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# Reagan Is Said to Have Approved Help to Egypt if It Attacked Libya

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*Special to The New York Times*

WASHINGTON, Feb. 20 — Early last year, President Reagan approved a secret directive under which United States military forces would support Egypt in the event of a "pre-emptive" attack on Libya, and the two countries continued to prepare for this contingency throughout 1986, Administration officials said today.

The officials said President Reagan agreed to the proposal in early 1986, shortly after the terrorist attacks in the Rome and Vienna airports on Dec. 27, 1985.

Under the plan, which was supported by some members of Mr. Reagan's National Security Council staff, the United States would support an Egyptian attack on Libya if it were intended as a response to a Libyan military threat.

### U.S. Raids in Libya Allowed

The policy allowed for American military strikes against targets inside Libya, officials said.

The Presidential directive replaced one that had called for logistical support for Egypt only if Libya attacked the Egyptians first, the officials said.

The Washington Post reported today that the State Department made great efforts in 1985 to block what The Post called a White House plan for a joint American-Egyptian attack on Libya. These included bringing Nicholas A. Veliotis, the Ambassador to Egypt, back to Washington to argue against a proposed mission to Cairo by Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, who was then the deputy national security adviser.

### 'No Policy or Plan'

Asked about a possible joint invasion of Libya, Marlin Fitzwater, the White House spokesman, said, "There was no policy or plan to do that that was put in motion."

It has been previously reported that Admiral Poindexter met with Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian President, in August 1985 to discuss possible military steps against Muammar el-Qaddafi, the Libyan leader, who has consistently been a target of the Reagan Administration's public polemics and covert activities.

There have been repeated suggestions that the Poindexter mission was part of an attempt by the Reagan Administration to prod an unwilling Egypt into providing a military answer to a problem that had defied solution by other means.

In March 1986, the semiofficial Egyptian newspaper Al Ahram said Cairo had rejected three requests from American delegations for joint Amer-

ican-Egyptian military action against Libya.

But several Administration officials who support President Reagan's policy on Libya insisted today that the meeting with President Mubarak and the subsequent planning were not an attempt to press Cairo to invade. One official said the United States had offered its support only if Egypt were facing a direct threat.

"It was a very sophisticated approach," this official said. "We wanted the Egyptians to know we were prepared to work with them. We were not trying to start a war."

Another official scoffed at reports that Mr. Mubarak was unwilling to proceed with the military planning. "They didn't have to be goaded into anything," this official said.

Planning for how to deal with Libya has been a major policy issue for the National Security Council staff for the last several years. In addition to covert operations by the C.I.A. to encourage opponents of Colonel Qaddafi to displace him, the United States conducted bombing raids on Libya last year after what it said was a Libyan-directed attack on a Berlin discotheque frequented by American soldiers.

Intensified Administration planning on how to deal with terrorism, one official said, was touched off in mid-1985 when Shiite Moslem radicals hijacked a Trans World Airlines flight and held Americans who were aboard hostage in Beirut.

In one such effort, National Security Council officials began preparing the way for covert arms sales to Iran, in what the Administration has said was an effort to build support for what were believed to be less radical elements in that country.

Meanwhile, in late December 1985, terrorists conducted simultaneous attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports in which 20 people were killed and 110 wounded. These attacks were subsequently tied to Sabry al-Banna, the terrorist known as Abu Nidal, whose activities over the years are said to have received support from Libya and other Arab countries.

Officials said it was after these attacks that President Reagan became prepared to authorize extensive American involvement to back Egypt in an attack on Libya even if the attack was in response only to a threat.

While Abu Nidal is said to receive support from several countries, among them Libya, he also is said to carry out operations without specific sponsorship, and no direct evidence of involvement by Mr. Qaddafi in the airport attacks has been produced.

In late 1985 the Reagan Administration also began discussing the kidnaping of suspected terrorists for trial in the United States, a proposed program on which The New York Times reported in January 1986.