

UPDATE

ONE YEAR LATER: PROBLEMS MOUNT FOR LIBYA'S QADHAFI

(Updating Backgrounder Update No. 27, "Responding to Libya's Terrorist War," October 10, 1986, and Backgrounder Update No. 3, "Libya Must Pay a Price for Terrorism," January 9, 1986.)

One year ago today, U.S. warplanes bombed Libya in retaliation for its sponsorship of international terrorism. The bombing raid sent a powerful anti-terrorism message that continues to reverberate to this day. Most important, Libyan strongman Muammar Qadhafi remains on the defensive, troubled by growing domestic disenchantment with his rule, a deteriorating economy, diplomatic isolation, and the rising costs of his unpopular war in Chad and his forces' humiliating rout this year. Qadhafi has lain low since the U.S. reprisal raid, chagrined by his vulnerability and lack of international support. Fearful of being overthrown by his own army, the mercurial Libyan has disappeared from public view for long periods of time and has run his government by remote control from secret fortified hideaways.

Bunker Mentality. Qadhafi's bunker mentality was underscored by his January 1 decision to move the seat of government from Tripoli to Hun, a small town 300 miles to the southeast. Qadhafi's deepening insecurity has prompted him to close Islamic schools which were a potential focal point for opposition and redouble repression of political dissidents. Nine Moslem fundamentalists, including three soldiers, were publicly executed in February, ostensibly for plotting the assassination of Soviet advisers. These executions were televised to intimidate Libyans and forestall the growth of organized opposition groups.

Although Libyan exile groups are growing stronger, the chief threat to Qadhafi is the prospect of a military coup. Qadhafi has built up the 50,000-man Revolutionary Guards, a loyal cadre of zealous followers, as a counterweight to the 71,000-man army which increasingly has chafed under his erratic leadership. The Revolutionary Guards control access to Libyan ammunition depots and are positioned to deter coup attempts. Libyan

army officers resent the growing role of the Revolutionary Guards and the constant shuffling of commanders aimed at preventing them from developing independent power bases. Libyan soldiers, meanwhile, have been demoralized by missed payrolls and the interminable war in Chad. High desertion rates and recent defections to Egypt of Libyan Air Force personnel with their warplanes indicate severe unrest within the Libyan military.

Stunning Defeat in Chad. The disastrous war in Chad is a potential rallying point for disgruntled army officers and could become a catalyst for a coup. Libyan troops plagued by low morale have suffered a stunning series of defeats at the hands of outgunned but highly motivated Chadian forces. Using French-supplied Milan anti-tank missiles mounted on Toyota land rovers, the Chadians have outfought Libyan tanks and have overrun Libya's chief strongholds. Since January the Chadians have killed approximately 3,000 Libyans and captured over 1,000, along with an estimated \$500 million of military equipment. Qadhafi has sought to limit the impact of the war losses as much as possible by suppressing news of Libyan losses, ordering Libyan wounded to be treated in field hospitals rather than in the capital and seeking mediation by Algeria and Nigeria.

Washington should help Chadian President Hissene Habre complete the humiliating rout of Libyan forces. Qadhafi's troops continue to occupy the uranium-rich Aozou strip in the north which was illegally annexed by Libya in 1973. Washington should step up military aid to enable the Chadians to press their attack before Libya's dispirited army can recover. The Chadians have made good use of \$25 million of emergency aid in the last four months and merit more assistance in view of their demonstrated effectiveness in resisting Libyan aggression. In particular, more Redeye anti-aircraft missiles will be needed to offset Libyan air superiority.

U.S. Signal to Libya. The U.S. should work closely with France which has deployed 2,400 troops in southern Chad and provides the Chadians with logistical support and training. Washington should press Paris to extend its aircover north of the 16th parallel, while the U.S. and France should bolster the unity of Chadian forces which at one time were splintered into eleven factions. In particular, the recent alliance between President Habre and Goukoni Oueddei should be strengthened. Oueddei's break with the Libyans in October 1986 was a crucial development that set the stage for Libya's current difficulties.

For the long run, the U.S. should monitor the Libyan army and establish discreet contact with disgruntled army officers. It also should work covertly to strengthen and unify the Libyan opposition. The risks of Qadhafi's vainglorious policies have been revealed by last year's U.S. air reprisal and the disastrous war in Chad. Washington now should signal that Libya will be welcome back into the family of nations once it has rid itself of Qadhafi and renounced his support of terrorism.

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