

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C19

THE WASHINGTON POST
9 March 1982

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Israeli Agents Put Qaddafi On the Couch

There is a tendency in Washington to refer to Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi as a crazy man. Armchair psychologists justify the glib label by pointing to his fanatic extremism, his failure to put realistic limits on boastful pronouncements and his periodic fits of deep depression, when he retreats to the desert and broods in a tent.

But beyond the egomania that afflicts most political leaders, is Qaddafi mentally aberrant? Is he truly deranged?

Israeli intelligence is a highly respected group of professionals with a particularly keen interest in the Libyan strongman. Qaddafi's oil billions, combined with his implacable hostility toward Israel, make him in many ways the beleaguered nation's most dangerous enemy. It is vital for the Israelis to know whether they are dealing with a madman.

After years of research, picking the brains of medical experts to assess the information gathered by their agents, Israeli intelligence officials have compiled a psychological profile of Qaddafi. My associate Indy Badhwar has seen a copy.

The Israelis' conclusion is that Qaddafi is not crazy. Representing him as mentally ill "is of no help to an understanding of him and does not fit the facts," the secret profile concludes.

Among the juicier suggestions in the various intelligence reports analyzed by the Israelis was that Qaddafi's behavioral quirks were the result of brain damage from venereal disease. But the profile says this possibility cannot be verified. "Apart from mental problems that could be associated with syphilis, there is no evidence that Qaddafi suffers from symptoms matching the disease."

There have been reports that Qaddafi suffers from schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteria and serious psychoneurotic disturbances. But the profile concludes: "Available evidence is insufficient to confirm or deny definitely whether he has a mental illness."

The profile says, "There is much information about his strangeness, lack of stability and emotional disturbances... [and he] does apparently suffer from a psychological disturbance that can be characterized as a character disturbance."

But the analysis points out that Qaddafi "has been functioning as the leader of Libya for 12 years, and it is difficult to believe that a man suffering from maniacal depressive psychoses would be capable of withstanding the pressures that he has been under for such a long time and

with such stability, without our being witness to repeated outbreaks of illness."

Qaddafi's mercurial temper and bouts of the blues may be partially explained by the man's catalog of painful physical ailments. He had tuberculosis as a child, underwent an appendectomy in 1970 and reportedly suffers from a stomach ulcer, gallstones and kidney colic, enough to make anyone moody and irritable.

It is also quite possible that Qaddafi's "strangeness"—to Western eyes at least—is simply the result of his personal background. A shepherd boy who was 16 before he completed the sixth grade, he had a dream of Islamic revolution and pursued it with single-minded zeal.

By the time Qaddafi was 16 his charisma and revolutionary fervor had made him a leader. Copying the successful methods of Egypt's pan-Arab revolutionary leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Qaddafi sought power through the military. He persuaded schoolmates to enroll with him in a military officers' school, and they managed to win over successive classes of cadets to their cause.

In 1969 the "Free Officers Movement" overthrew King Idris by an Arabian Nights ruse. They invited the king's police to a party and, at the peak of the festivities, took them prisoner. At 27, Muammar Qaddafi, the Bedouin shepherd, became ruler of Libya, eager to make his youthful dreams of glory come true.