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Libyan Terrorist Activity: A Status Report

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Interagency Intelligence Assessment

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April 1987

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**LIBYAN TERRORIST ACTIVITY:
A STATUS REPORT**

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Information available as of 22 March 1987 was
used in the preparation of this Assessment.

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SCOPE NOTE

This Interagency Intelligence Assessment provides an overview of Libyan terrorist activities between September 1986 and late March 1987, with emphasis on the last two months. The paper focuses on the primary targets for Libyan terrorism, Qadhafi's motivations, and the current capabilities of Libyan terrorist networks. The assessment also addresses, but not in depth, Libya's relationship with Syria and Iran on terrorism issues. It principally is intended to provide a concise overview of current Libyan activities.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

Libyan terrorist activity—primarily planning and positioning of assets—has resumed in recent months, traceable in the short term to real or perceived pressures from the Libyan exile opposition, supported by allegations in the international media of US plots against Qadhafi and by the US and French support for the Habre regime in Chad. Although intelligence on Libyan terrorism is traditionally fragmentary, some reports of recent Libyan operational activities—probably terrorist related—have been confirmed [REDACTED]

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In the short term, we believe the Libyan threat can be encapsulated as follows:

- Increased discontent at home, coupled with increasing rumors that exiles are plotting to overthrow him, have induced Qadhafi to focus terrorist activity on the Libyan opposition abroad.
- Nevertheless, Libyan intelligence officers have been preparing plans against French targets worldwide, and, to a lesser extent, US targets.
- Qadhafi is likely to activate his anti-French plans in response to his defeat in Chad.
- Although Qadhafi's desire to avenge the US 15 April 1986 airstrike on Libya could persuade him to support attacks on US and British interests, even in the absence of increased Western pressure, he is more likely to lash out if pressured.
- In Latin America and Africa, Qadhafi is continuing efforts to enlist radical and leftist groups to attack US and French interests.
- Libya is most likely to try to draw on the resources and talents of client groups to conduct anti-Western—especially anti-US—terrorist operations abroad.
- Qadhafi's eagerness to pursue sustained terrorist action far exceeds his capabilities to do so. Libyan terrorist operatives are limited in number and relatively unprofessional. There is, however, a small cadre of competent operatives who can draw on a number of Libyan assets abroad to support their operations.

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While the airstrike last year has made Qadhafi analyze his tactics more carefully, we believe he remains committed to the use of terrorism as an instrument of policy and is unlikely to abandon it. Lacking the military ability to confront enemies such as the United States and France openly, Qadhafi will continue to justify terrorism as an alternate form of warfare.

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