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Where Khadafy is still a hero

By A.M. Babu

WITH THE ever-increasing possibility that the United States and some of its Western allies might undertake military action in Libya to overthrow the regime of Col. Moammar Khadafy, it is crucial for Americans to take stock of possible consequences.

For the simple truth is that Khadafy is not perceived in the Middle East and Africa as he is portrayed in the United States. Massive propaganda efforts to discredit him well could backfire in a region already beset by political, economic, and social turmoil.

In addition, to ignore the view of Khadafy from Khadafy's own hemisphere is to ignore some of the more painful lessons in the history of U.S. foreign policy during the last three decades. The habit of American Presidents to pinpoint special villains in the Third World has had the regularity of a law of nature.

TRUMAN PICKED North Korea's Kim Il Sung as his arch-villain; Eisenhower chose Nasser of Egypt; Kennedy's nemesis was Fidel Castro; Johnson's was Ho Chi Minh; Nixon settled on Allende of Chile, and Carter on Khomeini. Now Ronald Reagan has his Khadafy.

All of these villains in one way or another indeed have challenged U.S. policies in their regions. But none of them seriously posed a security threat to the United States. Nevertheless, they have been presented consistently to the American public as though their power was deeply dangerous to U.S. survival and to world peace—and that their removal was essential for the good of humankind.

The great paradox, however, is that invariably these villains also happened to be extremely popular in their own countries, and in their respective regions as well. In fact, it now has become axiomatic that if a leader is fanatically vilified by the United States, he must be good for his people.

Conversely, those political figures who are favored by the United States more often than not tend to be unpopular among their own people. Anwar Sadat is the latest case in point.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this paradox is that U.S. policymakers either are hopelessly out of touch with reality or their policies are in fundamental contradiction with the aspirations of Third World people.

In recent months particularly, Moammar Khadafy has been characterized by the U.S. government and the American press as the most dangerous man on earth, the primary cause of all its evils: hijacking, kidnaping, revolution.

Indeed, reports recently surfaced in the American media that security was increased around President Reagan, Vice President George Bush, and two top Cabinet members after U.S. intelligence officials learned of possible assassination plots by Khadafy.

Last Aug. 19, two Libyan aircraft were shot down over the Gulf of Sidra by fighters of the American 6th Fleet. In the wake of that incident, editors from *Der Spiegel*, the West German magazine, asked Khadafy if the West's suspicion of him as the most dangerous man in the world were justified.

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Khadafy replied, "It depends upon what you mean by dangerous. I can tell you why America calls me the most dangerous man. It is part of the political and psychological preparations for the conquest of Libya. America intends to attack Libya and bring it under its domination again."

Thus, any tyrant in Africa or the Middle East today who wants to remain in power despite the popular will need only invoke the threat of Khadafy to qualify for U.S. military supplies. Much too often, these arms are used for suppressing their own people. Sudan has recently locked away more than 10,000 of its citizens. And the new leadership in Egypt is credited with rounding up 30,000 government critics.

THE FACT IS that Khadafy's real threat does not spring from his military might but from his genuine popularity among the inhabitants of neighboring countries. His progressive social and economic policies — and his general support for the oppressed — have enormous appeal with ordinary people, especially when they compare the Libyan colonel with their own leaders who so frequently are exploitative at home and subservient to the West.

To a large extent, the Moslem uprising in the Middle East and Africa is a repudiation of Western economic and cultural domination, a repudiation which also underlies Khadafy's political stance. He has not engineered it, but he does symbolize it, and this is the essence of his popularity.

Just before the Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in Nairobi in June, the United States mobilized all of its support among African heads of state to oppose Khadafy's election to the presidency of that organization next year. But to no avail: Khadafy will be the OAU president for 1982-3, after all, and host its summit in Tripoli.

At Nairobi, both France and the United States attempted to make a major issue of the invasion of Chad by Libya's army — again without success. In fact, the OAU acknowledged that Libya's army has helped reestablish peace in Chad after 20 years of a French-manipulated civil war which was terribly costly in lives and property.

French President Francois Mitterrand's assertion Oct. 23 at Cancun to the effect that Khadafy is about to overthrow President Goukouni Oueddei of Chad suggests a continuing Western strategy to embarrass and isolate Khadafy in preparation for his forcible ouster.

IT IS AN open secret that the United States is readying its Rapid Deployment Force for potential use in such a move in conjunction with Egypt and Sudan. As early as July of this year the U.S. press was discussing a CIA project to set up a "large-scale operation" for toppling Khadafy.

The Sadat assassination and the shaky condition of Sudanese president Gaafar Nimeiri have provided an ideal pretext for action.

But unlike the assassination of Sadat, any attempt on Khadafy's life would be bound to set off civil strife, not only in Libya but in Egypt, Sudan, and probably throughout most of the region.

It is well to remember the consequences of Western aggression on Egypt in 1956, when the Conservative Anthony Eden of England and socialist Guy Mollet of France attempted to oust Nasser over the Suez issue.

Instead, both Eden and Mollet were thrown out of power in their own countries, and Nasser emerged as the leading figure in the Middle East and Africa for more than a decade.