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WASHINGTON TIMES  
17 March 1986

# Libya looking for subs to menace ships at sea

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THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Terrorism experts say that Libya is shopping for small submarines that could be used to destroy commercial passenger and cargo liners.

"There is substantial evidence that the Libyans are out to purchase these submarines," said Robert Kupperman, an expert at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies. "You've got to ask how the Libyans would use them — they [the Libyans] are in the clandestine, highly covert business of terrorism, and a small submarine is an inexpensive, small instrument for terrorism."

A former submarine officer and expert on submarine warfare, who asked not to be identified, agreed.

"Because of the stealth associated with miniature subs, this type of operation would be very effective for terrorist actions," he said.

Federal officials concerned with terrorism are watching the situation closely. Since the so-called "minisubs" — which are produced in a number of countries, including Japan and some NATO nations — are relatively inexpensive, there is always the danger that the undersea weapons could fall into the hands of terrorist groups.

So far, however, only Yugoslavia — a country generally aligned with the Soviet Union — appears to be negotiating with Libyan officials.

The State Department and the FBI are declining to comment on the situation, but Mr. Kupperman said U.S. officials have warned the Yugoslav government not to sell the boats to Libya.

However, he said, the Yugoslavs may be above such U.S. diplomatic pressure, pointing to the sanctuary Yugoslavia provided fugitive Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal, suspected of masterminding the hijacking of the ocean liner Achille Lauro.

Minisubs are a relatively new phenomenon. They weigh from 150 tons to 200 tons and cost from \$20 million to \$50 million to build. Conventional, diesel powered attack submarines weigh about 5,000 tons and cost up to \$200 million.

The minisubs are capable of firing torpedoes and some can launch advanced anti-ship missiles.

The Soviets began building a 200-boat minisub fleet in the mid-1960s. U.S. allies, including Great Britain, West Germany, Japan and Italy, also have produced their own fleets. Sweden and Yugoslavia also are believed to have small submarines.

The Yugoslavian minisub, which is modeled after a Soviet design, is called the M-100. It is designed to carry a crew of seven

and is powered by a diesel-electric engine.

The Yugoslavian small submarine was described by one expert as of "European quality." Although the Yugoslav model looks different from its Soviet counterpart, it shares some common technology such as Soviet-style diesel fuel cells and integrated control systems, the expert said.

"They could literally sink an American warship," said Mr. Kupperman, a former State Department official. "They carry torpedos, are small, difficult to detect and useful in a clandestine environment."

Submarine experts say Libya has already developed a well-trained submarine force with a fleet of between four and six Soviet-built submarines.

One said U.S. naval squadrons in the Mediterranean would be more vulnerable to Libyan submarine attacks than to damage from the North African nation's air force.

U.S. officials are believed to be seriously concerned about the use of small submarines to tie up oil shipments passing through the Persian Gulf, threaten ocean liners, or engage in economic terrorism against an open seaport.

"Hit a couple of good-sized tankers and you can tie up shipping and put a wrench on Europe," a submarine warfare expert said. "All it would take is six or eight torpedos from small subs to do the job."

Neil Livingstone, president of the Institute on Terrorism and Subnational Conflict, said Libya's interest in covert weapons is broader than small submarines. He said Libyan agents were arrested recently in the Midwest attempting an illegal purchase of "sterile environment" equipment suited to chemical and biological warfare research.

But Mr. Livingstone said the minisubs can be detected by listening devices placed along the seabed.

"Libya has traditionally shied away from doing things directly," Mr. Livingstone said. "They've used surrogates [in the past]. So I'm not terribly afraid of them having small subs, because their traditional pattern of support has been to nominate proxies and then let the proxies carry out the attacks."

However, according to Mr. Livingstone, there is evidence that Libyan leader Col. Muammar Qaddafi ordered a Libyan submarine to sink a chartered cruise of the Queen Elizabeth II in the Mediterranean Sea during the 25th anniversary of Israeli statehood in 1972. Egypt's then premier Anwar Sadat found out and immediately recalled the ship, Mr. Livingstone said.

"But it does appear that a submarine was dispatched to sink what Qaddafi saw at the time was a major vessel full of Jews of various nationalities going to Israel to celebrate its 25th anniversary," he said.