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The Director of Central Intelligence  
Washington, D.C. 20505

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17 January 1986

National Intelligence Council

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Graham E. Fuller  
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: The Radical Challenge to US Interests  
in the Middle East

1. Three states stand basically opposed to US interests in the Middle East: Iran, Syria and Libya. All three states have widely diverging interests, personalities and style, but they share a number of critical points in common.

- Opposition to nearly all aspects of US policy in the region.
- A desire to weaken or destroy moderate Arab leadership.
- Active opposition to the US peace process
- Strong hostility to Israel and a willingness to do something about it.
- The use of terror to attain political goals.

2. The states differ radically in some respects:

- Iran loathes the Soviet Union, is anti-Communist, and seeks the spread of orthodox Islam regimes throughout the Moslem world.
- Syria is secular, Socialist--but barely, is basically pragmatic in its strategy for extension of power and avoids gratuitous confrontation with the United States.
- Libya has a quixotic vision of a radical world, possesses a visceral anti-Americanism and a mercurial approach to all its foreign relations.



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3. The leaders basically have contempt for each other, but recognize the value of the other in attaining the goals listed above. They consult periodically on strategic issues, develop some generalized common approaches, and provide some diplomatic support to each other in time of need. They provide a limited degree of military support to each other. Each recognizes that, as a group, they help maintain the strength of radicalism against the forces of moderation in the region.

4. The activities of these states are not directed by the USSR, but their policies largely serve Soviet interests by damaging both Western interests and moderate forces. The Soviets provide major military support to two of the three.

5. Syria is by far the most effective of the three. While its goals are more limited than the other two, its leadership is tactically brilliant and generally successful--qualities which hardly describe Iran or Libya.

6. Iran's attentions are largely consumed by the Gulf war and Shia politics in the Gulf--despite broader interests in propagating Shia fundamentalism in the world.

7. Libya, however, is probably the greatest overall threat to the US, the West, and moderate states in the region. Qadhafi has ambitions which range from Chile to the Caribbean, to South Africa, across the Middle East to East Asia, Indonesia, and the Southwest Pacific. No other state outside the Soviet Bloc has a geographic range of subversive activity to match Libya.

- Libya also has more money than the other two radical states with which to promote its ambitions. Small sums often buy a great deal in small, backward countries.

- Libya's threat to its immediate neighbors of Chad, Sudan, Egypt, and Tunisia is very real, and Libya has significant military forces to bring to bear.

- The good news is that a great deal of these activities are feckless and come to nothing. If even one-tenth of the plots were to succeed, Libya would be a far greater threat.

8. As the West seeks to contain these forces of radicalism, Libya presents itself as a unique target:

- Libya is almost exclusively the product of one individual; with his demise, Libya's policies could change significantly.

- Libya is readily accessible to outside intervention, just off the Mediterranean and its cities near the sea.

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- Libya has a very small--3 million--population.
- Qadhafi has alienated virtually every element of Libyan society by now -- a fact which is not true for the leadership of Syria or Iran. Qadhafi is hated and feared by virtually every single other state in the region; he has few allies with the exception of Syria and Iran--on occasion.
- The Soviets are less committed to Libya than to the other states; conversely, the Soviets' commitment to Syria is deep and Iran is a sensitive region since it lies on the Soviet border.
- Libya's politics are not the product of deep and complex social and political forces. They represent one man's vision. Syria's interests are complex and deeply involved in the entire Palestinian and Arab-Israeli issue; while Iran speaks for millions of Shia Moslems around the world.

9. Libya, therefore, presents a unique target. The chances are that were Qadhafi to disappear, the vast number of Libyan plots hatched daily would greatly diminish. The major destabilizing force in the whole Middle East, representing hostility to international norms of behavior would ease the atmosphere of turmoil--somewhat.

10. The collapse of Qadhafi would have a chilling effect on both Syria and Iran. It would take away considerable momentum from the force of radicalism in the Middle East and beyond. It reduces the number of available havens for terrorist and subversive action.

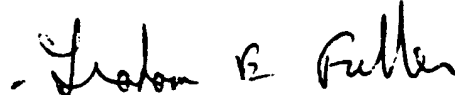
11. Terrorism in the Middle East nonetheless represents many different strands:

- Some is conducted by relative moderates who seek concrete limited goals and a tactical bargaining position--and are willing ultimately to negotiate.
- Some is conducted by thugs for hire by nearly anyone.
- Some is conducted by dedicated opponents of any political settlement.
- Some seek millenarian world revolution.

12. The Palestinian issue remains the single bleeding sore of the region. Unless legitimate Palestinian grievances are partially alleviated, nearly all regional players will throw up their hands and point to this as the root cause for terror and for inaction on their part.

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-- A partial alleviation of the Palestinian problem will not bring terrorism to an end. But it will eliminate a partial cause -- and even more, the major rationale. It will be slightly easier for the West and regional moderates to cope with terrorism if this single long-term package of reasonably legitimate grievances and needs are met. The war against terror must not allow us to lose sight of the key political issue of the region as well.

  
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