissident groups or create where none existed and promote coup attempts to install a favorable regime like the one Thomas Sankara installed in Burkina Faso (Upper Volta) in November 1983 and broadcast propaganda in local languages to agitate "disaffected groups" and support terrorist groups according to a 1984 assessment.<sup>434</sup>

Most of the problems of Libya faced and the failures the country endured were Qadhafi's doing. His proclivity of causing trouble made him few friends and his stockpiling of Soviet-made military equipment and weapons of more than his military could use was a source of concern for his neighbors and the West. The Reagan administration believed he was supplying this military hardware to Nicaragua through Brazil, but it was thwarted when Brazil detained the Libyan plane carrying the weapons.<sup>435</sup>

Despite the difficulties Libya was enduring, Qadhafi was not done making trouble with his neighbors. In July and August 1983, Libya launched a new invasion of Chad and seized Faya Largeau.<sup>436</sup> Faya Largeau, the largest city in northern Chad, was an important capture for Libya, because it allowed Qadhafi to control the Aouzou strip. The Aouzou strip bordered Libya and

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<sup>432</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Libya: Qadhafi's Domestic and International Position*, 17 January 1983.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid. and The White House, Memorandum, Libyan Troublemaking—1979-1984, 5 September 1984.

<sup>435</sup> The White House, Memorandum, Libyan Troublemaking—1979-1984, 5 September 1984.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

control of Faya Largeau practically guaranteed Libya complete control of the Aouzou strip. Reagan wrote in his diary that the US sent AWACS and fighter escorts to Sudan to monitor the Libyan air force in Chad. France apparently requested the AWACS in order to help the government of Chad.<sup>437</sup> On 8 August 1983, Reagan wrote that the AWACS and fighters were in Sudan, but he complained there was no French air force presence in Chad. The Libyans stopped bombing Chadian government forces and he wondered if the French had cut a deal with the Libyans. The press reported that the US had “combat air forces to intervene in Chad” and “the French refused to intervene.”<sup>438</sup> This had to frustrate Reagan because the press was reporting the US had combat forces in Sudan which would have triggered the reporting to Congress requirement of the War Powers Resolution. A report to Congress of the introduction of combat troops abroad would trigger the sixty-day duration of deployment allowed by law. On 11 August 1983, Reagan noted that the situation in Chad was worse. France finally sent 500 paratroopers to help protect the capital, but no French air force presence which allowed the Libyans to maintain air superiority. He wrote that a squadron of French fighter planes could have made a difference. He was convinced France made a deal because Libya was a major French customer.<sup>439</sup> This entire episode showed more Libyan meddling with its neighbors, but it also showed how lax the Europeans, particularly France, were toward Libyan subversion and support for terrorism. The Europeans placed more importance to economic prosperity than helping an ally end Libyan-sponsored terrorism.

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<sup>437</sup> Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 173.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-175.

The CIA produced a paper in 1984 on how Libya was using military aid to buy influence amongst governments and insurgent groups. Qadhafi believed that military aid was a symbol of power and it fed his “self-image as a major international leader,” according to intelligence analysts.<sup>440</sup> The CIA argued that the “greatest potential danger” was Qadhafi handing out “more sophisticated weapons systems that would enhance the military capabilities of the recipient.”<sup>441</sup> Of course, some of those sophisticated weapons like SA-5 surfaced-to-air missile system would not be appropriate for a terrorist group, but hand-held anti-aircraft rocket systems would be. Qadhafi’s efforts in Africa had proven to be a failure, but he did develop close relationships with Benin and Ethiopia, according to the CIA.<sup>442</sup> The intelligence assessment also stated that Libya expanded its activity in Latin America because Qadhafi considered the United States as his biggest threat and sending weapons to the region was considered as payback for Reagan’s policies toward his country.<sup>443</sup> However, the CIA stated that Libya was its own worst enemy because of the incoherent way it provided the supplies.<sup>444</sup> Promising aid and not following through or delivering what was promised caused irritation to Libya’s clients.

By the spring of 1984, the Reagan administration started developing a coherent policy toward countering terrorism. On 3 April 1984, Reagan signed the very important *National Security Decision Directive Number 138* on combatting terrorism. *NSDD 138* was to provide “guidance

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<sup>440</sup> Directorate of Intelligence, *Libyan Military Aid: Trying to Buy Influence: An Intelligence Assessment*, February 1984, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84800927R000300030006-3.pdf>, accessed on 3 November 2022.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.



for developing a long-term, two phased program for achieving these objectives.”<sup>445</sup> Phase I was to start immediately and it would end on 31 December 1984. Phase II was to start on 1 January 1985.<sup>446</sup> The departments and agencies charged with combatting terrorism such as State, Defense, Justice, and the CIA were to consult each other as they developed their programs. Much of the tasks listed in this NSDD were usual fare such as securing passage of legislation to implement treaty obligations, continue to improve military capabilities in countering terrorism “enhance collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence information on terrorist movements, organizations, and activities within the United States, and enhancing foreign intelligence collection of foreign groups or states that support terrorism.”<sup>447</sup>

The second phase which was to begin on 1 January 1985 was designed to “improve capabilities, organization, and management that will further protect U.S. interests, citizens, and facilities from acts of terrorism.”<sup>448</sup> This was the most significant document toward countering state-supported terrorism because in an unclassified extract of *NSDD 138*, the United States declared that “(s)tate-sponsored terrorist activity or directed threats of such action are considered to be hostile acts and the U.S. will hold sponsors accountable. Wherever we have evidence that a state is mounting or tends to conduct an act of terrorism against us, we have a responsibility to take measures to protect our citizens, property, and interests.”<sup>449</sup> This small paragraph was a signal

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<sup>445</sup> The White House, “Combatting Terrorism,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 138*, 3 April 1984, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd138.pdf>, accessed on 30 June 2021.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

that the United States would act against a state-sponsor of terrorism. This statement cleared the way for military action against Libya two years later.

In 1983, there were roughly 500 terrorist attacks. Forty percent targeted Americans, 271 were killed and 116 wounded. More casualties were produced in 1983 than the previous fifteen years.<sup>450</sup> The bombing of the US embassy in Beirut and the bombing of the US Marines barracks at the Beirut International Airport produced the most casualties. The State Department reported that state-supported terrorism had “risen alarmingly.”<sup>451</sup> The State Department determined that “approximately 70 attacks in 1983” were state-supported.<sup>452</sup> It has been argued by critics that Reagan pursued a misguided policy in the Middle East, particularly his Lebanon policy.<sup>453</sup> The pursuit of peace is never a misguided policy. It is true that mistakes were made. Lebanon consumed much of the policy deliberations during 1983 and the beginning of 1984. Regarding his counterterrorism policy, Reagan developed a coherent strategy and the United States did not waver from it. Reagan was certainly frustrated that America’s European allies did not agree with his policy toward Libya, but the Europeans were concerned about their economies. The United Kingdom was the only European ally that took limited action against Libya which included breaking diplomatic relations with Qadhafi, but the UK did not break economic ties with Libya completely.

The State Department also made it clear that the United States was no longer going to tolerate countries sponsoring acts of terrorism without any repercussions. Secretary of State

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<sup>450</sup> US Department of State, “International Terrorism,” *Gist*, September 1984. (U.S. Federal Documents, Depository Copy, Polk Library, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh)

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> Nicholas Lanham, *The American Bombing of Libya: A Study of the Force of Miscalculation in Reagan Foreign Policy* (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008).

George Shultz in a press conference warned that strong action was required against terrorism.<sup>454</sup> Shultz's statements were from events that took place in London the day before. Libyan dissidents were protesting outside the People's Bureau in London. They were demonstrating over the hanging of a student in Tripoli. Individuals in the People's Bureau sprayed machinegun fire at the protestors and killed one British policewoman and injured several protestors.<sup>455</sup> March 1984 was also a busy month for the Libyans, agents conducted terrorist attacks in Manchester and London: "Libya was implicated in the explosion of a French airliner in Chad;" and a "Libyan Tu-22 bomber attacked Sudan's main broadcasting facility near Khartoum."<sup>456</sup>

Shultz was a staunch proponent for the use of force to the extent it alarmed Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger. He was generally against the use of force, but he did propose six major tests to determine whether force would be used. In order to use force, its use had to be a vital interest, this was the first test. The second test required the necessary amount of force to achieve victory would be deployed. Weinberger stated that a "clearly defined political and military objectives" had to be developed. This was the third test. The fourth test required a constant reassessment of force size and objectives so the commitment could be readjusted when necessary to achieve victory. The fifth test required the full support of the American people and Congress behind the military operation and the last test demanded that the use of military force was a last resort. The US had to exhaust all avenues before using force.<sup>457</sup> These guidelines would assist in the decision-making process on using force and it helped to guarantee that force

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<sup>454</sup> John M. Goshko, "Shultz Warns of Strong Action Against Terrorism," *The Washington Post*, 19 April 1984. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, and The White House, Memorandum, Libyan Troublemaking—1979-1984, 3.

<sup>456</sup> The White House, Memorandum, Libyan Troublemaking—1979-1984, 3.

<sup>457</sup> "Secretary Weinberger on the Uses of Military Power (excerpts)," *Survival* 27 (1985): 34.

was used when appropriate. Weinberger's fear was committing the US armed forces in an open-ended combat situation. The fear of another Vietnam was still strong especially in the Congress.

Shultz also called Qadhafi and the Libyans "the troublemakers of the world."<sup>458</sup> He believed that the problem of terrorism was going to get worse and defensive measures would not make it go away, and his comments was spurred on by the example of how terrorism undermined Reagan's efforts in Lebanon. Concerns regarding the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and the Democratic and Republican presidential conventions as tempting terrorist targets came to mind as well.<sup>459</sup> In addition, in March 1984, the United States issued an unprecedented number of warnings to Warsaw Pact countries. Warnings were issued to Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania regarding espionage activity within the United States and sponsorship of international terrorism.<sup>460</sup> Shultz's comments sparked a few editorials.

Walter Laqueur, who was a well-known expert on terrorism, suggested that terrorism was not a mortal threat. It was an annoying irritant, but the survivability of the United States was not in jeopardy.<sup>461</sup> In another editorial by American journalist Carl T. Rowan, he claimed that Shultz should have refrained from assailing other countries over their support for terrorism when the CIA provided the Contras boats, weapons, and ammunition to conduct raids on oil storage tanks in Nicaragua.<sup>462</sup> While Rowan believed the Contras were guilty of terrorism against Nicaraguan citizens, he was mistaken because the attack on oil storage tanks do not equate to the bombing of

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<sup>458</sup> Goshko, *WP*, 19 April 1984.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>460</sup> Goshko, *WP*, 19 April 1984.

<sup>461</sup> Walter Laqueur, "It's an Irritant, But Not a Mortal Danger," *The Washington Post*, 29 April 1984. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>462</sup> Carl T. Rowan, "What About When We Do It?" *The Washington Post*, 29 April 1984. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

a French airliner. The destruction of oil storage tanks would cause inconveniences, but it would not terrorize the population. The purposeful downing of an airliner would cause alarm because people would think it could happen to them during their next trip abroad. Oil storage tanks, on the other hand, are legitimate insurgent targets.

The first section of this chapter has discussed Qadhafi's meddling with his neighbors in 1983 after his hopes to become the OAU chair were dashed because of his bad behavior. Qadhafi attempted to overthrow Nimeiri of Sudan and created tension with Egypt, Sudan, and the United States. The increased tension between the United States and Libya prompted Reagan to formulate new policies to help counter terrorism. After a brief debate on the use of force Defense Secretary Weinberger proposed six tests to determine whether military power should be used. As Reagan's first administration was coming to a close the strategic aspects of US foreign policy were changing, but his counterterrorism policy was not. The Reagan administration continued the three pillars of counterterrorism: no negotiations with terrorists, applying pressure on states that support terrorism and using the rule of law to bring terrorists to justice.

The next section will discuss 1985 which was a pivotal year for the Reagan administration. Several major terrorist attacks occurred, making 1985 the year of terrorism. These attacks convinced Reagan that action had to be taken against state-supported terrorism and the administration took one step closer in acting. However, Reagan held off because he wanted the evidence that proved beyond a shadow of a doubt who the guilty party was. Therefore, the next chapter will discuss the major terrorist attacks that girded the Reagan administration for action against Libya.

The year 1985 was a year of terror. It seemed one terrorist attack after another took place and it certainly placed a great strain on Reagan's counterterrorism policy. However, by the end

of the year, the Reagan administration was closer to using military power against Libya because the US government saw that previous attempts to persuade Qadhafi from supporting terrorism did not have the desired effect. Therefore, the coercive diplomacy strategy called for an escalatory response and it would also serve as a warning to other state supporters that their policies would not be tolerated. Prior to 1985, the coercive diplomacy strategy called for diplomatic, political, and economic pressures to convince Qadhafi to quit terrorism. The pressures were in the form of sanctions. At first, the sanctions were only minor like the closing of an embassy. These sanctions were designed to cause embarrassment or to shame a state into correcting its behavior. Many of the political and economic sanctions were to cause some form of inconvenience. However, the harsher economic sanctions were designed to damage the economy of the target state. By 1985, it became apparent to the Reagan administration that Qadhafi was not going to change his behavior and it became necessary to plan military exercises at first as demonstrations of power. If it was necessary, the demonstrations of power could become actual uses of force. The sanctions and the potential use of force were tools of the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy. Libya was not the only state-supporter active during the year, Iran was active in its support for Shiite-based terrorism in war-torn Beirut. While Iranian supported terrorism was a problem, Reagan's counterterrorism strategy would have been difficult to carry out. His strategy called for "an escalating series of steps to isolate 'rogue regimes,'" and "the Reagan administration's strategy aimed to preempt imminent terrorist threats, build a strong deterrent against future attacks, and create conditions inside an offending country that would prove conducive to regime change."<sup>463</sup> It would have been difficult to isolate

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<sup>463</sup> Matthew Frakes, "Reagan, Rogue States, and the Problem of Terrorism," *Sources and Methods: A Blog of the History and Public Policy Program*, 17 September 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/reagan-rogue-states-and-problem-terrorism>, accessed on 8 September 2022.

Iran because of its geographical size, Iran was a large country. The population was full of revolutionary zeal, it had some allies like Syria and it had oil. In addition, the United States did not have diplomatic relations with Iran which made it difficult for the CIA to gain sources inside the country. Libya, on the other hand, was geographically vulnerable with its long coastline, it was already isolated due to Qadhafi's politics of subverting its neighbors and it was militarily weak despite the large weapons stockpile Qadhafi purchased. Libya would have been the natural choice for Reagan's coercive diplomacy strategy.

Beirut attracted Reagan's attention because it was to play a role in a terrorist attack that took place on 14 June 1985 and this event lasted two weeks. This terrorist attack captured the attention of the world and it became a huge media spectacle. The evening news broadcasted into every American's living room the tragic drama that was taking place. The hijackers took over Trans World Airlines Flight 847 and demanded that it fly to Beirut and then Algiers. After several round trips between the two destinations the plane finally settled in Beirut. During the last layover in Beirut the hijackers killed a young US Navy diver Robert Stetson and unceremoniously dumped his body on the tarmac at the airport in Beirut.<sup>464</sup>

The US was silent about its efforts to end the hijacking because the aircraft was constantly on the move making it difficult to launch a hostage rescue raid to end the hijacking. However, Reagan ordered the military "to assure the readiness of all our resources which could help solve the problem."<sup>465</sup> Algeria and the International Red Cross negotiated for the release of the passen-

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<sup>464</sup> Joseph Berger, "8 Days of Mideast Terror: The Journey of Flight 847," *The New York Times*, 22 June 1985, (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University), Kathy Sawyer, "Sailor's Shooting Raised the Deadly Stakes," *The Washington Post*, 1 July 1985, (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University), and Molly Moore and Victoria Churchill, "Attendant Describes 'Brutal' Treatment: Four Marines Reported on Hijacked Plane: One Alleged Killed," *The Washington Post*, 17 June 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

gers of TWA Flight 847.<sup>466</sup> During a press conference with the State Department, the question whether US military forces could enter Algerian territory to end hijacking because of the “increasing cordial relations” between the two countries was asked. The State Department responded that Algeria was adamant about introducing US forces in the country; the US official said it was “nonstarter.”<sup>467</sup> Because Algeria did not want foreign military forces within their country, US military action in Algeria was ruled out. The US had to rely on other countries to end the hijacking and Algeria and the International Red Cross managed to arrange the transport to Damascus for the remaining hostages. A few weeks after the hostages were released, Lebanon’s Ministry of Justice announced it would attempt to put Ali Atwa, and the two other hijackers, Ali Younis and Ahmed Gharibeh on trial for the hijacking of TWA Flight 847, but no hijackers were prosecuted successfully in Lebanon.<sup>468</sup>

Because of the number of terrorist attacks that targeted US citizens and interests in the immediate past, the Reagan administration issued several directives. One such directive was *National Security Decision Directive Number 176* on combatting terrorism in Central America. *NSDD 176* was primarily centered on El Salvador. There was a considerable number of terrorist attacks against US citizens and President Reagan wanted the Defense Department to take steps to expedite “procurement and delivery of those items which have been ordered by the Government

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<sup>465</sup> Henry Trehwitt, “U.S. is swift but silent in its efforts to free Americans hijacking hostages,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 June 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Karen De Young and William Drozdiak, “Intense Diplomacy, Syrian Weight End Crisis,” *The Washington Post*, 13 July 1985, (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University) and Nora Boustany, “Lebanon Names Hijackers of TWA Flight 847,” *The Washington Post*, 13 July 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)



of El Salvador under our military assistance program.”<sup>469</sup> In addition, the Secretary of State was to coordinate with the Secretary of Defense, the Attorney General and Director of Central Intelligence for proposals on “helping the Government of El Salvador improve their public security programs,” the deadline for these proposals was on 20 July 1985.<sup>470</sup> These proposals were to enhance El Salvadoran capabilities in counterterrorism operations, police investigations and judicial capabilities as well.<sup>471</sup> The Secretary of State was to submit proposals “for supplemental assistance required to safeguard U.S. interests in Central America” and help the countries in the region to improve their capabilities in countering terrorism, “subversion and destabilization.”<sup>472</sup> This supplemental assistance to help combat subversion might have been targeting Libyan subversion in the area. Qadhafi was known to supply weapons to Nicaragua. He also attempted to increase his subversive operations in the Caribbean.

Because of the large number of hijackings and other terrorist attacks against US and foreign air carriers and the desire to curtail such terrorist attacks Reagan felt it was necessary to sign another directive on 19 July 1985 authorizing the creation of a civil aviation anti-terrorist program.<sup>473</sup> This NSDD authorized the expansion of the Federal Air Marshal Program. The expansion would be in three phases with all three phases completed within sixty days. The first phase was within fourteen days from the date of the NSDD. The “existing Federal Air Marshal

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<sup>469</sup> The White House, “Combatting Terrorism in Central America,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 176*, 9 July 1985, <http://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/scanned%20NSDDs/NSDD176.pdf>, accessed on 25 October 2016.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> The White House, “Civil Aviation Anti-Terrorism Program,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 180*, 19 July 1985, <http://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/scanned%20NSDDs/NSDD180.pdf>, accessed on 25 October 2016.

complement” would cover flights to cities that had the most severe threat of hijacking.<sup>474</sup> The second phase was to be completed within thirty days and the Federal Air Marshal complement was to be expanded through “federal law enforcement officers from other Executive Branch agencies.”<sup>475</sup> The third phase was within sixty days and the Federal Air Marshal complement was to be expanded by acquiring new special agents, in other words, through a recruitment process.<sup>476</sup> This expended complement was to be utilized until the Secretary of Transportation deemed otherwise.<sup>477</sup> The NSDD also provided authorization for assessing the security effectiveness of foreign airports, research and development of explosive detectors and other security enhancements, foreign technical assistance, “Enhanced Airline Security Training,” and crisis management responsibilities for the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration.<sup>478</sup> The Enhanced Airline Security Training was designed to train US air carrier crew members for high-risk flights. Crew members were to receive security training and receive threat awareness briefings from the Department of Transportation.<sup>479</sup> The goal was to reduce the vulnerability of flights from hijackings.

On 20 July 1985, the Reagan administration produced *National Security Decision Directive Number 179* which authorized the formation of the Task Force on Combatting Terrorism.<sup>480</sup> The United States recognized that international terrorism posed as “an increasing

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<sup>474</sup> The White House, *NSDD 180*.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>480</sup> The White House, *National Security Decision Directive Number 179*, 20 July 1985, <http://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/scanned%20NSDDs/NSDD179.pdf>, accessed on 25 October 2016.

threat” to American citizens and interests abroad.<sup>481</sup> The US further recognized that the federal government was obliged to protect US citizens and US interests from the dangers of terrorism and “(t)o the extent we can, we should undertake action in concert with other nations which share our democratic institutions to combat the menace of terrorism. We must, however, be prepared to act unilaterally when necessary.”<sup>482</sup> It was preferable to act in concert with other likeminded nations, but the United States reserved the right to act alone if necessary. Europe demonstrated a reluctance to use force against terrorism or to implement sanctions against states that supported terrorism. Europe took a soft approach toward terrorism which frustrated the Reagan administration. Reagan believed there were times when a tough approach was necessary to convey to state-supporters of terrorism that their antics would not be tolerated.

The Task Force on Combatting Terrorism was chaired by Vice President George H. W. Bush. The task force was to review and evaluate a list of items which included the effectiveness of US policy and programs designed to combat terrorism. These included national priorities as established by executive orders and NSDDs: “a review and evaluation of present laws and law enforcement programs;” and make appropriate recommendations to the president by year’s end.<sup>483</sup> The Vice President’s Task Force on Combatting Terrorism was not another blue-ribbon panel because their recommendations had real world consequences if they were wrong. The task force was to examine every aspect of US counterterrorism policy including agencies the American public was unaware of having a role in countering terrorism like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) which most Americans considered as responsible for natural

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<sup>481</sup> The White House, *NSDD 179*.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*

disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes. However, FEMA would react to man-made disasters like a terrorist bombing that resulted in heavy casualties. The United States has many places that could produce such casualties like high-rise buildings like the Sears Tower in Chicago or a sports stadium. Even large dams like the Hoover Dam were considered terrorist targets. While the TWA hijacking may not take total credit for this flurry of activity within the Reagan administration, it did leave a mark on the American psyche. The hijacking which was broadcast live in every living room frightened many people because they imagined it could have been them on the plane. The administration was developing a stronger and more consistent response to terrorist events through the various NSDDs and the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism.

While the US was recovering from this traumatic event, Qadhafi was making headlines in the Arab world. The American embassy in Tunis sent a cable to the State Department on 17 September 1985 regarding a media reaction in an Arab language weekly *Al Bayane*.<sup>484</sup> In this Arab language weekly, Qadhafi blamed the US for Libya's expelling Tunisian and Egyptian workers out of the country. He claimed that the decision for the mass expulsion was taken by the People's Committees, but the blame for it was on America because of the "U.S. blockade against Libya."<sup>485</sup> The imposing of "budget restrictions" caused the expulsion of these workers because of the blockade.<sup>486</sup> This would suggest that Reagan's restrictions on the export of oil and other technologies were effective against the Libyan economy. However, these restrictions would have been more effective if Western Europe also imposed sanctions against Libya. These

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<sup>484</sup> Cable, American Embassy Tunis to the Department of State, "Media Reaction: US-Libya," 17 September 1985, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP05-01559R000400400058-8.pdf>, accessed on 3 November 2022.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

restrictions were not as effective because Western Europe were still trading with Libya. If Europe joined the sanctions regime it could have forced Libya to change its behavior because the combination of these restrictions and the downturn of oil prices would have had a devastating effect on the Libyan economy. Qadhafi would have less money to cause problems and the Libyan oil industry would have had less parts, equipment, technology, and manpower to maintain production. This would have forced Qadhafi to modify his behavior.

The United States had barely recovered from the TWA drama during the summer when terrorists exposed the vulnerability of another mode of travel. This time four terrorists from the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) hijacked the luxury liner Achille Lauro during a Mediterranean cruise on 7 October 1985. The PLF splintered into two factions. One faction was based in Damascus was anti-Arafat and the pro-Arafat faction was based out of Tunis.<sup>487</sup> The pro-Arafat faction of the Palestine Liberation Front was led by Abu Abbas, a chief Arafat lieutenant.<sup>488</sup> The hijacking occurred by accident because a waiter entered Cabin 82 and discovered four men cleaning their AK-47s. The waiter tried to raise the alarm, but he was caught by the terrorists. With their cover blown they were forced to seize the ship.<sup>489</sup> Once the United States was made aware of the ship's seizure, the State Department requested the governments of Syria, Lebanon,

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<sup>487</sup> David B. Ottaway and John M. Goshko, "U.S. Voices Outrage at Murder: Administration Seeks Killers' Prosecution," *The Washington Post*, 10 October 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>488</sup> John M. Goshko and Lou Cannon, "Reagan Administration Accepts Release With Disappointment," *The Washington Post*, 13 October 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>489</sup> Scott C. Truver, "Maritime Terrorism, 1985," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, May 1986, 16, folder "Libya: Terrorism II [Terrorism: Libya 09/25/1986-09/30/1986], Oliver North Files, Box 105, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-105/40-633-1201554-105-022-2017.pdf>, accessed on 8 September 2022 and Loren Jenkins, "U.S. Protests Abbas' Departure After Issues of Arrest Warrant," *The Washington Post*, 13 October 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

and Cyprus to deny docking rights to the Achille Lauro.<sup>490</sup> The terrorists threatened to kill hostages if the ship was not allowed to enter port, but port authorities denied entry. The terrorists responded by killing Leon Klinghoffer, a 69-year-old American citizen who was wheel-chaired bound because of a stroke which paralyzed his right side of his body.<sup>491</sup> The fate of Klinghoffer was not discovered until after the Achille Lauro made port in Egypt.

Throughout the incident, the United States made it clear to the Mediterranean states about its first pillar of counterterrorism policy: no deals to terrorists.<sup>492</sup> However, despite US objections, a deal was struck and the terrorists surrendered the ship during the evening of 9 October 1985. The surrender was the result of intense negotiations between Abu Abbas, who was also known as Abu Khaled and was a member of the PLO Executive Committee, and the terrorists on board the Achille Lauro.<sup>493</sup> The terrorists left the ship by fishing boat and early on 10 October 1985, the US ambassador to Egypt Nicholas Veliotis, boarded the ship and discovered that an American citizen had been murdered. He became angry and “ordered the embassy to telephone the Egyptian foreign minister” and told him that the US insisted that Egypt prosecute them. The ambassador used much cruder language to convey his anger.<sup>494</sup> Ambassador Veliotis made his objections known, but the deal went ahead anyway.

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<sup>490</sup> Truver, “Maritime Terrorism, 1985,” 16 and Jenkins, *WP*, 13 October 1985.

<sup>491</sup> Truver, “Maritime Terrorism, 1985,” 16, Jenkins, *WP*, 13 October 1985, Ottaway and Goshko, *WP*, 10 October 1985, and Lionel Barber, “Crisis Ends in Tragedy for New Yorker’s Family,” *The Washington Post*, 10 October 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>492</sup> Turver, “Maritime Terrorism, 1985,” 16.

<sup>493</sup> Christopher Dickey, “Outraged U.S. Demands Egypt Prosecute Hijackers,” *The Washington Post*, 10 October 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, and Ottaway, Goshko, *WP*, 10 October 1985, and Truver, “Maritime Terrorism, 1985,” 17.

The Reagan administration received some criticism on how the US handled the hijacking. Phyllis Yellin, whose mother was on board the Achille Lauro stated she had “mixed emotions” about the ending of the hijacking.<sup>495</sup> She said she was happy that her mother was still alive and she stated that she “wouldn’t mind meeting” the perpetrators with a machine gun at night.<sup>496</sup> She also said that “she was alarmed by the apparent inability of the United States to counteract terrorism.”<sup>497</sup> She added, ““We out to be carrying a big stick, but in fact we are just carrying a twig. We have got missiles and satellites, but nobody seems to be able to do anything.””<sup>498</sup> While her frustration was understandable, but she and people in general, did not understand the complexity of the situation. The ship was technically Italian property and the Italian government would have objected to the use of force by the United States. Another question would have been the ship’s location. If force was used by the US and it occurred in the territorial waters of another country, that would have hurt the Reagan administration diplomatically, especially if the country was hostile to the United States. In addition, there was the possibility of the ship being rigged with explosives, if force was used, the terrorists could have set off the explosives causing the ship to sink and cause greater losses of life. Yellin mentioned missiles, but who would the US attack? The PLO? Libya or Syria? If the United States attacked the wrong party, that would hurt the Reagan administration diplomatically also and there would be the possibility of a confrontation with the Soviet Union. She also mentioned satellites. Satellites could have monitored the movements of a person or a group, but this technology could not provide any clues on intention.

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<sup>495</sup> Barber, *WP*, 10 October 1985.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*

US officials did not know where the four terrorists were after they left the ship. The Reagan administration believed they were still in Egypt, but Mubarak denied they were still in the country. He claimed the terrorists had already left Egyptian territory and he did not know where they went.<sup>499</sup> US intelligence assets, however, discovered the four hijackers were awaiting a flight out of the country at an Egyptian military base.<sup>500</sup> US intelligence believed the terrorists were going to fly out of Egypt that very night. The Deputy National Security Advisor Vice Admiral John Poindexter informed Robert McFarlane, the National Security Advisor that NSC staffers “conceived a plan to divert the Egyptian aircraft to Sicily” and take the terrorists into custody, this operation would have fell under the third pillar of US counterterrorism policy, bringing terrorists to justice.<sup>501</sup> On the night of 11 October 1985, four F-14 fighters launched from the USS Saratoga and intercepted the Egyptian Boeing 737 carrying Abbas, his assistant and the four hijackers. The F-14s forced the confused Egyptian pilot to fly the plane to Sicily and he complied.<sup>502</sup>

The US did not consult with the Italians before the launch of the intercept mission, but once the plane was on the ground it was quickly surrounded by both the Italians and US personnel. To avoid an international incident with a NATO ally, the US allowed the Italians to take the terrorists into custody, under protest.<sup>503</sup> The Italian government in a press statement said that the Italian prime minister, Bettino Craxi, agreed with President Reagan that the Egyptian aircraft be

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<sup>499</sup> Loren Jenkins, “F-14s Force Egyptian Aircraft to Land at Italian Base,” *The Washington Post*, 11 October 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>500</sup> Truver, “Maritime Terrorism, 1985,” 17.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>502</sup> Jenkins, *WP*, 11 October 1985.

<sup>503</sup> Jenkins, *WP*, 11 October 1985 and Truver, “Maritime Terrorism, 1985,” 18.



allowed to land at the US Navy's Sigonella Air Base in Sicily.<sup>504</sup> The press statement hid the fact the US did not consult with the Italians, the Italians were completely surprised and this press statement was issued to demonstrate that this was not the case.

Secretary of Defense Weinberger provided information about the operation during a press briefing after midnight to inform the press that the terrorists were in custody after the Egyptian airliner was intercepted. He stated that the USS *Saratoga* was cruising off the coast of Albania and it had received orders from Rome mid-afternoon. The *Saratoga* had to turn around since it was facing in the wrong direction.<sup>505</sup> He further stated that the Egyptian airliner was refused landing rights in Tunis and Athens, but it was still heading toward Tunis when it was intercepted and the US Navy F-14s did not require refueling during the operation.<sup>506</sup>

The interception of the Egyptian airliner was the American reaction to the frustration of Egypt allowing the terrorists to escape. Both Italy and the United States demanded that the four terrorists involved with the hijacking should have been extradited.<sup>507</sup> The Italians wanted the four terrorists for seizing the *Achille Lauro* while the US wanted them for the murder of Leon Klinghoffer.<sup>508</sup> For the Americans, the capture of Abbas was a bonus. Reagan received praise for the daring interception of the Egyptian plane and the capture of the terrorists. Reagan was quoted that the US sent "'a message to terrorists everywhere' that 'you can run but you can't hide'"<sup>509</sup> Reagan acknowledged the difficulty of capturing terrorists, for example, the Shi'ite

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<sup>504</sup> Jenkins, *WP*, 11 October 1985.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>507</sup> Jenkins, *WP*, 11 October 1985.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*

terrorists who blew up the Marine Headquarters in Beirut died in the blast making it tremendously difficult to find those responsible for that operation. He added that “(t)his has been our great problem with terrorism, but here was a clearcut case where we could lay our hands on the terrorists.”<sup>510</sup> The State Department suggested that US embassies, consulates or other facilities increase their security measures as a precaution in case of any terrorist backlash for the interception of Abbas.<sup>511</sup>

Reagan telephoned the Klinghoffer family to offer his sympathies over their loss. The White House issued a statement saying that the president spoke to Klinghoffer’s two daughters, Lisa Sue Arbitter, and Ilsa Peta Klinghoffer. The president told them that they were in his prayers and the prayers of Mrs. Reagan.<sup>512</sup> Reagan also stated “that ‘events of the past 24 hours reinforce the determination of all those who share the privileges of freedom and liberty to join together in countering the scourge of international terrorism.’”<sup>513</sup> However, the jubilation did not last, Mohammed Abbas or Abu Abbas, and his assistant were set free by Italian authorities despite US requests for extradition. The US issued an arrest warrant for Abbas and sent it to Italy, but Abbas and his assistant boarded a Yugoslavian airliner and managed to escape to Yugoslavia.<sup>514</sup> Maxwell Rabb, the US Ambassador to Italy said, “I’m not happy about what had happened here today.”<sup>515</sup> His statement was made after his meeting with Prime Minister Craxi,

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<sup>509</sup> Lou Cannon, “President Basks in Praise: Hill Critics Join in Applauding ‘Message to Terrorists,’” *The Washington Post*, 12 October 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Cannon, *WP*, 12 October 1985.

<sup>514</sup> Jenkins, *WP*, 13 October 1985.

Rabb “delivered a stiff protest to the Italian government” and US officials believed the Italians allowed Abbas to escape.<sup>516</sup> While the US was angered by the release of Abbas, the US government still appreciated Italy’s cooperation during the Achille Lauro incident.

The Achille Lauro affair convinced the Reagan administration that it was necessary to add an additional instrument to safeguard sea travel. The Achille Lauro hijacking brought the vulnerabilities of sea travel to the fore. The hijacking of the cruise ship led to the International Maritime Organization’s 1988 Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation at a conference held in Rome, Italy.<sup>517</sup> The Convention on Maritime Safety was based on a draft submitted by Austria, Egypt, and Italy for consideration during the 1986 International Maritime Organization (IMO) Ad Hoc Preparatory Committee meeting, the draft convention was accepted during a meeting in Rome in 1987 and a diplomatic conference for the convention’s adoption was scheduled for March 1988.<sup>518</sup>

The provisions of the convention would only apply to the twenty-five nations that signed it during the 1988 diplomatic conference in Rome and any other nations that signed and ratified it.<sup>519</sup> The IMO Convention on Maritime Navigation provided that parties to the convention would work to establish jurisdiction when an offense was committed “against or on board a ship flying the flag of the state at the time of the offense” or if the offense was committed in the territory of that state.<sup>520</sup> A ship bearing the flag of a state would be regarded as that state’s territory

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<sup>515</sup> Jenkins, *WP*, 13 October 1985.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>517</sup> Malvina Halberstam, “Terrorism on the High Seas: The Achille Lauro, Piracy and the IMO Convention on Maritime Safety,” *The American Journal of International Law* 82 (1988): 269.

<sup>518</sup> Halberstam, “Terrorism on the High Seas,” *AJIL*, 270.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 269-270.

when out to sea. Besides this new convention, international law had other agreements on the suppression of piracy, but the hijacking of the Achille Lauro was not considered an act of piracy because the ship was seized by terrorists already on board the ship. An act of piracy required another ship to seize control of the Achille Lauro.<sup>521</sup>

Although the US could not link the Achille Lauro affair to Libya, the Reagan administration was taking steps against Qadhafi. In early November, Stephen Engelberg, a reporter for the *New York Times*, reported that Reagan approved a covert operation against Libya.<sup>522</sup> Both Congressional and administration sources confirmed the covert action to weaken the Libyan regime. However, no details of the operation were mentioned, but the disclosure of the plan was damaging to the administration because it informed the enemy of US intentions and a US official was quoted in saying that Qadhafi probably suspected the United States of initiating such an operation.<sup>523</sup> An American weekly publication, *U.S. News & World Report* stated that the *Washington Post* leaked the covert plan. The magazine reported that the plan was developed by the Central Intelligence Agency. The plan “was built around Qadhafi’s support of foreign terrorist groups from Northern Ireland to the Philippines.”<sup>524</sup> A friendly third world country was to tempt Qadhafi into launching a new foreign adventure, but this adventure was rigged to fail and provide Qadhafi’s opponents in the Libyan armed forces a chance to overthrow him.<sup>525</sup> However,

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<sup>520</sup> Halberstam, “Terrorism on the High Seas,” *AJIL*, 295.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 284-285.

<sup>522</sup> Stephen Engelberg, “Reagan Approval Reported on Plan to Weaken Libya,” *The New York Times*, 4 November 1985, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00552R000505250054-7.pdf>, accessed on 2 May 2022.

<sup>523</sup> Engelberg, *NYT*, 4 November 1985.

<sup>524</sup> “CIA Sets Trap to Catch a Pest,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 18 November 1985, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00552R000505250029-5.pdf>, accessed on 2 November 2022.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*

the leak of the plan blew any chances of success, since it made Qadhafi aware of it. The leak prompted the Reagan administration to investigate the source. Bill Hart, a White House spokesman, said that the president was “very concerned” about “the unauthorized disclosure of intelligence and classified information.”<sup>526</sup> Hart further stated that the president was “ordering an investigation of the disclosure of the United States intelligence documents cited in this news report in an effort to determine who is responsible for such disclosures and to take appropriate action.”<sup>527</sup> While this covert plan failed because of early disclosure and Qadhafi became aware of it, the plan could still be considered a success because it increased pressure on Qadhafi to stop supporting terrorism. Since the plan involved his opponents within the Libyan officer corps, Qadhafi could not trust his officers because their loyalty was questionable. The only solution open to him was purging the officer corps and inadvertently remove loyal officers as well. Such a purge would have been demoralizing to the Libyan military officers possibly to the point of staging a coup in order to protect themselves. However, the coup did not happen. Qadhafi quietly purged officers out of key positions and replaced them with officers he could trust, mainly his own kinsmen.

The world was shocked by two nearly simultaneous terrorist attacks on 27 December 1985 and these attacks prompted the Reagan administration to act against the Qadhafi regime. The international airports in Rome and Vienna were attacked by several terrorists from the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO). The American embassy in Vienna sent a cable to the State Department reporting the attack at the international airport in Vienna. According to US diplomatic

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<sup>526</sup> Engelberg, *NYT*, 4 November 1985.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*

staff, the attack took place “approximately” at 9:10 am by “unidentified terrorists.”<sup>528</sup> The American embassy in Vienna also reported that there were “conflicting reports concerning the number of terrorists involved” and the number of casualties from the attack could not be discerned.<sup>529</sup> What the embassy knew for certain was the attack involved grenades and firearms and the attack was directed at the El Al counter in the departure lounge and according to their information, El Al had a departing flight to New York City about to leave the terminal.<sup>530</sup> The American embassy in Rome reported that “a firefight broke out between terrorists and El Al and Italian security guards” at approximately 9:10 am at the Fuimicino International Airport in Rome.<sup>531</sup> The embassy also reported that according to Italian news media at least seventeen people were killed including three terrorists, at least one US citizen was killed during the attack.<sup>532</sup> American embassy officials were sent to the airport and the hospitals to gather further information and fuller reports were to follow.<sup>533</sup>

A Crisis Pre-Planning Group meeting was quickly scheduled to meet on 28 December or 30 December 1985 to discuss the federal government’s response to these terrorist attacks.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Cable, American Embassy, Vienna to the Secretary of State, 27 December 1985, folder “Terrorist Attacks – Rome/Vienna 12/27/1985 (1),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reagan-library.gov/public/digitalibrary/smof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-001-2017.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2022.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> Cable, American Embassy, Rome to the Secretary of State, 27 December 1985, folder “Terrorist Attacks – Rome/Vienna 12/27/1985 (1),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-001-2017.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2022.

<sup>532</sup> Cable, American Embassy, Rome to the Secretary of State, 27 December 1985.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

<sup>534</sup> Memo, Crisis Pre-Planning Group Meeting (CPPG), 27 December 1985, folder “Terrorist Attacks – Rome/Vienna 12/27/1985 (1),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/>

What was discussed was not forthcoming, but the participants included key officials from the CIA, Defense, State, and the NSC.<sup>535</sup> As of 9:30 am EST on 27 December 1985, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, USMC, a NSC staffer had a copy of the available information of the facts regarding the attacks.<sup>536</sup> Most of the information matched media reports such as sixteen total dead in Rome including three terrorists, at least five Americans were in hospital and there was “no claim” for the attack. In Vienna there were three deaths including one terrorist and no Americans were killed.<sup>537</sup> At least four Americans died in the Rome attack including 11-year-old Natasha Simpson, daughter of Victor Simpson, the Associated Press Bureau Chief in Rome.<sup>538</sup> Daniella Simpson, also a journalist, was walking her dog outside the terminal at the time of the attack, after hearing gunfire, she rushed into the terminal to find her husband, Victor with a bloody hand and their nine-year-old son with a stomach wound and their daughter mortally wounded.<sup>539</sup> An opinion piece in the *International Herald Tribune* argued the US should pursue a more active role in countering terrorism, “(i)nstead of concealing American cooperation and participation in counter-terrorist strikes, we should publicize and proclaim that it will be U.S. policy to lead all possible assistance to any friendly government whose citizens are taken

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public/digitalibrary/smof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-001-2017.pdf, accessed on 14 June 2022.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> Fact Sheet, “Attack Against El Al – as of 0930 EST 27 Dec.,” folder “Terrorist Attacks – Rome/Vienna 12/27/1985 (1),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <http://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digital-library/smof/politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-001-2017.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2022.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Loren Jenkins, “17 Die in Attacks on Rome, Vienna Airports: Gunmen Use Grenades, Rifles,” *The Washington Post*, 28 December 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>539</sup> Harry Anderson, Theodore Stanger, Andrew Nagorski, and Zofia Smardz, “Holiday of Terror: In coordinated machine-gun attacks, gunmen allied with the Palestinian cause murder 14 people in the airports of Rome and Vienna,” *Newsweek*, 6 January 1986, 27-28.

hostage.”<sup>540</sup> Moreover, “(t)hat notice – the clear, advance warning to terrorists anywhere that if they strike against anyone, we are coming after them – is the best insurance policy against terrorism we can buy.”<sup>541</sup>

The United States became convinced the culprit for the attacks was the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) which was violently opposed to Yasir Arafat’s leadership in the PLO.<sup>542</sup> It was determined by US officials that it was the ANO because of “(t)he indiscriminate attack, the choice of targets, preliminary evidence, and method of operation to Abu Nidal.”<sup>543</sup> Abu Nidal was known to have enjoyed support from several Arab countries such as Syria, but Abu Nidal was known to have been supported “primarily (by) Libya.”<sup>544</sup> However, Italian military intelligence officials hinted that the terrorists trained in Iran and arrived in Italy by traveling through Syria.<sup>545</sup> The Italians reported that three separate terrorist groups claimed responsibility for the attacks and the attacks were reprisals for the Israeli raid on the PLO headquarters in Tunis and for the Sabra and Chatila massacres near Beirut in 1982.<sup>546</sup> A West German newspaper used intelligence sources from Bonn, West Germany reported that the attacks were staged because of a

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<sup>540</sup> David S. Broder, “For a Declared War on Terror,” *International Herald Tribune*, 28-29 December 1985, (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> “Terrorism: Theme Paper,” folder “Terrorist Attacks – Rome/Vienna 12/27/1985 (1),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smf/nsc-politicaland-militaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-001-2017.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2022.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>545</sup> John Tagliabue, “Italian Defense Official Says Attackers Trained in Iran and Arrived Via Syria,” *International Herald Tribune*, 30 December 1985. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.



deal between Qadhafi and Sabri el-Banna, whose nom de guerre was Abu Nidal.<sup>547</sup> This suggested Libya did have ties to the Rome and Vienna attacks.

The surviving terrorist of the Rome attack was interrogated and he was identified as Bou Hmida Yaser. He claimed to belong to the “Organization Cell of the Arab Guerrilla” which was affiliated with the ANO.<sup>548</sup> Yaser went on to explain that the organization was against Israel, Arafat, anyone who supported Arafat and the organization was supported by Libya and Syria.<sup>549</sup> Their mission was to capture hostages in the airport terminal, seize an El Al flight and “blow up the plane up over Tel Aviv.”<sup>550</sup> Yaser’s interrogation provided some intelligence information about how the ANO planned their operation and how they operated. The Rome and Vienna airport attacks were eerily like the Achille Lauro, where the original plan was to conduct a suicide attack in Israel, but plans changed when the terrorists were discovered.

A heavily redacted memo on a press conference held by the Tunisian Ministry of Interior stated that the Tunisians provided solid evidence implicating Libya in the recent attacks.<sup>551</sup> The memo stated that “Libya, however, has publicly praised the attacks as ‘heroic,’ and has condemned moderate Arab governments for denouncing them. We have considerable evidence of growing Libyan support for the Abu Nidal organization.”<sup>552</sup> The evidence the Tunisians had was the

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<sup>547</sup> Tagliabue, *IHT*, 30 December 1985.

<sup>548</sup> Cable, American Embassy Rome to Secretary of State, 30 December 1985, folder “Terrorism and Libya (2),” Donald Fortier Files, RAC Box 8, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/snof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/Fortier/R8/terrorismandlibya2.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>550</sup> Cable, American Embassy Rome to Secretary of State, 30 December 1985.

<sup>551</sup> Memo, no title, folder “Terrorism and Libya (2),” Donald Fortier Files, RAC Box 8, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/snof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/fortier/R8/terrorismandlibya2.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*

travel documents the terrorists had. They were either forgeries or legitimate Tunisian passports seized by the Libyans before expelling Tunisian workers out of the country, but the Tunisian authorities went out of their way to avoid press questions that directly implicated Libya in the terrorist attacks.<sup>553</sup> However, this was the second time that legitimate Tunisian passports seized by Libya were used by the ANO in a terrorist attack.<sup>554</sup> The Tunisians wanted to avoid directly implicating Libya in the attacks because Tunis feared reprisals by Qadhafi.

While this provided evidence of Libyan involvement, the State Department was not prepared to comment on Libya's guilt in the terrorist attacks during a daily press briefing.<sup>555</sup> The State Department was prepared to suggest that the Abu Nidal Organization was involved in the attack and that the evidence pointed to it and other governments reached a similar conclusion.<sup>556</sup> When asked about Italy's belief that Iran and Syria were involved in the Rome and Vienna terrorist attacks, the State Department stated that it did not have "any confirmation of those reports," and that "earlier in response to a question on Libya, we do know that there has been Abu Nidal presence in Syria."<sup>557</sup> The State Department refrained from mentioning a military response to the terrorist attacks.<sup>558</sup>

The American people were divided over the use of force against terrorists. There were four camps over the military response issue. Women mainly opposed the use of force against

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<sup>553</sup> Memo, no title, Folder "Terrorism and Libya (2)."

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> "Department of State Daily Press Briefing, 30 December 1985," folder "Terrorism and Libya (2)," Donald Fortier Files, RAC Box 8, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/Forteir/R8/terrorismandlibya2.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> "Department of State Daily Press Briefing, 30 December 1985."

<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

terrorists and this was about one-fourth of the survey results.<sup>559</sup> About one-third mainly men under the age of 45 favored military force to “discourage terrorism,” and “another third” consisted mainly of women with a large minority element swung “between general support for military action to discourage terrorism to opposition when the specific issue of innocent lives and violence begetting violence” was “raised.”<sup>560</sup> The “remaining twelfth” could be persuaded to support the use of force “if they are assured” the US was “punishing those that have attacked the U.S.,” but they were generally opposed to “military action.”<sup>561</sup> A slight majority of the American public supported military action against terrorism. Considering Reagan was known for his oratory skills, he certainly could persuade most Americans to support the use of force against terrorism. Americans favored a softer approach to terrorism which included “trade embargoes, asset seizures, diplomatic restrictions, and economic sanctions,” but at the same time, most Americans understood that these measures would not prevent future terrorist attacks.<sup>562</sup> Many Americans believed that the president could take executive action against terrorism without consulting Congress or US allies, but they preferred “deliberations and patience to military action, especially early in a terrorist incident.”<sup>563</sup> While this survey demonstrated that the American people were divided, it might suggest that US officials were divided as well since Secretary of State George Shultz was a huge advocate for the use of force while Secretary of De-

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<sup>559</sup> Memo, Rodney B. McDaniel to John M. Poindexter, “American Public Opinion and Terrorism,” 25 November 1985, folder “Libya and Terrorism (2),” Donald Fortier Files, RAC Box 8, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/fortier/R8/terrorism-and-libya2.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> Memo, Rodney B. McDaniel to John M. Poindexter, “American Public Opinion and Terrorism,” 25 November 1985.

fense Caspar Weinberger was vehemently opposed to exercising American military might needlessly.

The policy implications for this poll were that Americans would give a limited amount of time to resolve a terrorist incident, the administration could pursue soft power policies, the well educated and professional class opposed armed response, the president could “execute anti-terrorism policy” without consulting Congress and the “best opportunity for public support of the use of force against terrorists would appear after an incident like the embassy or military bombings” if there were no hostages to complicate the situation.<sup>564</sup> While the policy implications might appear frustrating for an administration that wanted to use force against terrorists, the information did show that the American public would accept military action under the right circumstances. Reagan was very capable of pulling at the heartstrings of most Americans and he could get the support needed to use force with the right kind of speech.

1985 was truly a year of terror, there were many terrorist attacks during this year and three of the major acts of terrorism were briefly discussed. The first attack was the TWA 847 hijacking which brought to the fore the plight of the Palestinians but also questions about the Middle East peace process. The terrorists gave the impression that there would be no peace in the Middle East until the Palestinian question was answered. The TWA 847 hijacking was beamed into every living room and captivated those who watched the drama unfold. The Achille Lauro affair demonstrated the vulnerability of sea travel and prompted the Reagan administration to act against maritime terrorism by encouraging the IMO to negotiate a maritime security convention which followed previous conventions on the and other forms of violence against aircraft. The Rome and Vienna airport attacks during the holiday season shocked the world and the

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<sup>564</sup> Memo, Rodney B. McDaniel to John M. Poindexter, “American Public Opinion and Terrorism,” 25 November 1985.

United States believed that Libya supported these attacks because of Qadhafi's association with Abu Nidal.

The Rome and Vienna attacks prompted the Reagan administration to act against Libyan-supported terrorism. The US response came in the guise of freedom of navigation (FON) exercises to pressure Qadhafi to change his policies. The Reagan administration launched three freedom of navigation exercises in a row in early 1986 and devised a stricter economic sanctions scheme at the same time. The Reagan administration urged their European allies to join the United States in implementing economic sanctions to increase the pain on Libya and force Qadhafi to change his behavior and policy, which are part of the second pillar of US counter-terrorism policy. The next chapter will discuss how the US deliberated over their response for the Rome and Vienna terrorist attacks, continue the discussion of US counterterrorism efforts during the month of January and cover the first of the freedom of navigation exercises in the Gulf of Sidra. The US hoped that these actions would be enough to force Libya to quit terrorism, but Libya responded with another terrorist attack which convinced Reagan to use force against Qadhafi which will be discussed in chapter eight.

## Chapter Seven: Operation Attain Document I and US Counterterrorism Efforts in Early 1986

Shortly after the attacks on the Rome and Vienna airports, the United States deliberated over their response. There was ample evidence that Abu Nidal was involved and the United States had reason to believe that Libya was involved since Qadhafi provided sanctuary to the ANO.<sup>565</sup> In a redacted report entitled “Responsibility for El Al Attacks,” the evidence against the ANO included many aspects of how it operated including coordinated attacks which were Abu Nidal’s “modus operandi” and Abu Nidal was “known to retaliate against those governments who imprison its members.”<sup>566</sup> In addition, two surviving terrorists from the Vienna attack claimed to have been members of the ANO during interrogation.<sup>567</sup> Evidence of Libyan involvement included possible foreknowledge of the attack and three confiscated Tunisian passports that were used in the operation. JANA, the “Libyan news agency on 29 December heralded the attacks as ‘heroic’ operations” and Qadhafi and Abu Nidal agreed to cooperate with each other “in targeting moderate Arab states, Israel and US.”<sup>568</sup> This agreement to cooperate with each other was reached in the spring of 1985 and Abu Nidal was residing in Tripoli despite having a headquarters in Damascus.<sup>569</sup> This chapter will examine the number of responses the Reagan administration developed against Libyan-supported terrorism and some of the difficulties of getting their European allies on board during the winter of 1986. Reagan’s responses were scheduling military maneuvers in the Gulf of Sidra, publicly naming Libya as the state sponsor

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<sup>565</sup> Report, “Responsibility for El Al Attacks,” 30 December 1985, folder “Terrorism and Libya (6),” Donald Fortier Files, RAC Box 8, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/fortierd/R8/terrorismandlibya6.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

of the Rome and Vienna terrorist attacks, and imposing stricter economic sanctions. These responses included the first of the three freedom of navigation operations (FON) that took place in January-March 1986. The freedom of navigation operations was part of Reagan's coercive diplomacy strategy. The freedom of navigation operations were military exercises designed to pressure Qadhafi into changing his international behavior, therefore, it fell under the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy. These operations were a signal to Tripoli that the United States did not accept the Gulf of Sidra as Libyan territorial waters, but as international waters open for any maritime nation to freely navigate. The freedom of navigation operations was strictly peaceful, but the aircraft carrier task forces were allowed the right of self-defense in case of attack. The freedom of navigation operations was part of Reagan's military options short of war. In the past, these kinds of operations were known as gunboat diplomacy. also known as power projection, it is an integral part of coercive diplomacy.

In early January 1986, the United States deliberated their response to Libyan-sponsored terrorism. On 4 January 1986, a memorandum for John M. Poindexter informed him that President Reagan called for a National Security Planning Group (NSPG) meeting for 6 January to discuss US measures to be taken against Libyan-supported terrorism.<sup>570</sup> The meeting also discussed "U.S. measure in response to the terrorist attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports."<sup>571</sup> Some talking points for Poindexter to use during the NSPG meeting were attached to the memorandum. The talking points stressed the importance of implementation of strong economic and political sanctions against Libya. The argument for these sanctions was that "(n)either American

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<sup>570</sup> Memo, James R. Stark, Oliver L. North, Howard Teicher, Jock Covey, Rod McDaniel, and Elaine Morton to John M. Poindexter, 4 January 1986, folder "Terrorism Targets: Libya (9)," Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/snof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-014-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

nor the West at large can afford to contribute resources which enable Qadhafi to support international terrorism.”<sup>572</sup> The talking points did not specify the resources that helped Qadhafi to support terrorism. It was more than likely oil profits, but it could also be material goods such as oil and gas equipment to maintain or increase production or military hardware such as rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), vehicles, munitions, and other military equipment.

The talking points also urged the United States to convince their NATO allies to “isolate Qadhafi,” both economically and politically, but the US would “act alone” if the Europeans did not cooperate with the United States.<sup>573</sup> Poindexter was to say that he was “distressed” at the billions of dollars spent on highly technical military weapons and that the US was “unwilling” to use these high technology weapons against terrorists.<sup>574</sup> He was to argue that “(i)t is imperative that we consider the use of these types of systems so that we can impose a high price on terrorists without putting U.S. forces unduly at risk.”<sup>575</sup> He was to urge the NSPG that military strikes should be a “key component of the integrated strategy.”<sup>576</sup> However, the talking points urged the “military strikes against discreet targets in Libya” to occur “one week from now.”<sup>577</sup> The one week delay was considered enough time for Westerners to leave Libya and for the Europeans to decide whether to cooperate with the US.<sup>578</sup> The Defense Department had several contingency plans in place, but Weinberger would have argued against the use of force because he was rabid

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<sup>572</sup> Memo, James R. Stark, Oliver L. North, Howard Teicher, Jock Covey, Rod McDaniel, and Elaine Morton to John M. Poindexter, 4 January 1986.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.



opponent of using force if it was not within the America's vital interest or he would argue that Defense needed more time to plan the operation.

A draft statement for the president provided comments on the attacks in Rome and Vienna. The draft placed blame for the attacks "squarely at the feet of the terrorist known as Abu Nidal."<sup>579</sup> The draft statement also said that the US was convinced that the terrorists could not launch these attacks without the assistance of Qadhafi's Libya.<sup>580</sup> The main purpose of the draft statement was to announce that Libya's policies and actions had been determined to be a national security threat to the United States and the president had "declared a national emergency to deal with the threat."<sup>581</sup> Reagan had taken these measures against Libya included "a total trade ban on direct import and export trade" with the country, the only exception was for humanitarian purposes.<sup>582</sup> In addition, to the ban on trade, Reagan also placed a ban on "all service contracts with Libya."<sup>583</sup> He also prohibited "all other transactions with Libya or in which Libya" had "an interest by U.S. nationals and U.S. persons," and travel was included in this ban.<sup>584</sup> The only exception was on travel to leave Libya or for "journalistic activity."<sup>585</sup> The purpose of this action was to push Qadhafi to "clearly understand one central and basic message – American and Americans should not and will not do business with Qadhafi's Libya."<sup>586</sup> It was

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<sup>579</sup> "Draft Presidential Statement," nd, folder "Terrorist Targets: Libya (9)," Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/snof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-016-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

unacceptable that Qadhafi characterized the “indiscriminate murder of innocent civilians as ‘heroic acts.’”<sup>587</sup> The draft statement stressed that America’s differences were with Qadhafi and his government. The United States carried no malice toward the Libyan people; at the same time the draft statement took issue with the Europeans saying that “(c)ivilized nations cannot continue to tolerate in the name of economic gain and self-interest, the murder of innocent citizens.”<sup>588</sup> The Reagan administration’s deliberations included discussions on using high technology weapons such as smart bombs or the Tomahawk cruise missiles against the Qadhafi regime and the terrorists he supported, any measures in responses to the Rome/Vienna terrorist attacks, discussions of economic and political sanctions against Libya, declaring a national emergency because of Libyan-sponsored terrorism, and efforts to engage the Europeans to convince them of imposing sanctions against Libya.

The Crisis Pre-Planning Group (CPPG) developed talking points regarding the 6 January meeting.<sup>589</sup> The talking points for the CPPG included “action required” like the State Department’s role in coordinating the economic sanctions executive order with the Office of Management and Budget, establishing a task force to further develop economic sanctions, and diplomatic initiatives to be announced or developed.<sup>590</sup> The diplomatic initiatives were to convince the Europeans to join the sanctions regime. Defense was slated to discuss naval movements in the Mediterranean and the political objectives for the show of force. The talking points suggested

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<sup>586</sup> “Draft Presidential Statement.”

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> The White House, “CPPG Talking Points,” 6 January 1986, folder “Terrorism and Libya (6),” Donald Fortier files, RAC Box 8, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/fortierd/R8/terrorismandlibya6.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

framing those political objectives as “something like show resolve, create uncertainty, prepare to strike targets if ordered, prepare for evacuation of U.S. citizens. Also, need to plan to increase pressure.”<sup>591</sup> The idea of creating uncertainty was to keep Qadhafi guessing what Reagan’s intentions were. Was the Sixth Fleet just flexing muscle as a warning or were they preparing to attack? If the US Navy was preparing for an attack, what were the targets? If Qadhafi believed that an attack was eminent, he would have to defend against it, but if he was uncertain about the target, Qadhafi would have to spread his forces around to defend everything and possibly weaken the intended target.

A redacted report entitled “Responsibility for El Al Attacks” with a handwritten date of 30 December 1985 provided information on who was responsible for the 27 December attacks. The report was written either by the CIA or NSC, but the name of the preparer was redacted.<sup>592</sup> The direct evidence of Libya’s involvement was determined to be: three Tunisian passports confiscated from Tunisian migrant workers who were expelled from Libya in 1988, one 1977 passport reported by the Tunisian consulate as lost, the two airport attacks in December 1985 and the hijacking of an Egypt Air flight which might have been “the result of the ‘evolving relationship’” between Abu Nidal and Qadhafi, and additional evidence of a \$1 million payout to Abu Nidal in August 1985 “for the purchase of arms and ammunition.”<sup>593</sup> The report concluded that “(t)he Abu Nidal group’s track record of successful terrorist operations probably appealed to Qadhafi. Increased funding by Libya is unlikely to win Qadhafi real leverage over the group, which was not wholly responsive to Syrian direction.”<sup>594</sup> In the other, Abu Nidal was an inde-

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<sup>591</sup> The White House, “CPPG Talking Points,” 6 January 1986.

<sup>592</sup> Report, “Responsibility for El Al Attacks,” 30 December 1985.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

pendent actor. He would gladly take Libyan and Syrian money, but he refused to take direction on operations from them. Their influence was limited, but apparently tolerable because Abu Nidal produced results they wanted. The fact that the Abu Nidal Organization was independent would have made it a transnational terrorist organization rather than an international terrorist group. Transnational terrorist groups did not rely on state-sponsorship to survive suggesting that the US might have been wrong about the relationship Abu Nidal had with Qadhafi. However, it did appear that Abu Nidal might have been dependent on Qadhafi because he resided in Tripoli where he knew he was safe from Western and Israeli intelligence.

Nicholas Pratt, Executive Secretary of the NSC, sent John M. Poindexter an undated memorandum about the executive order on imposing economic sanctions on Libya.<sup>595</sup> The memorandum was written before or on 6 January 1986, because Platt provided a draft of the executive order that was under consideration for the scheduled meeting on that day.<sup>596</sup> The memorandum stated that the draft order found “that the policies and actions in support of international terrorism by the Government of Libya constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States,” and the draft order declared a national emergency to deal with that threat.<sup>597</sup> According to Platt, the draft EO was meant to “have maximum political impact,” reduce the presence of American expatriates living and working in Libya, and minimize any criticism “from our allies and encourage their support.”<sup>598</sup> The

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<sup>595</sup> Memo, Nicholas Platt to John M. Poindexter, “Imposition of Economic Sanctions Against Libya Under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and Related Measures,” nd, folder “Terrorist Targets: Libya (9),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-016-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

memorandum included a section-by-section analysis of the draft order.<sup>599</sup>

Abraham D. Sofaer, a legal adviser in the State Department, sent a memorandum to the Secretary of State on 5 January 1986 on how the economic sanctions would affect US businesses.<sup>600</sup> US businesses had invested hundreds of millions of dollars into Libya and the oil companies were making a profit of approximately \$90 million, but Libyan assets within the United States were estimated to be around \$200 million.<sup>601</sup> US businesses had no remedy if Libya seized their assets and Sofaer suggested that the Treasury Department modify some of the proposed executive order's effects "to avoid undue hardship to American interests" and suggested an "alternative approach" that required US "companies with existing contracts" to "exercise any termination options."<sup>602</sup> The memorandum concluded that the executive order would not greatly affect Libya, and the termination of services and trade would have been merely an annoyance.<sup>603</sup> Essentially Libya would have recovered from the ban because the Eastern bloc would have been interested in Libyan oil and many European companies would have replaced the service contracts that were terminated by US companies.

Nicholas Platt was the author of a new memorandum on additional sanctions. There were proposals for an additional tier of "sanctions and controls against Libya."<sup>604</sup> These proposals were supplementary sanctions to protect US citizens against Libyan reprisals for the new econo-

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<sup>599</sup> Memo, Nicholas Platt to John M. Poindexter, "Imposition of Economic Sanctions Against Libya Under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and Related Measures."

<sup>600</sup> Memo, Abraham D. Sofaer to the Secretary, "Cost to U.S. Business of a Ban on Trade and Transactions Involving Libya," 5 January 1986, folder "Terrorism and Libya (4)," Donald Fortier Files, RAC Box 8, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/fortierd/R8/terrorismandlibya4.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

mic sanctions the Reagan administration was imposing by the proposed executive order and to help reduce Qadhafi's "ability to conduct terrorism in this country and abroad."<sup>605</sup> The NSPG had to approve these measures for "further exploration" and the NSC would "undertake coordination with the implementing agencies."<sup>606</sup> Platt did not list what the additional sanctions were and he did not mention how these measures would protect US citizens from reprisals or attack by the Libyans. The additional sanctions were related to the proposed executive order, therefore, might have been harsher economic sanctions.

In a draft paper on congressional or press points to make regarding Libya, US officials believed that the individuals who carried out the attacks in Rome and Vienna were "clearly linked to Libya."<sup>607</sup> Abu Nidal, the leader of the terrorist group that conducted the attacks was headquartered in Libya, his group conducted training there and the Libyan diplomatic corps gave logistical help to the ANO in order to carry out terrorist attacks in Europe.<sup>608</sup> US officials believed that Libyan agents and allied terrorist groups attacked targets throughout Europe, the Middle East, and the United States; moreover, Qadhafi repeatedly tried to subvert his neighbors and resorted to violence to intimidate Chad, Sudan, and other African countries.<sup>609</sup> The US had con-

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<sup>604</sup> Memo, Nicholas Platt to John M. Poindexter, "Proposals for a Second Tier of Sanctions and Controls against Libya," nd, folder "Terrorist Targets: Libya (9)," Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-016-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>605</sup> Memo, Nicholas Platt to John M. Poindexter, "Proposals for a Second Tier of Sanctions and Controls against Libya."

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Paper, "Libya: Congressional/Press Points to Make," nd, folder "Terrorist Targets: Libya (9)," Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-016-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

cluded that terrorism was “not ‘good for business,’” terrorist attacks had affected tourism throughout the region, and neighboring countries had to increase security spending with the millions or possibly billions of dollars spent on security a heavy burden for countries with developing economies.<sup>610</sup> In addition, these countries would “probably never know the full extent of foregone investment opportunities lost as a result of terrorism.”<sup>611</sup> US officials argued that the best way to get the desired coordination of responses was to demonstrate that the United States was willing to undertake action to isolate Libya alone if necessary and to “bring home to that regime the fact that support for terrorism is not cost free.”<sup>612</sup> This was the reason US officials wanted to close all “loopholes in U.S. trade and commercial relations with Libya through additional sanctions.”<sup>613</sup> The United States wanted to lead by example with the imposition of additional sanctions which would have had an adverse effect on US commerce and possibly shame their European allies to follow US example. The economic sanctions the United States imposed was based on a gradual escalation model. The US would impose rather weak sanctions to cause Libya annoyance, but nothing too damaging. By early 1986, the US imposed a financial transaction ban, trade bans on oil and gas equipment, bans on oil importation and a travel ban. The US attempted to convince American expatriates to leave Libya in order to cause a disruption in oil production and deny American expertise on the maintenance and repair of equipment. All these sanctions were designed to convince Qadhafi to quit terrorism and they were designed to be easily rolled back once Qadhafi made that decision. The United States was hoping that their European allies would follow Reagan’s example and impose economic sanctions of their own

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<sup>610</sup> Paper, “Libya: Congressional/Press Points to Make.”

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid.

well. The Reagan administration was hoping to shame Europe into action. The United States was willing to suffer the pain of economic loss if it meant a reduction or wholesale elimination of Libyan terrorism. The United States was formulating their antiterrorism policy on the sanctity of life principle, the country would accept economic losses by refusing to do business with a state that endorsed the attacking of innocent civilians.

The Reagan administration discussed how to convince the Europeans to follow suit. On 3 January 1986, Robert Oakley, head of Counterterrorism in the State Department, wrote an internal memorandum about a US reaction to the 27 December attacks in Rome and Vienna.<sup>614</sup> Oakley stated the US should convey its desire for European support of its counterterrorism efforts. He felt that the “long-term approach to combatting terrorism generally as well as dealing with Libya and Abu Nidal in particular” were well balanced.<sup>615</sup> If the US approach was not well balanced, Western Europe would not go along and would argue that the US was unfairly targeting Libya because it was weak and vulnerable compared to Syria or Iran. A balanced approach included diplomatic efforts such as limiting the number of staff in embassies and consulates and limiting the distances diplomatic staff could travel within the host country. It also included economic sanctions and if necessary, military options, but the approach used against Libya had to be applied to other state-sponsors of terrorism equally. In other words, the Europeans would only accept a balance approach, it had to apply equally to other state-supporters of terrorism like Syria or Iran, not only Libya.

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<sup>614</sup> Memo, “Reaction to Vienna and Rome Massacres,” 3 January 1986, folder “Terrorist Targets: Libya (7),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/snof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-014-2017.pdf>, accessed on 22 March 2022.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid.



Therefore, officials at the State Department believed it was necessary to consult with terrorism experts in other countries in order to develop a consistent policy toward Libya and other state-sponsors of terrorism. The American embassy in Rome informed the State Department that such a meeting between US terrorism experts and Italian terrorism analysts could not be scheduled until 13 January 1986, because 6 January was a “legal Italian holiday” and the Italians needed time to prepare for the visit of the US team of terrorism experts.<sup>616</sup> The embassy advised the State Department on the “precise dates proposed” for the meeting with the US counterterrorism team.<sup>617</sup> This showed some of the difficulties the Reagan administration faced when trying to convince their European allies to follow America’s lead in dealing with Libya and other state-supporters of terrorism. The United States was seeking for ways to eliminate or reduce terrorism because it was good for business and it would improve the personal security of many people. The Europeans, on the other hand, were concerned about their economic prosperity and did not realize that the short-term pain of imposing economic and political sanctions on Libya would benefit their economies long-term. Despite the frustration the Reagan administration felt regarding European intransigence, the Europeans shared intelligence with the United States.

Intelligence was a vital component for countering terrorism and the Europeans were very good in supplying it. On 3 January 1986, the American embassy in Rome sent a cable informing Washington of some intelligence the Italian counterterrorism police uncovered from Bou Hmida Yaser, the lone surviving terrorist of the Rome attack, who said during his interrogation how the

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<sup>616</sup> Cable, American Embassy Rome to the Secretary of State, “Terrorism – Discussions with Host Country Analysts,” 3 January 1986, folder “Terrorist Targets: Libya (7),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-014-2017.pdf>, accessed on 22 March 2022.

<sup>617</sup> Cable, American Embassy Rome to the Secretary of State, “Terrorism – Discussion with Host Country Analysts,” 3 January 1986.

terrorist cell traveled from Beirut to Belgrade to the Italian border.<sup>618</sup> The information Yaser gave was verified by the Italian police.<sup>619</sup> While interesting, the information given did not provide any intelligence on how the ANO operated, how the targets were selected, or whether weapons were brought with them or were acquired locally. If the weapons were acquired locally, it might have given credence to Sterling's terror network thesis that there was a secret network that provided weapons, safehouses, money, and intelligence. Whether it was controlled by the Soviets or a local communist organization would have been speculation.

The Reagan administration had to develop a diplomatic strategy that would convince their European allies to follow suit. Administration officials understood that Europe was "vulnerable in its relationship with Libya."<sup>620</sup> In a draft paper entitled "Background Paper on Approaches to European Governments," the NSC determined the Europeans had significant trade relations with Libya; in fact, "(o)ver 75% of Libya's foreign trade" came from Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.<sup>621</sup> Italy was "Libya's most important trade partner" during this period and West Germany was the second most important trading partner.<sup>622</sup> The main concern for the Europeans was the safety of their citizens since there were

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<sup>618</sup> Cable, American Embassy Rome to the Secretary of State, "Terrorist Attack at Rome International Airport," 3 January 1986, folder "Terrorist Targets: Libya (7)," Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-014-2017.pdf>, accessed on 22 March 2022.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> The White House, "Background Paper on Approaches to European Governments," nd, folder "Terrorist Targets: Libya (9)," Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-016-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid.

about a thousand US citizens still living and working in Libya, but the Reagan administration made numerous attempts to compel those Americans working in Libya to leave that country. The Europeans faced the same dilemma if the European governments ordered their citizens to leave Libya. Working in Libya was very lucrative and only severe legal consequences were required to convince citizens to leave.

While the Europeans were adamant in continuing trade relations with Libya, there was “momentum in Europe for firmer internal actions and closer cooperation with the United States” against international terrorism because of a growing awareness in the “upsurge” of “Middle East terrorism in Western Europe and its political and economic impact,” according to the White House’s background paper.<sup>623</sup> The economic impact was the loss of tourism and the revenues received from it and potential loss of investments for further development. Europe was considered wealthy by modern standards, but many third world countries relied on tourism for much of their revenue and could not afford major losses in revenue and investments. If a country was deemed unstable because of political violence, investors would shy away from it, affecting economic growth. While there was momentum for European cooperation, the White House background paper gauged, the reaction of European governments to Reagan’s efforts against international terrorism remained negative: West Germany and France were “publicly opposed” to “economic sanctions,” Italy “formally invoked the right to clear all non-NATO flights in or out of Sigonella,” and the UK “reminded us of our obligation to consult them on use of F-111s based in England.”<sup>624</sup> American use of force was also viewed negatively by the Europeans by the White House; the UK and West Germany might accept US rationale to use force, although pre-

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<sup>623</sup> The White House, “Background Paper on Approaches to European Governments.”

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

ferred the US not use their bases, but Italy's agreement to use force would have been more difficult to attain since Rome was vulnerable to terrorist attack and diplomatic pressure from Qadhafi.<sup>625</sup> White House officials concluded that the US had to be consistent on their policies against Libya, demonstrate leading by example by "making a maximum effort with U.S. firms to pull" out their remaining personnel in Libya, "and be clear on what precisely what we want the Europeans to do."<sup>626</sup>

While the United States was starting its deliberations, the Italians were concerned about US reactions to the Rome/Vienna terrorist attacks and were preparing a demarche for the State Department demonstrating that some of the US European allies were not comfortable with using force against Libyan-sponsored terrorism. Embassy officials in Rome sent a cable on 3 January 1986 detailing the criticisms of the Italian foreign minister.<sup>627</sup> The Italian coalition government was being criticized for having "been too accommodating of Libya and other terrorist states and of the Palestinian cause" by the Italian press and within the coalition government itself.<sup>628</sup> Italy was selling arms to Iran and Libya, but the US sent Rome a demarche over the selling of trucks to Libya in 1985.<sup>629</sup> The trucks fell into a "grey area" meaning the vehicles could be used in a military role. However, the embassy believed that it was asking too much for Italy to stop the sale of "non-military" items, but the US could send a demarche requesting the reduction or

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<sup>625</sup> The White House, "Background Paper on Approaches to European Governments."

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Cable, American Embassy Rome to the Secretary of State, 3 January 1986, folder "Terrorist Targets: Libya (7)," Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/snof/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-014-2017.pdf>, accessed on 22 March 2022.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

elimination of military sales to Libya.<sup>630</sup> The embassy planned on meeting with US commercial carrier representatives about airport security, but felt that some of the technical and political aspects of airport security was beyond their purview “to evaluate locally” and might require a meeting of experts in Washington.<sup>631</sup>

The Italians sent Washington a demarche regarding their concern about “possible US military responses” to the recent terrorist attacks.<sup>632</sup> In a memo to John M. Poindexter and Donald Fortier, NSC official Tyrus Cobb stated that the Italian demarche raised questions about “consultations and coordination of responses, particularly keeping in mind the difficulties we had at Sigonella.”<sup>633</sup> The difficulties at Sigonella that Cobb was referring to was the interception of the Achille Lauro hijackers during October 1985 and the subsequent release of Abu Abbas by Italian authorities, despite a US extradition request. Stating that he did not know of any military “planning beyond what I read in the Post,” Cobb suggested, “if operational considerations” permitted, the US should have devised a consultation scheme to notify NATO allies “shortly before the initiation of the response.”<sup>634</sup> This demarche by the Italians demonstrated the concern Rome had regarding US intentions toward Libya. The Italians worried that Qadhafi would have retaliated against US targets in Italy such as the naval base at Sigonella.

Cobb believed that the Italians might have misread US intentions with the Sixth Fleet’s

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<sup>630</sup> Cable, American Embassy Rome to the Secretary of State, 3 January 1986.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> Memo, Tyrus Cobb to John M. Poindexter and Donald Fortier, “Italian Demarche on Possible Military Retaliation,” 3 January 1986, folder “Terrorist Targets: Libya (7),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-014-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

departure from Naples.<sup>635</sup> The Sixth Fleet left Naples for the upcoming FON known as Operation Attain Document I. Freedom of navigation operations served several purposes: to demonstrate that every seafaring state had the right to navigate through a body of water for legitimate purposes such as cruise ships or ships loaded with goods for trade and also was a power projection exercise. Power projection exercises demonstrated the US ability to project power anywhere in the world and impress upon any potential adversary that the United States was able to launch an attack when required. Power projection was used to convince a target country to backdown. Power projection exercises fall under the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy because it is designed to apply pressure on the target country.

However, the Italians believed that the US military movements around their country were unusual and Lieutenant General Jucci, the Vice Chief of the Defense Staff, sent a request for information on these movements.<sup>636</sup> Jucci had a list of movements which he felt were unusual.<sup>637</sup> Jucci told the US embassy that Italy wanted to know if the US was planning to attack Libya, because Italy believed it could suffer the consequences of a terrorist attack in the guise of Libyan retaliation.<sup>638</sup> In addition, Italy wanted to avoid the unpleasantness that occurred at Sigonella after the capture of the Achille Lauro terrorists, and Jucci emphasized that the “Italian uniformed military” services wanted to “avoid strains.”<sup>639</sup> The Italian Chief of Operations Rear Admiral

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<sup>635</sup> Memo, Tyrus Cobb to John M. Poindexter and Donald Fortier, “Italian Demarche on Possible Military Retaliation,” 3 January 1986.

<sup>636</sup> Cable, American Embassy Rome to the Secretary of State, “Italian MOD Requests Info Re U.S. Force Movements in Mediterranean,” 4 January 1986, folder “Terrorist Targets: Libya (10),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-017-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

Venturoni stressed “that it was important for them to know what was going on from the standpoint of the defense of Sigonella” because the Italians feared that would be Qadhafi’s primary target for retribution.<sup>640</sup> The US embassy ended the cable with an action request suggesting that the administration provide the Italians with information in order to avoid conflict and the potential denial of “certain activities.”<sup>641</sup>

The Italians were not the only European country concerned about US military action in the Mediterranean. The Greek government sent a demarche to the US embassy in Athens around the same time as the Italian demarche. Athens was adamantly against American military action in retaliation for the 27 December attacks, citing that the Greece was “concerned about the present state of tension in the Mediterranean Area.”<sup>642</sup> The Greek government believed that the Mediterranean was “a volatile area and a military outbreak would be very difficult to contain.”<sup>643</sup> The Greek Navy reported to Athens about a large flotilla of ships “60 nautical miles” off the coast of Crete which concerned the Greeks, but the Greek foreign minister was “pleased to hear” that President Reagan stated the US had no plans to attack Libya.<sup>644</sup> The Greek foreign ministry reminded the US that American bases in Greece were not permitted to launch offensive operations “against third countries especially the Arab countries.”<sup>645</sup> The Greek foreign ministry be-

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<sup>640</sup> Cable, American Embassy Rome to the Secretary of State, “Italian MOD Requests Info Re U.S. Force Movements in Mediterranean,” 4 January 1986.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

<sup>642</sup> Cable, American Embassy Athens to the Secretary of State, “Greek Demarche on U.S. Military Action against Libya,” and “Greek Support on Link Between Syria and Abu Nidal,” 4 January 1986, folder “Terrorist Targets: Libya (10),” Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitaryaffairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-017-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

lieved that the “fight against terrorism” was a “‘common’ one” for all countries and that it might have been beneficial for the US and Europe to “work together” in countering terrorism.<sup>646</sup>

Therefore, the foreign ministers should have called for a meeting to discuss how both sides of the Atlantic formulate common policies toward counterterrorism.<sup>647</sup> US embassy officials also informed the State Department that the Greek government had consulted with the European Community (EC) governments about how Syrian support of Abu Nidal had made the 27 December attacks possible and that Libya was not involved in the attacks. This was counter to what the United States believed, because the Reagan administration believed that Libya was responsible for the attacks based on the Tunisian passport evidence.<sup>648</sup>

This demonstrated the problems the Reagan administration had to deal with regarding possible cooperation with Europe. The Europeans were particularly sensitive to the use of force in the fight against terrorism. The Europeans feared possible retaliation from Libya or Syria. Italy was very sensitive about attacking Libya. Italy feared Libyan retaliation, but also any threat to their trade relations with Tripoli. Most of Europe tolerated terrorism as a nuisance and preferred to maintain trade because it increased their economic prospects. The Europeans continually reminded Washington that US bases on their territory could not be used to launch offensive operations against state-supporters of terrorism, thus making it difficult for Reagan to act when he felt it was necessary and to convince the public at home and abroad of the necessity to act against terrorism. Reagan believed that terrorism would continue to plague society if states allowed it to continue.

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<sup>646</sup> Cable, American Embassy Athens to the Secretary of State, “Greek Demarche on U.S. Military Action against Libya,” and “Greek Support on Link Between Syria and Abu Nidal,” 4 January 1986.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid.



During the 6 January meeting, US officials presented Reagan with three policy options to increase pressure on Libya to change its behavior. The first option included economic and political sanctions. This option provided a full array of sanctions: a full trade ban would be imposed, the sanctions would include “mandatory transaction controls, i.e., transfer of money or other financial instruments would be tightly controlled or banned outright.”<sup>649</sup> US businesses and citizens faced criminal penalties for continued presence in Libya and the US would seek allied cooperation for the implementation of comparable economic sanctions, requesting US allies not to replace US business contracts with European companies or there would be implied costs “for non-responsiveness.”<sup>650</sup> Part of this sanctions package included a diplomatic effort to isolate Libya by advocating the closure of Libyan embassies and consulates, and the US “(r)eserved the right to act militarily.”<sup>651</sup> The Reagan administration had already exercised much of this policy option. Reagan had always reserved the right to use force and the White House already issued most of the economic and political sanctions advocated. The US slowly, but steadily, imposed sanctions in a wait-and-see approach. The Reagan administration refused to impose a total economic and political sanctions regime because the president wanted to give Qadhafi opportunity to change his behavior. Reagan gave him every opportunity to change after each escalation of diplomatic pressure. In every escalation Qadhafi refused to concede forcing Reagan to react with more sanctions.

The second option included simultaneous sanctions and a limited use of military

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<sup>649</sup> The White House, “Summary of Controls,” folder “Terrorist Targets: Libya (9),” nd, Oliver North Files, Box 48, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smf/nsc-politicalandmilitary-affairs/north/box-048/40-633-1201554-048-016-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid.

power.<sup>652</sup> This option included the sanctions regime in option one, but also the launch of “limited military strikes against key Libyan targets associated with terrorism and Qadhafi’s power base” as well as consultations with America’s European allies regarding sanctions and military strikes.<sup>653</sup> Some of the negative consequences of this option, besides the usual condemnation by US European allies, were the likely increase in terrorist threats to US bases, interests, and personnel abroad, a possible missed “opportunity to get Allies committed to economic option,” and Qadhafi seen in a more sympathetic light.<sup>654</sup>

The third option involved sanctions followed by limited use of military force. This option followed the sanctions regime in option one and the “limited military strikes” of option two, but it also included a two-week waiting period both to allow the economic sanctions to have an impact “and deceive Libya on military option” and to consult with US allies before implementing sanctions.<sup>655</sup> The two-week period to deceive Libya about the military option was to give Qadhafi a false sense of security. It was to convince Qadhafi that Reagan was all talk and Libya would not be attacked because the US did not have the resolve to act and this was one of the negative consequences for this option. White House officials argued that there was a “(g)reater likelihood of erosion of U.S. resolve to use military force” during the two-week waiting period.<sup>656</sup> However, once force was used, it would have a greater impact because it would catch Qadhafi off guard and possibly damage his prestige. Reagan clearly chose option three because the US had three FON operations in a row over a three-month period, which were

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<sup>652</sup> The White House, “Summary of Controls.”

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

limited military operations then launched air strikes on five key targets in Libya, and imposed a total economic sanctions regime in early January.

James C. Miller III, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, sent a memorandum for the president on a proposed economic sanctions executive order being discussed during the 6 January meeting, recommending that the president sign this new executive order.<sup>657</sup> The Office of Legal Counsel in the Department of Justice (DOJ), also sent a memorandum signed by Assistant Attorney General Charles J. Cooper. He believed that the proposed executive order was not inconsistent with the international obligations of the United States, but he recommended consulting with the State Department on that question.<sup>658</sup> Cooper considered the proposed executive order “acceptable as to form and legality.”<sup>659</sup> The General Counsel of the OMB, John F. Carley, sent a letter to Attorney General Edwin Meese III regarding the trade sanctions on the Libya executive order. Carley noted, “In order to comply with the notification provisions of IEEPA after signing the Executive order, the President also must sign the notification letter, informing the Congress that he has exercised his authority under that statute and stating the reasons why he believes such action is necessary to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the United States.”<sup>660</sup> Carley informed Attorney General Meese that the Director of the OMB ap-

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<sup>657</sup> Memo, James C. Miller III to the President, 6 January 1986, folder “JGR/Libya (2 of 5),” John G. Roberts Files, Box 32, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/counsel/roberts/box-032/40-485-6908381/032-002-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>658</sup> Memo, Charles J. Cooper to the White House, “Re: Proposed Executive Order entitled ‘Prohibiting Trade and Certain Transactions Involving Libya,’” nd, folder “JGR/Libya (2 of 5),” John G. Roberts Files, Box 32, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/counsel/roberts/box-032/40-485-6908381-032-002-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid.

<sup>660</sup> Letter, John F. Carley to Attorney General Edwin Meese III, 6 January 1986, folder “JGR/Libya (2 of 5),” John G. Roberts Files, Box 32, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/counsel/roberts/box-032/40-485-6908381-032-002-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

proved of the proposed executive order.<sup>661</sup> US officials recognized the proposed executive order as a legitimate and legal use of US power.

The day after the 6 January NSPG meeting, Reagan signed Executive Order 12543, which prohibited trade and other transactions with Libya.<sup>662</sup> During a press briefing on 7 January 1986, an unnamed senior administration official said that the new executive order was “useful to review the specifications which led us make the decision to impose more draconian economic sanctions on the Qadhafi regime.”<sup>663</sup> The senior official went on to say the Rome and Vienna airport attacks were a contributing factor and that Abu Nidal basing his terrorist group in Libya, “financial support” and training of his group there, and the confiscated Tunisian passports helped convince Reagan to impose the sanctions.<sup>664</sup> In addition, “Qadhafi’s diplomatic missions have given logistical assistance to Abu Nidal’s terrorist assaults.”<sup>665</sup> The Abu Nidal Organization was not the only terrorist group Qadhafi supported. He also supported terrorist groups in the Middle East, Europe, and East Asia. Qadhafi was known to support subversion and political violence against neighboring countries, he was a major arms supplier to Iran, and there was a continued Libyan Army presence in Chad.<sup>666</sup> The senior official also mentioned that European and Middle Eastern countries lost over a billion dollars in tourism revenues; countries throughout the

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<sup>661</sup> Letter, John F. Carley to Attorney General Edwin Meese III, 6 January 1986.

<sup>662</sup> President Ronald Reagan, “Libyan Sanctions,” *Current Policy No. 780* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State, 1986). (Government Publication and Legal Reference Library, Leslie F. Malpass Library, Western Illinois University)

<sup>663</sup> The White House, “Background Briefing by Senior Administration Official on Sanctions Against Libya,” 7 January 1986, folder “JGR/Libya (2 of 5),” John G. Roberts Files, Box 32, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/counsel/roberts/box-032/40-485-6908381-032-002-2017.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

world were spending millions of dollars installing security measures in airports and other public facilities.<sup>667</sup> The press briefing thus provided key background information about the economic sanctions to the press.

The opening statement by President Reagan on the signing of Executive Order 12543, spotlighted the death of 11-year-old Natasha Simpson. The naming of the 11-year-old girl was for shock value. It illustrated the randomness of terrorist attacks. Reagan wanted to drive the point home that these attacks could not happen without the help of Qadhafi and others like him. The president said in his remarks that the US would “make every effort to bring Abu Nidal and other terrorists to justice. But these murderers could not carry out their crimes without the sanctuary and support provided by regimes such as Col. Qadhafi’s in Libya.”<sup>668</sup> His rhetoric was meant to demonize Qadhafi, but it was also meant to galvanize support for economic sanctions particularly within the European Community (EC). The Europeans were always lukewarm on economic sanctions because sanctions never worked in their eyes. The sanctioned country usually tried to find ways to circumvent the sanctions and there were countries willing to violate the sanctions regime by openly trading with the affected country. The main reason for this was the violating country was either sympathetic or was allied to the affected country.

During the background briefing on sanctions against Libya, the senior official remarked that Prime Minister Craxi of Italy called for the identification of “those states” that provided protection and armed terrorist groups in order to “organize themselves to carry out their bloody rage” soon after the Rome attack and the same senior official argued that “the time has come for more rigorous and directed action to deter Qadhafi, even if we incur a measure of commercial

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<sup>667</sup> The White House, “Background Briefing by Senior Administration Official on Sanctions Against Libya,” 7 January 1986.

<sup>668</sup> Reagan, *Current Policy No. 780*.

loss.”<sup>669</sup> However, the senior administration official understood that US action alone would not convince Qadhafi to relinquish terrorism as a foreign policy tool: “(w)e do not contend that our action alone will bring an end to Qadhafi’s sponsorship of terrorism. Such a goal will require the support and active involvement of a broad range of like-minded states.”<sup>670</sup> The Reagan administration understood that other states had to join the sanctions regime to make it effective. Without universal support the sanctions regime would only provide limited economic pain. Libya would find other trading partners willing to violate the sanctions thus defeating the purpose of the sanctions and Qadhafi could use the American sanctions regime for propaganda purposes, arguing that the US was trying to bully Tripoli. However, universal support for the sanctions would have undermined Qadhafi’s propaganda efforts. A united front against Qadhafi’s support for terrorism would have provided immense pressure for Tripoli to change its behavior. If Qadhafi failed to do so, the draconian economic sanctions of 7 January 1986 would have gutted the Libyan economy as long as there was universal support for it.

Reagan informed Congress of the new executive order by transmittal letters to the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate on 7 January 1986.<sup>671</sup> In these letters, Reagan informed Congress that he declared a national emergency to deal with Libyan-sponsored terrorism and the new executive order prohibited “purchases and imports from and to Libya,” banned “U.S.-Libya maritime and aviation relations,” banned “trade in services relating to projects in Libya,” and banned “credits or loans or the transfer of anything of value to

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<sup>669</sup> The White House, “Background Briefing by Senior Administration Official on Sanctions Against Libya,” 7 January 1986.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>671</sup> Reagan, *Current Policy No. 780*.

Libya or its nationals.”<sup>672</sup> However, there was an exception to property “held prior to the effective date of this order or transactions allowed by regulations providing for normal activities by Libyans lawfully in the United States,” and it prohibited “transactions relating to travel by Americans to, or in Libya, other than commercial activities permitted until February 1, 1986,” with the only exception to the travel ban being Americans leaving Libya or for journalistic reasons.<sup>673</sup> Most prohibitions were to be enforced immediately, but there were several provisions of *EO 12543* that would take effect on 1 February 1986, 12:01 Eastern Standard Time.<sup>674</sup>

Reagan did not explain why the prohibitions were staggered, but the reason could have been giving US citizens in Libya enough time to put their affairs in order and leave the country. Reagan stated the reason for the new sanctions was that “Libyan use and support for terrorism also constitute a threat to the vital foreign policy interests of the United States and of all other states dedicated to international peace and security.”<sup>675</sup> Reagan listed all the efforts his administration and past administrations had attempted against Libya to convince it to modify its behavior. Libya was designated in 1979 as a state-supporter of terrorism and all the economic and political sanctions imposed, such as denying exports of national security-controlled items, denial of technical data, or the ban on oil and gas technology, and equipment, had not changed Libyan behavior.<sup>676</sup> Reagan reaffirmed America’s “call to Libya and all nations supporting terrorism to turn away from that policy” and Reagan called upon other countries to join US efforts to isolate Libya until

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<sup>672</sup> Reagan, *Current Policy No. 780*.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid.*

Qadhafi changed his behavior.<sup>677</sup> According to Reagan, “(f)ailure to call Libya into account for its policy places the civilized world at the mercy of terrorism.”<sup>678</sup> Clearly Reagan was hoping to garner support by America’s European allies for his efforts and that Qadhafi would realize that his regime should change course to have these sanctions lifted, but these sanctions would not have the desired effect as long as Western Europe and Japan continued to purchase Libyan oil and bid on Libyan service contracts.

Reagan signed another executive order on 8 January 1986.<sup>679</sup> This executive order “blocked all property and interests in property of the Government of Libya, its agencies, instrumentalities, and controlled entities and the Central Bank of Libya that are in the United States, that hereafter come within the United States or that are or hereafter come within the possession or control of U.S. persons.”<sup>680</sup> *Executive Order 12554* authorized “(t)he Secretary of the Treasury in consultation with the Secretary of State” to carry out the provisions found within it.<sup>681</sup> This executive order either blocked access to Libyan held property to US citizens or Libyans and it also denied the purchase of said property because the Reagan administration wanted to deny Libya the ability to raise cash from the sale of these assets within the United States. The Reagan administration believed those funds raised from the sale of their property would have been used

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<sup>677</sup> Reagan, *Current Policy No. 780*.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid., and the White House, “Blocking Libya Government Property in the United States or held by U.S. Persons, Executive Order 12544, 8 January 1986,” *Federal Register* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1986), [https://www.proquest.com/dnsa\\_te/16791366141/D676C4430B34D4APQ/6?account-id=12085](https://www.proquest.com/dnsa_te/16791366141/D676C4430B34D4APQ/6?account-id=12085), accessed on 13 May 2022. (National Security Archives, George Washington University)

<sup>680</sup> Reagan, *Current Policy No. 780*, and *Federal Register*.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid.



for terrorism purposes. It also denied Libya opportunity to circumvent the other economic sanctions by temporarily transferring ownership of the property.

Regarding the military aspect of the administration's approach, the Central Intelligence Agency issued a paper entitled "Libya-US: Repercussions of the President's Special Measures" on 8 January 1986.<sup>682</sup> In the redacted paper, US intelligence analysts believed that Qadhafi would respond to US Navy movements in the Gulf of Sidra based on how deeply the US penetrated Libyan claimed waters and the length of time US warships remained in the gulf as well as the types of aircraft and surface vessels used during the military operations.<sup>683</sup> US intelligence analysts also warned that the Libyan military was "already at full alert and ... they are taking seriously reports that Israelis and US units will soon strike."<sup>684</sup> The paper suggested that Qadhafi would carefully consider his options, but he was "attracted" to the ideal of sinking a US Navy vessel or shooting down US aircraft, yet was also leery about such an action because it provided the United States the justification for "broader military action against Libya."<sup>685</sup> According to the CIA, "Libyan warships and submarines" were deployed along the Libyan coast to better respond to "any threat that materialized."<sup>686</sup> The CIA believed that a "forceful response" was unlikely "if the US penetration was shallow."<sup>687</sup> In other words, if the US Navy penetrated Qadhafi's proclaimed Line of Death a few nautical miles deep the Libyans would not consider

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<sup>682</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Libya-US: Repercussions of the President's Special Measures," 8 January 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP88G01116R001001560020-7.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

the move a threat and would not respond violently against it. However, a military engagement was more likely the closer to the Libyan coastline US military forces were stationed because Qadhafi would have considered it a threat to Sirte, his “tribal homeland.”<sup>688</sup> An approaching naval task force would have been considered an invasion force and instead drawn Libyan warships into the gulf, while US aircraft drawn fire from the coastal antiaircraft batteries. The CIA’s paper mentioned that two US warships penetrated fifteen miles south of the gulf, out of its total ninety-mile depth, and the Libyans responded by dispatching two fighters. This suggested that US warships need only penetrate fifteen miles south to draw a Libyan military response.<sup>689</sup> The Libyans did not respond with Libyan surface ships, but they did respond to two Navy F-14s patrolling in the gulf by sending two SU-22s. The Libyan air response resulted in a dogfight between the aircraft and the two US Navy pilots shot down the Libyan fighters.

The paper argued that the effects of the economic sanctions imposed on 7-8 January 1986 would have an “immediate disruptive effect,” but over time the effectiveness would gradually have “little impact.”<sup>690</sup> Libya would have difficulty finding replacements for the services American companies provided to Tripoli. However, the CIA believed that “Japanese, South Korean, or West European firms” could take over “US projects in the Great Man-Made River Project.”<sup>691</sup> These foreign firms had similar technological capabilities and could have easily replaced US firms and allowed Libya to continue the project without interruption. The CIA believed that the sanctions would have disrupted Libyan oil production for about two months if US oil companies

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<sup>688</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Libya-US: Repercussions of the President’s Special Measures,” 8 January 1986.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid.

were forced to leave the country.<sup>692</sup> The Libyan government would take action to reduce the disruption by increasing foreign technicians to replace the Americans and offer concessions to foreign oil companies. The CIA believed that countries like “Austria, West Germany, Italy, France, Finland, Brazil or even Romania” would be willing to operate in Libya or the other option was nationalizing the US companies and have foreign technicians operate their newly acquired assets.<sup>693</sup>

Reagan also signed *National Security Decision Directive Number 205* entitled “Acting Against Libyan Support of International Terrorism” on 8 January 1986.<sup>694</sup> In this new directive, Reagan explained that the extent of Libyan terrorist activities was a grave threat to US foreign policy and national security and therefore he declared a national emergency and was forced to impose additional economic sanctions on the government of Libya.<sup>695</sup> The United States pursued the “following objectives” to counter Libya’s increasingly criminal behavior: “demonstrate resolve in a manner that reverses the perception of U.S. passivity in the face of mounting terrorist activity.”<sup>696</sup> The US government attempted efforts to “isolate Libya and reduce the flow of Western economic resources which help finance Libyan support of international terrorism.”<sup>697</sup> The economic sanctions were to help the United States to achieve those objectives and “every

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<sup>692</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Libya-US: Repercussions of the President’s Special Measures,” 8 January 1986.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid.

<sup>694</sup> The White House, “Acting Against Libyan Support of International Terrorism,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 205*, 8 January 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd205.pdf>, accessed on 21 September 2021.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

effort” was to be made to gain cooperation with Europe by implementing similar sanctions with the US seeking to “initiate a global diplomatic and public affairs campaign to isolate Libya.”<sup>698</sup>

A redacted annex was attached to *NSDD 205* which included additional military and intelligence actions designed to signal US resolve, reduce risks to American citizens still in Libya, increase military readiness in the region for possible military operations against Libya, and “create uncertainty regarding U.S. intentions.”<sup>699</sup> The annex provided for an additional carrier task force in the Mediterranean in order to demonstrate US resolve and capability. The freedom of navigation operations were to be conducted in the Gulf of Sidra and the Secretary of Defense was to “submit a plan for these operations for review and approval by January 9 1986.”<sup>700</sup> The significance of *NSDD 205* was the inclusion of adding a second carrier group into Mediterranean, planning for FON operations which were the three Attain Document operations, and clearing the way for Operation El Dorado Canyon which was the operation to bomb Tripoli and Benghazi in April, 1986. On the same day Reagan signed *NSDD 205*, Secretary of State George Shultz met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin to discuss various topics relating to the future of arms control negotiations.<sup>701</sup> Shultz was seeking the Soviet perspective Reagan’s decision to impose sanctions on Libya during the meeting and instead of Shultz tried to impress upon Dobrynin the US “certainty of Qaddafi’s links to terrorism.”<sup>702</sup> Dobrynin’s response was

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<sup>698</sup> The White House, *NSDD 205*.

<sup>699</sup> The White House, “Annex: Acting Against Libyan Support of International Terrorism,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 205*, 8 January 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd205.pdf>, accessed on 21 September 2021.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> “Memorandum from Secretary of State Shultz to President Reagan, 9 January 1986,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume V, Soviet Union, March 1985-October 1986*, Elizabeth C. Charles, ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2020), 1. (Document 174)

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

“that the roots of terrorism lie in the unresolved Palestinian problem.”<sup>703</sup> Shultz felt that Dobrynin’s response was “disappointing boilerplate” and that “(i)t was made without conviction,” but Shultz eventually convinced Dobrynin to agree with him “that there was no justification for actions like the Rome/Vienna attacks.”<sup>704</sup> This exchange between Shultz and Dobrynin suggested that the Soviets were lukewarm over their good relations with Libya. In no instance did Shultz report that the Soviet ambassador was upset over the sanctions against Libya. Dobrynin did not issue a protest or excuse Qadhafi’s behavior. The lack of response indicated the Soviets were trying to distance themselves from Libya and they were not interested in close relations because Qadhafi was independent and unpredictable, which was something the Soviets did not like.

In an interview at his headquarters in Tripoli, Qadhafi’s reaction to the economic sanctions was to threaten an alliance with the Soviet Union, suggesting that Libya would become “a Cuba in the Arab World.”<sup>705</sup> Qadhafi also said that “Libya was studying the possibility” of freezing American assets in Libya as a response to Reagan’s freezing Libyan assets.<sup>706</sup> While the Europeans generally avoided taking similar actions against Libya, the Reagan administration had some success in convincing Europe to take limited actions. For example, Italy halted arms sales to Libya and took measures not to take advantage of US businesses leaving Libya. The Italians would not take over US contracts. These measures were touted by the *International Herald Tribune* as “the first concrete European policy response to Mr. Reagan’s call for allied action

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<sup>703</sup> “Memorandum from Secretary Shultz to President Ronald Reagan, 9 January 1986.” (Document 174)

<sup>704</sup> Ibid.

<sup>705</sup> Judith Miller, “Qadhafi Hints of Shift to Soviet: Says U.S. Pushes Libya to Moscow,” *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>706</sup> Ibid.

against Libya.”<sup>707</sup> The US ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, Richard R. Burt, reported that Bonn “promised not to undercut American measures against Libya.”<sup>708</sup> These actions might have been a reaction from a recent press conference in mid-January held by Secretary of State Shultz. Shultz and other senior officials asked for America’s allies not to undercut the recently imposed sanctions.<sup>709</sup> Shultz stressed that Libya provided “safe haven” and “financial support” to terrorist groups such as the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO).<sup>710</sup> The administration asserted that Abu Nidal was based in Libya by early 1985 and received generous financial support from Qadhafi.<sup>711</sup>

Qadhafi responded to US actions by calling for an emergency meeting of the Arab League.<sup>712</sup> The foreign ministers of the Arab League nations agreed to meet during the end of January, which was considerably later than Qadhafi wanted, but he expressed his appreciation for the favorable response he received.<sup>713</sup> Libya was hoping for a tough response by the Arab League. The League did voice opposition to the US sanctions, called for an end to the sanctions, and the League also voiced their support to the beleaguered Libyan state.<sup>714</sup> The Libyans believed that the sanctions would hurt the United States more than Libya economically and the

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<sup>707</sup> E. J. Dionne, Jr., “Italy Halts Arms to Libya,” *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>708</sup> “Envoy Cites Bonn Pledges,” *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>709</sup> Don Oberdorfer, “Asks Allies Not to Help Oil Industry,” *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>710</sup> Ibid.

<sup>711</sup> Ibid.

<sup>712</sup> “League Sets Session for End of Month,” *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>713</sup> Ibid.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

Libyan Foreign Minister Treiki said that “(t)his ‘big-stick’ policy—we reject it. Everybody thinks the policy followed by the U.S. is very dangerous. All are unanimous in saying that these steps are against international law.”<sup>715</sup> The Libyans wanted the Arab League to take “practical and positives measures” against the American sanctions regime, suggesting the Arab League impose sanctions of their own like the Arab oil embargo of the 1970s.<sup>716</sup> Chadli Klibi, the secretary general of the Arab League, was instructed to contact the European Community (EC) to discuss US sanctions. Libyan Foreign Minister Treiki praised the twelve foreign ministers of the European Community for rejecting the US sanctions and he said that Libya had “better cooperation” with the Europeans because “(t)hey are serious.”<sup>717</sup> Treiki added, “we don’t have the same point of view on all questions, but there is a minimum of mutual respect.”<sup>718</sup> The Islamic Conference Organization, a 45-member international organization, passed “a strongly worded resolution” which condemned the American sanctions and “asked the United States to rescind them.”<sup>719</sup> Yet Qadhafi received nothing concrete from the Arab World. He received only words, not deeds. He was hoping that the Arab League imposed an oil embargo on the United States. He believed that an oil embargo would have been extremely damaging to the US economy. The Arabs refused an oil embargo because they knew that what affect the US economy would affect their economies and both the US and Western Europe were not as dependent on Middle East oil.

This was the extent of the support Libya was able to muster, he failed to garner greater support from Western Europe as well. While the European Community were opposed to the

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<sup>715</sup> “League Sets Session for End of Month,” *IHT*, 11-12 January 1986.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*

sanctions, the Europeans were not willing to confront the United States on the issue. One of the reasons for the Europeans unwillingness to confront the US was that much of the European defense relied on the United States. The United States promised to cover West Europe with their nuclear umbrella and thousands of American soldiers were stationed in Europe. Many were stationed along the West German border, including West Berlin and the infamous Fulda Gap. The Fulda Gap was a major invasion route into West Germany for the Soviets. The Europeans enjoyed economic prosperity because of the American defense burden in the North Atlantic area during the Cold War. The Soviets were not interested in starting an alliance with Libya because they feared the USSR would have been drawn into a war with the United States over Qadhafi's regime. If the Soviets did enter an alliance with Libya, the haughty Colonel Qadhafi would have certainly launched terrorist campaigns with impunity because he could have relied on the Soviets for protection. The Arab World was sympathetic to Libya's plight, but they were not interested in bowing to Qadhafi's whims. Qadhafi managed to annoy most of the Arab World with his antics, which included the support of revolutionaries bent on overthrowing the very governments he was asking to provide support against the United States.

The new economic sanctions drew praise and criticism in the opinion pages of major newspapers. *The New York Times* suggested that Reagan looked defensive because he took the same approach as Jimmy Carter with more sanctions rather than pursue the oft-promised surgical strikes that his senior advisers continually promised.<sup>720</sup> Reagan was apparently playing a lone hand and "the Palestinians he (Qadhafi) protects are killers bent on destroying the Palestinian Liberation Organization."<sup>721</sup> While the *New York Times* appeared to be criticizing Reagan, the

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<sup>720</sup> The New York Times, "Reagan Plays a Lone Hand," *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>721</sup> Ibid.



editors believed that while he was “right (to) respond carefully, his responsible choices so far are severely limited.”<sup>722</sup> The editors of the *New York Times* believed the best way to expand his choices was to share the evidence of Libya’s complicity, because Libya was “a unique offender even by the tolerant standards of international law. And wantonly killing innocent passengers in an airport is a declaration of war against civilizations.”<sup>723</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., an American conservative columnist, argued that the United States should have declared war against Libya.<sup>724</sup> Buckley argued that it was a myth that it was easier to deal with a madman because the actions of a madman could not be predicted, but Qadhafi was very capable, suggesting that he was not mad at all.<sup>725</sup> Because Libya was isolated because of Qadhafi’s antics and policies, Libya was vulnerable to a declaration of war and this declaration of war would have provided Reagan the legality of attacking the country. While an interesting argument, Buckley failed to answer what would happen if the Soviets came to Libya’s defense? In addition, even if the Soviets failed to intervene, what would be the end goal for the United States? Would it be the overthrow of Qadhafi? Who would replace Qadhafi and what guarantee the replacement would not be worse? These would be questions the Reagan administration would have answered before pursuing a declaration of war.

Flora Lewis, an American opinion columnist, criticized the Europeans with their excuses against acting on Libyan support for terrorism.<sup>726</sup> Lewis argued that their excuses such as the US

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<sup>722</sup> The New Times, *IHT*, 11-12 January 1986.

<sup>723</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>724</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., “Declare War Against This Beatable Foe,” *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>725</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>726</sup> Flora Lewis, “What to Do About Qadhafi: The Unhappy Dilemma,” *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

needing to prove Qadhafi's complicity in terrorism and the US failing to prove that sanctions worked were dangerous.<sup>727</sup> Lewis argued that the Europeans knew that Qadhafi supported terrorism, and she pointed out that "the Europeans knew as well or better than the United States what Colonel Qadhafi does."<sup>728</sup> The fact that confiscated Tunisian passports were recovered in Rome after the 27 December attack was "a fingerprint, if not a hot smoking gun."<sup>729</sup> Lewis suggested that this was clear evidence of Libyan complicity, but the European clearly did not want to acknowledge it. On the point regarding the sanctions, Lewis noted if "all the major countries" joined the sanctions regime, it would have been effective.<sup>730</sup> This was a common-sense argument. If the Europeans participated in the sanctions, Libya would have felt the pain of the sanctions more quickly and changed their behavior. Lewis argued that the West Europeans were "putting economic and general political interests ahead of their nonetheless urgent interest in stemming terrorism."<sup>731</sup> This was fair criticism considering the number of times the Reagan administration implored US allies to join the sanctions regime in order to convince Qadhafi to change his behavior. Reagan's calls for peaceful action fell on deaf ears. While Lewis' opinion piece was not part of the Reagan administration's public relations campaign (the public relations campaign was through official channels), it certainly affected the opinion of the American public and in turn potentially affected the Europeans in tourist revenue.

Two foreign policy experts were asked by *U.S. News & World Report* in the 20 January 1986 edition, if the US should have sought Qadhafi's overthrow. The two experts were Michael

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<sup>727</sup> Lewis, *IHT*, 11-12 January 1986.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>729</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>730</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*

Ledeen of the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies and George Ball, former undersecretary of state.<sup>732</sup> Ledeen was asked why he was in favor of using covert operations to remove Qadhafi. His answer was “(b)ecause when you have a serious challenge – in this case – phenomenon of state-sponsored terrorism – you must deal with the state sponsoring it.”<sup>733</sup> Ledeen dismissed concerns that someone worse than Qadhafi could take his place because he thought there were a “number of Libyans who would rather have a civilized country” who would be concerned with the well-being of the citizenry.<sup>734</sup> Ledeen also argued that the Soviets were subverting friendly governments. The US had the means to remove Qadhafi, but it was a question if the US had “the will and discipline” to commit to the removal and the United States had to provide “our friends the means to fight their own battles.”<sup>735</sup>

George Ball, the former undersecretary of state during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, was opposed to the United States attempting to overthrow Qadhafi, saying he saw no point to it. He continued, “we have no business messing around trying to overthrow governments just because we don’t like them. History shows that almost always when we’ve done that we’ve put something worse in its place.”<sup>736</sup> Ball also argued that Qadhafi was not a major threat to the United States, although he was “a bloody nuisance” and “(w)e’re making him look like a world leader when he’s a pipsqueak.”<sup>737</sup> Ball also rejected arguments that the lack of action

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<sup>732</sup> “Voices of America: Should U.S. Seek Qadhafi’s Overthrow?” *U.S. News & World Report*, 20 January 1986, 79, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00845R000201190010-4.pdf>, accessed on 2 November 2022.

<sup>733</sup> *U.S. News & World Report*, 20 January 1986, 79.

<sup>734</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

would damage US credibility abroad when he said that “American credibility is on the line only when the President of the United States spends a week yammering about it and making threats he’s not going to carry out.”<sup>738</sup>

Ledeen represented, or appeared to represent, the Reagan administration’s viewpoint with his bellicose rhetoric. It was true that the administration wanted to stop state-supported terrorism and develop covert operations to disrupt either terrorist attacks or a state’s ability to support such operations. While the US wanted to develop covert operations against Libya, the American government was not actively seeking the removal of Qadhafi because it violated the president’s no assassination order. However, if the Libyan people overthrew and eliminated Qadhafi, that would have been received favorably by the Reagan administration. Ball, on the other hand, represented the voice of reason. Ball was one of the few remaining Kennedy foreign policy officials within the Johnson administration who questioned the utility of introducing US troops to South Vietnam. He had argued against US involvement in the war since there was no strategy to achieve victory. When Ball said that history was replete with the US replacement being worse than the previous leader, he must have had the ouster of Ngo Dinh Diem in mind. The Army of the Republic of South Vietnam (ARVN) generals who replaced him proved to be worse and were detrimental to US efforts to defeat the communist insurgency. The point Ball was trying to make was that there was no guarantee that the replacement would turn out better than the previous ruler. Chances were great that the replacement would be worse and the United States would be drawn into another potential conflict. Ball argued that America should learn from its mistakes and avoid using force if a vital national interest was not threatened. There were no guarantees on the outcome when using force and Vietnam demonstrated this perfectly.

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<sup>738</sup> *U.S. News & World Report*, 20 January 1986, 79.

Joshua Muravchik, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, criticized Reagan for “sounding more like Carter” when it came to terrorism.<sup>739</sup> He was critical of Reagan because his rhetoric was very militant toward terrorism, but he failed to launch military strikes against Libya or against terrorists despite his rhetoric.<sup>740</sup> Muravchik argued that Carter did not advocate weakness, Carter believed “that force had lost much of its usefulness in the modern world.”<sup>741</sup> However, Reagan disagreed that military power was limited or useless, according to Muravchik.<sup>742</sup> It was true that Reagan did not launch military strikes, because he deployed the US military either in a peacekeeping role like in Lebanon or in freedom of navigation operations like Attain Document in the Gulf of Sidra, but there were reasons for not responding in the way Muravchik envisioned. First, military operations required a great deal of intelligence and planning. It was difficult to pinpoint terrorists because they are constantly on the move. In addition, countries like Libya and Syria tried to conceal their involvement as best as they could. Second, some countries refused to allow US forces to operate within their borders. The US could deploy its forces, but if caught, the operation would cause a major international crisis. Third, the target country might have a powerful patron such as the Soviet Union or even a US ally like the United Kingdom or France. Launching a military strike could lead to either a major embarrassment for a US ally or a possible confrontation with the Soviets. Fourth, the stationing of military forces to launch an attack would cause the target country or group to take notice and prepare for the attack, possibly producing many casualties among the attacking forces. These were considera-

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<sup>739</sup> Joshua Muravchik, “Terrorism: Reagan Is Sounding More Like Carter,” *International Herald Tribune*, 16 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>740</sup> Ibid.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid.

tions Muravchik failed to take into consideration. These opinion pieces suggested that the American public were divided on the issue of US-Libyan relations or on using force to stop terrorism.

Secretary of State Shultz might have agreed with Muravchik's argument. On 17 January, Shultz argued that the United States should not wait for another terrorist attack to have occurred before using force against terrorists or those states that supported them.<sup>743</sup> One of Shultz's aides said that the secretary of state was trying to convey that the US would not hesitate to respond with military force instead of economic sanctions if there was another terrorist attack that was clearly linked to Libya.<sup>744</sup> Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger remarked that the US "should not use terrorist means to deal with terrorism."<sup>745</sup> This comment illustrated that Weinberger was clearly against the use of force to deal with terrorism, suggesting the American reaction would have been similar to terrorist tactics. Shultz retorted that "(s)ome have suggested that even to contemplate using force against terrorism is to lower ourselves to the barbaric level of the terrorists."<sup>746</sup> This was something Shultz rejected. He also took issue with the concept that international law proscribed using force against low-intensity warfare threats. Shultz remarked that "(i)t is absurd to argue that international law prohibits us from capturing terrorists in international waters or airspace," to force them from attacking US territory, and to rescue hostages or to use force against states that sponsor terrorism.<sup>747</sup> The secretary of state argued that

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<sup>743</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, "Shultz Seeks Tougher U.S. Response to Terrorism," *International Herald Tribune*, 17 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>744</sup> Ibid.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid.

every state had the right to defend its citizens and territory. Qadhafi, appearing in the Hall of the National People's Congress, responded before a crowd of people saying Libya would train terrorists, suggesting that his country would become "a base for the liberation of Palestine" and "if Israel or the United States attacked it," he would use all forms of violence in self-defense.<sup>748</sup> Qadhafi inadvertently admitted to being complicit in sponsoring terrorism, contradicting his official government statements that denied complicity.<sup>749</sup> Qadhafi decided to stop his conciliatory tone with the United States that he used when Western reporters interviewed him a week earlier.<sup>750</sup> His previous tone had been puzzling since throughout his career as Libya's leader since the 1969 revolution, Qadhafi was always anti-Western because he identified the West, and the United States in particular, as pro-colonialist and pro-imperialist, while identifying himself as pro-revolutionary and pro-socialist. His rhetoric was for domestic consumption and possibly for propaganda purposes as well. Qadhafi wanted to sound strong to the Arab World because Arab states did not respect weakness. Qadhafi's rhetoric was to gain support from the Arab World, within Libya, and the Eastern bloc. Arab support would have inflated his ego. Eastern bloc support was for defensive purposes because Libya relied on the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations for military hardware and there might have been a hope the Soviets would have come to their rescue when the United States did strike back militarily. However, those hopes were dashed when the Soviets placed arms control negotiations with the United States before Libyan security despite the growing conflict between Libya and the United States.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>748</sup> Christopher Dickey, "Qadhafi Says He'll Train Terrorists," *International Herald Tribune*, 17 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> Dickey, *IHT*, 17 January 1986.

Secretary of State Shultz during an appearance on the CBS News production “Face the Nation in mid-January called for military action against states that sponsored terrorism or to punish “those who help them and not just apply economic sanctions.”<sup>752</sup> Shultz said, “My opinion is that we need to raise the cost to those who perpetrate terrorist acts by making them pay a price, not just an economic price, so they will have to think more carefully about it.”<sup>753</sup> Shultz was recognized as the most vocal advocate for the use of force within the Reagan administration.<sup>754</sup> However, Reagan chose to impose economic sanctions instead of using military force against Libya and when Shultz was asked if the president would use force after the next terrorist provocation, Shultz refused to answer.<sup>755</sup> He was also asked about Europe’s reaction to the newly imposed economic sanctions. Shultz was not surprised by Europe’s response to the sanctions, but suggested that the sanctions were designed to make the Europeans “think about the rightness of taking action against Libya.”<sup>756</sup> Margaret Thatcher, the British prime minister, said to American journalists that she was against the sanctions suggesting they were ineffective and that military force would “produce ‘greater chaos’ in the region and would be illegal.”<sup>757</sup> US Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger remarked on ABC News production “This Week” that the

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<sup>751</sup> Joseph C. Harsh, “East-West dialogue continues, despite dispute over Libya,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 January 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-0096R0402760014-1.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>752</sup> Neil A. Lewis, “‘Raise the Cost’ to Terrorist, Shultz Says,” *The New York Times*, 13 January 1986.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid.



UK was against sanctions because of their economic ties with Libya and the British subjects residing in the country.<sup>758</sup>

As US internal policy discussions on Libya continued the CIA developed talking points for the Deputy Director of Intelligence (DDI) on the “Potential Scope of Libyan Military Reactions,” on 15 January 1986. These CIA talking points argued that Libya had “the capability to mount a formidable challenge to US ships and aircraft.”<sup>759</sup> The Libyans could develop an advantage through forewarning by various technical means such as radio direction, reconnaissance flights, and radar. In addition to those assets, the Libyans could gain intelligence through Soviet IL-38 reconnaissance aircraft which conducted early warning flights on Libya’s behalf.<sup>760</sup> The Libyan Air Force had at least 125 fighter aircraft that could take on US warships and aircraft, and there were twenty MiG-25s that were flown by Syrian pilots, although their formidable air assets, most of the Libya pilots had marginal training.<sup>761</sup> The same was true of the Libyan Navy. It had plenty in its arsenal such as the dozen or so missile boats and three submarines that were active in the Gulf of Sidra and the thirty-one missile ships and six submarines, some were used to defend Tripoli and Benghazi, according to the CIA.<sup>762</sup> Like the air force, Libya naval personnel were not well trained, and according to the CIA, only a quarter of the personnel on board the missile ships could launch them. Moreover, the CIA estimated at least twelve Otomat and Styx

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<sup>758</sup> Lewis, *NYT*, 13 January 1986.

<sup>759</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Potential Scope of Libyan Military Reactions,” *Talking Points for the DDI*, 15 January 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP91B00874R000200080010-2.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>761</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid.*

missiles could be launched once the ships received orders to fire.<sup>763</sup> While the CIA talking points painted the Libyan military as a formidable force but it was marginally trained and not very effective, yet also capable of doing damage.

The Reagan administration conducted a broad counterterrorism policy review in January 1986. The policy review was in conjunction with the publication of the declassified version of the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism and President Reagan "determined that we must enhance our ability to confront this threat and to do so without compromising our basic democratic and human values."<sup>764</sup> The president also wanted US policy to become "effective in ameliorating this threat to our people, property and interests."<sup>765</sup> US policy toward terrorism was to be "unequivocal:" the United States was firmly opposed "to terrorism in all its forms."<sup>766</sup> It did not matter if it was domestic terrorism committed by US citizens or international terrorism committed by foreign nationals on US territory or elsewhere.<sup>767</sup> US policy was "based upon the conviction that to accede to terrorist demands places more American citizens at risk. This no-concession policy is the best way of protecting the greatest number of people and ensuring their safety."<sup>768</sup> This was a clear summation of the first pillar of US counterterrorism policy which was first formulated in 1972 as a response to the Munich Olympics. The Reagan administration stressed the no-concession policy to deter US corporations and private citizens from paying ran-

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<sup>763</sup> Central Intelligence Agency "Potential Scope of Libyan Military Reactions," *Talking Points for the DDI*, 15 January 1986.

<sup>764</sup> The White House, "The National Program for Combatting Terrorism," *National Security Decision Directive Number 207*, 20 January 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd207.pdf>, accessed on 30 June 2021.

<sup>765</sup> The White House, *NSDD 207*.

<sup>766</sup> Ibid.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

soms for the release of kidnapped colleagues or loved ones. The US government also pointed out that “the practice of terrorism by any person or group” was “a potential threat to the national security” of the country and would “resist” it through every “legal means available.”<sup>769</sup> In addition, any state that supported terrorism or practiced it would “not be allowed to do so without consequence,” according to *NSDD 207*.<sup>770</sup>

The Reagan administration developed a national program to combat terrorism which was to respond with “coordinated action before, during and after” a terrorist event.<sup>771</sup> *NSDD 207* promulgated the lead agency concept for the coordinated response to a terrorist attack, and the Reagan administration delegated the Department of State as the lead agency during international terrorist incidents. For terrorist attacks within US territory whether domestic or international, the lead agency was the Department of Justice with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) running point and for aircraft hijackings, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was the lead agency.<sup>772</sup> The president’s National Security Advisor would resolve any uncertainties regarding the designation of a lead agency when the occasion presented itself.<sup>773</sup> The lead agencies could take advantage of the full gamut of federal assets including diplomatic, economic, legal, and intelligence assets. There were a number of groups within the National Security Council, the lead agencies had access such as the Terrorist Incident Working Group (TIWG), the Inter-depart-

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<sup>769</sup> The White House, *NSDD 207*, 20 January 1986.

<sup>770</sup> Ibid.

<sup>771</sup> Ibid.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid.

mental Group on Terrorism (IG/T), and the Interagency Intelligence Committee on Terrorism (IICT).<sup>774</sup>

The TIWG consisted “of representatives from State, Treasury, DOD, Justice, CIA, JCS, FBI, the Office of the Vice President and the NSC staff.”<sup>775</sup> The TIWG was normally activated by the president’s National Security Advisor “or at the request of any of its members” and would remain convened during a terrorist incident.<sup>776</sup> The Interdepartmental Group on Terrorism was chaired by the State Department’s Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism and it was “re-sponsible for the development of overall U.S. policy on terrorism.”<sup>777</sup> Membership of the IG/T included all the agencies and departments that supported the national policy to combat terrorism, which meant, members of the Terrorist Incident Working Group (TIWG).<sup>778</sup> The IICT was chaired by the National Intelligence Officer for Counter-Terrorism and Narcotics (NIO/CT-NARC) and it provided intelligence support to the Special Situations Group (SSG) and the TIWG.<sup>779</sup> The IICT coordinated “interagency intelligence efforts to counter international terrorist threats.”<sup>780</sup> All of these working groups might suggest there was some redundancy within the counterterrorism community. However, it should be seen as a hierarchical structure like the military’s order of battle. One working group was composed of lower-level bureaucrats under middle management which did much of the grunt work in countering terrorism such as collecting

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<sup>774</sup> The White House, *NSDD 207*.

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>777</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*

intelligence on known terrorist groups and discovering new organizations. The next group composed of middle-level bureaucrats under the leadership of an undersecretary or equivalent, and this group discussed any issues regarding policy and made recommendations. The next working group chaired by the second highest ranking individual within the department or agency such as State or the CIA. This working group discussed the recommendations made by the middle-tier group and polished the choices before the recommendations were submitted to the NSC for final approval of policy or submission to the president for his approval. The policy considerations on Libyan-sponsored terrorism were part of this broader policy reassessment on counterterrorism.

In late January 1986, the US Navy was ordered to prepare for an operation in the Mediterranean. The United States introduced an additional carrier task force consisting of the USS Coral Sea, but the Soviets surveilled the US fleet with several “eavesdropping ships.”<sup>781</sup> According to Defense Secretary Weinberger, the Soviets sent these ships to shadow the US fleet, to monitor its movements, and inform Libya about their findings, but the Americans countered their activities by launching “a reconnaissance aircraft near the Gulf of Sidra and the Libyans responded by sending two fighters.”<sup>782</sup> The US Navy’s response of launching a reconnaissance flight was to test either the Soviet or Libyan response. Fortunately, no hostile actions occurred, although the two Libyan fighters monitored the American reconnaissance aircraft.<sup>783</sup> The Soviet ships had the capability to warn Libyan anti-aircraft batteries of approaching aircraft and the Soviets had long-distance bombers stationed on the Crimean Peninsula to attack the US fleet in order to defend Libya.<sup>784</sup> However, the Soviets shadowing American ships did not provide any

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<sup>781</sup> Harsch, *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 January 1986.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

<sup>783</sup> Ibid.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

evidence of hostile intent. This standard fare during the Cold War, where both sides constantly monitored ship and aircraft movements. Moreover, neither the USS Coral Sea or any other US Navy aircraft or ship entered the Gulf of Sidra.<sup>785</sup>

Bob Woodward and George C. Wilson reported in a *Washington Post* article that the battle groups of the USS Saratoga and USS Coral Sea were to be “‘part of the administration’s war of nerves’ between” the US and Qadhafi, and both battle groups were ordered to begin operations north of Libya.<sup>786</sup> US Navy fighter aircraft were to fly sorties “‘within range of Libyan radar,” but these sorties were labeled as training exercises and the aircraft were ordered not to violate Libyan airspace.<sup>787</sup> The White House also ordered additional manpower and funding for CIA covert operations against Libya and further inquiries about “‘coordinating possible military options” with Egypt were made.<sup>788</sup> In fact, there were administration officials who wanted Egypt to become more vocal and aggressive in confronting Qadhafi’s Libya, but the Mubarak regime had been reluctant to grant US requests.<sup>789</sup> The most likely reason for Egypt’s reluctance was the perception of the Arab World. Egypt did not want to appear to be in league with the United States against another Arab nation. The Arab World was critical of US policy, especially America’s link to Israel. The last time Egypt followed America’s lead, their president Anwar al-Sada was assassinated by Muslim extremists.

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<sup>785</sup> Harsch, *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 January 1986.

<sup>786</sup> Bob Woodward and George C. Wilson, “U.S. Navy Planes Begin Operations North of Libya,” *The Washington Post*, 24 January 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00965R00087570045-9.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid.

<sup>788</sup> Woodward and Wilson, *WP*, 24 January 1986.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

During the military exercises in the Gulf of Sidra, the US sought possible cooperation with Egypt in a joint covert operation, but a joint US-Egypt covert operation was a possibility only if Libya attacked Egypt.<sup>790</sup> The likelihood of that happening was very remote considering Libya had a relatively small army compared to Egypt and Qadhafi understood it was suicide to attack Egypt because the US would intervene. Regardless of the unlikelihood of a Libyan attack against Egypt, the Pentagon had started “initial military planning discussions” with Egypt the previous summer.<sup>791</sup> The US maneuvers in the Gulf of Sidra and the planning of potential covert operations were part of the coercive diplomacy strategy. Both were used to pressure Libya into changing its behavior. The freedom of navigation operation in the gulf was to demonstrate US military power and the determination to use that power. If necessary, at the same time, the potential covert operations were to provide Qadhafi further incentive to act according to diplomatic protocol. Qadhafi had to worry about the possibility of a coup attempt by disgruntled military officers supported by the United States and his opposition.

The gathering of two aircraft carrier battle groups was in preparation for Operation Attain Document I, which was a freedom of navigation operation in the Gulf of Sidra. The two battle groups formed Task Force 60 and the operation was launched on 26 January 1986 with several combat air patrols (CAPs) posted to protect the task force. The Libyans responded by sending two MiG-25 fighters, also known by their NATO designation Foxbats, armed with AA-6 Acrid air-to-air missiles.<sup>792</sup> The two Libyan fighters headed for a CAP of two F/A-18 Hornets from the USS Coral Sea and were intercepted by the two Navy fighters without incident. The Libyan air-

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<sup>790</sup> Bob Woodward, “CIA Operation Expanded,” *International Herald Tribune*, 25-26 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

<sup>792</sup> Joseph T. Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War With Qaddafi* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 123.

craft left the area after roughly ten minutes of maneuvering with the US fighters and returned to base.<sup>793</sup> The Libyan government immediately denounced the presence of the US Navy off the Libyan seaboard and called it “‘another aggressive provocation’ by Ronald Reagan ‘which will not go unanswered.’”<sup>794</sup> The freedom of navigation operation was scheduled to end by 31 January 1986, but the Libyans had naval vessels anchored in Tripoli harbor to respond if the US task force moved closer to shore.<sup>795</sup> The Soviet ambassador to Turkey, Vladimir S. Lavrov, warned the US “not to escalate the situation” and he said in a news conference, “‘I can tell you now that the United States has started military maneuvers. We have called on the United States not to seek results which would escalate the matter to serious proportions.’”<sup>796</sup> Lavrov did not mention what the Soviet response would be if the US and Libya were drawn into a shooting match. The Soviet concerns were understandable considering the Mediterranean region was under tremendous pressure since the 27 December attacks. Doctors in Vienna reported that “‘a 26-year-old Austrian teacher” Elizabeth Kriegler recently died, bringing the Vienna airport death toll to four.”<sup>797</sup> However, the US Navy did not conduct any hostile actions against the Libyan armed forces. None of the aircraft intercepts resulted in fighting.

In a media stunt, Qadhafi, dressed in Libyan naval attire, boarded a patrol boat to “confront” the US Navy on the first day of the maneuvers.<sup>798</sup> He addressed a group of reporters

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<sup>793</sup> Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 123-124.

<sup>794</sup> “Libya Assails Start of U.S. Maneuvers Off Its Coast,” *International Herald Tribune*, 25-26 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>795</sup> Ibid.

<sup>796</sup> Ibid.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid.

<sup>798</sup> Judith Miller, “Qadhafi Sails to ‘Confront’ U.S. 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet,” *International Herald Tribune*, 27 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)



before boarding the boat stationed at Misurata saying, “I am sailing out along parallel 32.5 to stress that this is the Libyan border.”<sup>799</sup> Qadhafi’s claim of the entire Gulf of Sidra added an additional 150,000 square miles “between Misurata and Benghazi” as territorial waters, and Qadhafi stressed, “This is the line of death where we shall stand and fight with our backs to the wall.”<sup>800</sup> Qadhafi returned to Misurata later in the afternoon with a group of cheering Libyan sailors to greet him as a backdrop for Libyan television.<sup>801</sup> In Washington, US officials stated that the maneuvers were a demonstration of “‘U.S. resolve’ to operate on international waters and airspace,” but Libya’s response was that the United States had no right to conduct military exercises in the gulf because it was Libyan territorial waters.<sup>802</sup>

During Operation Attain Document I, the European Community (EC) held a foreign ministers meeting to discuss an arms embargo against state supporters of terrorism, and EC officials stated that Libya was the target for this arms embargo.<sup>803</sup> This arms embargo was a response to the 27 December attacks, but before discussing the embargo, the Dutch raised a question regarding a reforms package that was scheduled for a vote the following month.<sup>804</sup> The Danish delegation wanted to maintain their environmental standards which they felt were threatened by the new reforms.<sup>805</sup> The foreign ministers were only “studying proposals to embargo

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<sup>799</sup> Miller, *IHT*, 27 January 1986.

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>801</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>803</sup> Steven J. Dryden, “EC Debates Arms Embargo Against Backers of Terrorism: Libya Target Officials Say,” *International Herald Tribune*, 28 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>804</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>805</sup> *Ibid.*

arms sales to countries supporting terrorists,” according to an EC spokesman.<sup>806</sup> Other measures under consideration were greater security measures at European airports and tighter visa controls.<sup>807</sup> However, some of the Europeans were wary of the embargo because they believe sanctions did not work or that the United States failed to prove Libyan complicity in terrorist attacks.<sup>808</sup> This demonstrated the issues the Reagan administration had in convincing the Europeans to follow the US example.

In late January, the CIA provided more talking points for the Deputy Director for Intelligence on the subject of “Qadhafi’s Vulnerabilities.” In the redacted talking points, the US had several options to cause “additional pressure on Qadhafi.”<sup>809</sup> The “most significant” opportunity to apply pressure on Qadhafi was his penchant for foreign adventures, which involved the Libyan military, although these foreign adventures were very unpopular with the officer corps.<sup>810</sup> The CIA believed that “a campaign of increase pressure on Libyan forces in Chad” was an option to consider because the Libyan army officers were vehemently opposed to Qadhafi’s intervention in Chad in 1983 and information available to the CIA indicated that Chad was an extremely “unpopular assignment for Libyan officers.”<sup>811</sup> Another option was “highlighting Libyan military assistance to Iran.”<sup>812</sup> The talking points did not mention who was receiving this information—

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<sup>806</sup> Dryden, *IHT*, 28 January 1986.

<sup>807</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>808</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>809</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Qadhafi’s Vulnerabilities,” *Talking Points for the DDI*, 28 January 1986, [https://www.proquest.com/dnsa\\_te/docview/DAB200B2428A4080PQ/77account=12085](https://www.proquest.com/dnsa_te/docview/DAB200B2428A4080PQ/77account=12085), accessed on 13 May 2022. (National Security Archive, George Washington University)

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid.*

the media or other Arab governments. Part of this option was the issuance of public warnings threatening Libya that the United States would prevent Libyan officers travel to Iran if it was to support terrorist operations.<sup>813</sup> How the US would prevent travel between the two countries was not mentioned. Of course, the US could impose the air travel sanctions of the Bonn Declaration to deny Libyan military officers from traveling to Iran. These sanctions would also deny Libyan civil air transportation landing rights to foreign airports and would effectively close Libyan airports because flights to Libya would be banned.

While Operation Attain Document I progressed, Qadhafi feared that an American attack was brewing and he proposed that Libya would curb support for terrorism if the US would agree not to launch an attack against his country.<sup>814</sup> This was a different stance compared to the media stunt earlier in the month. Qadhafi was usually belligerent, but the possible threat of an air strike made him more conciliatory. Qadhafi said he was “willing to help stop Arab terrorist operations in Europe if the US” promised not to attack Libya.<sup>815</sup> The message was conveyed through Malta’s Prime Minister Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici to Italy’s Prime Minister Craxi and Rome informed Washington about the offer.<sup>816</sup> Craxi believed Qadhafi was attempting to open a dialogue with the United States and the offer was a “sharp contrast” to Qadhafi’s bellicose rhetoric.<sup>817</sup> Qadhafi change of heart coincided with the EC agreeing to ban arm sales to countries supporting terrorism. While it did not name any countries, the arms embargo would affect

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<sup>813</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Qadhafi’s Vulnerabilities,” *Talking Points for the DDI*, 28 January 1986.

<sup>814</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, “U.S. Action is Possible,” *International Herald Tribune*, 29 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>815</sup> Ibid.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid.

Libya and Qadhafi wanted to avoid the closing of the West European arms market.<sup>818</sup> John C. Whitehead, the deputy secretary of state, warned that the US reserved the right to use military force against states supporting terrorism.<sup>819</sup> This was effectively the US answer to Qadhafi's offer and until he changed his policy regarding the support of terrorism, the United States could not tolerate a leader who condoned it.<sup>820</sup> One of the reasons why Reagan had not actively used force against Qadhafi was the concern about the well-being of approximately 1000 US citizens living in Libya.<sup>821</sup> The maneuvers in the Gulf of Sidra, talk of using force, the European Community arms embargoes, and discussions of a new media campaign highlighting Libya's military support of Iran were designed to increase diplomatic pressure on the country to the point that Qadhafi started to issue feelers to start a dialogue with the United States. However, the United States appeared reluctant to open a dialogue with Qadhafi because his offer to curb terrorism was equivalent to a temporary ceasefire or truce on terrorism rather than a complete repudiation of it.

US citizens began leaving Libya as the sanction's deadline loomed within a few days.<sup>822</sup> The returning Americans removed one of the barriers for Reagan to use force against Libya. However, Reagan still feared that Qadhafi would use the oil workers as hostages or possibly kill them in retaliation for an American attack. Libya did offer to start talks with the United States and during a special Arab League meeting in Tunis to discuss an Arab response to the US sanctions on Libya, the Libyan delegation said the only precondition Libya had for talks was the re-

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<sup>818</sup> Gwertzman, *IHT*, 29 January 1986.

<sup>819</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>820</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>821</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>822</sup> "As Sanctions Deadline Nears, U.S. Presence in Libya Falls Off," *International Herald Tribune*, 31 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

moval of the US Navy from the Gulf of Sidra, hoping this was enough to jumpstart talks with the United States.<sup>823</sup> The Reagan administration refused that precondition because the freedom of navigation operations were important in guaranteeing the right of foreign ships to navigate the Gulf of Sidra and as a tool of coercive diplomacy, applying diplomatic pressure on Libya until it denounced supporting terrorism and returned to acceptable international behavior.

The United States started the new year with an internal debate over the US government's response to Libyan supported terrorism and a general review of US counterterrorism policy. The US also faced difficulties with convincing the European to join Reagan's sanctions scheme. During the counterterrorism policy review, Operation Attain Document I commenced. This operation was to protect every seafaring nation's right to freely navigate the Gulf of Sidra. These freedom of navigation operations fell under the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy because it increased pressure on Qadhafi to change his behavior. The European Community finally agreed to impose an arms embargo on Libya, which convinced Qadhafi to open a dialogue with the United States to spare Tripoli from attack. The United States would conduct two more freedom of navigation operations, and the third one resulted in actual combat. At least two Libyan patrol boats were sunk in the clash. Libya responded with a terrorist bombing of a West Berlin disco that prompted Reagan to finally use military force against Qadhafi's terrorist infrastructure in April, 1986.

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<sup>823</sup> *IHT*, 31 January 1986.

## Chapter Eight: Attain Document II-III, Operation El Dorado Canyon, and Its Aftermath

The full range of US economic sanctions against Libya took full effect on 1 February 1986 and there was some confusion about the administration's plans on carrying out the sanctions. For instance, businesses expected publication on whether the Reagan administration would allow US oil companies and related businesses in Libya to receive income from Libya through the transfer of their operations to a foreign subsidiary.<sup>824</sup> There was agreement among diplomats and businessmen that a downturn in international oil prices would be worse for Libya than the sanctions.<sup>825</sup> Reagan signaled in his State of the Union Address that the United States refused to recognize Qadhafi's claims and would increase the pressure on Libya.<sup>826</sup> Reagan also said that a decision to move US aircraft carriers closer to the Libya coast had already been made. The return of the two carrier groups were to signal US resolve and US officials stated that this pressure was "making Colonel Qadhafi less willing to support terrorism."<sup>827</sup> This chapter will examine briefly Operations Attain Document II-III and the actual bombing of Libya, Operation El Dorado Canyon. This chapter will also discuss the aftermath of the April 1986 bombing of Libya. Operation El Dorado Canyon was an important part of Reagan's coercive diplomacy strategy and it was also a part of the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy. The use of military force exerted tremendous pressure upon the target country to change its behavior. Additional attacks would be forthcoming if the target country did not respond in an appropriate

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<sup>824</sup> Judith Miller, "Questions Remain as U.S. Sanctions Against Libya Take Effect," *International Herald Tribune*, 3 February 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute on International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>825</sup> Ibid.

<sup>826</sup> George C. Wilson, "U.S. Carriers May Sail In Area Qadhafi Claims," *International Herald Tribune*, 4 February 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute on International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>827</sup> Ibid.

manner. While Qadhafi's compound was targeted, Operation El Dorado Canyon was not a decapitation operation. Qadhafi's compound was located within a headquarters complex in Tripoli which was a legitimate target. In addition, a decapitation operation would have violated US law which banned assassination.

The freedom of navigation operations were designed to achieve certain goals which included "driving a wedge between" Qadhafi and the Soviet Union, send clear signals that the US would not tolerate state-supported terrorism, and gain vital intelligence on "Libya's military and terrorist networks," according to Niles Lathem, the Washington Bureau Chief for the *New York Post*.<sup>828</sup> The Soviets could have been a vital resource for the Libyans since Soviet spy ships shadowed the US task force in the Mediterranean, but the Kremlin cautioned Qadhafi not to provoke the Americans.<sup>829</sup> The United States countered the Soviet spy ships with overflights of electronic warfare aircraft capable of collecting Libyan defense messages for the purpose of breaking their codes, and this was vital intelligence work.<sup>830</sup> US officials stated that it was "no coincidence that" Libya did not launch any terrorist attacks while the US Navy was operating in the Gulf of Sidra because that would spark a response by the United States. In addition, embarrassing Qadhafi by defeating his fledgling naval forces was "certain to" encourage the "Libyan dissident movements throughout the world new momentum."<sup>831</sup>

On 12 February 1986, Operation Attain Document II started, lasting four days and ended without incident, but the Libyans did show a little more aggressiveness.<sup>832</sup> The number of inter-

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<sup>828</sup> Niles Lathem, "What the U.S. Achieved in Libya," *New York Post*, 27 March 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-0065R00040370032-4.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>829</sup> Ibid.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid.

<sup>831</sup> Ibid.

ceptions increased, but all ended without combat.<sup>833</sup> A former Libyan Arab Air Force (LAAF) pilot recounted how three LAAF pilots encountered two US Navy F/A-18 Hornets over the Gulf of Sidra. According to Abdelmajid Tayari, a former LAAF MiG-23 pilot, the three Libyan pilots “overflew the Americans and ended (in an) advantageous position, at their ‘6 o’ clock.”<sup>834</sup> The Americans were forced to disengage and flew away.<sup>835</sup> Tayari was the flight leader for a pair of MiG-23s and tasked to intercept a pair of F-14s flying CAP 92 nautical miles north-west of Benina. Their MiGs were armed with one R-24R, one R-24T, and four R-60 MK missiles and a full complement of 23mm cannon rounds.<sup>836</sup> Tayari claimed he surprised the US Navy pilots with his maneuvers and gained the upper hand a few times, but the F-14s were able to pull themselves out of the situation. After Tayari performed a complicated scissors maneuver to gain the advantage once again, he noticed that he was low on fuel and two more US Navy F-14s were closing on their position as reinforcements. Tayari and his wingman broke off and flew back to their home base.<sup>837</sup> Tayari praised the skill of the US Navy aviators and said he had the best dogfight of his life.<sup>838</sup> However, dogfighting would suggest that actual combat was involved. While the Libyans might have had the intention of shooting down an American warplane, they did not fire on the American aircraft. The maneuvering that took place might have been too quick to

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<sup>832</sup> Joseph T. Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War With Qaddafi* (Annapolis: Naval Institution Press, 2003), 124.

<sup>833</sup> Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 124.

<sup>834</sup> Dario Leone, “Libyan MiG-23 pilot remembers a memorable dogfight with U.S. Navy F-14 Tomcats,” *The Aviation Geek Club*, 16 June 2019, <https://theaviationgeekclub.com/Libya-mig-23-pilot-remembers-a-memorable-dogfight-with-u-s-navy-f-14-tomcats/>, accessed on 3 May 2023.

<sup>835</sup> Ibid.

<sup>836</sup> Ibid.

<sup>837</sup> Ibid.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid.



launch their missiles, but the Libyan MiGs did have 23mm cannons and the Libyans could have used those weapons if they intended to shoot down the Americans. It was an engagement to be sure, but to call it a dogfight might be an exaggeration. The engagement highlighted how tense the situation was in the Gulf of Sidra. However, the Libyan pilot's account might have been propaganda, because Libyan pilots were not well trained and as the August 1981 encounter demonstrated US Navy pilots had outperformed the Libyans and were able to shoot them down.

Joseph T. Stanik, a retired US Navy officer, stated in his 2003 book, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War With Qaddafi*, that Libyan pilots "exhibited an assortment of behaviors" during this freedom of navigation operation.<sup>839</sup> Some tried to lure US pilots south of the "Line of Death."<sup>840</sup> The Libyan pilots were most likely trying to provide the Libyan government a propaganda opportunity by bolstering the morale of the Libyan military by claiming the downing of several US fighter aircraft. Considering there were no news reports about US pilots being shot down, the Libyans clearly failed in their attempts to lure American aviators close to the Libyan coast and the US Navy maintained strict discipline during Operation Attain Document II. There are several reasons why this was significant. As stated above, the attempt to lure American pilots close to the Libyan coastline was for propaganda purposes. The Qadhafi regime wanted to boast about the skill of his pilots or anti-aircraft batteries. Tripoli could have also accused the United States of aggression if the aircraft were shot down over Libyan territorial waters. The attempt to lure American pilots over Libyan territory might have been used to convince the Soviets to defend Libya, thus insulating it from US retribution.

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<sup>839</sup> Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 125.

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

The US government was not alone in its concern over Libyan-sponsored terrorism, because writers and academics expressed their concern as well. Prior to the third Attain Document operation, *CQ Researcher* published “Dealing with Libya in their new highly respected *Editorial Research Reports* publication for public consumption.<sup>841</sup> Each report was a single theme issue, and “Dealing with Libya” was divided into three parts: “Qaddafi’s Power Base,” “Pursuit of Revolution,” and “Exporting Terrorism.”<sup>842</sup> Qadhafi had a “vision” when he obtained power in 1969 and his vision was Libya becoming an example to the rest of the world as the progenitor of the third way to govern.<sup>843</sup> This third way, known as the Third Universal Theory, was a rejection of capitalism and communism, and was instead a form of Arab socialism which allowed for limited private ownership, “direct state intervention in the economy,” and citizen committees in all aspect of economic activity to allow the people’s participation; in addition, the people would govern themselves through local committees and “popular congresses.”<sup>844</sup> However, his vision required a great deal of largesse from the state because reorganizing how the state operated took a great deal of money. Fortunately for Libya, the country was rich in low-sulfur petroleum, which made the poor country extremely wealthy. However, as the 1980s progressed, there was a slump in world oil prices and the economic and political sanctions by the United States affected Libya’s economic performance.

After gaining power, Qadhafi had tried to export his revolution to the annoyance of his neighbors and the Arab World. Part of Qadhafi’s revolutionary ideology was the creation of

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<sup>841</sup> Elena Berger, “Dealing with Libya,” *Editorial Research Reports* 1 (1986): 187-204.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid.

<sup>843</sup> Ibid., 189-190.

<sup>844</sup> Ibid., 190.

Arab unity.<sup>845</sup> “Dealing with Libya” argued that Qadhafi was a strong advocate for the destruction of Israel and sought alliances with Arab states with similar goals. Throughout his reign he continually attempted to unify with other Arab states including Egypt, Syria, and Morocco, but the unification process always failed. Qadhafi wished for Libya to play a lead role in Arab unity, and it might have been his dream to create a new caliphate with Tripoli as its new capital. However, this proved to be impossible because of Qadhafi’s personality, his meddling with his neighbors, his support for revolutionaries and terrorists that often targeted other Arab governments, and the fact that Libya had such a small population. These were factors in denying Qadhafi the creation of a united Arab state. New York City had a larger population than Libya and with such a small population, Libya could not raise an army capable of projecting power abroad.

Because Libya lacked the ability to influence or intimidate its neighbors with larger military establishments and since Qadhafi wanted a greater role or position in international relations, Libya began to support terrorism drew the unwanted attention of the United States and Reagan imposed harsh sanctions on Libya. Qadhafi had threatened to export terrorism several times as a retaliation for US hostility.<sup>846</sup> This only caused the United States to bolster its resolve to defeat state-supported terrorism. “Dealing with Libya” concluded while “(o)thers view Qaddafi as a menace to Western security, (he is) the ‘Daddy Warbucks of international terrorism’ who fully merits a fierce response.”<sup>847</sup> Despite the perceived threat Libya posed to Western security, it was only the United States that responded to Qadhafi’s support of terrorism. “Dealing with Libya” demonstrated that writers at the time as well as academics were concerned about

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<sup>845</sup> Berger, *Editorial Research Reports* 1 (1986): 195-197.

<sup>846</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

Libya's support for terrorism and how to deal with it.

The United States planned on crossing Qadhafi's so-called Line of Death during Operation Attain Document III. The US Navy gathered three aircraft carriers and twenty-seven other warships for the operation.<sup>848</sup> The operation was scheduled to take place between 23 March to 29 March 1986.<sup>849</sup> There was a "contingency operation" within Attain Document III, called "Operation Prairie Fire," and according to Stanik, these operations "delineated a set of graduated responses to varying levels of Libyan aggression."<sup>850</sup> Unidentified US officials said the operation "was not aimed at provoking" Qadhafi into attacking the flotilla or US warplanes, but there were "detailed plans" for the US task forces to defend against Libyan attacks.<sup>851</sup> The Reagan administration argued that it was "simply exercising the U.S. right of navigation in the Gulf of Sidra," despite Qadhafi's constant threat to use force to drive US warships and aircraft out of their self-perceived territorial waters.<sup>852</sup> Both the United States and the Soviet Union recognized 12-miles as the extent of territorial waters as delineated by international law.<sup>853</sup> The fact that Libya could not rely on Soviet support on this issue had to be disappointing to Qadhafi because it illustrated Libya's growing isolation internationally. The three US aircraft carriers were the USS Coral Sea, USS Saratoga, and USS America which could muster 240 aircraft if hostilities erupted.<sup>854</sup> The Soviets did have spy ships shadowing the three aircraft carriers to provide in-

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<sup>848</sup> George C. Wilson, "U.S. Ships to Defy Libya By Crossing Gulf of Sidra," *International Herald Tribune*, 22-23 March 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

<sup>849</sup> Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 127.

<sup>850</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>851</sup> Wilson, *IHT*, 22-23 March 1986.

<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>854</sup> *Ibid.*

telligence to keep Libya apprised of US movements.<sup>855</sup> Operation Attain Document III was another freedom of navigation operation, but this time US warships entered the Gulf of Sidra past Qadhafi's Line of Death. The operation was to guarantee the right of navigation in internationally recognized international waters to the United States and other maritime nations. It was also an exercise designed to apply pressure on Qadhafi to change his policy of supporting terrorism. Freedom of navigation operations were an important part of Reagan's coercive diplomacy strategy.

The operations carried out in the Gulf of Sidra were characterized as "peaceful freedom of navigation and overflight exercises in international waters and airspace" but they provoked an armed response by Libya. At approximately 7:52 am eastern standard time on 24 March 1986, unprovoked Libyan forces fired two surface-to-air missiles at US aircraft operating over the gulf.<sup>856</sup> The missiles were fired from a SA-5 missile battery located at Sirte. Another SA-5 battery and a SA-2 battery also fired missiles late morning or early afternoon for a total of six missiles launched, although none of the missiles hit their targets.<sup>857</sup> The US Navy responded by launching an attack on the SA-5 battery at Sirte and produced some damage, and the Libyans sent several missile boats into the gulf which were attacked by US warplanes and at least one was sunk.<sup>858</sup> Principal Deputy Press Secretary Larry Speakes criticized the Libyan attack as "entirely unprovoked and beyond the bounds of normal international conduct."<sup>859</sup> Two days

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<sup>855</sup> Wilson, *IHT*, 22-23 March 1986.

<sup>856</sup> The White House, "Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speakes on the Gulf of Sidra Incident," 24 March 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/statement-principal-deputy-press-secretary-speakes-gulf-of-sidra-incident-1>, accessed on 23 November 2022.

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>858</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid.*

later, 26 March 1986, Reagan sent identical letters to the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, the letters informed Congress of the military action that took place in the Gulf of Sidra.<sup>860</sup> The War Powers Resolution required the president to inform Congress when the US military deployed abroad were involved in combat, and these letters provided a little more detail of the events that took place. President Reagan informed Congress of the actions of the USS Yorktown which was stationed near the Line of Death. Libyan missile boats were attempting to target the Yorktown, but the American warship fired two Harpoon missiles and struck the Libyan patrol boats.<sup>861</sup> US fighter aircraft attacked the Libyan boats and sank one.<sup>862</sup>

US officials claimed that “Reagan had struck an important psychological blow in the war against terrorism.”<sup>863</sup> The idea that the operation in the Gulf of Sidra was driving a wedge between the Soviets and Qadhafi was questionable. The Soviets distrusted Qadhafi because he was too independent. Qadhafi never listened to their counsel and did what he wanted and the Soviets saw his antics as troublesome. Qadhafi was not afraid to draw attention to himself and he would openly voice his support for terrorism. Such behavior was dangerous because it drew unwanted attention to Libyan government activities. The Soviets considered Qadhafi an embarrassment and the Libyan leader was only tolerated because he was a source of hard currency. The Soviets were willing to sell Qadhafi weapons, but refused to form an alliance with him because he would potentially draw the Soviet Union into a war with the United States. The breaking of Libya’s

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<sup>860</sup> The White House, “Letters to the Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore,” 26 March 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90B01390R000300360011-6.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>861</sup> Ibid.

<sup>862</sup> Ibid.

<sup>863</sup> Lathem, *NYP*, 27 March 1986.

military codes allowed the Pentagon to read Libyan military messages and, their diplomatic codes might have been broken also. This would explain why the State Department was later able to provide several messages between Tripoli and the People's Bureau in East Berlin as evidence of Qadhafi's culpability in the 5 April bombing of the West Berlin disco. The National Security Agency (NSA) was tasked in breaking Libya's codes. Reading Libyan military messages would have been useful when planning military missions against Libya because the US military would know where Libyan military units were stationed, their movements, weaponry, and possibly their state of readiness. Such military intelligence would be useful to Libya's neighbors like Egypt, if Cairo was drawn into hostilities with Libya.

On 27 March 1986, the Reagan administration announced that the naval exercises in the Gulf of Sidra had ended a few days early.<sup>864</sup> The Navy "flew 188 sorties" over the gulf, according to Defense Secretary Weinberger, and the three aircraft carriers with their 27 escort ships withdrew to new positions north of the gulf.<sup>865</sup> During Operation Prairie Fire, three navy ships – USS Ticonderoga, an Aegis cruiser, and two destroyers, USS Scott and USS Caron – were stationed below Qadhafi's Line of Death, and were withdrawn around 10 am.<sup>866</sup> The Libyans responded to the American operation by launching SA-5 and SA-2 surface-to-air missiles at US warplanes and sent at least three missile boats into the gulf. At least two of these missile boats were sunk.<sup>867</sup> Reagan administration officials "familiar with intelligence reports" were aware of four Soviet spy ships shadowing the US Navy in the Mediterranean, but the US officials stated

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<sup>864</sup> Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Says Navy Has Completed Libyan Exercises," *The New York Times*, 28 March 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00965R0003024300190019-3.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>865</sup> Ibid.

<sup>866</sup> Ibid.

<sup>867</sup> Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 1334-138.

the information available suggested the Soviets “did not provide ‘real-time’” intelligence to the Libyans regarding US fleet movements.<sup>868</sup> The US aviators attacked the SA-5 battery near Sirte twice and knocked out the radar both times, while the Libyan air force kept its aircraft grounded to avoid friendly fire from the SA-5 batteries.<sup>869</sup> During the American naval maneuvers, Qadhafi threatened to conduct “target practice in the Mediterranean,” but Defense Secretary Weinberger noted that “all of the Libyan naval and air units had been ‘pulled back in, so it’ll take them some time’” to launch an operation.<sup>870</sup> Operation Attain Document III was very successful. The US Navy managed to send three warships into the Gulf of Sidra well past Qadhafi’s Line of Death and protected them from any threat Libya could muster. Despite Qadhafi’s militant rhetoric, the Libyan armed forces could only muster a half-hearted attempt against the US fleet, which resulted in the sinking of at least two missile boats. While the situation was dangerous for the Americans, the Libyans could have damaged the US warships if a fully committed attack took place. The Libyans had adequate assets within the navy to sink US warships such as the six Soviet-built submarines. Qadhafi understood that a fully committed attack would be repulsed at great cost to the Libyan Navy, but the sinking of an aircraft carrier would be a major embarrassment to Reagan. However, the Libyan attack would draw the ire of the American people and Qadhafi knew that would be the end of his regime. While Operation Prairie Fire was not exactly a dry run for El Dorado Canyon, it did demonstrate US airpower and capabilities. Reagan pursued these operations to apply pressure on Qadhafi to change his policies of supporting terrorism and to guarantee the right of all nations to navigate the Gulf of Sidra without harassment

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<sup>868</sup> Gordon, *NYT*, 28 March 1986.

<sup>869</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>870</sup> *Ibid.*



from Libya.

On 28 March 1986, Qadhafi appeared at a celebration for the British withdrawal from Libya after their military basing rights expired.<sup>871</sup> In a long and rambling speech Qadhafi claimed a great victory over the Americans during the recent freedom of navigation exercises in the Gulf of Sidra. He claimed that Libyan anti-aircraft missiles shot down three F-14s over the gulf and the United States was covering up the loss of six pilots.<sup>872</sup> However, there were no media reports of any US losses during the military exercises and Qadhafi's boastful remarks were propaganda and were possibly for bolstering the morale of the Libyan military since Qadhafi had grounded the air force and most naval vessels stayed close to the coastline. The Libyan news agency, JANA, produced a list of student and revolutionary groups that sent telegrams condemning US actions in the Gulf of Sidra, and there was a total of fifty-three groups from all over the world.<sup>873</sup> One of the student groups was the Libyan Revolutionary Force in Oxford Aerodrome in Britain which gave Qadhafi a message of support. This group was not part of the list of fifty-three groups, but it threatened to launch suicide attacks against the Americans.<sup>874</sup> The messages from the student groups were for propaganda purposes and to encourage the Libyan public to support Qadhafi and possibly gain support from the Arab World and the Soviet Union. Qadhafi would welcome Soviet support considering he faced three US military

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<sup>871</sup> "Al Qadhdhafi Addresses Rally," 28 March 1986, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, 31 March 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP05-01559R000400410029-9.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>872</sup> Ibid.

<sup>873</sup> "JANA Lists Cables of Support for Al-Qadhdhafi," 28 March 1986, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, 31 March 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP05-01559R000400410029-9.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>874</sup> "Oxford Group Threatens 'Suicide' Acts Against U.S.," 27 March 1986, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, 31 March 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP05-01559R000400410029-9.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

operations which pressured him to change his policies. The groups could have been Libyan diplomatic staff sending the cables such as the Libyan Revolutionary Forces in Oxford Aerodrome in Britain suggesting to the Libyan people and the world that Qadhafi had considerable support. However, if those groups were legitimate revolutionary groups, and their messages of support might have contained a quid pro quo. These groups sent their cables for financial support. Qadhafi had promised financial support in the past, but failed to follow through or the amount was less than promised. Qadhafi often frustrated groups like these with promises of support, but failed to follow through. Therefore, these telegrams were questionable because groups frustrated over their benefactor's largesse tend to become hostile and critical.

Around this time, Soviet officials produced a report regarding US actions against Libya. This report was dated on 1 April 1986 which might be a mistake or a misprint because Soviet technicians did not arrive in Libya until 20 April 1986.<sup>875</sup> However, the report might have been on Operation Prairie Fire that occurred during Operation Attain Document III. US Navy aviators attacked the SA-5 battery located at Sirte twice and attacked the Libyan naval assets in the gulf also. The Soviet report began with a list of air defense systems Libyan air defenses acquired from the Soviet Union. Soviet defense officials estimated that Libyan air defenses had “more than 200 launch pads, which was “more than enough” to protect the Libyan capital from air raids.<sup>876</sup> The Soviet narrative of Operation Prairie Fire which took place toward the end of March was like the Libyan one. On 24 March the Libyans detected US aircraft approaching the coast and launched two missiles based on Qadhafi's orders, “the target disappeared from the

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<sup>875</sup> “New Evidence on 1986 US Air Raid on Libya,” April 01, 1986, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, BStU, Translated from the original German by Grace Leonard for the Cold War International History Project, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112011>, accessed on 20 November 2018.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid.

monitor,” and the aircraft were confirmed destroyed when US air rescue helicopters searched for the wreckage.<sup>877</sup> Another group of two US aircraft were also shot down by the Libyans and Qadhafi claimed a total of five US aircraft were lost by the Americans, but “Soviet specialists determined that three aircraft had been shot down.”<sup>878</sup> However, President Reagan denied there were any losses.<sup>879</sup> Libya faced three freedom of navigation or power projection operations to force it to change its international conduct. Considerable pressure had to have been exerted on Libya because it faced one operation after another for the first three months of 1986. These military operations fueled Qadhafi’s paranoia because he was convinced that the United States planned his removal. The freedom of navigation operations were to accomplish other goals such as isolating Libya further and convince the Europeans to finally impose significant sanctions on the Qadhafi regime. Qadhafi was certainly humiliated by the lackluster performance of the Libyan military. Libyan air defenses were bombed twice, the Libyan Navy suffered the loss of two patrol boats, and the Libyan Arab Air Force was grounded during the last freedom of navigation operation.

According to the CIA in early April 1986, Qadhafi ordered “increased surveillance of U.S. diplomats and other personnel in Western Europe and the Middle East” toward the end of December 1985.<sup>880</sup> US officials were shocked to discover thirty-five American targets were under surveillance by Libyan agents and the rising tensions between the two countries suggested

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<sup>877</sup> “New Evidence on 1986 US Air Raid on Libya,” April 01, 1986.

<sup>878</sup> Ibid.

<sup>879</sup> Ibid.

<sup>880</sup> Don Oberdorfer, “U.S., Libya Near State of Undeclared War: Qaddafi Accused of Backing Up Rhetoric With Instructions for Terrorist Attacks,” *The New York Times*, 6 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

that a “state of undeclared war” was at hand.<sup>881</sup> According to “intelligence information” that was available, both West and East German officials “as well as U.S. military and diplomatic headquarters in Berlin had been alerted to the danger of attacks before” the La Belle bombing took place.<sup>882</sup> This was one of the problems with alerts because there was ambiguity over the target. There were too many targets available to the terrorists: government buildings, concert stadiums, marketplaces, bars, and nightclubs. The State Department produced five years of diplomatic cables that detailed Qadhafi’s terrorist operations and among the documents was a 1981 report documenting the Libyan practice of providing false traveling documents to terrorists, and these documents were evidence of Libyan complicity in terrorist operations.<sup>883</sup> ABC World News Tonight’s 7 April broadcast also reported that Libyan agents were surveilling Americans and US facilities for possible terrorist attacks and US intelligence sources said there was “substantial communication between Libya and its East Berlin Embassy before the attack.”<sup>884</sup>

Qadhafi quickly responded to the humiliation Libya suffered in March by bombing a West Berlin disco, the La Belle Club on 5 April 1986.<sup>885</sup> The disco had 500 patrons inside when the bomb exploded, initially killing two and injuring 155.<sup>886</sup> The United States quickly suspected Libyan involvement and began investigating the Libyan People’s Bureau in East Berlin. One

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<sup>881</sup> Oberdorfer, *NYT*, 6 April 1986.

<sup>882</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>883</sup> Jack Anderson and Dale van Atta, “Cables Detailed Qaddafi’s Operations,” *The Washington Post*, 9 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>884</sup> “Terrorist Linked to Libya,” *ABC News World News Tonight*, 7 April 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/reading-room/CIA-RDP90-0065R000504140005-6.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>885</sup> John Tagliabue, “2 Killed, 155 Hurt in Bomb Explosion at Club in Berlin: Libyan Role is Suspected, American Soldier and Turkish Woman Die in Blast at Bar Popular Among G.I.’s,” *The New York Times*, 6 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.*

US official told the *New York Times*, “There is a definite, clear connection,” but the US official refused to provide any further details.<sup>887</sup> American installations in West Berlin were subject to increased security after the US 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet conducted exercises in the Gulf of Sidra, according to Manfred Kittlaus, the West Berlin chief of police.<sup>888</sup> He did not want to speculate if the bombing was “Libyan-inspired,” but Kittlaus said that he could “not exclude the participation of Libyan activists” and that he did not want the investigation to be ““tied down in any one direction.””<sup>889</sup> The police did receive “at least three anonymous phone calls” state that West German or Arab groups were responsible for the bombing.<sup>890</sup> The United States issued a brief statement on the La Belle Club bombing. The president was “concerned about the increasing number of terrorist incidents that were affecting Americans in Europe and worldwide.”<sup>891</sup> The president wanted to capture and prosecute those responsible for the act and “take every measure in concert with the allies in order to prevent terrorist incidents.”<sup>892</sup> The German police were not convinced that Libya was involved in the bombing because there were other culprits like the Red Army Faction or radical Palestinian groups. The US believed Libya was involved, but US officials refused to give further comment because they were not privy to specific information or they were protecting a source. The US intelligence community did not want to compromise their information collection techniques. One these techniques were exposed, the target country would change their

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<sup>887</sup> Tagliabue, *NYT*, 6 April 1986.

<sup>888</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>889</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>890</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>891</sup> The White House, “Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speakes on the Terrorist Bombing of a West Berlin Nightclub,” 5 April 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/statement-principal-deputy-press-secretary-speakes-terrorist-bombing-west-berlin>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*

communication methods and the US would lose a source.

However, US intelligence experts believed the United States would intercept Libyan communications again because of Tripoli's penchant for electronic communications and John Greaney, a CIA veteran, believed the interception of Libyan communications demonstrated that the US capability to countering terrorism had improved.<sup>893</sup> Greaney and other intelligence experts argued that terrorists rarely made it easy to gather intelligence on them. Terrorists normally were not susceptible to communications intelligence or COMINT, which involved spy aircraft and satellites.<sup>894</sup> COMINT involved specialist intelligence agencies like the National Security Agency (NSA). Generally, intelligence on terrorist organizations was through human intelligence or HUMINT, which involved a spy infiltrating the group.<sup>895</sup> This form of intelligence gathering was very dangerous and US intelligence experts stated that it was difficult or near impossible to infiltrate a terrorist group because they were small and highly disciplined. Members of the group were closely monitored, which made turning a member extremely difficult.<sup>896</sup> In addition, the intelligence agencies might lack personnel with the necessary foreign language skills which would make tracking terrorist groups and translating communications difficult. There was also the lack of cultural knowledge which could be very dangerous for the asset in the field.

Although communications intelligence might have been closed to US intelligence, the fact that the NSA could read Libyan communications was an intelligence coup. Besides reading

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<sup>893</sup> Richard Whittle, "Publicity to U.S. spying experts say: Libya expected to tighten up methods of communication," *Dallas Morning News*, 16 April 1986, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-0052R000505380037-2.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>894</sup> Ibid.

<sup>895</sup> Ibid.

<sup>896</sup> Ibid.

the message about Qadhafi being happy about the headlines the next day suggesting the bombing was a success, the United States intercepted another message on 5 April that was a few sentences long which stated the La Belle Club operation was “‘happening now,’” and that message “was sent within 10 minutes of the bomb exploding,” according to Bob Woodward, an American journalist and author.<sup>897</sup> Woodward argued the messages taken individually “were somewhat ambiguous, but their timing and cumulative impact left no real doubt in the minds of senior American officials that they could rightly blame Mummar Qadhafi’s Libya for the bombing.”<sup>898</sup> He reported that “half a dozen sources” knowledgeable about the intercepts said “their impact” was very “convincing because they provided the elements intelligence analysts consider crucial: a motive, an order, a time and place and an after-action report.”<sup>899</sup> The cables showed Libya was planning a terrorism campaign in most of Western Europe, with one message mentioning that US military personnel had to be at the target such as a bar or other “social gathering places” and this message was sent to the “Libyan People’s Bureaus in Paris, Rome, Madrid and four other European capitals” besides East Berlin.<sup>900</sup> Woodward reported that the above message, which was sent on 25 March 1986, was not sent to London because the UK broke diplomatic relations with Libya in 1984. When the UK received the evidence against Qadhafi, “British authorities were elated” because Libya did not have a presence in the United Kingdom any longer and they could not conduct terrorist operations there.<sup>901</sup> Those messages were the irrefutable evidence Reagan

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<sup>897</sup> Bob Woodward, “Intelligence ‘Coup’ Tied Libya to Blast: Berlin Messages Read,” *The Washington Post*, 22 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>898</sup> Ibid.

<sup>899</sup> Ibid.

<sup>900</sup> Ibid.

<sup>901</sup> Ibid.

said was in US possession. What made the evidence irrefutable was the fact they were Libyan diplomatic cables. It was difficult for a country to deny involvement in an act of aggression when their diplomatic messages were intercepted by a foreign intelligence agency.

There were a few within the US who were not convinced that Libya was involved in the 5 April bombing. These individuals were critical of Reagan's foreign policy and disagreed because of ideological differences or were not convinced that evidence of Libyan culpability was available. However, the Reagan administration suspected that Libya had a hand in the La Belle bombing, but a senior State Department official admitted that the US would "'not necessarily' retaliate militarily" against Libya.<sup>902</sup> Robert B. Oakley, the State Department's Director of the Office of Counterterrorism, said on CBS News' "Face the Nation," that "'We take seriously what Qaddafi says, even though he's a madman in some respects.'" Furthermore, "'Hitler was also a madman in some respects, and there was a lot of trouble when people didn't take seriously what he was saying.'"<sup>903</sup> Oakley also stated that the discotheque bombing followed "'the pattern' of Qaddafi-sponsored terrorism," but the US government did not have concrete proof of Libyan involvement in the attack that killed two and injured 204.<sup>904</sup> To further complicate the search for the responsible party, there were three separate terrorist groups that claimed responsibility: "West German leftist terrorists, radical Arabs and Western Europe's Red Army Faction," and none of these groups had any known connection to Qadhafi.<sup>905</sup> Oakley acknowledged that US critics of

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<sup>902</sup> Michael Weisskopf, "U.S. Suspects Libya In Disco Bombing: Europe Urged to Help Thwart Qaddafi," *The Washington Post*, 7 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>903</sup> Ibid.

<sup>904</sup> Ibid.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid.



Reagan's foreign policy claimed that countering terrorism was an obsession.<sup>906</sup> Oakley countered this criticism by stating that it was not just the United States against Libya, but that Libyan-sponsored terrorism affected Europe as well. Qadhafi was pushing for more terrorist acts in Europe. Oakley stated that US objectives in Europe were to convince the Europeans to act against Libya because "(w)e're in this together."<sup>907</sup> Oakley also stated that "Reagan's anti-terrorism campaign has failed because 'international cooperation has not been great enough.'"<sup>908</sup> Oakley and most of the principal foreign policy team believed that Libya was involved in the La Belle Club bombing, and the Reagan administration was compiling evidence. The evidence was very sensitive because of how it was gathered and exposing it would compromise how the US intelligence community collected the evidence. The Europeans, on the other hand, were sensitive to Libyan reaction because their cities were usually the targets of Libyan-sponsored terrorism. In addition, the Europeans were more concerned about their economic prospects than American security concerns. They did not support Reagan's sanctions scheme because they did not believe sanctions worked or believed the effect of the sanctions was too slow. Regardless of Europe's beliefs, the Reagan administration tried to shame the Europeans into supporting the sanctions scheme. The US pointed out that it was the only country that was pushing back on state-supported terrorism and the only reason why their efforts were for naught was because of the lack of international cooperation, i.e., the Europeans' refusal to cooperate. The Europeans, Japan, and the other developed economies had the power to make a difference in challenging Qadhafi because their economies ran on fossil fuels just like the United States. If Europe joined

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<sup>906</sup> Weisskopf, *WP*, 7 April 1986.

<sup>907</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>908</sup> *Ibid.*

in the sanctions scheme it would have affected the Libyan economy to such an extent that Qadhafi would have no choice but to either quit terrorism or negotiate some sort of compromise.

The United States stating that military options were not being considered was a ploy to keep Libya off guard. The mere suggestion of military options being considered would have heightened Libya's defensive posture and would have made a surprise attack unlikely. In addition, the United States lacked conclusive evidence of Libya's complicity in the attack. The only evidence the US had was the information on the seized Tunisian passports by Libyan authorities and the diplomatic communications between Tripoli and the People's Bureau in East Berlin. However, this could have been misinformation to convince Tripoli that Libya was safe from retaliation. The Hitler comparison was not very helpful, because it was an easy label to toss around. Yet it did offer the point that the lack of action had devastating consequences. Therefore, it was better to act, because removing a threat early or at least damage their ability to cause mischief would signal that the international community would not tolerate their aggression. The United States was convinced that Libya was involved in the bombing while the West Germans were not entirely convinced, but they were performing an investigation into the bombing of the La Belle Club. It was understandable for the West Germans to have kept an open mind during the investigation because there were other suspects such as the Red Army Faction. A criminal investigation required that all avenues were explored before coming to a conclusion. West Germany was sensitive over their relations with Libya, because it was one of Libya's important trading partners and the West Germans did not want to jeopardize their trading relations with Tripoli. The same was true with the other European countries. The Europeans were benefitting from the US absence in Libya, and they coveted Libyan oil because of its low-sulfur content and believed that sanctions did not work. Despite US-West German differences over Libyan-sponsored terrorism,

the United States still maintained considerable military installations in West Germany and stationed large military formations there and extended their nuclear umbrella over the country because it was more concerned about protecting it against an unlikely Soviet invasion. This demonstrated a rather complicated relationship between the United States, West Germany, and Western Europe in general.

Washington was urging the West Germans and other key allies to expel all or some Libyan diplomats from their territory “because of the evidence linking Libya to the bombing” of the West Berlin discotheque.<sup>909</sup> The US was supplying evidence to West European capitals to convince them to act against Libya. One US official said that it was ““convincing evidence.””<sup>910</sup> The evidence supplied were intercepted and decoded diplomatic messages between Tripoli and the Libyan People’s Bureau in East Berlin; in addition, the Hamburg-based newspaper *Bild* reported that a Libyan diplomat Elamin Abdullah Elamin “was ‘urgently suspected’ of directing the bombing.”<sup>911</sup> *Bild* also reported that Chancellor Helmut Kohl was meeting with his cabinet to consider expelling two Libyan diplomatic staff members of the Libyan People’s Bureau in Bonn.<sup>912</sup> While the US welcomed this action, the Reagan administration also urged East Germany and the Soviet Union to shutter the People’s Bureau in East Berlin and “Reagan raised the question of Soviet support with” the outgoing Soviet ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin.<sup>913</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had

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<sup>909</sup> “U.S. seeks allied ouster of Libyans: Diplomats linked to Berlin bombing,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>910</sup> Ibid.

<sup>911</sup> Ibid.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid.

<sup>913</sup> Ibid.

voiced his opposition to terrorism, but failed to condemn Libya's support for it, and the Soviet foreign ministry responded by saying that the United States had unjustly accused "Libya of terrorist activity."<sup>914</sup>

On 9 April 1986, Bonn expelled two Libyan diplomats, the USS Coral Sea left Malaga, Spain for the central Mediterranean and the USS America weighed anchor at Livorno, Italy.<sup>915</sup> While the Reagan administration was pursuing diplomacy to urge their European allies and the Soviet Union to act against Libya, Washington was also planning to take military action against Libya. The two aircraft carriers that would take part in El Dorado Canyon left their respective ports to rendezvous in the central Mediterranean. Tripoli most likely assumed the US was planning another freedom of navigation operation, considering the US 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet had operated near the Gulf of Sidra for the past three months, and so the aircraft carriers' presence did not cause any alarm with the Libyans.

Because of the bombing of the German disco the United States was planning on taking military action against Libya. The Reagan administration believed it had enough evidence to link Libya to that bombing and drafted a new national security decision directive on 10 April 1986 authorizing military action against Libya. *National Security Decision Directive Number 224*, "Counter-Terrorist Operations Against Libya," was signed on 12 April 1986 and provided the justification for military operations against Qadhafi's government.<sup>916</sup> *NSDD 224* stated there was compelling evidence that implicated "Libya in numerous terrorist attacks over an extended

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<sup>914</sup> *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 April 1986.

<sup>915</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>916</sup> The White House, "Counter-Terrorist Operations Against Libya," *National Security Decision Directive Number 224*, 12 April 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd224.pdf>, accessed on 30 June 2021.

period of time.”<sup>917</sup> In addition, the US had “pursued every public, diplomatic, and economic opportunity to persuade the Libyan leadership to stop these acts of aggression,” but despite all of these efforts, Libya still continued to sponsor terrorism.<sup>918</sup> Therefore, the president had authorized the Pentagon to “take more forceful measures in self-defense to stop” Libyan-supported terrorism and Reagan directed “that the United States take appropriate preemptive action, as permitted under international law, not later than dawn, Tuesday, April 15, 1986.”<sup>919</sup> The Reagan administration was careful with its wording. The orders authorizing the use of force was careful to recognize that it had to be permitted under international law. The United States argued that the military operation against Libya was self-defense, an action permissible in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. Therefore, the US could not be accused of violating international law because it was exercising its right to individual self-defense. Most of Europe rejected this argument because they believed the use of force was counterproductive, but Europe also refused to impose sanctions. The use of force did accomplish several goals: it shocked the Europeans to finally act against Libya, forced Libya to curb its support of terrorism, demonstrated US resolve against state-supported terrorism, and signaled to other state-supporters that the United States would not tolerate their support of terrorism any longer. The US military operation was also a safety valve in that it managed to release some of the tension that was brewing in the Mediterranean region over the past few years.

By scheduling the attack for no later than 15 April, the president’s order gave the Pentagon a few days to identify targets and plan the attack. It also provided the White House a

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<sup>917</sup> The White House, *NSSD 224*, 12 April 1986.

<sup>918</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>919</sup> *Ibid.*

few days to develop some talking points for the Congressional leadership. Congress would likely demand answers regarding the military operation and would expect a report congruent with the War Powers Resolution by the president. The talking points for the president's national security advisor suggested that each principal foreign policy advisor (i.e., State, Defense, CIA, and JCS) would answer questions or brief Congress about the military operation.<sup>920</sup> The national security advisor was to reassure Congress that the "United States has tried every possible means short of military action to convince Colonel Qadhafi to stop his outlaw behavior. Diplomacy, economic sanctions, and even military pressure have all been in vain as George (Shultz) will attest."<sup>921</sup> The administration denied that military action would provoke Qadhafi. The US understood that Qadhafi used that as an excuse for his reckless behavior and that it was "our unanimous opinion that a failure to respond by the world community has encouraged Qadhafi's aggression," according to the national security advisor's talking points.<sup>922</sup> The Reagan administration believed that only once Qadhafi paid a high, "unacceptable price will he stop" his support for terrorism and John M. Poindexter, the national security advisor, finally informed the Congressional leadership both that military operations against Libya would take place "very shortly" and that the president would send a full report of the operation to Congress within forty-eight hours.<sup>923</sup>

The president's talking points for the meeting with the Congressional leadership followed

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<sup>920</sup> National Security Council, "National Security Advisor: Talking Points for Congressional Leadership," 14 April 1986, DNSA Collection, *CIA Covert Operations: From Carter to Obama, 1977-2010, NSC Staff, Top Secret, 14 April 1986*, Digital National Security Archive, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>, accessed on 21 September 2020.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid.

<sup>922</sup> Ibid.

<sup>923</sup> Ibid.

the same format as Poindexter's. The president's talking points discussed some of the "clear and compelling evidence" the administration had on Qadhafi's complicity regarding international terrorism and the La Belle Club bombing specifically.<sup>924</sup> According to Reagan, the US knew "that the Libyan People's Bureau in East Berlin was advised on March 25 to carry out an attack against Americans. On April 4, East Berlin People's Bureau alerted Tripoli to watch for results on morning of April 5."<sup>925</sup> Tripoli received a cable from East Berlin stating "that the 'operation was successful and untraceable on the morning of April 5 at about 1:30 am,'" which was stressed by Reagan as "the exact time of the" La Belle Club bombing.<sup>926</sup> Reagan stated that his "guidance" was to determine a terrorist-related targets list for an operation that would minimize civilian casualties and avoid economic targets at the time because he believed that Qadhafi was planning on increased terrorist attacks.<sup>927</sup> Reagan provided what appeared to be evidence of Libya's complicity in the La Belle Club bombing. The information Reagan provided to the Congressional leadership demonstrated Libyan foreknowledge of the attack. The military operation the Pentagon planned was not a decapitation operation because it would violate the presidential ban on assassination. Reagan wanted to use enough force to shock Qadhafi into quitting his support for terrorism. The administration did not hide the fact that Qadhafi's elimination during the military strike would have been a pleasant surprise. However, the Reagan administration stated repeatedly that the removal of Qadhafi was left to the Libyan people.

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<sup>924</sup> National Security Council, "Presidential Talking Points: Congressional Leadership Meeting," 14 April 1986, DNSA Collection: *CIA Covert Operations: From Carter to Obama: 1977-2010, NSC Staff, Top Secret, 14 April 1986*, Digital National Security Archive, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>, accessed on 21 September 2020.

<sup>925</sup> Ibid.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid.

<sup>927</sup> Ibid.

Oddly enough, Reagan told the news media that he had not decided on attacking Libya and added that Qadhafi could forestall such an attack if he “called off” his plans to launch further terrorist operations.<sup>928</sup> US rhetoric hinted toward an attack against Libya, but Deputy Secretary of State John C. Whitehead said in a television interview the US could “forego” an attack if Qadhafi changed his international behavior.<sup>929</sup> Clarifying the US position on military retaliation, Whitehead said: ““Not if he (Colonel Kadafi) changes his conduct. Not if he stops training terrorists, financing terrorists, supplying them with arms, supplying them with documents. As soon as he stops those actions, then we would certainly back away from our actions.””<sup>930</sup> In order for Qadhafi to “avert U.S. action,” he had “to act quickly and credibly.”<sup>931</sup> However, the decision to use force was made and *NSSD 224* was evidence of that fact. Reagan’s statements about making no decision on attacking Libya was clearly misinformation to keep Qadhafi off balanced. An announcement of an impending attack would alert the Libyans and their armed forces would prepare for it, making the attack less successful.

Qadhafi apparently passed on the last-minute effort for diplomacy, because US aircraft bombed five locations in Libya: a marine commando training school at Murrat Sidi Bilal, the Azziziyah barracks in Tripoli which acted both as the command, control, and communications headquarters for Libya’s terrorist activities and the main residence for Qadhafi, Tripoli International Airport which housed Libyan logistics aircraft, Benghazi barracks that housed Qadhafi’s guards and potential terrorists, and Benina Airfield in order to deny Libyan fighters from re-

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<sup>928</sup> Robert Timberg, “Halt to terrorism by Kadafi as way to peace,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>929</sup> Ibid.

<sup>930</sup> Ibid.

<sup>931</sup> Ibid.



sponding.<sup>932</sup>

Because of the distance between Tripoli and Benghazi, the Pentagon believed the aircraft from two aircraft carriers were not enough to launch two simultaneous attacks. Therefore, a contingent of F-111s based in the United Kingdom were necessary, but the US needed permission from the UK to use American aircraft based in British territory for missions outside of NATO purview. Fortunately, Reagan convinced Margaret Thatcher, the British prime minister, that the bombing raids were purely self-defense and not unlawful retaliation. Unfortunately, both France and Spain denied fly over right through their airspace and the F-111s had to fly around the Iberian Peninsula into the Mediterranean. The Europeans called for a European Community foreign ministers meeting to discuss sanctions to impose on Tripoli because they believed an attack on Libya by the United States was imminent.<sup>933</sup>

Principal Deputy Press Secretary Larry Speakes announced that the United States carried out a “series of carefully planned air strikes against terrorist-related targets in Libya,” and that the bombing raid was in response to the 5 April attack in West Berlin.<sup>934</sup> Speakes placed the blame for the bombing raid squarely on the Libyans, saying , “In light of this reprehensible act of violence (La Belle Club bombing) and clear evidence that Libya is planning future attacks, the United States has chose to exercise its right to self-defense. It is our hope this action will preempt and discourage Libyan attacks against innocent civilians in the future.”<sup>935</sup> US aircraft

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<sup>932</sup> Todd R. Phinney, *Airpower versus Terrorism: Three Case Studies* (Montgomery: Air University Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>933</sup> Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 150-175.

<sup>934</sup> The White House, “Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speakes on the United States Air Strike Against Libya,” 14 April 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/statement-principal-deputy-press-secretary-speakes-united-states-air-strike-0>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>935</sup> Ibid.

attacked parts of Qadhafi's ability to support terrorism such as command, control, communications, and logistics, as well as intelligence and training facilities; in addition, US warplanes avoided civilian casualties.<sup>936</sup> President Reagan addressed the country on the air raids against Qadhafi's terrorist infrastructure. He provided a justification for the attack, saying he warned Qadhafi several weeks prior in a speech in New Orleans when Reagan told him the United States "would hold his regime accountable for any new terrorist attacks launched against American citizens."<sup>937</sup> Qadhafi ignored Reagan's warnings and conducted the 5 April bombing of the La Belle Club that was popular with US servicemen and the bombing killed Sergeant Kenneth Ford, a Turkish woman, and injured 230 other patrons including fifty US military personnel.<sup>938</sup> Reagan's evidence included orders sent from Tripoli to the East Berlin People's Bureau to conduct a terrorist attack. This order was sent on 25 March and on 4 April, the East Berlin People's Bureau informed Qadhafi that the attack would occur "the following morning."<sup>939</sup> The president stated that the evidence in US possession was "direct," "precise," and "irrefutable;" the president also thanked US allies in Europe who cooperated with the air raid saying, "Europeans who remember history understand better than most that there is no security, no safety, in the appeasement of evil. It must be the core of Western policy that there be no sanctuary for terror. And to sustain such a policy, free men and nations must unite and work together."<sup>940</sup> This was clearly a

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<sup>936</sup> The White House, "Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speakes on the United States Air Strike Against Libya," 14 April 1986.

<sup>937</sup> The White House, "Address to the Nation on the United States Air Strike Against Libya," 14 April 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-united-states-air-strike-against-libya>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>938</sup> Ibid.

<sup>939</sup> Ibid.

<sup>940</sup> Ibid.

call for the other West European countries to join the United States in acting against international terrorism, particularly against Libya, through a united front. Reagan understood that Qadhafi would take notice if the United States and Western Europe had taken a sterner position against terrorism such as a joint sanctions scheme against Libya. A joint sanctions scheme like the US sanctions Reagan imposed would cause alarm in Tripoli. However, Qadhafi could rely on the Europeans to take a soft approach on Libyan-sponsored terrorism because Europe was more concerned with economic issues due to the world economy suffering through a deep recession.

While the air raid was a success, everyone who participated did not return home. Of the eighteen F-111 fighter bombers that took part in the bombing raid, two did not return to their base in Mildenhall, UK.<sup>941</sup> Deputy Press Secretary Larry Speakes gave a statement that two of the F-111s did not return to the UK. One F-111 developed “mechanical problems,” and was forced to make an emergency landing in Spain, but one F-111 was “unaccounted for.”<sup>942</sup> The unaccounted for aircraft was piloted by Captain Fernando Ribas-Dominicci and Captain Paul Lorence as his Weapons Systems Officer (WSO).<sup>943</sup> The Pentagon launched an investigation about the possibility of the missing plane dropping its payload too early and inadvertently hitting a civilian area.<sup>944</sup> It became apparent that Captain Ribas-Dominicci and Captain Lorence were killed when their plane went down and one of the bodies was recovered by the Libyans. The Libyan government attempted to hold the body for ransom, the Libyans were holding out for a

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<sup>941</sup> The White House, “Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speakes on the United States Air Strike Against Libya,” 15 April 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/statement-principal-deputy-press-secretary-united-states-air-strike-against>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>942</sup> Ibid.

<sup>943</sup> Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 197-199.

<sup>944</sup> “Probers say lost jet may have missed mark,” *Daily News*, 17 April 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/492834621>, accessed on 16 July 2020. (New York, New York)

ransom or a concession from the United States through secret negotiations via the Belgium Embassy.<sup>945</sup>

The Reagan administration declared the air raid as a success, but there were some mistakes. The French Embassy was accidentally hit during the raid, but no one was injured; the Libyans provided tours to foreign journalists of the bomb damage in residential areas of Tripoli. The news media reported that “the rear of the French Embassy was heavily damaged with windows blown out” and several houses were also damaged.<sup>946</sup> The Associated Press reported that Qadhafi was at home when the attacks occurred, and a Libyan official told the Associated Press that the Libyan leader survived the attack, quoting the Libyan Information Director, Ibrahim Serger, ““He’s O.K., he’s O.K.””<sup>947</sup> Libyan radio, according to Reuters, said that several of Qadhafi’s relatives were injured in the ““treacherous and barbaric’ air strike.”<sup>948</sup> This might be the time the story of his adopted daughter’s death was circulated. Abdel-Hamid Bakoush, former prime minister of Libya after the 1969 revolution and living in exile in Egypt, said that more than 300 Libyans died in the US raid, but the report of Qadhafi’s adopted 15-month daughter dying in the attack was a fabrication.<sup>949</sup> The Libyan government reported only forty-five civilians died.<sup>950</sup> The discrepancy might have been reported to avoid the embarrassment of los-

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<sup>945</sup> “Libya seeks ransom for airman’s body,” *Chicago Tribune*, 16 June 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>946</sup> Bernard Weinraub, “U.S. Jets Hits ‘Terrorist Centers’ in Libya; Reagan Warns of New Attacks If Needed,” *The New York Times*, 15 April 1986, <http://nytimes.com/1986/04/15/politics/15REAG.html?pagewanted=print>, accessed on 20 October 2016.

<sup>947</sup> Ibid.

<sup>948</sup> Ibid.

<sup>949</sup> “Khadafy’s adopted girl a fabrication, exile says,” *Chicago Tribune*, 10 May 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>950</sup> Ibid.

ing 300 Libyans or the numbers might mean that there were forty-five civilians lost and the rest were military personnel and terrorists at the training areas. The adopted girl fabrication was for propaganda purposes, and Qadhafi wanted to gain sympathy within the Arab World and sought condemnation for the US attack. Qadhafi's rhetoric, however, did not encourage any sympathy toward his country. Because Qadhafi in a speech in Benghazi broadcasted by Libyan television, called for the Egyptian army and people to revolt against their government. In the same speech, he "said Libya would fight any Arab country that harbored units of the U.S. 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet."<sup>951</sup> He also said in Benghazi, "Libya would answer violence with violence" suggesting that Qadhafi planned more terrorist attacks.<sup>952</sup> Qadhafi threatening more violence should not be a surprise considering his rhetoric in the past was always defiant.

Reagan fulfilled his War Powers Resolution requirement of sending a report on the air raid to both houses of Congress. The report was in the form of a letter to the Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and was dated 16 April 1986.<sup>953</sup> The letter reported that the air strikes started around 7:00 pm (EST) on 14 April and listed the five targets: the naval contingent attacked the targets around Benghazi, which included the Benina Air Field and the military barracks, while the US Air Force F-111s attacked the three targets in Tripoli, which included Azziziyah Barracks, Tripoli Air Field and Sidi Bilal.<sup>954</sup> Reagan used Article 51 of the UN Charter as justification for the air strikes which allowed for individual or collective

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<sup>951</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 10 May 1986.

<sup>952</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>953</sup> The White House, "Letter to the Speaker of the House of the Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate on the United States Air Strike Against Libya," 16 April 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/letter-speaker-house-representatives-and-president-pro-tempore-senate-united-states>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>954</sup> *Ibid.*

self-defense in the case of deterring aggression and stated that if Libya continued to support future terrorist attacks against US citizens, the United States would not hesitate to “take appropriate measures to protect United States citizens in the exercise of our right of self-defense.”<sup>955</sup> this was a warning to Qadhafi to stop sponsoring terrorism or face additional attacks from US military power. The president also showed the precision of the attack. Both the US Air Force and US Navy coordinated the attack to be nearly simultaneous despite the distance the US Air Force F-111s had to travel. This suggested that no matter the distance, the US could strike at terrorist targets or the governments that support terrorism. Reagan also warned Qadhafi that he could face more air strikes if he did not change his policies and his international conduct.

The US intelligence community was concerned about Reagan’s very public confirmation regarding intercepting Libyan diplomatic cables.<sup>956</sup> Terrorists normally operated in a very small cell with up to three individuals making detection nearly impossible, but Qadhafi had been very vocal about his support for terrorism.<sup>957</sup> Every time an act of terrorism occurred, Qadhafi was suspected because of his carelessness in his overt support of terrorist activity and Libyan codes were not very sophisticated and could be intercepted and decoded.<sup>958</sup> A “former senior intelligence official told the *Dallas Morning News* a few days after the US air strikes, that he feared the Libyans would change their codes and their ““methods of communicating. The president went very far last night in giving away the obvious source of access. So you’re not likely to get information (that way) for a long time.”<sup>959</sup> However, the US intelligence community believed it

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<sup>955</sup> The White House, “Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate on the United States Air Strike Against Libya,” 16 April 1986.

<sup>956</sup> Whittle, *Dallas Morning News*, 16 April 1986.

<sup>957</sup> Ibid.

<sup>958</sup> Ibid.

would be able to intercept Libyan diplomatic cables and break their codes again, because the Libyan government was not very sophisticated.

The United States was hoping that a coup to overthrow Qadhafi would take place after the air strikes. The US news media reported small arms fire in a neighborhood near the Azziziyah Barracks in Tripoli a day after US aircraft bombed the compound. Qadhafi was quick to respond to the US attack by appearing on state-run television for a speech putting to rest any speculation of a coup to overthrow him.<sup>960</sup> In the speech, he told the Libyan people, “We are ready to die and we are ready to carry on fighting and defending the country.”<sup>961</sup> He called Reagan a war criminal who killed children. He said, “We will not kill your children. We are not like you. We do not bombard cities,” but also went on to say, “Kill the Americans, civilian and military, wherever you may find them!... Kill him after you kill his children in front of him.”<sup>962</sup> He claimed that any Arab who killed an American would go to paradise.<sup>963</sup> In Sudan an employee of the US embassy in Khartoum was shot in the head from a drive-by shooting near the Libyan People’s Bureau. The US embassy employee underwent emergency brain surgery in Saudi Arabia and Americans in Sudan were requested to shelter indoors. The US embassy was closed as a safeguard.<sup>964</sup> According to the CIA, the attack on the US embassy staffer had “circumstantial evidence” linking “Libyan involvement.”<sup>965</sup>

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<sup>959</sup> Whittle, *Dallas Morning News*, 16 April 1986.

<sup>960</sup> William Goldschlag, “Khadafy lives, seethes: Calls Reagan ‘war criminal’ & child killer,” *Daily News*, 17 April 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/492834617>, accessed on 16 July 2020. (New York, New York)

<sup>961</sup> Ibid.

<sup>962</sup> Ibid.

<sup>963</sup> Ibid.

<sup>964</sup> “Shot U.S. envoy undergoes surgery,” *Daily News*, 17 April 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/492834617>, accessed on 16 July 2020. (New York, New York)

Qadhafi's response to the US airstrikes was the murder of three British subjects who were kidnapped and held prisoner in Lebanon. They were held for thirteen months before Qadhafi had them killed to avenge the US airstrikes. Qadhafi "singled out" the three Britons because of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's role in the bombing operation. She allowed the F-111 fighter-bombers and refueling aircraft to use British airfields as a base of operations and Qadhafi called her a murderer of children.<sup>966</sup> The group claiming responsibility for the killings was the Arab Revolutionary Cells and the residence of the British ambassador was also attacked in a new wave of Libyan-sponsored terrorism a few days after the US airstrike.<sup>967</sup> Because of the potential for more violence in Libya, itself, the *Daily News* out of New York City reported that "embassies warned Westerners to stay off the streets," but the borders were closed and the airport in Tripoli was inactive for the few Westerners who were seeking a way out of the country, shortly after the new wave of Libyan-sponsored terrorism began.<sup>968</sup>

Qadhafi attempted to dehumanize the Americans. Dehumanizing an enemy usually made the task of killing them easier for the military. When the enemy was considered less than human, the military could rationalize killing them. In an interview with Soviet journalists over a week after the airstrike that was filmed, Qadhafi "called Americans and their NATO allies an uncivilized subhuman species."<sup>969</sup> Qadhafi continued, "It seems they are a species in between

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<sup>965</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "International Terrorism: Before and After the US Airstrike," nd, 6, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP91B00874R000100170015-8.pdf>, accessed on 9 March 2023.

<sup>966</sup> William Goldschlag, "Avengers of Khadafy kill 3 Britons in Lebanon," *Daily News*, 18 April 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/492837965>, accessed on 16 July 2020. (New York, New York)

<sup>967</sup> "Raid on Libya sparks a reign of terrorism," *Daily News*, 18 April 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/492837985>, accessed on 16 July 2020. (New York, New York)

<sup>968</sup> "Westerners Be Warned," *Daily News*, 18 April 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/492838035>, accessed on 16 July 2020. (New York, New York)

<sup>969</sup> Khadafy calls Americans subhuman," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)



pigs and humans. They have not developed to the level of normal humans.”<sup>970</sup> Pigs are considered dirty animals in Islam and to call someone a pig was very insulting. He also exaggerated during the Soviet interview the type of aircraft the United States used in the raid, “Bombers attack a family, a house, and children to murder them, strategic bombers, hundreds of aircraft for hitting a house.”<sup>971</sup> While there might have been hundreds of aircraft involved in the operation, only eighteen F-111s and equivalent number of US Navy aircraft were involved in the actual raid. Furthermore, US strategic bombers were the large B-52 and B-1 bombers capable of carrying incredible payloads that could reduce Tripoli and Benghazi to rubble if they were used in force.

Libya accused the CIA and Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, of planning terrorist attacks in Europe as an excuse to conduct another raid against it.<sup>972</sup> Libya’s information minister, Mohammed Sharafeddin, said in a press briefing in late April, “Information received from friendly countries and our own intelligence service have indicated there will be a number of attacks on European countries that have been sympathetic to Libya so far.”<sup>973</sup> He continued to say that the purposes of the attacks were to “undermine the confidence” that those countries had for Libya and to justify another airstrike against Tripoli.<sup>974</sup> The information minister refused to answer questions during the briefing, but wanted the “world to know about this conspiracy.”<sup>975</sup> The fact that Sharafeddin did not want to answer any questions about this conspiracy would sug-

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<sup>970</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1986.

<sup>971</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>972</sup> Uli Schmetzer, “Tripoli charges CIA plans frame-up attacks,” *Chicago Tribune*, 24 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>973</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>974</sup> *Ibid.*

gest there was no truth to the rumors, that it was misinformation or a ploy to garner sympathy for Libya. There was also the possibility that Qadhafi was planning to launch a terrorist campaign in Europe and leaked this story to cause doubt about US credibility.

However, the US airstrikes appeared to have affected the Libyan government. There appeared to have been a “power shake-up” within the ruling Revolutionary Council.<sup>976</sup> There were “conflicting orders issued each day,” suggesting there was a power struggle within the Revolutionary Council and each member of the council had their “own pocket of influence,” according to a report by Uli Schmetzer in the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>977</sup> It appeared each member of the Revolutionary Council was jockeying for power and influence and how Qadhafi fitted into that power struggle was not known at the time.<sup>978</sup> There was unprecedented criticism in the Libyan news regarding the army’s performance during the raid as well as criticism of Libyan news coverage, stating that the Libyan news reports of twenty-eight US aircraft shot down was an exaggeration.<sup>979</sup> These criticisms were unprecedented because Qadhafi would not allow it; therefore, these events suggested a struggle for power was occurring. The British media reported that Qadhafi had lost control of the Libyan government and was reduced to “figurehead” status.<sup>980</sup> Qadhafi appeared on television, but had not appeared in public such as rallies or news conferences.<sup>981</sup> Not making an appearance in public was a precaution since the air raids had

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<sup>975</sup> Ibid.

<sup>976</sup> Uli Schmetzer, “U.S. raids splinters Libya’s ruling elite,” *Chicago Tribune*, 27 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>977</sup> Ibid.

<sup>978</sup> Ibid.

<sup>979</sup> Ibid.

<sup>980</sup> “Khadafy only a figurehead since air raid, paper reports,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

shaken him. In addition, Qadhafi had to be worried about coup or assassination attempts. Being out of the public eye and spending more time away from Tripoli, possibly Sirte, was a safeguard against any assassination attempts this was his home region and he was surrounded by his clan. It was also a protection against coup attempts because of the military assets located at Sirte, and because of the importance of the region to Qadhafi, he had placed considerable military installations there. Sirte was his personal stronghold and a major guarantee for him to hold on to power as long as it remained loyal to him.

America's European allies were upset over the El Dorado Canyon operation. The Europeans agreed to meet to discuss actions against Libya when the US launched the operation. The Europeans agreed to expel Libyan diplomats, but did not go any further. They acknowledged Qadhafi's sponsorship of terrorism, but they were afraid that supporting Reagan's airstrikes in the way Thatcher did would have invited more terrorism against them.<sup>982</sup> The Europeans eventually became critics of Qadhafi's "terrorism and Reagan's military retaliation."<sup>983</sup> Professor Paul Wilkinson, professor at Aberdeen University, remarked that the air raids followed "the Israeli pattern of retaliating for terrorism with military operations that sometimes hit civilian populations. 'And that hasn't made Israel any more secure.'"<sup>984</sup> The Europeans also had economic considerations as well as security concerns, and some European countries chose to make secret deals in the hopes they would be spared Qadhafi's wrath. Only Thatcher was undeterred, and she called on the other eleven European Community (EC) members to adopt

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<sup>981</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 23 April 1986.

<sup>982</sup> Timothy Harper, "Allies caught between Ron & hard place," *Daily News*, 17 April 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/49284625>, accessed on 16 July 2020. (New York, New York)

<sup>983</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>984</sup> *Ibid.*

stronger measures against Libya.<sup>985</sup>

Thatcher “strongly defended” her position in supporting Reagan’s air raids against Libya, and she told Parliament that ““(i)t was clear that Libya is planning more attacks.””<sup>986</sup> She made it clear that the UK had to be vigilant against potential terrorist reprisals and “requested enhanced security for British embassies abroad.”<sup>987</sup> Thatcher said, ““Terrorism has to be defeated, it cannot be tolerated or sidestepped. Terrorism thrives on appeasement.””<sup>988</sup> She claimed if the UK refused to allow US aircraft based there to participate in the raid, the operation would have taken place with more lives lost. Thatcher assured the British that they helped save lives by granting permission for UK-based American aircraft to participate in the airstrikes.<sup>989</sup> However, most of NATO, China, and the Soviet Union joined with the Arab World in criticizing the US operation against Libya. TASS, the Soviet news agency, “said the Reagan administration, ‘has started speaking in its true tongue, the tongue of bombs, flames and death.’”<sup>990</sup> French criticism of the raid could be found as late as February 1987.<sup>991</sup> Jacques Chirac, the French prime minister, criticized the reactions of the United States as a “little primitive.”<sup>992</sup> Libya received most of its oil revenue from US oil corporations, but “was subject to bitter criticism” and poten-

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<sup>985</sup> Harper, *Daily News*, 17 April 1986.

<sup>986</sup> “Maggie alone stands by U.S.,” *Daily News*, 17 April 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/492834625>, accessed on 16 July 2020. (New York, New York)

<sup>987</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>988</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>989</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>990</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>991</sup> Jacques Chirac, ““American Reactions are a Little Primitive,”” *MERIP Middle East Report* 144 (1987): 39-43.

<sup>992</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

tial aggression by the United States “on the political level.”<sup>993</sup> Chirac criticized the US because he saw the Reagan administration simultaneously “pursue a perfectly normal, open policy toward Syria – normal trade, normal discussions and relations.”<sup>994</sup> Syria was considered a state-supporter of terrorism; therefore, in Chirac’s eyes, the US was hypocritical in pursuing normal relations with Syria while being aggressive toward Libya. However, that was power politics. The US pursued normal relations with Syria because the Syrian leadership had influence in the region and the complete backing of the Soviet Union while Libya did not. Libya was vulnerable to attack and could not expect the Soviet Union or its Arab neighbors to provide aid or protection. Chirac’s views were the very thing Thatcher was warning about. In Thatcher’s eyes, Chirac was the hypocrite because the US was attempting to curb state-supported terrorism by targeting Libya as an example of what would happen to other state-supporters of terrorism if they did not change their policies and international conduct. During the entire first administration of Ronald Reagan, the US government had called on Europe to impose punitive sanctions on Libya, but the Europeans refused because they placed a premium on their economic prospects. Reagan and Thatcher held similar convictions and the US and UK had experienced a special relationship since Winston Churchill during World War II. Chirac’s criticism of Libya making most of its revenue from US oil companies while receiving political criticism was ludicrous because the United States had every right to criticize Libya because the oil revenues were funding terrorist operations.

West Germany started to question the US narrative in late April 1986. The West Germans started to claim that the United States ““massaged”” the Libyan diplomatic cables, which it had

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<sup>993</sup> Chirac, *MERIP Middle East Report* 144 (1987): 39.

<sup>994</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

used as evidence against Libya in the La Belle Club bombing.<sup>995</sup> Catherine Field, Tony Catterall, and Ian Mather of *The Observer* reported that there were “discrepancies ... between the American and West German versions of the messages between the Libya People’s Bureau in East Berlin and Tripoli.”<sup>996</sup> The discrepancies were in the translations of the cables. The German translations were ambiguous. For example, the 4 April cable which the US translated as ““You will be very happy when you see the headlines tomorrow,”” while the German translation said, ““Something will happen tomorrow when Allah wills.””<sup>997</sup> According to Field, Catterall, and Mather, the German translation was “taken directly from the Arabic.”<sup>998</sup> The West German intelligence service (BND) cracked the Libyan codes and provided the key to the American National Security Agency (NSA).<sup>999</sup> Regardless of the discrepancies in the translations, the Libyan cables still provided evidence of the Libyan government’s foreknowledge of a terrorist attack on the La Belle Club that was frequented by US service personnel.

Overall, the US airstrikes prompted the Europeans and Japan to act against Libyan-sponsored terrorism. During the Summit Seven conference in May 1986, the seven largest economies agreed to name Libya as a state-supporter of terrorism, which was unprecedented because this was the first time the Summit Seven had named a country a state-supporter of terrorism.<sup>1000</sup> The Tokyo statement had the strongest language of all the Summit Seven state-

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<sup>995</sup> Catherine Field, Tony Catterall, and Ian Mather, “Disco bomb evidence ‘massaged,’” *The Observer*, 27 April 1986. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and the Observer, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>996</sup> Ibid.

<sup>997</sup> Ibid.

<sup>998</sup> Ibid.

<sup>999</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1000</sup> Geoffrey M. Levitt, *Democracies Against Terror: The Western Response to State-Supported Terrorism* (New York, Westport, and London: Praeger with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1988), 71-85.

ments on terrorism. For the first time a state was named as a state-supporter of terrorism and the Summit Seven agreed to share information regarding potential threats.<sup>1001</sup> The Tokyo statement also provided measures to be taken against states sponsoring terrorism, which included the reduction of diplomatic staff, denied entry into the country, and restrictions of diplomatic missions.<sup>1002</sup> For much of the 1980s, the United States called on its allies to join it in curbing state-supported terrorism, but discovered that much of Europe and Japan were hesitant to join in American efforts to apply punitive sanctions against countries like Libya. During the early years of Reagan's first administration the United Kingdom was critical of his efforts to counter terrorism; however, Thatcher began to support Reagan by his second administration. Thatcher might have been swayed to support Reagan because the United States supported the UK's decision to close the Libyan People's Bureau in London and break off diplomatic relations with Tripoli. Reagan also broke off diplomatic relations with Libya as a gesture of solidarity with the UK. In addition, Reagan strongly supported the UK during the Falklands War in 1982 when Argentina illegally seized the sparsely populated islands. Thatcher was repaying Reagan for his staunch support of the UK's efforts to regain the Falkland Islands. The other European allies placed their economic prospects before security concerns and believed would not work, essentially leaving the United States without any support for its counterterrorism efforts. The Europeans believed that Libya would target them for retribution if they supported the United States. Therefore, Europe refused to join the US in quelling Libyan-supported terrorism.

There were criticisms of the bombing of Libya. An article entitled "Reagan's Way" in the *Economic and Political Weekly* began with an incredibly hyperbolic statement, "The murderous

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<sup>1001</sup> Levitt, *Democracies Against Terror*, 115.

<sup>1002</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

attack by American warplanes on the Libyan cities of Tripoli and Benghazi on Tuesday has set a new high mark in the US record of using its military might to impose its will worldwide.”<sup>1003</sup> The article continued, “However, to appreciate the full significance of the US aggression against Libya, it has to be seen as part of the overall belligerent trend of US foreign policy under the Reagan administration.”<sup>1004</sup> This article went on to criticize Reagan’s foreign policy, stating the US forced the Soviet Union to revoke an “eight-month old unilateral moratorium on nuclear tests,” because the Reagan administration conducted underground nuclear tests.<sup>1005</sup> The majority of the American people believed the evidence linking Libya to the 4 April bombing in West Germany and supported Reagan’s bombing of Libya enthusiastically.<sup>1006</sup> The majority of the American people supported the bombing because in the second half of the 1970s, the United States lacked a strong foreign policy and was skittish about using force. The infamous Vietnam Syndrome affected the use of force within foreign policy circles in the US government because of fear of getting entangled in another debacle like the conflict in Vietnam. Most Americans venerated military service. They saw it as a duty and honor to serve one’s country and supported the government’s decision to use force if it ended in victory. After the conflict in Vietnam, the American people had limited patience for protracted conflicts and the air strikes against Libya were supported by most Americans because they were quick operations that did not result in many casualties.

Opinion polling reflected that support of the air raids existed among Europeans. The United States Information Agency (USIA) conducted opinion policy in Britain, France, and West

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<sup>1003</sup> “Reagan’s Way,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 21 (1986): 673.

<sup>1004</sup> *Ibid.*, 673.

<sup>1005</sup> *Ibid.*, 673.

<sup>1006</sup> *Ibid.*, 673.



Germany.<sup>1007</sup> The opinion poll was conducted on 18-20 April, and large majorities saw Libyan-sponsored terrorism as a threat to people in their respective countries: UK (83%), France (88%), and West Germany (65%).<sup>1008</sup> However, the British and West Germans disapproved of the use of airstrikes in countering terrorism: UK (60%) and West Germany (70%), with only the French supporting US military action by a slim majority of 51 percent.<sup>1009</sup> A vast majority of West Germans, a slim majority of British, and a considerable minority of French “would disapprove of their own government’s use of military force against Libyan-sponsored terrorism: West Germany (93%), UK (57%), and French (48%).<sup>1010</sup> However, there was support for their respective countries joining a “comprehensive economic and political sanctions” scheme against Libya for their support of terrorism, and the USIA characterized the support as “solid majorities (56-68%).”<sup>1011</sup> There was some irony in the polling numbers in that a majority of Britons were against their government’s official position of supporting the United States in using American military forces stationed in the UK against Libya, while a slim majority of French supported US actions and disapproved of their government’s position. The West Germans took a pacifist stance and this might reflect their militarist past.

The Western European press was critical of the airstrikes as well. The USIA analyzed 145 editorials, 210 commentaries, and news analysis from seventy-four newspapers from fifteen

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<sup>1007</sup> United States Information Agency, “Among British, French, and Germans, Only French Would Support U.S. Military Actions in Response to New Terrorist Attack,” *Foreign Opinion News*, 23 April 1986, folder “[Terrorism – Libya Public Diplomacy – Working Material] (1),” Judyt Mandel Files, Box 91721, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-communicationsandinformation/mandel/91721/terrorism-libyapublicdiplomacyworkingmaterial1.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>1008</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1009</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1010</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1011</sup> Ibid.

countries from a two-week period (10 April-23 April 1986).<sup>1012</sup> The USIA determined that “95 percent of European press coverage” believed the airstrikes were “inappropriate and counterproductive,” 80 percent of the coverage stated the airstrikes strained “NATO unity,” and 90 percent “were critical of European inaction on anti-terrorism measures.”<sup>1013</sup> The USIA also found that 75 percent of European press coverage believed the diplomatic sanctions adopted by the European Community did not go far enough and might not satisfy the US, 70 percent said US “frustrations over West European ‘cowardice’ contributed to Reagan’s decision to launch airstrikes against Libya,” and 60 percent said the Soviets refused to intervene on Libya’s behalf because “their relations with” the United States were “too important.”<sup>1014</sup> The USIA argued that the European press coverage was a unique blend of self-criticism and condemnation.<sup>1015</sup> The European press deplored the loss of civilian lives and believed the airstrikes would cause more terrorism, but at the same time criticized the lack of will of their own governments in taking action against Libya.<sup>1016</sup> While the European press criticized Reagan’s military action, they understood the reasons for launching the airstrikes. While the European press did not condone the use of force, they saw the US becoming increasingly frustrated by European inaction against Libyan-sponsored terrorism due to only taking their economic interests into consideration. The European press also believed that US action would strain NATO unity, but they failed to see that re-

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<sup>1012</sup> United States Information Agency, “West European Press Critical of U.S., But also of European Inaction After the U.S. Strike at Libya,” *Foreign Media Analysis*, 24 April 1986, folder “[Terrorism – Libya Public Diplomacy – Working Material] (1),” Judy Mandel Files, Box 91721, Ronald Reagan Library, <https://www.reagan-library.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/nsc-communicationsandinformation/mandel/91721/terrorism-libyapublicdiplomacy-workingmaterial1.pdf>, accessed on 29 March 2022.

<sup>1013</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1014</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1015</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1016</sup> Ibid.

lations within NATO would recover. One of the greatest crises in NATO's history was President Charles de Gaulle's withdrawing of France from NATO's military structure and forcing NATO's headquarters to move to Brussels, Belgium in the 1960s. NATO was able to recover from that crisis. The European press was correct regarding the inaction of the Soviets during the US airstrikes. The Soviets viewed their relations with the United States as too important to jeopardize. The Soviets were looking for several negotiated agreements with the United States in nuclear arms reductions. Reducing tensions between the US and the USSR would help the Soviets financially, especially during the perestroika reforms. A reduction in military spending would help fund the reforms Gorbachev was hoping to implement.

There was an increase in terrorist attacks immediately after the airstrikes, but the attacks leveled off over a six-week period.<sup>1017</sup> Libyan-supported terrorism did decrease over time. Before the airstrikes there were nine Libyan-supported terrorism attacks in early 1986, but after the airstrikes there were ten Libyan-supported terrorism attacks in the later half of 1986, and the attacks declined afterwards. In 1987 there were seven, only two in 1988, one in 1989, and two in 1990, according to Stephen D. Collins in an article published in the well-respected *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*.<sup>1018</sup> Between 1991 and 2000, there was only one Libyan-supported terrorist attack in 1993.<sup>1019</sup> The data demonstrated that Libya reduced their sponsorship of terrorism within a one-year period and Qadhafi stopped supporting terrorism altogether.

This and the previous chapters have shown that the Reagan administration developed a comprehensive Libya policy to convince Qadhafi to stop supporting terrorism. Direct Libya

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<sup>1017</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "International Terrorism: Before and After the US Airstrikes."

<sup>1018</sup> Stephen D. Collins, "Dissuading State-Support of Terrorism: Strikes or Sanctions? (An Analysis of Dissuasion Measures Employed Against Libya)," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27 (2004): 5.

<sup>1019</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

support of terrorism diminished after the 15 April airstrikes, but there were “renewed signs of Libyan planning and support for international terrorism,” according to the White House in August 1986.<sup>1020</sup> There was still a fear of a revival of Libyan-supported terrorism, which convinced Reagan to renew his coercive diplomacy efforts to convince Qadhafi to quit terrorism completely. There were three objectives for the new Libya policy as developed in *National Security Decision Directive Number 234*: “to dissuade Qadhafi from engaging in terrorism and subversion,” “to enhance the chances of a positive change of leadership,” and “to minimize the risk of Soviet gains.”<sup>1021</sup> The Reagan administration planned to “pursue a multi-faceted strategy which intensifies pressures on Qadhafi.”<sup>1022</sup> The strategy was not new. It was the continuation of the administrations previous diplomatic, economic, and political sanctions, threat of military action if needed, and intelligence gathering regarding Libya.<sup>1023</sup> The intelligence section was redacted, but it was most likely on gathering intelligence on Qadhafi’s terrorist network by various means. The new NSSD on Libya suggested that the Reagan administration was not aware that the US had dissuaded Qadhafi from sponsoring terrorism in the short term. Collins’ data showed that this was the case, but US officials did not know this pattern would occur in the context of mid-1986. Collins’ data demonstrated that Reagan’s coercive diplomacy strategy worked. Libya refrained from sponsoring anti-US terrorist attacks in order to avoid further demonstrations of US military power. US application of the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy convinced Qadhafi not to sponsor any more attacks on US interests.

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<sup>1020</sup> The White House, “Libya Policy,” *National Security Decision Directive Number 234*, 16 August 1986, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/reference/scanned%20NSDDs/NSDD234.pdf>, accessed on 25 October 2016.

<sup>1021</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1022</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1023</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion

The origins of modern terrorism were in 1968 when rural guerrilla formations in Latin America moved into the cities and the Palestinians resorted to terrorism after the humiliating defeat of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria within six days by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in 1967. The United States overlooked terrorism because the Vietnam War, nuclear proliferation, and US-Soviet relations were more pressing issues. It was not until 1972 after the Lod Airport terrorist attack and the Munich Olympics debacle that the US finally started to formulate a policy against international terrorism. While on an ad hoc basis at first, the Nixon administration formulated a clear policy which became the first pillar of US counterterrorism policy: no negotiations, no concessions to terrorists. Reagan stressed the importance of this policy in order to inform the American public that ransoms would not be paid, but he equally emphasized that US officials would talk to anyone regarding the well-being of the hostage(s). This was an important distinction, the US government would not negotiate, but they were concerned about the welfare of their citizens held for ransom. The Reagan administration stressed that talking to the terrorists or their representatives about the well-being of hostages did not equate to negotiations.

This tough policy became the cornerstone of Reagan's counterterrorism policy. During the 1980s, the Reagan administration added two more pillars to US counterterrorism policy: pressuring states to quit sponsoring terrorism and bringing terrorists to justice. These three pillars became the bedrock of Reagan's policies toward combatting terrorism. It was important for Reagan to develop a clearcut policy against terrorism because the United States was the most targeted country for terrorism throughout the world. During the pursuit of formulating policy, Reagan created a template for future administrations on how to combat state-sponsored terrorism. The pressuring of states to forego terrorism was the focus of this dissertation because it

was an integral part of Reagan's coercive diplomacy strategy. The third pillar was also an important aspect of his coercive diplomacy strategy because prosecuting terrorist produced intelligence on states that supported terrorism or the terrorist groups. This intelligence was important because it provided evidence of state-supported terrorism and this evidence provided the justification for the use of force against the sponsoring state. These three pillars were designed to pressure state supporters of terrorism to quit supporting terrorism. The second and third pillars were important for Reagan's coercive diplomacy strategy because the use of force like Operation El Dorado Canyon was meant to pressure Qadhafi, not eliminate him, and the third pillar was meant to bring terrorists to justice.

Reagan was criticized for what appeared to be the lack of resolve in dealing with terrorism by people like Phyllis Yellin, whose mother was on board the Achille Lauro. Yellin was happy that her mother survived the hijacking, but she criticized Reagan for carrying a twig rather than a big stick.<sup>1024</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., argued in an opinion piece that Reagan should declare war on Libya because it was an easy foe to defeat.<sup>1025</sup> Buckley was not criticizing Reagan's policy although in a way he was. Rather than trying to convince the Europeans to join the United States in an economic and political sanctions scheme, Reagan should request the Senate to declare war against Libya and remove Qadhafi. Apparently, Reagan talked a tough game, but did not back it up with action. These criticisms were without merit. Reagan wanted direct evidence of a state's guilt. It was unwise to attack a country without direct evidence. Sometimes intelligence is wrong or incomplete. Attacking the wrong country would not only be

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<sup>1024</sup> Lionel Barber, "Crisis Ends in Tragedy for New Yorker's Family," *The Washington Post*, 10 October 1985. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University)

<sup>1025</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., "Declare War Against This Beatable Foe," *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 January 1986. (Newspaper Archive, Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 1990)

an embarrassment, but could have drawn the United States into a conflict it was not prepared to fight or the Soviets might have responded in a detrimental way. Reagan was always accused of being a cowboy rushing into a situation with guns blazing by the media and some European leaders like Jacques Chirac.<sup>1026</sup> The book *Reagan vs. Qaddafi: Response To International Terrorism?* by R. A. Davidson III was critical of Reagan's foreign policy toward Qadhafi.<sup>1027</sup> When he was being thoughtful regarding a response he was accused of lacking resolve by pundits. He was very deliberate in his actions. Davidson's book was marketed as a "close and unbiased look at a significant time in American history."<sup>1028</sup> Davidson was highly critical of Reagan's policies toward Libya and was hyperbolic about the US government's reasoning for Operation El Dorado Canyon. According to Davidson, the US airstrikes was not about ending state-supported terrorism, but global dominance and the airstrike was a decapitation operation.<sup>1029</sup>

*Mad Dogs: The US Raids on Libya*, by Mary Kaldor and Paul Anderson, was a collection of essays critical of the US airstrikes.<sup>1030</sup> The book was highly critical of Reagan's foreign policy and the argument was through a Marxist prism. Joseph T. Stanik's book *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War With Qaddafi* was a straight forward military history on the

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<sup>1026</sup> Jacques Chirac, "American Reactions are a Little Primitive," *MERIP Middle East Report* 144 (1987): 39-43.

<sup>1027</sup> R. A. Davidson III, *Reagan vs. Qaddafi: Response To International Terrorism?* np, 2002.

<sup>1028</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1029</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>1030</sup> Mary Kaldor and Paul Anderson, ed., *Mad Dogs: The US Raids on Libya* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

US airstrikes.<sup>1031</sup> It was highly detailed regarding US military operations and despite the title, it was not critical of the airstrikes.

Reagan developed a very clear coercive diplomacy strategy. The strategy might have been slow, but it was by design. He developed a wait-and-see strategy. Reagan would first impose political and diplomatic sanctions. These sanctions were the limiting of diplomatic and consular staff and limited travel privileges within the country. The next step was the recall of the US ambassador and the withdrawal of diplomatic and consular staff in the host country. The last step in these political and diplomatic sanctions were the closure of the embassy and consulates in both countries, but diplomatic relations would continue. These sanctions are part of the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy, pressuring states to refrain from supporting terrorism.

When these sanctions did not work, the United States resorted to more sanctions such as the withdrawal of diplomatic relations. The United States broke diplomatic relations with Libya in 1984 in solidarity with the United Kingdom. The next step was the imposition of economic sanctions. Again, the Reagan administration imposed light sanctions. These sanctions targeted specific trade or industries. The sanctions were meant to be an annoyance to the target country. When Qadhafi refused to comply with the United States demand of quitting terrorism, the United States imposed heavier sanctions such as a ban on Libyan oil. The United States allowed time to pass before imposing more sanctions believing that the Libyan government would realize their people were suffering under the weight of the sanctions and would modify their behavior. The United States finally imposed a complete economic sanctions regime which included a ban on air travel to and from Libya. These economic sanctions fall under the second pillar of US counter-

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<sup>1031</sup> Joseph T. Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undecided War With Qaddafi* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003).



terrorism policy, because the Reagan administration was hoping that economic hardship would be enough to convince Qadhafi to quit supporting terrorism.

While the US sanctions were taking a toll on the Libyan economy, Qadhafi found other trade partners that help alleviate the effects of Reagan's efforts. These trading partners were the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact countries, and Western Europe. Because of Libya's efforts US sanctions did not have the desired effect. The Reagan administration understood that America's NATO allies had to participate in the sanctions also. President Reagan pleaded with most of leaders of Western Europe to join in the imposition of sanctions, but to no avail. The Europeans placed self-interest and economic prosperity about everything else. This showed the divisions the US government faced with Western Europe over its policies against Libyan-supported terrorism.

Since the Europeans refused to impose sanctions, the Reagan administration turned to military options to convince Libya to modify its behavior. The United States started military exercises known as freedom of navigation operations. These military exercises were to demonstrate that all sea-faring nations had the right to navigate through the Gulf of Sidra. These exercises also doubled as projections of power. Power projection demonstrated the US's ability to use force anywhere in the world. Power projection became increasingly important for the United States especially after the development of the supercarrier during the 1970s. The development of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers allowed the US Navy to patrol the seas for extended periods of time without the need for refueling. These power projection exercises were designed to pressure Qadhafi into modifying his behavior. The stationing of several aircraft carrier task forces worried Qadhafi. He believed that the United States planned on invading his

country to overthrow him and impose a puppet government. The Libyan military had to spread forces around to defend every potential military target, thus weakening their defenses.

The United States also planned several covert operations to destabilize Libya. The goal was the overthrow of the Libyan government and the removal of Qadhafi. The United States approached Egypt and Sudan in the possibility of a joint invasion with US air support. However, Egypt declined to participate in such an operation because of the vulnerable position it was in within the Arab World. Much of the Arab World would have rallied to Qadhafi's side if Egypt participated in a joint invasion with US support. While most of the Arab World loathed Qadhafi, they would have reacted poorly to the forced removal of the mercurial Libyan leader. In addition, Qadhafi's opposition was scattered throughout the world and it was not well organized. The Libyan officer corps could have been a potential alternative to the civilian opposition and there were US efforts to recruit disgruntled army officers, but Qadhafi carried out several purges which removed potential rivals.

When all these efforts failed to convince Qadhafi to modify his behavior, President Reagan finally decided to use force. However, he waited until he had conclusive evidence of Libyan complicity with terrorists. The US found evidence of Libyan support for the 5 April 1986 attack on a West Berlin nightclub. Operation El Dorado Canyon occurred on 14/15 April 1986. Targets located in Tripoli and Benghazi were attacked simultaneously and was successful in destroying Libyan assets that helped train terrorists and plan their attacks. Despite the success of El Dorado Canyon, many NATO allies criticized the operation. Much of the Arab World criticized the attack also, but none offered Libya a hand in attacking the United States, because most of the Arab World knew how dangerous Qadhafi was. Many were targets of Qadhafi's

meddling and subversion. Qadhafi could not rely on their assistance because of his revolutionary policies. The Soviet Union offered mild criticism.

Operation El Dorado Canyon was successful in curbing Libyan-sponsored terrorism. There appeared to be an uptick of Libyan-sponsored terrorism in the following month, but these were already planned attacks. However, Libya was quiet for at least two years following the US operation. Libya did not resume their support for terrorism until December 1988 during the final weeks of the Reagan administration. Pan Am Flight 103 exploded over the Scottish town of Lockerbie. Both the United States and the United Kingdom conducted a joint investigation and concluded that Libya supported the bombing of the aircraft. While Libya denied any involvement, the US and UK named two Libyan intelligence agents as the culprits and demanded their surrender. However, Libya refused to comply. The United States and the United Kingdom both took up the issue with the United Nations Security Council.

The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution ordering Libya to surrender the two Libyan intelligence agents into the custody of the US or the UK. When Libyan refused to comply with the United Nations, another resolution was passed that imposed harsh sanctions against the country. Qadhafi tried to circumvent the sanctions, but the Libyan economy suffered a downturn and the Libyan people suffered as a result. Qadhafi, worried about a possible coup, attempted to negotiate a solution, and he included a renunciation of terrorism. However, the US and the UK refused to budge on the sanctions until both intelligence agents were surrendered. Finally in the late 1990s, a compromise was agreed upon by Libya and the Western powers. Libya agreed to surrender the two intelligence agents to Dutch authorities. The two men were tried by a Scottish court held at the Hague and Libya agreed to pay compensation to the families of Pan Am Flight 103 and the town of Lockerbie in exchange for the lifting of some of the sanc-

tions. Libya announced it would dismantle their weapons of mass destruction program in the early 2000s and became an important ally to the United States during President George W. Bush's War on Terror.

Considering how quickly Libya wanted to have the international sanctions lifted during the 1990s would suggest that Reagan was correct when he wanted America's NATO allies to join the sanctions he imposed against Libya. Western Europe was an important trade partner with Libya, and while the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc could have replaced Western Europe as trading partners, they could not have replaced the high technology both the US and Western Europe had. The international sanctions imposed by the United Nations convinced Libya to modify its behavior without the use of force. Reagan's sanctions framework within his coercive diplomacy strategy could have worked if Western Europe imposed sanctions and the US could have refrained from using force. Reagan wanted the sanctions to work, but when it failed, he finally used force to convince Qadhafi to stop supporting terrorism. Contrary to Reagan's cowboy image of rushing into a situation with guns blazing, he waited six years before using force. The use of force falls under the second pillar of US counterterrorism policy because it was designed to shock Qadhafi to quit supporting terrorism.

The lightning-fast air strikes of Operation El Dorado Canyon was a template for future administrations in using force against terrorists and the states that supported them. For example, President William Clinton used Tomahawk missiles against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. President George W. Bush's War on Terror was an expanded version of Reagan's use of force. Reagan never contemplated invading Libya, but Bush invaded both Iraq and Afghanistan to eliminate the governments of those state-supporters of terrorism. President Barack Obama used unmanned aircraft or drones to eliminate terrorists without extending their due process rights. Reagan never

considered denying terrorists their due process rights. Reagan wanted to bring terrorists to justice, not assassinate them. While Reagan was criticized in attacking Qadhafi's personal residence and accused of attempting to assassinate Qadhafi, US intelligence officials noted that Qadhafi's personal residence was located within the compound of a military headquarters. The military headquarters were a legitimate military target and the US government repeatedly denied any attempt to assassinate Qadhafi. If Qadhafi was killed as a result of the attack, the US would have welcomed it because it granted Libya the chance to change their government. It was clear that US policy banned assassination as an instrument. This ban was based on moral considerations. In addition, if the US assassinated world leaders, the president would have been a target of assassination. Therefore, Operation El Dorado Canyon was not a decapitation operation.

Reagan's coercive diplomacy strategy showed considerable restraint. He could order the Defense Department to prepare for a regime change operation for Libya along the lines of President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq. Reagan wanted a regime change in Libya, but he chose not to invade Libya because of potential blowback from the Arab World and the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet refrained from developing close relations with Qadhafi and the Soviet Union did not want to commit any troops to Libya because of the war that was occurring in Afghanistan. To the Reagan administration regime change had to occur internally. Reagan was implementing a long-term strategy. There were gradual steps of escalation. This strategy failed in Vietnam because President Lyndon B. Johnson believed gradually escalating in Vietnam would convince the North Vietnamese to negotiate a solution. However, it failed to convince the North Vietnamese to compromise at the negotiation table. Most successful military strategies called for the use of overwhelming force to accomplish military objectives.

However, Reagan's gradual escalation was to give Qadhafi time to modify his behavior. Each escalation was to increase the pressure Qadhafi had to bear. Reagan's strategy was multifaceted: political, diplomatic, economic, and military. The initial pressure was to be an annoyance. It was to be an embarrassment to the Libyan government that the US knew Tripoli supported terrorism. When change was not forthcoming, the escalation was to break diplomatic relations, which historically meant a declaration of war would soon follow. While minor, the breaking of diplomatic relations was meant to be alarming to the government in Tripoli. When annoyance and embarrassment did not achieve Reagan's goals, economic sanctions were imposed. Economic sanctions were escalated gradually as well, and just like the political and diplomatic sanctions, the first imposition of sanctions was to be an annoyance. The sanctions would gradually escalate to complete trade and air travel bans. The sanctions were designed to cripple the Libyan economy.

The military options were the last resort in Reagan's coercive diplomacy strategy. The freedom of navigation operations was designed to annoy Qadhafi. These operations were to demonstrate that Libya could not exercise its sovereignty in the entire Gulf of Sidra. The United States and the international community recognized that territorial waters extended to a twelve-mile limit out to sea. While denying Libyan sovereignty to the Gulf of Sidra, the freedom of navigation operations was a taunt to Qadhafi to push the US fleet out of the gulf. Every time Qadhafi challenged the US fleet militarily, he was defeated. The incompetence of the Libyan military was an embarrassment to Qadhafi. The US air raids of 14/15 April 1986 shook Qadhafi, because he believed Reagan would not act against him. Operation El Dorado Canyon demonstrated that Libya was highly vulnerable to attack. The US air raids convinced Qadhafi to modify his behavior temporarily because he was completely isolated diplomatically. While the

Arab World and the Soviets criticized US actions, none of them rushed to Libya's defense. The Soviets agreed to replace what was lost, but Gorbachev refused to send troops to defend Tripoli.

During the air raids, the Europeans finally agreed to impose limited sanctions, but their sanctions did not go far enough for the Reagan administration. The Europeans agreed to reduce Libyan diplomatic staff and limited their traveling privileges, but there were no economic sanctions. The Europeans, especially Italy, feared the United States was planning an attack on Libya, but they did nothing to prevent the US from attacking. The United States would have foregone an attack if Europe joined the strict sanctions Washington imposed on Libya. The Europeans placed a premium on short-term economic gain, except the UK, in the 1980s. It never occurred to them that strict sanctions would have accelerated Libya's compliance to modify its behavior and Qadhafi's reward for compliance would have been the gradual lifting of the sanctions as the UN-imposed international sanctions demonstrated.

Reagan's coercive diplomacy campaign demonstrated a viable strategy for any country desiring to modify a target state's behavior. This strategy offered a gradual escalation strategy that increased pressure for the target state to modify its behavior. It worked best on a diplomatically isolated country, a country without powerful allies. The strategy offered the use of force as the final option. At the same time, it also demonstrated that economic sanctions imposed jointly with other countries was more effective in modifying behavior. When the target state lost all or most of its trading partners, the economy suffered. When the economic prospects of the country decreased, the leaders quickly modified their behavior.

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