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TO: Mr. Thomas K. Latimer, Staff Director
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Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Tom:

The enclosed paper is per your request
to



House Affairs
Office of Congressional Affairs

Enclosure (Trends in Arab Media Commentary on
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Trends in Arab Media Commentary on the United States

The most common theme of Arab media comment on the United States is criticism of what is portrayed as an imbalance in U.S. policy toward the Arab states and Israel. Although the degree of acerbity varies widely by country and tends to be issue-related, Arab commentators are uniformly critical of what they view as an uncompromising U.S. bias toward Israel. Frustration over this often carries over to critical commentary on bilateral issues such as arms sales to Jordan and the American aid programs in Egypt and Sudan. While the U.S. raid on Libya was almost universally condemned by Arab media, the stridency and duration of the anti-U.S. rhetoric varied depending on the political orientation of the particular Arab country.

Arab Moderates

Jordan

Jordanian media comment on the United States over the past year was primarily critical, reflecting King Husayn's continued frustration with U.S. Middle East policies, including the Administration's failure to win approval of a proposed arms sale to Jordan. While U.S. support for Israel and Washington's unwillingness to engage in direct negotiations with the PLO prior to that organization's recognition of Israel's right to exist have occasioned bitter complaints by Amman commentators, Jordanian media frequently balance this criticism by censuring the Arab world for its inability unite in support of a peace initiative.

Limited editorial reaction to the 15 April airstrike deplored what the daily Al-Dustur, for example, called the use of "a big stick" against the third world. Jordanian commentators have also sought to link the terrorism issue with the need to resolve the Palestinian problem. In its comment on King Husayn's current trip to the United States, Al-Dustur said on 6 June that the U.S.-Jordanian relationship was facing "a political test" because in its campaign against terrorism, the U.S. Administration was not taking into consideration the fact that "Palestinians are deprived of their legitimate rights."

Egypt

Principal themes in Cairo's media comment on the United States include both broader U.S. Middle East policies and and bilateral issues such as the U.S. aid program. Authoritative commentaries take their cue from official statements and tend to criticize the United States only occasionally and usually in constructive and balanced terms. At the other end of the spectrum, commentaries in the opposition press regularly

lambaste Washington. In between the two extremes are a variety of views--primarily critical of U.S. policies--that appear in government-supported publications.

The raid on Tripoli provoked considerable comment divided along these lines. For example, while the semiofficial daily Al-Ahram's 16 April editorial basically replayed the official reaction to the attack, noting that "international tension cannot be eased by resorting to military force," an editorial in the less authoritative daily Al-Jumhuriyah on the same day called the raid "an act of barbarism" and "worse than terrorism." Although comment on the raid died down in the government-supported papers after a few days, opposition journalists have continued to excoriate the United States over the attack.

An important topic of Egyptian media comment on the United States is the debate over the utility and costs to Egypt of the U.S. economic assistance program. Authoritative media commentary has taken a pragmatic and constructive position on the issue, suggesting that it would be politically naive to expect donor countries to give aid without getting something in return and that this system of quid pro quo does not necessarily harm the interests of the receiving party. Commentators in less authoritative publications--both government-supported and opposition--have frequently voiced deep mistrust of U.S. intentions over the aid program.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi media commentators are generally reserved in their treatment of the United States. U.S. support for Israel is the most common focus of criticism, with commentators typically appealing for more balance in U.S. policy toward the Arab world and Israel. In a 5 April editorial reported by the official Saudi Press Agency, for example, the daily Al-Bilad called on the United States to apply its principles regarding "human rights, freedom, and self-determination" to the Palestinian people and to abandon its "biased stand" in favor of Israel. While Saudi editorialists criticized the United States over the raid on Libya, they avoided vitriolic excesses and merely replayed Saudi leaders' statements on the attack. In recent weeks, Saudi media have focused on the proposed U.S. arms sale, with commentators urging Washington to approve it. According to the Riyadh radio press review, a 6 June editorial in the daily Al-Jazirah welcomed the Senate vote upholding President Reagan's veto as a victory over Israel's supporters in the United States and expressed optimism about prospects for a "realistic" American policy "that does not disregard the right of one party in favor of another."

Gulf States

While Gulf editorial comment on the United States consists primarily of criticism of U.S. policy on the Palestinian problem and the Middle East conflict, bilateral exchanges with Washington--most recently Vice President Bush's April tour of Arabian Peninsula states--have prompted positive media treatment of the United States. Washington's expressions of support for regional security and warnings against expansion of the Iran-Iraq war have been particularly well received by editorialists in Gulf states where fears of involvement in the war run high. While Gulf media harshly condemned the U.S. airstrike on Libya, this behavior reflected a traditional sense of obligation to support an Arab state facing outside attack and disapproval of U.S. policy on Libya, rather than any real support for al-Qadhdhafi whose backing of Iran in the Gulf war conflicts with Gulf interests.

Sudan

Prior to the raid on Libya, the United States was frequently criticized by Khartoum media over its Middle East policies, its past support for former Sudanese President Numayri, and its economic aid policies. While the raid prompted Sudanese media denunciations of Washington, in the weeks following the airstrike commentators became increasingly preoccupied with events leading up to the recent elections and the reorganization of the Sudanese Government.

North Africa

Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian media have not in recent months been observed to comment extensively on U.S. policy. Prior to the U.S. raid on Libya, occasional Algerian commentaries criticized American economic sanctions against Tripoli. North African media criticized the U.S. airstrike. On 16 April, an editorial in the Algerian ruling party's daily El-Moudjahid accused the Administration of menacing "international security and peace" under the "pretext" of opposing terrorism. A commentary in the pro-Government Moroccan daily Le Matin Du Sahara on 17 April asserted that there was "no justification" for the American attack, which was a "complete violation" of "international morality" and an act of "gunboat diplomacy." There was very little comment on the raid in pro-Government Tunisian media, and critical commentary in all three countries abated by the end of April.

Arab Hardliners

Libya

Editorial comment in Tripoli media predictably reflects Libyan leader Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhafi's implacable hostility to the United States. Washington's support for Israel, for a Middle East peace process, and for Arab moderates prompt frequent vitriolic denunciations by Libyan commentators. In 1986 the tone of Libyan media comment grew increasingly strident as the Administration made clear its intention to hold Libya accountable for its sponsorship of terrorism. A 3 April statement broadcast by Libya's regional radio "Voice of the Greater Arab Homeland" described U.S. policy as "uncivilized, barbaric and an aggression against the rights of others." Media statements since the U.S. raid on Libya have coupled strident denunciations of American policy with violent and at times bigoted personal attacks on and threats against U.S. leaders. President Reagan, for example, is commonly referred to as a "child-murderer" or a "Zionist-Mossad mad dog," while Secretary of State Shultz is often dismissed as "the Jew Shultz."

Syria

Syrian media commentators regularly excoriate the United States over Washington's support for Israel and for a Middle East peace process which Damascus considers antithetical to its interests in the region. Commentaries typically claim that U.S. backing of Israel encourages Tel Aviv to commit aggression against the Arabs and that only Damascus has been able to defend Arab interests against Washington. Commentators shrilly condemned the airstrike against Libya, a regional ally of Damascus. In the weeks following the raid, as investigations into recent terrorist attacks raised questions about Syrian complicity and as Damascus grew increasingly nervous about possible U.S. or Israeli retaliation for the incidents, commentators warned that the United States was planning to join with Israel in further hostile actions against the Arab world. For example, a 23 April editorial in the ruling party's daily Al-Ba'th stated that Washington and Tel Aviv had agreed to "carry out a series of aggressions against the Arab nation" and that they would use "terrorism" as a pretext for striking at any state that opposes their will.

Iraq

Iraqi media monitored in recent months have consistently avoided commentary, either favorable or unfavorable, on the United States. The 15 April U.S. attack on Libya, an ally of Iraq's enemy Iran, provoked no hostile comment regarding the United States, although the Baghdad radio "Voice of the Masses" did replay Foreign Minister Tariq 'Aziz's mild condemnation of the raid. This low-key Iraqi treatment of Washington is

consistent with the gradual moderation of Baghdad's media line toward the United States which began several years before diplomatic relations were resumed in November 1984. One issue that did prompt limited criticism of the United States by Baghdad media, in April of that year, was Washington's charge that Iraq was using chemical weapons in its war with Iran.

West Bank

West Bank Palestinian commentators are generally critical of the United States over American support for Israel and what they perceive as Washington's unwillingness to address the Palestinian problem. An editorial in the 14 March 1986 issue of the daily Al-Fajr--the most influential of West Bank Palestinian papers--typified such criticism, condemning what it viewed as Washington's "intransigent position" which "rejects recognition of the PLO and ignores all the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people." Commentary since mid-April has added to these themes condemnation of the raid on Libya. A 9 May Al-Fajr editorial linked the raid with the Palestinian issue, asserting that the attack reflected an American policy which treated those engaged in "national liberation movements" as "terrorists."