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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*An Intelligence Assessment of Libya*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
13 February 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

An Intelligence Assessment of Libya

Introduction

This memorandum assesses current Libyan trends as they affect the staying power of the present regime and the directions in which its leaders appear to be moving.

Libya in the Arab World

1. Developments in Libya should be viewed within the context of general trends in the Middle East. Foremost among these has been the growing involvement of all Arab states in the Palestine issue. This has meant, for the most part, joining the conflict against Israel or at least supporting it. US prestige and influence in the Arab world has been inversely related to this trend; from a high point of good will reached as a result of President Eisenhower's actions in the 1956 Suez war, the course has been generally downward. The June 1967 war accelerated this trend, and a sharp drop followed the US decision in early 1969 to supply F-4 Phantom jets to Israel. Even the seven Arab states that could then have been characterized as political moderates or conservatives and had retained

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diplomatic relations with the US found it politically necessary to denounce the US publicly. The actual delivery of the aircraft and their subsequent highly publicized use in combat have led the Arab press to portray the US as a supporter and ally of Israel and the primary enemy of the Arabs.

### The Junta

2. The members of the Revolutionary Command Council that installed itself in Libya in September 1969 were bound together by a common desire to overthrow King Idris, who was for them a symbol of corruption, the presence of foreign bases, and a too strong pro-West stance. They are young, inexperienced officers between the ages of 25 and 30, and have only vague ties to the various pan-Arab ideological movements. Although they proclaimed appropriate slogans in the early hours of their coup, they have not as yet developed a clear and agreed upon political program. Libya's new rulers are seized both by an enthusiasm for Arab nationalism and by a desire to modernize their country. They have neither the expertise nor the machinery to make and carry out decisions in an orderly manner, thus they are likely to be caught up in cycles of failure and frustration.

3. The power relationship within the junta remains largely unknown. Although Muammir Qaddafi has been named council president, prime minister, and commander in chief of the armed forces, he does not appear to be all powerful. The available evidence suggests that the 12-man council, all of whose members have finally been publicly identified, acts as a collegial group. There may also be other officers in the armed forces who have a special relationship with and access to the council. Recent evidence also suggests that the council has pro- and anti-Egyptian factions with the former presently in the ascendancy.

4. The junta members, who were suspicious of the ease with which they were able to oust the King, still are insecure. To date, however, the junta has been challenged only by its own members. In December 1969, the ministers of defense and interior were arrested before they could make a planned move against

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their colleagues. There have been reports of discontent among the tribes of Cyrenaica and elsewhere in the civilian sector. These groups do not possess sufficient arms to challenge the army seriously, accordingly in the present situation they do not appear to pose any real danger to the regime. Under present circumstances, any move against the regime is likely to come from within the army. The junta has begun transferring units of the armed forces that seem most likely to become troublesome--the Cyrenaicans--to Egypt for training and eventual duty along the Suez Canal. Thus far, approximately 2,600 men have been sent to Egypt, with another 1,900 scheduled to join them before the end of February.

5. Perhaps of far more significance than this is the movement of Egyptian troops into Libya, an operation that began in December. Some 1,500 to 2,000 Egyptian soldiers are now stationed in Benghazi and Tripoli. Approximately 500 other Egyptians have been assigned to military, security, and communications posts. Thus, the Egyptians may be in enough key points to forestall any counter coup by indigenous elements. In the event of foreign moves to topple the regime, these Egyptian units could probably be considered as controlling an air- or beach-head through which additional forces could be moved into Libya.

#### The Present Policy Trend

6. For Libya's new rulers, there is no obvious conflict between Libyan and Arab nationalism. One of the first statements issued by the junta was an attack on King Idris for his relatively passive attitude toward the Palestinian guerrilla movement and the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact, however, there had been some support of the Arab cause by Idris. The Palestine Liberation Organization was allowed to carry out a number of activities in Libya, and sizable official contributions had been made to it. By the end of 1969 Libya had also contributed more than \$200 million to Egypt and Jordan, but for the junta this was not enough.

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7. At the recent Arab summit conference in Rabat, Qaddafi was most vocal in his demands that wealthy Arab states increase their commitment to the struggle against Israel. As proof of its own commitment the Libya leadership now has decided to grant Egypt \$96 million in addition to its annual subsidy of \$59 million. Another symbol of Libya's commitment to the Arab war effort is its transfer of troops to Egypt, even though this also serves as a convenient way to remove possible dissidents.

8. Upon seizing power, the council announced that it would honor existing oil concessions, which brought in revenues last year that may have amounted to \$1.2 billion, and the oil companies report that operations in Libya have continued without significant harassment. In January the Libyan Government began negotiations with a number of operating oil companies, including some US corporations. These talks aim at securing higher posted prices on which government revenues are based. The companies are being threatened with unspecified punitive actions if they fail to reach an agreement. Nationalization, always the ultimate possibility, has not been raised by the new Libyan rulers and at this point does not appear to enter the picture. Indeed, Libyan commitments to purchase a sizable number of French aircraft and promises of more aid to Egypt and Jordan would suggest that Libya cannot afford to engage in adventurism in its oil arrangements.

9. So far, given the quick US decision to meet Libyan demands for the evacuation of Wheelus Air Base, official relations have not been overly difficult. Certain irritations have arisen, however, and the Libyans have so far failed to delineate the nature and the form of the military assistance relationship they profess to desire. This may have to await complete evacuation of the base, because the Libyans continue to be highly suspicious of US and British intentions.

10. To date, the junta has kept the USSR at arms length. The Soviets offered military assistance in the first few days of the coup, but were quickly rejected. As far as we know, subsequent approaches

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have also been rebuffed. This negative attitude of the Libyans may be reinforced by the advice reportedly offered by Nasir not to become dependent upon the Soviets for support. France, seeing a big power vacuum in Libya and aware of the economic advantages available, is seeking to fill that void partly. Paris' future intentions are unclear, other than its obvious desire to increase its influence all along the North African littoral. The Maghreb states, which are themselves moving toward a closer relationship with France, probably hope that the growing role of France in Libya is a force that will help preserve Libya's Maghreb orientation.

The Junta and its Future

11. The life expectancy of the junta will ultimately depend upon several factors. First and foremost, the junta must guard against serious dissidence within its own ranks. In December 1969, Qaddafi had to act quickly to a potential threat from within the junta. Coup attempts are also possible by either members of the former ruling clique or other disaffected civilian groups; however because they lack cohesion and an effective power base, their chances of dislodging the junta are minimal. Moreover, Nasir is apparently willing to give support in preventing any effort of this type. Over the longer run, the rulers of Libya need to find ways to encourage popular support. To be sure, much mileage will be gained from publicizing the removal of Western military forces from the country and the use of the US as a whipping boy for Arab military shortcomings. Public attention, however, cannot be diverted from domestic problems forever. Such civilian support as there is for the regime comes from professional men, university graduates, lower grade military officers, lower level government officials, and students--precisely the same elements that were the most disaffected under the monarchy. Having proclaimed its intention to modernize Libya and rid it of the evil vestiges of the old regime, the junta will have to show some signs of making good its promise.

12. Another factor is the relationship between the junta and Egypt. At some point, it could well

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become a liability to both parties. At present it would be difficult for opponents of the regime to attack its close cooperation with Egypt without being accused of hampering the struggle against the Israelis. As the relationship is maintained--and perhaps expanded--the presence of large numbers of Egyptian advisers and troops in Libya could become a source of irritation. A growing realization that financial resources that could be used for internal development are being sent outside Libya could add to public discontent. For the Egyptians, the tangible benefits accruing from their present relationship are important. If the junta maintains power and acquires a substantial arms inventory, Libyan military equipment might eventually represent a contingency asset for Cairo. During the next few years, however, Egyptian ability to assimilate more sophisticated weapons will remain limited, and Libyan arms will be of far less significance to Nasir than Libyan financial support.

13. With the passage of time, increased self-confidence and experience may make the Libyan junta more independent minded. Moreover, recalling his previous difficulties in Syria and Yemen, Nasir himself may come to have second thoughts about extensive involvement with the Libyan regime. Whatever the course of Libyan-Egyptian relations and internal Libyan politics, the junta's policy is likely to remain militantly anti-Israel. This is probably the one important issue on which few Libyans would disagree. Although Libya's business relations with the US will probably be correct, Tripoli will be largely hostile, or at least cool, toward the US which it will view as the chief mainstay of Israel.

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