

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1WASHINGTON POST
29 April 1984

Qaddafi's Authority Said to Be

By Bob Woodward
Washington Post Staff Writer

TRIPOLI, Libya—Col. Muammar Qaddafi is still publicly hailed as "The Leader" of this North African revolutionary state, but there are signs that his regime faces potentially serious trouble.

Often under the influence of sleeping pills, constantly fearful for his life, at times a near hermit and unpredictable to his subordinates and allies, Qaddafi appears to have lost the once fervent support of some of his countrymen, according to several Libyan officials who have personal contact with Qaddafi.

During my week-long visit here, many of the western-educated officials and bureaucrats who try to run the country on a daily basis said in private that they have become increasingly frustrated by the internal and foreign chaos their leader has stirred. Some refer to him jeeringly as "God."

"The country is in turmoil," one official said. "We expect something."

Another official, in a rage, called Qaddafi "small, out of it . . . a pinhead."

By no account is Qaddafi, who has ruled Libya for nearly 15 years, losing all of his political instincts. There are times when he appears in public, gives speeches and shows his lucidity and flair. But these periods are interspersed with longer times of withdrawal and public utterings that two Libyan authorities here separately described with the same word: "gibberish."

Qaddafi has always left aides and visitors waiting for hours or days for meetings with

him, but some Libyan officials said it has become much worse in recent months. He has trouble sleeping, they said, and wanders around day and night making morbid remarks. They said he is not in good health and either is incapable of making some key decisions or unable to communicate his thoughts. There is an irregularity in his daily schedule that is transmitted through the entire government and country.

Highly classified CIA reports circulating

in the U.S. government confirm this evaluation, including evidence that Qaddafi takes an excessive amount of sleeping pills,

Weakening

according to American sources. One U.S. official said that Qaddafi is "burning the candle at both ends . . . high anxiety, high energy."

During this month's crisis at the Libyan embassy in London, which led to the British decision to break diplomatic relations with Libya, it was apparent here that government authority was almost hopelessly spread among Qaddafi, the Foreign Ministry and the so-called people's committees

that theoretically rule the country. The result was bungled negotiations that many here had hoped to resolve without a break in diplomatic relations.

If a dictatorship controls either by co-opting or crushing, Qaddafi has been crushing more than co-opting, stepping up a campaign of internal terror and repression. This may be in response to an attack on one of his most trusted aides, a shadowy but key figure in the Libyan government named Said Qadaf Dam. According to U.S. intelligence, Dam, a military officer and Qaddafi relative, is the second most powerful man in Libya and has been in charge of a series of attacks against the Libyan opposition abroad, including dissidents and unfriendly foreign governments.

In March, it was learned here, a car bomb injured Dam, and officials said he may lose his legs as a result. Foreign Minister Ali Treiki said Dam had been hurt in an automobile accident, but brushed off questions about the incident. Another well-placed official in Libya confirmed that it was an attack and said the bombing had substantially increased Qaddafi's fear that the CIA or Libyan dissidents were going to kill him.

Libyan officials also confirmed that a government ammunition dump had recently been blown up by a dissident group based in Rome, reportedly called The Volcano.

One Libyan dissident, Omar Abdullah Muhayshi, a one-time Qaddafi intimate who left the country in 1975 after a dispute with the ruler,

recently returned and, according to one reliable account, was kidnaped by Qaddafi's agents. In 1983, former CIA agent Edwin P. Wilson, who had been imprisoned for selling explosives to Libya, was acquitted by a U.S. District Court jury in Washington of charges of plotting the assassination of Muhayshi.

All this attention on real or imagined enemies has disillusioned many officials here, as have Qaddafi's various military adventures in Africa—as in Chad, where he has about 5,000 troops—and his attempts to overthrow enemies in Egypt and Sudan. His designs to forge a greater Arab revolutionary state, unifying Libya with Tunisia, Algeria, Syria, Egypt or Sudan, have, in the words of one Libyan official, "cost billions and got us nowhere."

The internal repression has left a deep mark. The public hangings of two students for treason at Tripoli University on April 16 contributed to the anti-Qaddafi demonstration at the Libyan Embassy in London the next day. It was at that demonstration that a British policewoman was killed by shots fired from the building and 11 other persons were wounded. Five days later Britain broke diplomatic relations.

During that week, several Libyan officials urged me to write about the hangings. It was obvious from the tone of their remarks, and the fear expressed in their eyes, that the public executions greatly troubled them. The public hangings are a frequent subject of whispered conversations on the streets and in government offices.

One report circulating among Libyans was that a total of 23 persons had been publicly executed for treason in April alone. An official said that number was an exaggeration; he placed the total at 10. But he added: "It is impossible to know because there is no certain information, only rumors and maybe one hanging becomes 10 as [the report] circulates and is repeated."

This official said there were thousands of political prisoners in Libya, people who had spoken out against

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Qaddafi or some revolutionary principle and were jailed for doing so. Questioned about such a high number, the official repeated: "Thousands. I tell you thousands." He said he knew names but refused to provide any, insisting that even to know about the alleged political prisoners or to discuss them was dangerous.

He then told a story about someone who reportedly disappeared suddenly after making a derogatory comment about green tea. Green is the national revolutionary color of renewal: the Libyan flag is green, and Qaddafi's three-volume revolutionary manifesto is called "The Green Book."

The official acknowledged that the story might be apocryphal, at least an exaggeration, but he insisted

that it had taken on the weight of truth on a larger and more revealing scale.

"People believe it," he said, "because it could happen. Things like that happen." Carrying the thought further, perhaps in another exaggeration, he said, "No one is happy here."

Qaddafi's peculiar and sometimes contradictory statements and actions in foreign affairs have troubled some of his countrymen. In a speech a month ago he publicly suggested that "to vex the United States," Libya could provide the Soviets with bases along the country's 1,300-mile Mediterranean coastline.

"We can change the balances [between the superpowers] a thousand times and turn the tables upside down," Qaddafi said.

But later in an interview here, Foreign Minister Treiki dismissed the idea.

"We are against any foreign troops in any other country . . . whether it is the United States in Grenada or West Germany or the Soviets in Afghanistan." Treiki added: "We don't accept communism and we will never accept communism and they know it."

Qaddafi seemed to be sending another perplexing signal to an African ally recently. Sam Nujoma, leader of the South-West Africa People's Organization, which is fighting to end South African rule in Namibia, came here earlier this month to see Qaddafi and get more money to supplement the millions of dollars Nujoma said the Libyan leader has supplied

to his rebel forces. For six days Nujoma was stranded at a seaside hotel, ignored by Qaddafi. As of last Tuesday he still had not seen him.

One Libyan official, distressed by his boss's unavailability, said that Nujoma would someday be the leader of Namibia and it was a measure of Qaddafi's shortsightedness that he had been kept waiting so long.

Nujoma laughed off the long wait, but one of his aides and a Libyan official said it was insulting and humiliating, almost an unforgivable slight in the revolutionary brotherhood. By contrast, when Maurice Bishop, the late leader of the Caribbean island of Grenada, came to see Qaddafi in 1982, Bishop stayed at his guest house and spent four days with the Libyan leader.

The Libyan handling of its crisis with Great Britain, from the April 17 shooting outside the Libyan People's Bureau, or embassy, in London to the time five days later when the British decided to break relations with Libya, was botched from beginning to end, according to some officials here. One called it "a metaphor for our pathology about dissent."

There were many voices in the Libyan government for accommodation.

"What possible, what conceivable advantage would we have in broken relations with [the] British?" one frustrated official asked. Fuad Zaliteni, who is one of Qaddafi's regular interpreters, said that the British move was a blow, a kind of international seal of disapproval.

It was clear that no one here had the authority to conduct the negotiations from the Libyan side, although Foreign Minister Treiki had the assignment in name. Several hours after the announcement that relations would be broken, British Ambassador Oliver Miles said of Treiki in an interview: "Half his ministry is against him. He has no authority."

The day after the shootings in London, the people's committee of the Foreign Liaison Bureau (the name given the foreign ministry) issued a statement blasting the British for aggression against the embassy, for "arrogance and barbarism," and promising "revenge." Treiki said the next day, "The British are very reasonable people, people we can deal with."

Qaddafi placed himself between the two voices of his revolutionary government—the people's committees and the bureaucrats and senior officials, like Treiki, who are for the most part western-educated professionals. The committees, which theoretically run everything, are dominated by younger Libyans dedicated to revolutionary principles and full of rhetorical zeal. At the Foreign Liaison Bureau, the committee is made up of 10 members, many of whom have no diplomatic training or qualifications—"street bureaucrats," according to one official.

Qaddafi, either unwilling or incapable of resolving disputes between the two factions, often lets them argue and contradict each other. The results are chaotic.

Treiki has a deputy in the foreign ministry. But according to rules set up by the people's committee, when he is absent the acting foreign minister comes from the committee, rotating each month among the 10 members. Several foreign diplomats in Tripoli say it is nearly impossible to do business when Treiki is out of town.

To make the Libyan actions during the British crisis even more confusing, according to officials here, Qaddafi was sending personal messages of "revolutionary encouragement" to those manning the people's bureau in London during the siege by British police.

So negotiations were conducted on four fronts by the Libyans—Treiki, the people's committee here in Tripoli, the people's bureau in London and Qaddafi.

The point seems to be that the revolution is more important than the government. The revolutionary

principles and drumbeat of anger at old authority don't die very easily and Qaddafi feeds the fires regularly. The British were a perfect target, a symbol of the imperialist, colonial past. One committee member even suggested that the march to revolutionary purity must necessarily entail diplomatic disengagement with the British.

At the foreign ministry officials saw all this as a loss. Several experienced observers here noted that the situation resembled the Iranian revolution in 1979 when the radicals would articulate, then initiate, a course of extreme action—such as

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the seizing of the hostages in the American embassy—and the moderates had no other choice than to go along.

The thin, expert fingers of the soldier moved effortlessly over the release springs of the Soviet-designed AK47. Out on the blacktop of the vast parade ground the soldier hurriedly field-stripped the weapon, laid out the final part and leapt up, black combat boots clicking. The soldier shouted in Arabic, "It is ready, sir!" and came to attention, a slight smile of pride rising and then quickly snuffed out. The time was about 30 seconds, faster than anyone else in the class.

A long, braided pony tail flopped over the small, red shoulder boards denoting the lowest rank, coming to rest at the back of the green fatigues. She was 14 years old, a female volunteer in Col. Qaddafi's new cadre. Women have been training here at the Women's Army College since 1979, according to Maj. Abdul Razak.

Qaddafi has tried to institute universal compulsory military training for women, but the People's Congress which he set up in the 1970s has so far thwarted him, so all women are volunteers. By the hundreds, some hardly 4 feet tall, aged 13 to 17, they march and learn about machine guns, pistols and larger weapons.

During one morning of drill, while watching the gangly adolescents wield the weapons, in some cases the bayonets as long as the teen-agers' thighs, an official whispered: "Look at this, what kind of life is this for these girls?"

Military training for men is not popular. Work normally stops here at about 2 in the afternoon, but men undergoing military training must keep their regular jobs and then spend three to four hours, five days a week, with their military unit. They must do this for six months to one year at different intervals every several years.

Qaddafi set up a universal education system that now costs about \$1.5 billion a year. But Abdul Hafiz Zallitali, chairman of the People's

Education Committee, said in an interview that the system is undergoing dramatic revision.

"We have been so concerned in the last 13 or 14 years to expand and solve the literacy problem," said Zallitali, a heavy-set, well-dressed man smoking Rothman cigarettes.

"This means we had to build classrooms and train teachers . . . We inherited a traditional system with no specialties, no emphasis on practical and technical skills. We [educated] people to put them on the doorsteps of a university . . . This system was irrelevant to the needs of the country. . .

"We poured enormous sums into this, [but] the people who work here do not need a university education. So we needed serious rethinking and we've been doing so in the last three years and now we're settled on a general course."

That course, he said, will emphasize the "manpower needs of the future." That means about 40 percent of the students, those with lower academic achievement levels, will get vocational training and another 30 to 35 percent will get various types of technical training.

The practical effect of the old educational system is that much work is done by outside laborers and technicians; about 40 to 50 percent of the labor force in the entire country is foreign. They do everything from waiting on tables in hotels to the most technically sophisticated work in the oil fields.

One official said, "So we have thousands of university-educated people who are too educated to do [vocational or basic labor] and have nowhere to fit in . . . and we wind up with thousands sitting around being revolutionaries."

Others interviewed said there is bound to be some resistance to the education department's efforts to tell the low achievers they are going to solder circuit boards or repair refrigerators for a living. The expectations raised by the Qaddafi socialist revolution are greater.

Libya's economy is not in very good shape, according to information provided by Libyan officials and government reports.

Oil revenue, which accounts for about 99 percent of the country's income, has been cut as much as half by comparatively low prices and reduced quotas set by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. In addition, the economy is not structurally sound. Although some officials tried to convince a reporter that many industries were springing up, others said this claim was exaggerated.

"We can't make even a needle to sew a shirt," said one. "All labor and equipment come from outside . . . We cover everything with money."

Take away the money or the oil and we have nothing."

Nonetheless, travel around Tripoli and its outskirts revealed a land that appears to be one vast construction site, with housing, factories and nearly every imaginable building being erected. Billions of dollars of the work is being done by foreign subsidiaries of American companies, much more than either the Libyans or U.S. government would like to acknowledge. Libyan officials say the U.S. role is critical and accounts for the generally good treatment that the hundreds of Americans who work here receive.

Libya has spent billions of dollars for arms from the Soviet Union and is currently negotiating to buy another \$5 billion to \$10 billion worth, but many officials, including Foreign Minister Treiki, made it clear that they would rather buy arms from the United States.

U.S. relations with Libya have grown increasingly cool since Qaddafi took power. All U.S. diplomats were withdrawn from Libya after an attack on the embassy in December 1979 and Libyan diplomats were expelled from the United States in May 1981. In August of that year, U.S. planes shot down two Libyan jets over the Gulf of Sidra and there have been other tense encounters in the same area since.

Fawzi Shakshuki, the minister of planning, said in an interview that the only nonmilitary project with the Soviet Union was a small agricultural contract to study the soil.

"There are no big projects with the Soviet Union," he said, "because they can't give us the best prices and conditions."

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The largest development project in the country, the first stage of which will cost \$3 billion, is a desert irrigation plan that was awarded to a South Korean company; \$100 million of that goes to the Texas-based construction firm of Brown and Root for managing the project.

One visible success of the Qaddafi revolution is that the oil wealth has been distributed widely and poverty has been virtually eliminated. Food, most of which is imported, is heavily subsidized. Rent has been abolished and ownership transferred to those who occupy a house or apartment.

The lavish, ostentatious wealth of the oil-rich Persian Gulf states cannot be found. I did not see a single limousine during a week's stay in Tripoli.

Despite the strict fundamentalist Moslem laws here, there are several large television antennas in the Tripoli area, which reportedly are used, among other things, to pick up sexually oriented broadcasts from Italy.

On Friday, the day of worship, Foreign Minister Treiki arrived at my hotel in the driver's seat of a dark green, 1982 government Chevrolet. He drove me to a friend's farm south of Tripoli.

Libyan and U.S. sources described Treiki, 45, as smooth and ruthless. Said one analyst: "He is the man that has carried out the policy of Qaddafi. During the Chad [invasion] Treiki was the guy who appeared with the money in one bag and threats in the other."

After we arrived at the farm, Treiki regularly tuned in the news on a three-band radio-cassette player. This was in the third day of his negotiations with the British ambassador over the siege at the Libyan Embassy in London.

Treiki seemed relaxed, took off his shoes and socks and lay down. Covering relations and policy from the Soviet Union to Nicaragua, he kept to the line that Libya wants peace and the United States is the aggressor.

For nine hours he laughed, asked questions, shrugged, gave half-hearted denials but provided little news. Before sunset he drove to the coast and the Roman ruins of the large city of Leptis Magna and walked through the remains of the forum, theater and baths for an hour.

He kept trying to turn the discussion to the United States, saying it had no real foreign policy in the Middle East, rather just a series of incoherent actions that change direction almost daily.

"You should write a long article about this city instead of the other things . . . President Reagan should give up the billions he spends for armaments to rebuild this city."