

S/S 10622

August 5, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Soviet Military Deliveries
to Libya

The introduction of Soviet medium tanks and armored personnel carriers into Libya directly from the USSR on July 20-22 has not in itself significantly altered the arms balance in the region. However, we are concerned over its implications for the future of US-Libyan relations, and are therefore asking Ambassador Palmer to return to Washington for consultations.

The tanks involved are medium models, more sophisticated than those previously in the Libyan inventory. Our intelligence indicates that they came directly from the Soviet Union. Their delivery follows a British refusal to supply the Chieftain tanks contracted for by the old regime and inconclusive LARG negotiations for French and West German models. Although we have no information on the extent of any Libyan-Soviet agreements covering the deliveries, the way is clearly opened for the USSR to become a significant supplier of the Libyan armed forces and possibly to establish a training mission in Libya. This would make sense in Libyan terms, since the Libyan Revolutionary Command Council suspects both the US and UK as being hostile to the regime, unreliable suppliers, and pro-Israeli. The fact that we have not indicated that we will deliver the eight F-5s to Libya for which they have a valid contract strengthens this Libyan impression of us. The British find themselves in the same position inasmuch as they have suspended indefinitely any action on the delivery of 188

Chieftain tanks for which the Libyans also have a valid contract. (Both contracts, of course, were signed with the old regime.)

The purchase of Soviet equipment is also consistent with the strong pro-UAR attitude of the RCC's leader, Colonel Qadhaafi. In fact, purchase of the Soviet equipment may have been stimulated by the Egyptians, who have been urging other Arab nations to accept Soviet offers of military equipment. Moreover, purchase of the Soviet equipment would be consistent with the Libyan regime's policy of "unity" with Egypt and Sudan, whose armed forces are Soviet-equipped.

We still have two significant interests in Libya we wish to preserve: our important stake in the petroleum industry, and our diplomatic presence. The consultations with the Ambassador would be designed to obtain his considered estimate of the chances of their survival over the near and mid-term.


William P. Rogers