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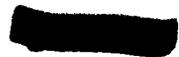
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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

LIBYAN ARMS SUPPLIES SINCE THE 1969 REVOLUTION



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31 July 1970  
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Background

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
31 July 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Libyan Arms Supplies Since the 1969 Revolution

Introduction

Libya became independent in 1951 and formed its first army in 1953. In September 1969, an army coup replaced the monarchy with a Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) headed by Colonel Muammar Qaddafi. Before the coup, all weapons and military equipment were of Western origin, primarily British and US, acquired through purchase and grant aid worth in all about \$75 million. Since the coup in 1969, Libya has drastically reduced its dependence upon the UK and the US, has concluded a shaky \$400-million military-economic deal with France, and has received clandestine deliveries of Soviet-made tanks from Egypt, as well as the recent overt deliveries of tanks and other equipment via two Soviet freighters. The 1970 Libyan defense budget is \$245.5 million, about 21 percent of the total budget.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence, and coordinated with the offices of National Estimates, Strategic Research, and Economic Research, and with the Directorate of Plans.

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The United Kingdom

1. Until 1970, the chief supplier of military equipment to Libya was the UK. British dealings involved equipment worth over \$40 million, including tanks, armored cars, artillery, small-arms, and naval ships. Some of this has not been delivered; Libya has changed its mind about some items, and the UK has reneged--at least for the moment--on an order for 162 Chieftain tanks.

2. Britain was instrumental in setting up the Libyan Army and paramilitary forces through a military mission that was part of a 20-year defense pact signed in 1953. The goodwill gained thereby among the Libyan armed forces, however, did not survive the change of government last year. Libya had previously regarded the agreement primarily as a defense against Egypt. When the new government patterned itself on Nasir's and brought in Egyptian troops and security men to help sustain it, there was no longer any need for a Western defender. This alienation from Western influence made the UK wary of delivering its best tanks into pro-Egyptian hands. London's new Tory government will probably re-examine the order and may conclude that since British tanks might pre-empt further Soviet deliveries, British commercial interests should benefit from the sale. At present, only a small British mission remains in Libya.

The United States

3. The US commenced its military aid to Libya in 1957 when it sent a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) to administer the grant aid given to Libya under the Military Assistance Program (MAP). From 1957 to 1970, this aid totaled about \$33 million in small-arms, armored vehicles, telecommunications, and aircraft. MAAG conducted Libyan Air Force training while the British handled Libyan Army and Navy training. The US mission was based at Wheelus Air Base, but when this installation was handed over to the Libyans on 11 June 1970 MAAG was reduced to a liaison section of five men attached to the US Embassy.

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The Libyans now have nine F-5s and three C-130s among their fleet of 30 aircraft. Eight more F-5s are due to be delivered in early 1971, and five C-130s remain on order. Five Libyan airmen are presently scheduled to receive flight training in the US.

4. Despite the political differences between Libya and the US, primarily over US policy toward Israel, the Libyans apparently wish to continue receiving US military assistance, perhaps as a stopgap measure until French Mirage deliveries can begin. On the other hand, delivery of more US Phantoms to Israel would probably cause a strong Libyan reaction against the US, including a complete breakdown of any further military assistance programs.

#### The French

5. The French have only recently entered the military assistance picture in Libya, but they did so with high drama and great initial impact. In January 1970, Paris announced the conclusion of a military-economic assistance program that included the eventual sale of 110 Mirage aircraft. The package was estimated at some \$400 million. Despite pressure from Israel and the US, as well as from domestic public opinion, Paris seized the opportunity of making the sale to increase French prestige and influence in the Arab world and reap the economic advantages that this seemed to entail. In justifying their decision, the French argued that a vacuum existed in Libya as a result of the US and UK pullout, and that if they did not sell the planes, the Soviets would.

6. The high hopes the French originally had for using the arms deal as a wedge for rapidly expanding cultural and economic ties have dimmed, primarily because of Libyan indecision. There have been reports that the Mirage sale itself is in trouble, but there is no firm evidence that either the French or the Libyans intend to break their contract. Details regarding the training of Libyan pilots have

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not been worked out, but 18 Libyans have already departed for training in France and--at last report--more were expected to leave in the fall.

### The Egyptians

7. Egyptian military assistance has been delivered clandestinely, and it is not yet clear whether the armaments that Cairo has shipped to Libya were from Egyptian inventories or were cut-out deliveries from the Soviet Union. In any event, the equipment has been delivered by Egyptian ships, and it has been manned by Egyptian personnel. It consists of two or three ex-Soviet minesweepers and an estimated 65 obsolescent T-34 tanks, which arrived in March and May of this year complete with Egyptian training missions. Although it has been suggested that the armored training mission merely served as a cover for an Egyptian force that would buttress the RCC in case of trouble, an adequate "palace guard" already existed in the form of two Egyptian commando battalions and perhaps 1,500 Egyptian security men. Egypt also transferred its own Naval Academy out of enemy range in Alexandria to the Libyan town of Susa, where it would presumably serve the Libyan Navy as well.

8. This program of military assistance has been supplemented by political discussions concerning some form of tripartite union between Egypt, Libya, and Sudan. To date any such "union" is without substance, and the initial steps toward it have dealt largely with economic cooperation. In short, it was believed that Nasir wished to establish a relationship with Libya that would enable him to derive maximum benefits from Libya's oil wealth while becoming as little involved as possible. He wanted to maintain the pro-Egyptian RCC, and he probably hoped that he could benefit from a role as the Soviet Union's arms broker in Libya much as he had done in Yemen.

### The Soviet Union

9. The Soviet Union entered the picture suddenly and with little warning with an overt delivery of tanks and artillery on 18 July 1970. Since the coup

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in September 1969, the Soviets had made offers to Libya, and a special envoy from the Soviet Defense Ministry had visited Tripoli as early as 19 September. In return, Deputy Prime Minister Jallud and another member of the RCC journeyed to Moscow in November to line up military supplies in case talks with the British collapsed. In March, Jallud was reported to have gone to Moscow again, rather than to his announced destination of Cairo. The Libyans reportedly said they preferred Soviet T-55 tanks (an improved model of the T-54) if Chieftains could not be obtained from the British.

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10. The known situation at present is that at least 57 T-54/55 tanks, plus Soviet-made artillery and armored vehicles were unloaded from two Soviet arms vessels [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] To date, we have no hard information on any arms agreement, its date, or its terms, nor have we any good reporting on the presence or the extent of any Soviet military mission in Libya. It is possible that the Egyptian armored unit personnel are capable of training Libyans in T-54/55s as well as the T-34s.

#### Outlook

11. There seems to be no doubt that the Soviet Union has been eager to become a military supplier to Libya since the 1969 coup, but until now the Libyans had appeared to hold Moscow politely at arms' length. Nasir is reported to have advised Libya in March to deal with the French rather than the Soviets in order to bind Paris more closely to the Arab cause. More recently, Soviet pressure on Nasir appears to have led him to counsel Libya to make some sort of deal with the Russians in order to placate them, as well as to standardize its equipment with the other important Arab states. One step Nasir is reported to have

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urged unsuccessfully was for Libya to allow the Soviet Union to use al-Adem airfield after the British evacuation.

12. Until the extent of the Soviet deliveries is known, three speculations seem reasonable. The RCC has already announced that it intends to obtain arms from all quarters "so that it will be indebted to no one." Among its present suppliers, the US, France, and the UK all have various problems causing a delay in deliveries; Egypt is not itself a manufacturer of arms and has to give serious consideration to its own needs. This leaves the USSR ready, willing, and able to deliver goods that Libya wants immediately, and it is unrealistic to expect that the Libyans could have held off dealing with the USSR much longer. The political aspects of the deal will probably become clear when the arrangement for training personnel is revealed.

13. Secondly, the USSR may have learned a lesson in Yemen about using Egypt as its front, and it may have decided that Soviet arms purchased by Libya would be delivered by the Soviet Union in Soviet vessels for all the world to see. In addition to gaining credit in Libya for the Soviet Union, direct delivery would also give the Soviets greater leverage over the Libyan arms supply and perhaps over Nasir as well by exerting some control over his bankers, the Libyan RCC.

14. A third possibility, raised by US Ambassador Palmer, is that the Soviet deliveries might be for broader Arab requirements rather than solely for Libyan use. It is possible that Libya is intended to be an area for the maintenance of strategic reserves of weapons and a training sanctuary for all the Arab confrontation states.

15. In any event, this is probably the first direct delivery to Libya by the USSR of any major items of military equipment. The new deliveries may well be an indication that the Libyans will turn to the Soviet Union, for reasons of reliability of supply if nothing else, as the main source of equipment for their land forces in the future.