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Talking Points for the DDI
27 January 1986

The Libyan Internal Situation

[REDACTED] Qadhafi-- whose public standing reached a low point in Libya last year--has received a mixed reaction from the Libyan populace to his confrontation with the US. In our view it is unlikely that he has significantly improved his internal position as a result of the crisis.

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-- Qadhafi's use of carefully staged rallies in Libya suggests that he has been unable to expand his domestic support beyond a hardcore of young radicals. Press reports indicate that some Libyan audiences have not responded enthusiastically to Qadhafi's exhortations, and

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--prior to the exercises--few Libyans believed that the US was prepared to attack Libya, despite Qadhafi's warnings.

-- [REDACTED] many middle class Libyans--most of whom are already inclined against Qadhafi--feared that US economic sanctions would lead to the collapse of the Libyan economy within two years, and tended to blame Qadhafi for the crisis.

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-- [REDACTED] many Libyans may even be disappointed that the US has not carried out military retaliation against Qadhafi, as they believe such a strike would hasten Qadhafi's downfall.

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-- In addition, Qadhafi's actions in response to the crisis --such as tightening restrictions on travel abroad by Libyans, increased militarization of schools and society in general, and the constant military alert--tend to aggravate the very grievances that have fueled opposition to his regime.

-- According to a press report today Qadhafi has sent a message via Malta to Italian Prime Minister Craxi, offering to call on all Arabs to halt attacks in West European countries. In return Qadhafi has asked for a guarantee that the US will not attack Libya. If true, this suggests that the US naval maneuvers--initiated after Qadhafi believed the crisis was winding down--have undermined Qadhafi's self-confidence.

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Qadhafi's willingness to accept stiff Algerian preconditions--such as discussing a Libyan withdrawal from Chad, including the Aozou strip--in order to meet with President Bendjedid may be another indication that he is feeling US pressure and consequently wishes to reduce frictions with Algiers at almost any cost. [REDACTED]

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-- We believe the regime probably will maintain its solidarity in the face of immediate US actions, but that infighting will resurface over time. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the infighting continues to generate tribal problems in the interior of Libya.

[REDACTED]

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Despite Qadhafi's apparent inability to improve his domestic standing, he probably is not in immediate danger of being ousted.

-- Potential coup plotters--especially internal dissidents and exiles--probably will lay low until the crisis dies down in order to avoid being branded US puppets. They also may wait for internal divisions within the regime to reemerge before undertaking antiregime activities.

-- Nationalist sentiment in Libya is volatile, and could change drastically in the event of a military clash with the US. A successful US military action that causes few casualties might tarnish Qadhafi's reputation for invincibility and encourage activity towards his eventual removal. On the other hand, an unsuccessful US strike, or one that caused substantial civilian casualties, probably would strengthen both his own position and his efforts to promote widespread anti-US sentiment in Libya. [REDACTED]

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