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ON PAGE 1

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Proposed by NSC

Shultz Blocked Libya Invasion, Officials Say

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WASHINGTON—The National Security Council staff proposed a joint U.S.-Egyptian invasion of Libya in 1985, but Secretary of State George P. Shultz, joined by other State Department and Defense Department officials, blocked the plan, Administration officials said Friday.

The officials said the plan, originally suggested to the NSC by Deputy CIA Director Robert Gates, called for Egyptian troops to invade Libya with U.S. air support to topple Libyan leader Moammar Kadafi.

The proposal was approved by Robert McFarlane, White House national security adviser at the time; his deputy, Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, and Donald Fortier, then the NSC's third-ranking official, before Shultz was able to derail it. Nicholas A. Veliotos, then U.S. ambassador in Cairo, was called home to help marshal arguments against the plan.

Confirmation Issue

A State Department official said Friday that a contingency plan for an invasion of Libya remains in the Administration's files, "but we haven't given it any serious consideration."

The report came at a particularly embarrassing time for Gates. President Reagan's nominee to succeed William J. Casey as CIA director, Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) said the Senate might delay a confirmation vote for as long as a month to see if any other problems come to the surface.

"It is unfortunate that the Administration has sought to nominate Mr. Gates," Byrd said. "I don't have anything against Mr. Gates personally, but the fact that he was

the No. 2 man [at the CIA] and was nominated almost immediately after the resignation of Mr. Casey does not look well.

"Having to vote on the nomination before all of the facts are out puts me in a very difficult position," he said. "We're put in the position of voting for someone who, as the facts unravel down the road, may have been implicated to the extent that we'll all be sorry."

However, Byrd said he did not believe that the nomination should be held up much more than a month because the CIA needs a permanent director to start rebuilding its credibility.

Gates was not available for comment.

The Administration officials said the Libya invasion plan, drafted after the June, 1985, hijacking of TWA Flight 847 by terrorists thought to be backed by Kadafi, was never presented to Reagan for approval. They added that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was never asked to approve it either.

The plan was first revealed by the Washington Post in its Friday editions.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater sidestepped questions about the report. Replying to questions at the daily press briefing, he refused to talk about whether the NSC staff had proposed such an invasion. He limited himself to denying that the President had approved the plan or that it had been carried out.

Fitzwater said there was "no decision directive on invading Libya. . . . There was no policy or plan to do that that was put in motion."

State Department spokeswoman Phyllis Oakley said, "I have nothing to add beyond what the White House said this morning."

Gates suggested the U.S.-Egyptian attack in a memo prepared in July, 1985. Casey, then CIA director, ordered a study of Libyan military targets that might be hit in the early days of such an attack.

Administration officials said McFarlane, Poindexter and Fortier ultimately devised a plan calling for Egyptian troops to capture half of Libya's territory, moving under cover of U.S. close air support.

They said Shultz summoned Veliotos back to Washington to explain Egypt's probable reaction to such a proposal and to underline the disadvantages of the approach.

Veliotos suggested replacing the plan for immediate military action against Libya with a contingency plan that could be put into effect if hostilities broke out later. It is that plan which remains on the books, one official said.

The officials said Reagan approved a visit to Cairo by Poindexter and Fortier in the late summer of 1985. However, they were instructed to discuss the issue only in generalities with Mubarak, not to suggest a joint military operation.

Mubarak made it clear that if Egypt took military action against Libya, it would be for Egyptian reasons only, not because of U.S. interests, the officials said.

The State Department objections to the joint invasion were underlined by the Defense Department. In addition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said such a plan could eventually involve up to six U.S. combat divisions, draining troops from Europe and other U.S. areas around the globe.

Veliotos, now chief of the Assn. of American Publishers, did not return telephone calls Friday.