

NEW YORK TIMES
13 November 1985ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A3

Challenges To Qaddafi Discounted

By JUDITH MILLER
Special to The New York Times

PARIS, Nov. 12 — The relative weakness of Libyan opposition groups and the rising anti-Americanism among several of Libya's neighbors are likely to complicate any effort to undermine the Government of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, according to Western and Middle Eastern diplomats and specialists here.

Administration officials and Congressional sources said recently that President Reagan had approved a covert plan aimed at weakening the Libyan Government.

But the diplomats and experts said they questioned whether such a plan could succeed, despite their view that the Libyan leader appeared to be at one of his most vulnerable points in his 16-year rule.

"The fact that this plan has been made public automatically decreases the chances of success," said Pierre Lellouche, deputy director of the Paris-based French Institute of International Relations.

"Each of the neighboring countries has cause to be unhappy with Mr. Qaddafi," Mr. Lellouche said, "but the neighbors are under equal pressure from religious and political groups, some of which are manipulated by Libya. The last thing they need is accusations that they are participating in a C.I.A. plan to do away with their nemesis," he said.

Algeria Spurns U.S. Plan

Last week, Algeria denied that it would countenance such an American-sponsored "plot" against another Arab nation. Despite Algeria's long-standing dispute with Libya over oil-producing territory in the south, Algeria expressed its "solidarity" with the Libyan regime.

The National Front for the Salvation of Libya, widely regarded as the strongest of the divided and weak opposition groups, issued a declaration in London recently that was highly critical of the American plan.

The statement noted that the National Front had been responsible for the attack in May 1984 by armed rebels on Colonel Qaddafi's barracks.

"Reports of other covert operations as well as the schemes themselves are liable to discredit and undermine the genuine Libyan strength and preempt any national action that might be carried out against Qaddafi," the statement said. "Such reports can only give credence to Qaddafi's propaganda that

he is the victim of an international conspiracy and a chance to recover some prestige and influence in certain quarters. It can only provide him with more incentive to step up and expand his mischief and terrorism."

Sudan Coup Forces Evacuation

Abu Abdullah, a London-based spokesman for the National Front, said that his and other Libyan opposition groups active in the Sudan had been forced to leave the country after the coup last April that ousted President Gaafar al-Nimeiry. Several weeks later, the new Sudanese military Government signed a defense agreement with Libya, Mr. Abdullah said.

The National Front, which has representatives in London, Rome, Paris, Baghdad and the United States, now operates an anti-Libya radio station from Cairo for four hours a day. But Egypt, National Front officials said, keeps a close watch on the group and is careful not to sanction the launching of subversive operations from the border it shares with Libya.

Egypt has frequently been the target of subversive and terrorist operations from Libya, Egyptian officials have said. In the early 1970's, the officials said, President Anwar el-Sadat wanted to invade Libya to unseat Colonel Qaddafi. But staunch opposition from the United States, among other powers, forced him to abandon the idea, Egyptian officials said.

Egypt has recently been the target of Libyan-sponsored terrorist attacks, but President Hosni Mubarak, wary of any external adventure, has been unwilling to authorize serious efforts to undermine his neighbor, Egyptian officials and Libyan opposition representatives agreed.

Egypt Humiliates Qaddafi

In the summer of 1984, Egypt humiliated Colonel Qaddafi by permitting a Libyan assassination squad to believe it had killed a Libyan opponent, Abdel Hamid Bakkush, a former Libyan Prime Minister, in Cairo. After Libya claimed credit for Mr. Bakkush's "execution," the Egyptian Government showed Mr. Bakkush at a news conference, arrested several Libyan and British citizens purportedly involved in the plot and denounced Libya for its assassination attempt.

Egypt announced Monday that it had foiled a new attempt to kill Mr. Bakkush and several other Libyan exiles. It said four Libyans were seized after a fifth member of their "hit squad" gave the police information that allowed them to intercept the gunmen as they moved in to shoot the exiles.

While President Mubarak has approved such operations, he has been reluctant to do more, officials said. Several added that Egypt was likely to be even less willing now than ever before to cooperate with or take part in American-sponsored subversion given the current strain in American-Egyptian relations prompted by the forcing down in October by American jets of an Egyptian plane that was carrying the four hijackers of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro.

Nor was Tunisia likely to be helpful, diplomats and opposition groups agreed. Relations between Tunis and Tripoli were badly strained by Libya's expulsion this spring of thousands of Tunisian workers because of budgetary constraints.

How U.S. Displeased Tunis

But American-Tunisian relations were damaged by what Tunis perceived as Washington's condoning of Israel's Oct. 1 raid on the Tunisian-based headquarters of the Palestine

Liberation Organization. Mr. Abdullah, of the National Front, said it was unlikely that subversive operations could be launched either from neighboring Niger or from Chad, torn by civil strife and still partly occupied by Libyan forces.

Libya's other neighbor, Morocco, signed a union accord in 1984 with Tripoli. Although strains have emerged between them, the accord was useful to both Colonel Qaddafi and King Hassan II, diplomats said. Libya has stopped supporting the Polisario rebels in Western Sahara, and Morocco has expelled Libyan opposition groups.

Arab diplomats here said that even before the accord was signed, King Hassan signaled his good will toward Libya by handing Omar Mehesi over to Colonel Qaddafi. Mr. Mehesi was one of the most respected of the colonel's opponents and had been given asylum in Morocco. According to a highly placed Arab official, Mr. Mehesi was flown to Libya in the King's plane and was kicked to death by Colonel Qaddafi's aides in a waiting room.

Diplomats said it would be difficult to kill Colonel Qaddafi since he was heavily surrounded by East German security guards. Besides, the diplomats said, an American executive order prohibits direct or indirect American participation in assassination attempts.