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Note: This was handed over "for background information" by the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Harold Wilson, at an informal dinner for the Members of the House of Commons on Sunday 7 Jan 1970.

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LIBYA: APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY AND TERRORISM

Summary

Adm.

Since Colonel Qadhafi came to power in September 1969 Libya has supported a variety of revolutionary and terrorist groups around the world, pursued violent campaigns against dissidents outside its own borders, and intervened on numerous occasions in the internal affairs of other states. Qadhafi's erratic and unpredictable behaviour has embarrassed and alienated governments, and his fondness for dramatic rhetoric has served to deepen the suspicion and distrust with which he is widely regarded. Having good relations with Libya does not protect states from Qadhafi's meddling. There is some evidence that he will modify his behaviour, at least temporarily, if sufficient pressure is brought to bear.

1. Since Qadhafi seized power 20 years ago his approach to relations with other states has been erratic and unpredictable. His fundamental belief is that he and Libya have the right and the duty to lead the Third World and to champion revolutionary movements; his "Third Universal Theory" proposes a new world-wide social order, replacing capitalism and communism with socialist and Islamic principles. In keeping with his anti-imperialist and revolutionary outlook, Qadhafi has lent support to Third World countries with left-wing governments, revolutionary movements acting against Western interests and opposition movements with an Islamic orientation.

2. Qadhafi still sees himself as the heir to Nasser, alone capable of unifying the Arab world and the sole remaining torch bearer of Arab nationalism, socialism and anti-colonialism. His hostility to the US, and to a lesser extent Britain, stems in great part from America's support and protection of Israel and the perceived identification of Britain with this policy. For Qadhafi Israel remains as a visible legacy of Western "imperialist" policies towards the Arab world and a continuing affront to the dignity and independence of the Arab nation; as a result Libya has a long track record of support for the more extreme fringes of the Palestinian movement. In this context Qadhafi has largely supported and helped those groups which reject any compromise with Israel or dilution of the Palestinians' national aspirations; this in turn has led to Libyan association with acts of international terrorism perpetrated by such groups. His rejection of perceived "colonialist" and "imperialist" influences has led him to provide a large number of "national liberation movements" with funding and other assistance and to Libya's history of support for and involvement in terrorism. An important institution for implementing Libyan policy towards the Third World has been the Mathaba, or Anti-Imperialist Centre, which

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serves as a talking shop for radical groups and a channel through which money and training can be provided for a wide variety of organisations including those engaging in revolutionary or terrorist action. It concentrates its activities in the Caribbean and Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Far East.

3. During the 1970s Qadhafi was blatant in his support for a number of major terrorist operations. He allowed terrorists who had just mounted major attacks to go free once they had reached Libya: for example, members of the Japanese Red Army and the PFLP who had hijacked a JAL aircraft to Benghazi in 1972; members of the JRA who had seized the US consulate in Kuala Lumpur in 1975 and subsequently fled to Libya; and the group led by Carlos who took to Libya the OPEC Oil Ministers who had been seized in Vienna, also in 1975. Qadhafi's regime has also given considerable support in the form of weapons, finance and training to a variety of terrorist groups: extremist Palestinians benefitted throughout the 1970s, and since at least 1971 there has been conflict over arms supplies between the Libyans and PIRA. In 1972 Qadhafi publicly expressed support for PIRA, and in 1973 the ship "Claudia" was seized with a cargo of 5 tons of arms destined for PIRA. Libya also gave PIRA substantial sums of money during the 1970s.

4. From 1980 an additional element appeared as Qadhafi's attempts to eliminate opposition to his regime were extended to attacks on dissidents living abroad, and Libya began to engage directly in acts of terrorism in Europe. A series of attacks and assassinations followed, often directed by local Libyan People's Bureaux. In the campaigns against the dissidents (or "stray dogs" in Libyan terminology) Qadhafi frequently showed himself reckless as to the consequences for Libya's relations with the states in which these acts of violence were perpetrated. In Britain a series of attacks culminated in the shooting at demonstrators and police in London in 1984 which resulted in the death of WPC Fletcher and the consequent rupture of UK-Libyan relations. During the 1980s at least eight Libyan dissidents were murdered in Italy and Greece, the two European countries with the closest links to Libya.

5. During the 1980s Qadhafi continued to extend assistance to extremist Palestinian groups, a variety of revolutionary movements around the world and to PIRA. In the early part of the decade however Qadhafi put a temporary stop to his support for terrorism and conducted an exercise in diplomacy similar to the one in which he is currently engaged. In 1983 he had been under pressures similar to those of 1986-7: Libyan forces had been ejected from their first intervention in Chad; he felt threatened by a close US military presence; and his 1982 Chairmanship of the OAU had ended in humiliation. By 1984 the pressure had eased and Qadhafi resumed his military campaign in Chad, attacks on dissidents abroad continued,



and assistance to radical Palestinian factions was stepped up.

6. Since 1986 it seems that the combination of pressures on Qadhafi has again led him to respond either by completely stopping activities which he judges could attract retaliation or by taking greater pains to conceal or to modify others. It is not clear to what extent Libya continues to support terrorism, but it does seem that in general Libya has been reducing its support to terrorist groups. In 1989, for example, there were no attacks against American interests around the 15 April anniversary of the US air raids on Libya as had happened in 1987. During 1988 and 1989 there have been no terrorist attacks which can be firmly tied to the Libyans: this compares with 5 in 1985, 12 in 1986 and 4 in 1987. Relations with extremist Palestinian groups are at best strained. There are conflicting reports about the current status of Fatah - Revolutionary Council (Abu Nidhal's organisation) in Libya following the apparent split in the group. Reports that Libya has closed the group's offices and facilities and even placed Abu Nidhal himself under arrest have not been confirmed, but it seems clear that Libya is trying to distance itself from the organisation. Links with the PFLP GC and the Abu Musa group (Fatah - Provisional Command) appear to have been cut back even more; both groups have complained publicly that their Libyan funding has ceased and their facilities closed down. There is however no indication that Qadhafi has modified his position towards the Palestinian cause or that he has taken action against these groups because he no longer agrees with their policies. His reaction to Arafat and to the PLO programme adopted in 1988 remains lukewarm. It is likely that he has reduced support for the extremist factions in response to pressure from other Arab States and because continued support for them represents a major stumbling block in his efforts to improve relations with the West, principally the United States.

7. Although there is some evidence that there may be a rough correlation between Libyan bouts of unpleasantness towards a particular state and low points in relations between that state and Libya, Qadhafi remains in general motivated by his revolutionary and anti-imperialist outlook. The breaking of diplomatic relations between Britain and Libya which followed the fatal shooting of WPC Fletcher may well have fuelled Qadhafi's resentment against the UK, but his support for PIRA seems to be rooted in his perception of the organisation as an efficient liberation movement combatting occupation and colonial repression. Britain's assistance to the US in the 1986 bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi gave Qadhafi strong reasons for wanting revenge on Britain as well as the USA, and a number of terrorist attacks took place on British targets in which a Libyan hand could be detected. Some months after the bombing a further large arms shipment was made to PIRA and in October 1987 the Eksund was intercepted, also en route with arms for PIRA. However, the Claudia arms shipment in 1973 took place at a time of relatively

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cordial relations between Britain and Libya. More recently, during the latter half of 1989, while Libyans have been giving clear indications that they would like to see an improvement in Libya-UK relations, Qadhafi has at the same time been expressing in public implied support for PIRA.

8. Looking back over the period there is no evidence that a friendly approach guarantees protection against Qadhafi's methods, or that a close or improving relationship is proof against some unpredictable outburst. Recently, Libya's diplomatic offensive in Africa, which he pursued in 1988 and 1989 to counter improvements in relations between certain African states and Israel, suffered setbacks early in the year. Burundi broke off relations after discovering Libyan involvement in an attempted coup, and Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone claimed to have uncovered evidence of Libyan plotting. Qadhafi has also been playing a double game in the Sudan conflict, offering overt support to the Government while cultivating the opposition at the same time. In two further recent examples Qadhafi has shown himself capable of jeopardising relationships from which Libya benefits substantially. In September 1989 Qadhafi initiated a particularly virulent campaign against Italy, Libya's main trading partner and a country which he has often described as Libya's best friend in Europe. The issue, which centres on Libya's demand that Italy pay compensation for the colonial period, is raised regularly by the Libyans, but in 1989 both the language used and the action taken, which included the despatch of a boatload of Libyans to Naples and the possibly related murder of an Italian citizen in Libya, was more violent than usual. This came at a time when Qadhafi was openly trying to improve Libya's image in and relations with the West; the Italians too were making efforts, and had shortly before sent the Foreign Minister to attend the celebrations in Tripoli of the 20th anniversary of the Libyan revolution. Also during the latter half of 1989, as part of the campaign to improve relations with member states of the EC, Libya set about repairing its ties with France, which had been severely strained as a result of France's reaction to Libyan intervention in Chad. The agreement signed with Chad in August 1989 opened the way to a possible settlement of the dispute over the Aozou strip, and in November France lifted its embargo on arms purchased by the Libyans before the imposition of the EC arms embargo in 1986. According to the French authorities the decision was made in response to improvements in Libyan-Chad relations. Libya however maintained that the embargo remained in force despite the French announcement, and in response the Libyan News Agency, JANA, called for a boycott of French goods. Ships sailing under a French flag were subsequently banned from entering Libyan ports.

9. As the paper illustrates there is no firm evidence of Libyan involvement in terrorist activity since early 1988. However,

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Libya has neither disbanded its own terrorism infrastructure nor completely broken links with revolutionary or terrorist groups. At present Qadhafi appears to believe that his foreign policy interests are best served by placating his opponents and distancing himself from terrorism, but in the past he has shown himself to be both entirely unpredictable and quite willing to conduct entirely contradictory policies at the same time. These factors account for the apparent fluctuation in his support for terrorism.