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## GENESIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF US-LIBYAN CONFLICT

### Introduction

The US military action in Libya in mid-April 1986 added a new dimension to the already complex and confusing political situation in the conflict-ridden Middle East region. The involvement of external powers, including the superpowers, in the regional conflicts in the Middle East is not a new phenomenon, but the recent US attack on Libya is a new dimension in the sense that it was for the first time a superpower directly attacked a militarily weak Non-aligned Arab country far away from its mainland and apparently peripheral to its national interests. Over the years US had made a long list of accusations against Libya particularly its leader Colonel Gaddafi. These include, the Libyan 'involvements' with international terrorism, Gaddafi's support to national liberation/leftist-extremist movements all over the world, political and military interference into the internal affairs of Arab and African states, a claim of 200 miles over the Gulf of Sidra as territorial water, sending of 'hit squads' to assassinate President Reagan and other US officials and so on, while Libya, on its part, denied almost all the US charges. However, the question that may arise is whether those US alleged accusations against Libya are sufficient enough for military action? Secondly, why after all the United States who always apparently had a peace



keeping mission and tried to play an honest brokerage role to ease the situation in the Middle East suddenly went for direct military action in Libya? Thirdly, were there other ways and means than to militarily deal with Libya? Or in other words, did the US explore all other avenues, including the good offices of the UN, before taking military action? Fourthly, what may be the possible outcome of US raid? Will it end the terrorist activities? Will it be able to bring any change in Libya either in its domestic policy or in international posture? Finally, how it may affect United States' relations either with the Soviet Union, Western alliance or with the Arab world? The present article will attempt to answer some of these questions.

### Genesis of US-Libyan Relations

Although early in this century US had a military clash with Libya, the relations with this North African state and the US was cordial until Colonel Gaddafi's coming to power in September 1969. Libya became independent in 1951 under the auspices of the UN and the new state developed close links with the West, particularly with Britain and the USA. In 1953 Libya concluded a 20 years treaty with Britain which permitted the latter to use the Libyan bases and in return Libya got £ 1 million annually for her economic development. In 1954 similar agreement was signed with the USA which permitted the US to use a number of Libyan airbases and in return Libya was granted economic aid amounting of \$ 40 million over 20 years and later on the amount was substantially increased. According to the agreement USA maintained its largest air base, outside USA, near Tripoli.<sup>1</sup> Economic and trade agreements were also signed with France and Italy. Throughout 50s Libya was one of the poorest countries in the

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1. *The Middle East and North Africa 1986*, Thirty-Second Edition (Europa publication) P. 576



Arab world with per capita annual income of only \$ 50 and mainly survived by assistance received from the UK and the USA.

As Libyan oil revenues increased her dependence on Britain and USA decreased and already in mid-1960s there were talks about the future of American and British bases in Libya. The Arab-Israeli war in 1967 and US support to Israel seriously affected the US-Libyan relations. There were anti-American and anti-Israeli demonstrations all over Libya and the young Libyan army got utterly dissatisfied with the role played by the Monarch during the war.

As the Suez-Canal was closed after 1967 Arab-Israeli war Libya, because of her geographical location west to the Suez, increased her oil export dramatically and by 1968 she became the second largest oil producer in the Arab world.<sup>2</sup> The political situation was tense in Libya, anti-monarch attitude was everywhere and the young Libyan army seriously influenced by Nasser's pan-Arab nationalist policy could not support the pro-Western authoritarian regime of King Idris. In this situation in September 1969 when the King was out of the country the young army officers headed by Colonel Gaddafi came to power and formed a Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). The new regime pursued nationalist policy, denounced US-initiated Security Council Resolution 242 regarding Palestine, developed relations with the Arab Republic of Egypt and got immediate recognition from radical Arab states and the USSR.

In spite of radical stand and anti-Western posture adopted by the new regime it appeared that the US recognised the reality and tried to develop relations with Libya. Washington not only recognised the regime of Colonel Gaddafi but also reportedly saved him from several coup attempts within the RCC to overthrow him. Gaddafi's anti-communist stand and anti-Soviet words

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2. *Ibid*, P. 577



and deeds also encouraged the USA and many in Washington counted that he would be an useful asset for the USA in North Africa. Just after coming to power, in early 1970s Gaddafi announced that Islam was more progressive than communism,<sup>3</sup> a position obviously liked by the USA. In 1971 Gaddafi helped Sudanese government to reverse a communist coup, while in the Indo-Pakistan conflict he denounced the Soviet role as "conforming to Soviet imperialist design in the area".<sup>4</sup> Libya also criticised the Soviet-Iraqi treaty of 1972 and it was reported that Gaddafi approved the expulsion of Soviet experts from Egypt in 1972. At the same time Gaddafi took tougher stand in regard to the oil companies operating in Libya and by mid 1974 he controlled two-thirds of its production. In 1972 the Agreement with the USA was abrogated. Nonetheless, the US oil companies enjoyed relatively more facilities in Libya compared to those in Iraq, Algeria and Syria. In the early 1970s although Gaddafi was determined to eradicate Western bases and political influence from

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Libya, he was at the same time categorically opposed to granting the Soviets any concessions. From mid 1970s US relations with Libya however, sharply deteriorated over Gaddafi's political, economic and military support to national liberation, extremist or separatist movements all over the world. Libya was also accused of supporting international terrorism and intervening in internal

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3. *Ibid.*, 142

4. John K. Cooley, "The Libyan Menace" *Foreign Policy*, Number 42, Spring 1981, P. 75



affairs of Arab and African states. In protest of Libyan activities the US ambassador to Libya was called back in 1973 and since then until the closure of US embassy in 1979 the relations were maintained at Charged' Affairs level.<sup>5</sup>

Gaddafi's total denunciation of the Camp David process initiated by the US and formation of the "front for steadfastness and confrontation" further irritated Washington. In December 1979 the Libyan mobs attacked the American embassy in Tripoli in protest against US's giving shelter of deported Shah of Iran which led to the closure of US embassy in Tripoli.<sup>6</sup> The Libyan embassy in Washington was closed in May 1981 and all 27 Libyan diplomats were expelled on the ground of what the State Department described "Libyan provocations and misconduct including support for international terrorism".<sup>7</sup> Since then diplomatic relations have not been reestablished although Libya at times expressed her interests to mend the fences with the USA.

In late 70s the two countries clashed sharply over the sale and delivery of military hardwares. The US blocked the delivery of 8 Libyan-purchased Lockheed C-130 Hercules military transport planes since 1976 because Washington claimed that Libya used the older ones in support of Idi Amin of Uganda. Nonetheless, the Carter Administration appeared to be flexible toward Libya and instead of taking any harsh measures concentrated on using weapon sales as a lever to counter Gaddafi's support for radical regimes and terrorist organizations. In 1978 when Libya signalled its willingness to accede to the Hague Anti-hijacking Convention and to promise not to use US planes for military purpose the State and Commerce Departments

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5. *Ibid.*, P. 84

6. *The Middle East and North Africa 1986*, P. 580

7. Bernard Gwertzman, "US Expels Libyans and Shuts Mission, Charging Terrorism", *The New York Times*, 7 May 1981



decided to sell two Boeing 727 and three Boeing 747 planes. As it was characterised by former US ambassador to Libya, "we entertained hopes that these decisions would not only be commercially advantageous but would also open opportunities for a more constructive dialogue with Libya on issues which have divided us".<sup>8</sup> But those opportunities never come and the sales of Boeings, heavy duty trucks and other military equipments were cancelled. However, Libya tried to influence the US policy through some influential personalities in Washington including President Carter's brother and some ex-CIA officials.<sup>9</sup> But all these attempts apparently ended in failure.

#### US-Libyan Relations During Reagan Administration

President Reagan coming to power in winter 1981 readily picked up the anti-Gaddafi theme and the Libyan issue became a subject of heated debate in the Administration, particularly about the nature of Libyan politics and whether Libya was a genuine threat to American interests in North Africa and what should be the appropriate American response to Libyan actions. As it has been mentioned earlier, in May 1981 the Libyan embassy in Washington was closed and the Libyan diplomats were expelled.

The first US-Libyan direct clash occurred in August 1981 when two American F-14s downed two Libyan jets over the Gulf of Sidra. Libya claimed a 200 mile off-shore limit to the Gulf of Sidra as territorial water which was rejected by the USA. However, it seemed to have less repercussion. Although some Arab countries criticised the US move, Gaddafi himself appeared to be cool in reacting to the US action and no measures against USA, including oil embargo or expulsion of US citizens, were announced.

8. John K. Cooley, *op cit.*, P. 89

9. For details see, Aaron Segal, "The United States and Northern Africa", *Current History*, Vol. 80, No. 470, December 1981, P. 403



The US-Libyan relations deteriorated throughout 1981 and in early 1982 Reagan called all Americans to leave Libya, banned US citizens to travel to Libya and imposed restrictions on the US purchase of Libyan oil. Washington increased anti-Gaddafi propaganda at all levels and in 1982 was instrumental in dividing the OAU members who were supposed to hold a summit in Tripoli. The US was also concerned about the alleged Libyan finance of nuclear technology in Pakistan and procurement of sophisticated arms from the Soviet Union. Libyan involvement in Chad, Tunisia, Western Sahara and Uganda and tense relations with Sudan and Egypt were also looked upon by Washington as a permanent destabilizing factor in the area and the Reagan Administration substantially increased military help to the neighbouring countries of Libya. In early 1982 a security agreement was signed with Morocco which permitted the US to use strategic air command bases. Discussions were also held with Tunisia for the establishment of an aerial gunnery range for the use of the US

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Sixth Fleet.<sup>10</sup> In response, Gaddafi formed a "defence alliance" with Yemen PDR and Ethiopia to eradicate US influence in the region. The US-Libyan relations further deteriorated in mid 1983 when Gaddafi dispatched soldiers to Chad to seize control over the northern part of that country. Relations were also tense with Sudan and Egypt and it was alleged that Gaddafi was planning to stage a coup in Sudan to overthrow President Nimeiri. At the request of Sudan and Egypt Washington deployed 4 AWACS

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10. William H. Lewis, "North Africa : An Embattled Strategy". *Global Affairs*, Winter 1986, P. 61



planes in Egypt, dispatched some F-15 fighters to Sudan and the Sixth Fleet conducted its manouvres off the Libyan coast,<sup>11</sup> and it appeared that the USA was in the verge of a war with Libya. However, USA avoided the confrontation by withdrawing from the conflict and declaring that protection of Chad, a former French colony, was the responsibility of France.

Whatever may be the levels of relationship, it was, perhaps not possible for Reagan Administration to take any adventurous step toward Libya, including military action, in early 1980s because of some reasons; (a) In spite of all irritants in bilateral relations, in early 1980s Libya provided about 12 percent of US oil imports and was the third largest oil supplier to US after Saudi Arabia and Nigeria. In 1980 US purchase of oil from Libya amounted to about \$ 9 billion. (b) Transportation of oil from Libya was easier and secure as it had not to cross the volatile straits of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb and Suez-Canal. Moreover, Libyan oil is better in quality than oil from other countries and it is ideal for making gasoline. (c) More than 50 US oil companies were operating in Libya and more than 2000 Americans were working there.<sup>12</sup> (d) The US was afraid that any military action would seriously affect the interests of West European countries because of their high dependence on Libyan oil. (14 percent of Libya's oil production went to West Germany and 13 percent to Italy). Finally, (e) As the Arab countries were critical of US support of Israeli invasion in Lebanon in June 1982, Reagan Administration apparently did not want to further escalate its relations with the Arab world by taking any harsh measure against Libya.

There were, in fact, no major developments in US-Libyan relations in 1984 but as the activities of territoist groups increased in the second half of 1985, the US-Libyan relations suffered a

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11. *Ibid*

12. John K. Cooley *op cit.*, P. 90



serious set back with President Reagan's accusation of Libyan involvements with the terrorist groups. The US-Libyan relations reached its lowest in early 1986 when President Reagan accused Libya of attacking Rome and Vienna airports on December 27, 1985 which left 20 dead, 5 of them Americans. US claimed that they had 'irrefutable evidence' of Libyan connection in Rome and Vienna attacks, although West European experts found that the attackers were the members of Abu Nidal group and were mainly trained in Syrian occupied Bekka Valley of Lebanon and none of the extremists recognised any Libyan connection.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Economic Sanctions on Libya*

President Reagan in a nationally televised news conference in early January 1986 announced an economic embargo on Libya which included a total ban on direct import and export trade with Libya, except for humanitarian purposes, prohibition of commercial contacts and other transactions with Libya, including travel

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related activities, freeze of Libyan assets in the USA and warning to US citizens working in Libya to leave that country by February 1, 1986 or face trial.<sup>14</sup> President Reagan also asked his European allies to join the US and to sever all relations with Libya. He also threatened that "further steps" would be taken if economic sanctions proved to be ineffective. However, not a single NATO government followed Reagan's appeal to sever trade relations with

13. *Time*, 20 January 1986, PP. 18-19

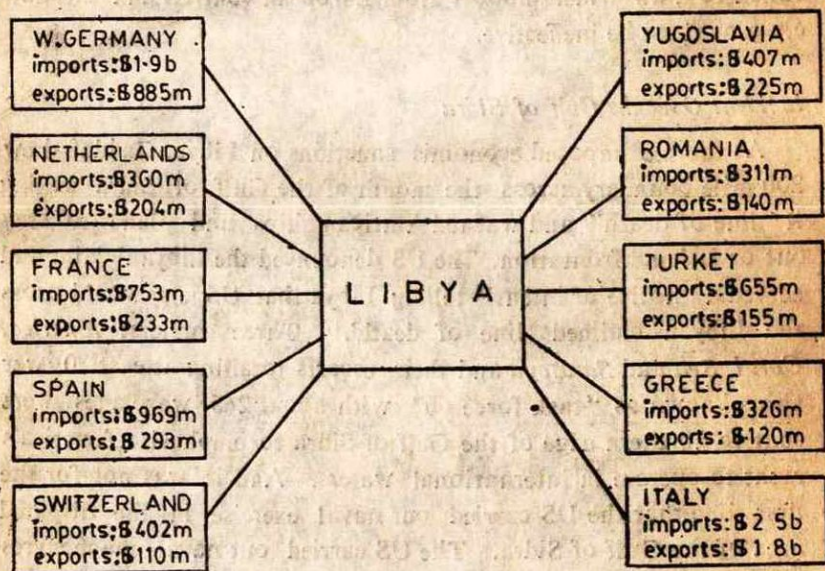
14. *International Herald Tribune*, 9 January 1986, P. 5



Tripoli rather they expressed doubts that economic sanctions could be an effective political weapon. In fact, West Europe has more close economic linkage with Libya than the United States. In 1984 EEC's two way trade with Libya amounted to \$ 10.2 billion, while US's trade with Libya fell down to \$ 230 million.<sup>15</sup> Western Europe gets more than \$ 4 billion every year from Libya by exporting their goods. The following Chart shows the Libyan trade with European countries.

### LIBYAN TRADE WITH EUROPE

(1984 figures according to the International Monetary Fund)



Moreover, 15,000 Italians and a number of Europeans from other countries are working in Libya. West Europe is also heavily dependent on Libyan oil. In 1985 Libya exported

15. *The Guardian Weekly*, 5 January 1986, P. 15



914,000 barrels of oil per day to European countries.<sup>16</sup> The Europeans because of their own interests could not join the US in imposing economic sanctions on Libya. The US policy was also strongly criticised by Arab and Islamic countries. The Organization of the Islamic Conference whose Foreign Ministers were in a meeting in Morocco condemned the US sanctions against Libya, while the Arab League expressed its readiness to make up the losses originating from the US imposition of economic sanctions. There was also a widespread speculation that the oil rich Arab countries would withdraw their money from the US banks in case of sanctions on Libya. The US economic sanctions appeared to have failed to draw wider support from European countries and ultimately proved to be ineffective.

#### *Incident Over the Gulf of Sidra*

As the US imposed economic sanctions on Libya, Gaddafi drew 200 mile boundary across the mouth of the Gulf of Sidra calling it "line of death" and warned American ships and planes to stay out or risk confrontation. The US denounced the Libyan claim and served a "notice of intent" telling Libya that US jets would cross the Libyan claimed 'line of death'.<sup>17</sup> Three carriers; *America*, *Coral Sea* and *Saratoga* and their escorts totalling at east 30 war ships known as "task force 60" with about 265 warplanes were sent to northern edge of the Gulf of Sidra to emphasise America's right to operate in international waters. And it was not for the first time that the US carried out naval exercise in the disputed area of the Gulf of Sidra. The US carried out naval manoeuvres

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16. Libya exports 44,000 barrels of oil per-day to UK, 3,000 b/d to Portugal 50,000 b/d to Netherlands, 2,000 b/d to Belgium, 1,000 b/d to Sweden, 195,000 b/d to West Germany, 68,000 b/d to Switzerland, 290,000 b/d to Italy, 60,000 b/d to Greece, 50,000 b/d to Turkey, 21,000 b/d to Austria and 1,000 b/d to Japan. For details, see, *Newsweek*, 5 May 1986, P. 23
  17. *Khaleej Times*, 24 March 1986, P. 22



near the Libyan coast 16 times since 1981 and 4 times only in 1986.<sup>18</sup> The situation was tense over the Gulf of Sidra in March 1986 when the US ships and planes were conducting a provocative exercise. It was claimed that at least 6 Libyan missiles attacked the US positions and in retaliation 4 Libyan boats were sunk and a fifth one was damaged, while Libya claimed of shooting down 3 US aircrafts. The incident over the Gulf of Sidra was strongly criticised all over the world. The Italian Prime Minister told in the Parliament that it was unacceptable that a dispute should be dealt with militarily.<sup>19</sup> Although the British government supported the US move the opposition Labour Party criticised the military confrontation and described the US move as 'unwise'. Tass described the US action as an "act of undisguised armed aggression against Libya"<sup>20</sup> The Arab countries also criticised the US act, albeit with various degrees of intensity.

In carrying out naval and air exercises in the Libyan claimed territorial water in the Gulf of Sidra, Washington put the argument that it did it to ensure the freedom of international navigation. But it seems to be not too much convincing, moreover, questions may arise, as to whether the US act in the Gulf of Sidra will be able to ensure the freedom of international navigation. Since it was a disputed issue, it could be brought to the Security Council or could be solved through negotiations or by mediation of a third party. And it is not only Libya; there are other countries who also claim 200 miles off-shore as territorial water. For example, Canada claims the Hudson Bay as its territorial water. Moreover, the Libyan claim on the Gulf of Sidra is based on the internationally accepted

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18. *Khaleej Times*, 29 March 1986, P. 5

19. *Khaleej Times*, 1 March 1986, P. 5

20. *Khaleej Times*, 26 March 1986, P. 1



principle known as, 'historical bay'.<sup>21</sup> Cyril Townsend, a Conservative Member of the British Parliament, for example, holds the view, "Libya has a case in international law to impose such a boundary, as do many other countries."<sup>22</sup>

### *US Attack on Libya*

The US-Libyan relations further deteriorated after the incident over the Gulf of Sidra in March 1985. Two major events in early April—a bomb blast in a TWA flight which killed four Americans and a bomb attack at a West Berlin discotheque which killed one American soldier and a Turkish woman and wounded more than two hundred people—further complicated the situation. The US repeatedly claimed that it had "irrefutable evidence" of Libyan involvement with the Berlin incident, while Libya denied its connection. And on April 14, 1986, 18 F-III fighter bombers from bases in Britain and 15 A. 6 E Intruder and A-7 bombers from two US aircraft carriers *USS Coral Sea* and *USS America* north of the Libyan coast carried out attacks on Libyan position.<sup>23</sup> But *Sunday Times* of London alleged that 44 F-III fighter bombers were used in striking on Tripoli and Benghazi, while Pentagon admitted that 29 planes took part in the raid and US planes bombed at least seven places. The US raid on Libya killed about 60 people including Colonel Gaddafi's adopted daughter and more than 100 were injured.

The US was long planning for using military force against Libya. Although US imposed economic sanctions in January

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21. A bay of particularly large dimensions can be considered national territory following continued and uncontested use for more than a century by the coastal nation in a clear and effective manner. See, *Khaleej Times*, 26 March 1986, P. 28

22. *Khaleej Times*, 26 March 1986, P. 4

23. *The Guardian Weekly*, 20 April 1986, P. 1



and later on attacked Libyan missile position in March, the option for attacking Libya was always open. In fact, just after the attacks in Rome and Vienna airports US started drawing up the targets to be attacked in Libya. But the operation could not be carried out earlier because of the lack of sufficient information and for some technical problems. Moreover, it appeared that the Administration was divided

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on the issue. Secretary of State George Shultz was more in favour of a military action, while Casper Weinberger was in favour of other measures including economic sanction. Another consideration might be that US did not want to be involved directly, rather she was interested in involving some Arab countries hostile to Gaddafi to attack Libya. According to a report of *Al-Ahram* US repeatedly approached Egypt to take military action against Libya but Egypt refused to raise arms against any Arab country.<sup>24</sup>

The US attack on Libya was strongly criticised and condemned all over the world and only Canada, Israel and Britain supported the US action. The National Assembly of Kuwait denounced the US attack described it a flagrant aggression and urged all Arab nations to join ranks to defend themselves and their rights in all parts of the Arab world. Saudi Arabia regretted the US action and was of the opinion that "such American action will not bring peace to the Mediterranean."<sup>25</sup> PLO Chairman and North Yemeni President called for an Arab summit to discuss the crisis. A very strong

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24. *Al-Ahram* (editorial), 31 March 1986

25. *Khaleej Times*, 16 April 1986, P. 1



protest came from the Arab League Secretary General who condemned the US act as "murderous aggression", called it, "not only an act of terrorism but a mistake pregnant to the consequences" and expressed the concern that, "it is unacceptable that a great power should act in such a bellicose and impulsive fashion to endanger peace."<sup>26</sup> Strong protests also came from two of Libya's allies in the Middle East—Iran and Syria. Some of the leading Arab newspapers called to withdraw Arab assets from Washington, to stop investments in the UK and the USA and to recall Arab ambassadors from those countries. Some even proposed for imposing economic boycott or an oil embargo against the US and its allies. Moscow strongly criticised the US move, called on Washington to repair the damage of superpower relations and called for an international conference on Mediterranean peacemaking to be attended by adjacent states, Soviet Union and the USA. The European Parliament also condemned the US raid as a "flagrant violation of international law".<sup>27</sup> Anti-American demonstrations were all over the world including in the United States. A very strong protest came from the Non-aligned group whose Foreign Ministers were then meeting in New Delhi. It called the US act "totally unjustifiable" and denounced the US raid on Libya as, "drastically blatant and unprovoked aggression". A Non-aligned delegation headed by Indian Foreign Minister visited Tripoli to express the group's deep concern and profound indignation over the US attack on Libya.<sup>28</sup> While the five Non-aligned members of the Security Council submitted a draft condemning all terrorist activities as well as the American aggression against Libya which was promptly vetoed by the USA, UK and France.

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26. *Ibid.*

27. *International Herald Tribune*, 18 April 1986, P. 2

28. *Khaleej Times*, 21 April 1986, P. 1



President Reagan described the US attack on Libya as "self-defence" and claimed that the act was justified under Article 51 of the UN Charter which preserves "the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations".<sup>29</sup> But President Reagan's argument was not accepted by many international lawyers and politicians including Professor Oscar Schachter, former Chief Legal Counsel of the UN. While the leader of the British Labour Party argued that the US action in Libya could not be justified as an act of self-defence under international law, even if there was clear evidence of the Libyan government's involvement in the international terrorism."<sup>30</sup>

Another problem is that when the UN Charter says about "individual or collective self-defence" it generally refers to states but the US alleged Libyan involvement in the attack on Berlin disco club was not an attack on the US territory. Moreover, there was no indisputable evidence of Libyan government's involvement to the act. Even German officials believed that the evidence of Libyan involvement in the Berlin attack was rather indicative not conclusive and there was no proof that Gaddafi had planned and ordered the attack.<sup>31</sup> Washington claimed that its intelligence agency intercepted messages sent by Gaddafi to its Peoples Bureau in East Berlin which clearly indicated Libyan involvement to Berlin attack, while Tass described the messages as fakes and claimed that those were not sent by Libya but by CIA agents to make America's case against Libya stronger. Secondly, even if indisputable evidence of Libyan involvement in Berlin attack was available, it was not the US but West Germany could have exercised the right of self-defence. Thirdly, Article 51 of the UN

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29. *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, United Nations, New York, Article 51, P. 27

30. *The Economist*, 26 April 1986, P. 32

31. *Time*, 21 April 1986, P. 10



Charter also says that, "Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council".<sup>32</sup> So after the attack on Libya US would have to report to the Security Council immediately but, the US did not do it rather President Reagan announced, "we have done what we had to do. If necessary we shall do it again." Fourthly, although President Reagan claimed that he had to attack Libya because all other means including private diplomacy, public denunciation and economic sanctions failed, it again seems to be not convincing. The issue was not referred either to the Security Council or was not brought to the International Court of Justice and since the problem of terrorism is an international issue and not only US citizens but other nationals also often fall victims of its activities international cooperation could be sought to solve the issue. Finally, how to define terrorism or who are the terrorists?,—is a question of long dispute and controversy. The US is supporting the Afghan Mujahedeens on the ground that they are fighting for self-determination against Soviet occupation, while she is denouncing the same rights for the Palestinians and other nationalist movements. On the other hand, to the Soviets the Afghan Mujahedeens are terrorists although they are supporting nationalist/leftist movements elsewhere in the world.

The important question that looms large is what was the actual US objective in attacking Libya or what did the United States want to gain out of it? The declared US aim was to prevent "further killings of Americans" and "to end terrorism for ever." But it appeared that US failed to achieve those goals by attacking Libya, rather immediately after the raid a series of attacks were carried out on US citizens and installations throughout the world. Two Britons and an American were killed in Beirut and a group called Arab Commando Cells claimed that they carried out the operations in reprisal for the US attacks on

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32. *UN Charter*, op. cit. Article 51, P. 27



Libya.<sup>33</sup> US diplomats were shot dead in Sudan, Yemen and there was an explosion near a US airforce base in Japan. In the like manner, a number of attacks were carried out on US citizens and properties throughout Europe. And in fact, it is not possible to end terrorism by attacking a particular state because international terrorism has already developed its own origin which can even survive without the support of nation states. Moreover, there are a number of countries who are directly or indirectly linked with terrorist activities. As Zbigniew Brzezinski in an interview with *Washington Post* said, "International terrorism feeds upon itself. It has an independent existence, irrespective of support from a particular state. And more than one state, in

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addition to Libya, has been engaged in supporting it."<sup>34</sup> So the question arises whether the US military action only against Libya will be able to end terrorism when there are other countries who are also involved with terrorist activities. And according to many experts it is not Libya, rather Syria and Syrian occupied Bekka Valley of Lebanon that are the main centres for international terrorism. David Hirst, an expert on Middle East, was of the opinion that Reagan's official objective of checking international terrorism would not be achieved by such methods for the simple fact that "the main centre of international terrorism is not Libya at all ... .. The main, or the really significant centre of international terrorism is Lebanon".<sup>35</sup>

33. *Khaleej Times*, 22 April 1986, P. 14

34. Quoted in, *The Guardian Weekly*, 19 January 1986, P. 15

35. *The Guardian Weekly*, 20 April 1986, P. 1



Other pertinent questions that can be raised are:- Is Middle East the only source of terrorist groups ? Are the terrorist activities a new phenomenon or has it increased recently ? Is the US only victims of terrorist attacks ? According to statistics on terrorism compiled by the State Department, Middle East is not the leading source of terrorist attacks, the real hot spots are Latin America and Europe. There were 309 terrorist incidents involving Americans in Latin America from 1980 to 1985 and 458 in Europe, compared with only 84 in the Middle East. Secondly, the terrorist danger to the Americans has not increased significantly compared to early 1970s. 42 Americans died of terrorist attacks in 1972 compared to only 11 in 1984. Finally, non-Americans are more frequent victims of terrorist attacks than Americans. In 1985 international terrorism caused 2,223 casualties of which only 162 were Americans, i.e only about 7 percent of total victims<sup>36</sup>

Observers and analysts widely believe that the real objective of the US military attack on Libya was not to deal with terrorism but some what else. The Libyan Deputy Foreign Minister in an interview with Maltese radio gave three reasons why the US attacked Libya; to make Libya accept an agreement with Israel ; to accept American bases; and, to make Libya stop supporting Palestinians and other liberation movements.<sup>37</sup>

Although Washington denied that the US raid on Libya was planned with the hope that Gaddafi would be killed, there were sufficient evidences which indicated that the US had a plan to kill or topple Gaddafi and to replace him by a man more acceptable to Reagan Administration. One US official who was involved in the planning recognised that, "we hoped we would get him but nobody was sure where he would be at that time".<sup>38</sup>

36. For details see, *Khaleej Times*, 13 April 1986, P. 13

37. *Khaleej Times*, 22 April 1986, P. 14

38. *The Guardian Weekly*, 27 April 1986, P. 13



The statement drafted by National Security officials also described Gaddafi's death as "fortuitous". And it was admitted by Reagan Administration that one of the goals of the US attack was to encourage a coup against Gaddafi. As Secretary of State Shultz put it, "if a coup toppled Gaddafi, that's all to the good".<sup>39</sup> Even Gaddafi's residential compound and personal tent were not put off limits to attack rather it was described as "nerve centre of terrorist training" and was planned to strike with four 2,000 pound bombs which could damage everything in the vicinity. It was also widely speculated and propagated that Gaddafi was killed and there was a coup attempt in Libya, while the Western diplomats in Tripoli described the situation as, "what we saw was manoeuvring by different groups. It was not a coup as such".<sup>40</sup>

From the pure military point of view the US attack on Libya raised many questions about the capability and effectiveness of the US army. According to a report during the operation in the Gulf of Sidra US HARM missiles fired at the Soviet made SAM-5 radar station which knocked on only one of the seven surveillance radars at base. The Sixth Fleet devices failed to complete jamming the Libyan air defence radar, a system that is 80 percent American made.<sup>41</sup> According to *Khaleej Times*, 33 fighter bombers equipped with advanced infra-red night vision gear and laser guided "smart" bombs were used to attack Tripoli and Benghazi and 5 out of 18 air force F-111 did not drop their bombs and 2 of the 15 Navy A-6 bombers aborted their strikes. Furthermore, a dozen of bombs and missiles appeared to have missed its targets and hit firms and residential areas which caused heavy civilian casualties. In Benghazi the bombs also missed its targets to the airport and hit a row of civilian

39. *Khaleej Times*, 19 April 1986, P. 1

40. *The Economist*, 26 April 1986, P. 32

41. *Newsweek*, 14 April 1986, P. 7



houses next to the airport. Pentagon said that the reasons of failure were mainly because of mechanical and computer malfunctions and cloud cover over the targets. But military experts, including Garry Hart, a Colorado Senator, were of the opinion that the raid exposed the fragility of complex high-tech weapons and expressed doubts over the effectiveness of the US army.<sup>42</sup>

### Implications

There is no denying the fact that the US attack in Libya could, at least, relieve the tremendous psychological pressure and moral indignation in which the American people particularly President Reagan was suffering because of an over all US policy failure in the Middle East and frequent falling of US citizens to the prey of terrorist attacks allegedly instigated by Libya. Over the years the two countries were seriously involved in propaganda war strong psychological and emotional barriers were created and the personal antipathy between President Reagan and Colonel Gaddafi reached its climax. The Reagan Administration was, however, in a dilemma what to do with Libya particularly with its leader, on the other hand, the Americans were rather confused and frustrated about the power of their state and the capability of their President to tackle the situation particularly in the Middle East. And it appeared that in the case of Libya the interests of the Administration and the American people coincided which, later on, reflected in over-whelming support to President Reagan's military action. (About 70 percent of Americans supported the US attack on Libya).<sup>43</sup> Many American experts on Middle East referring to public opinion poll tend to argue that President Reagan's action

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42. For details see, *Khaleej Times*, 20 April 1986, P. 12 and *International Herald Tribune*, 21 April 1986, P. 5

43. *Newsweek*, 28 April 1986, P. 14



in Libya had popular support and it was carried out purely for internal consumption. But there are two aspects of the argument; firstly, it is true that initial domestic support to the US raid on Libya was encouraging but the question is, as the euphoria is over, the evaluation will be made and the consequences will be counted the support will be much downgraded, no doubt. Secondly, whether the US, the leader of the free world and a superpower with global responsibility can carry out military action far away from its border only for domestic consumption without considering its global implications? Although it is too early to evaluate the US raid in Libya, it can be argued that the act,

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*The US military action in Libya will, in no way, help to solve any existing problems in the Middle East, rather it may affect long term US interests and subsequently a perception of US as a less reliable partner, can be developed among its allies in the region.*

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in no way, will help to solve any existing problem rather it may affect US interests, erode its influence and subsequently a perception of US as a less reliable partner can be developed among its allies in the region.

The initial European response to US actions in Libya was negative. As it has been observed, Europe did not join the economic sanctions imposed by the USA, did not support the idea of military action and no European government, except Britain, allowed its airspace to be used by the US planes for attacking Libya. Ultimately under continuous pressure Europe came forward to take certain measures against Libya including an arms embargo, curtail of the size of Libyan diplomats and restrictions on the movements of diplomats and entry of Libyan nationals to the EEC countries.<sup>44</sup> Some economic measures were also adopted, includ-

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44. *Newsweek*, 5 May 1986, P. 19



ing the dropping of Libya from the list of North African states which benefit from a special high subsidy for EEC butter exports and restrictions on supply of beef and cereals to Libya from EEC countries.<sup>45</sup>

In the Tokyo Economic Summit of 7 industrialized nations in early May 1986 President Reagan tried to convince his allies for total diplomatic and economic isolation of Libya and suggested Europeans to buy oil from Mexico, America's heavily indebted neighbour, instead of Libya, which could serve the interests of Washington in both ways. But it appeared that Washington failed to sell the idea. Canada supported the move, West Germany and Italy opposed the economic sanctions against Libya, while Britain, whose bases were used for attacking Libya and accorded full support to the US, expressed doubts whether economic sanctions at all work.<sup>46</sup> However, such reactions from European allies did not apparently affect or damage alliance relationship. But if the US will go for long confrontation with Libya as President Reagan indicated in that case the Europeans who have much more economic stakes in Libya may not support the US. Rather Europe may initiate and activate its own Middle East policy independent of the USA.

Although the Soviet Union criticised the US action in Libya cancelled a meeting of Soviet Foreign Minister with the US Secretary of State, it is not apparent whether the Libyan issue will have any serious implication for the US-Soviet relationship. The indifferent posture and remarkable restraint shown by the Soviets to the initial US actions encouraged Washington to attack Tripoli and Benghazi. In fact the US bombing in Libya and its consequences best suited the Soviet long term strategy in the region. During the military raid French and Iranian embassies were damaged, the US planes missed targets and

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45. *Khaleej Times*, 24 April 1986, P. 11

46. *Newsweek*, 5 May 1986, P. 11



hit civilian areas, Gaddafi escaped from the attack and emerged stronger with more inclination to Moscow—all these would certainly satisfy Kremlin. Although at times we observe points of irritation in Libyan-Soviet relations and Kremlin utters dissatisfactions on Colonel Gaddafi's activities, still Moscow's relations with Libya seem to be politically very useful, strategically cheap and financially very much profitable. For the last 15 years Soviet Union had received more than 18 billion of US dollars in hard currency by selling arms to Libya.<sup>47</sup> After the US attack Libya repeatedly expressed that it would be closer to the Soviet Union, join the Warsaw Pact or be a Cuba in the Middle East and a number of initiatives have also been taken but response from Moscow and its East European allies is cool and they do not seem to be enthusiastic. Rather the Soviets are interested to sell sophisticated arms to Libya and to get cash dollars than to be closely involved with orthodox and unpredictable Gaddafi.

The interest and enthusiasm the Soviets showed about Libya in 1981 substantially diminished in September 1985 when Gaddafi visited Moscow. During the visit Gaddafi had three main objectives : (a) to finalise the Friendship Treaty, (b) to get

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more arms from Soviet Union and (c) to get Soviet assistance in building a nuclear reactor. The Soviets agreed to help with nuclear reactor for power generation only. Moscow criticised the Libyan support to Iran, reported arms supply to the Gulf war and the request for military assistance was passed to a Commission and Kremlin was non-committal about the

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47. *The Guardian Weekly*, 21 April 1986, P. 11



question of Friendship Treaty with Libya, although they have similar treaties with Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Ethiopia.<sup>48</sup> Opening in the Gulf, to influence the future developments of the Iran-Iraq war in its favour, to be the main actor in Lebanon from behind the scene and to mend fences with old ally Egypt-these are areas more preferable to Soviet policy in the Middle East than to be stagnated with Libya.

The US attack on Libya will hardly have any implication for the Arab world. In spite of Colonel Gaddafi's repeated appeals no Arab country did genuinely come forward to help Libya. Even the Arab League failed to hold a Summit to discuss the issue. Libya insisted that the Summit should be held in Libya and discuss the US attack exclusively, while some Arab leaders were reluctant to go to Libya and considered the Iran-Iraq war "more dangerous to the Arab nation and has preceded the American aggression against Libya, so it should be discussed before the US attack on Libya".<sup>49</sup> And Washington before attacking Libya, an Arab country and a member of the Arab League, will read the fact that Arab world was too divided, engaged with feuds and bilateral disputes and could not be united to create any meaningful resistance to the US

The Arab reaction to the US attack on Libya, however, should be viewed in retrospect of Libya's relations with other Arab countries.<sup>50</sup> Libya is the only Arab country that made repeated attempts to be united or form confederation with a number of Arab countries and at the same time she had strained relations with almost all Arab countries from time to time. She was even engaged in border conflicts with neighbouring countries and have no diplomatic relations with immediate neighbours, like Egypt and

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48. *Arabia, The Islamic World Review*, December 1985, P. 37

49. *Khaleej Times*, 27 April 1986, P. 1

50. For details of Libya's relations with other Arab and African countries in early 70s, see, *Conflict Studies* No. 41, December 1973.



Tunisia. Although it is a harsh reality, the fact remains that Colonel Gaddafi is no less an irritant to many Arab countries than to the United States and if he is killed or replaced by someone else many Arab leaders will be no less satisfied than President Reagan himself.

Finally the question that may arise is what may be the implication of the US attack for Libya itself? Will it break the deadlock situation of US-Libyan relationship? Or will it bring any change in internal politics of Libya? So far as the US-Libyan relations are concerned, there seem to have no immediate possibility of its improvement unless there is a leadership change either in Tripoli or in Washington. Whatever may be the rhetoric Libya tried on a number of occasions to mend fences with Washington. In 1981 when diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed Gaddafi called on Washington for its re-establishment and expressed interests to visit the USA. Even after the imposition of economic sanctions on Libya in January 1986, Gaddafi invited President Reagan to visit Tripoli. In March, just a day after the Sidra incident Gaddafi asked for mediating help from Saudi Arabia and two Libyan envoys were sent there with message for US Vice-President Bush who was visiting the Kingdom, but it appeared that the US was not interested in negotiation with Libya, and the bid failed. Later on, Libya also approached some Arab countries and also Belgium for mediation to cease the hostilities with the USA, but there appeared to be no response from Washington.

Although it was widely speculated and expected by the US Administration that there would be a coup attempt and Gaddafi could be replaced, the US attack apparently seemed to have failed to provoke any mutinies among the Libyans against Colonel Gaddafi. Rather many experts, including Libyan exile leaders, are of the opinion that the US attack helped Gaddafi to consolidate his power and the possibility of a coup has been delayed. Lisa



Anderson, a Middle East expert, expressed the view that, "This action will put off a coup that might have taken place"<sup>51</sup>

There are about 10 opposition groups in Libya but most of them are not known to the Libyans and are operating from foreign countries, particularly from European capitals.<sup>52</sup> The most important group is the National Front for the Salvation of Libya which has its military wing in Libya as Salvation Corps and carried out a successful raid on Libyan army in 1984. Earlier the group trained its commandos mainly in Sudan and they had also a radio station there but as Gaddafi's relation with the new regime of Sudan has significantly been improved they are in trouble now. Secondly, under Gaddafi's leadership the Libyan

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*Although Colonel Gaddafi is a controversial figure and is disliked by many, both from within and outside the region, there is no denying the fact that under his leadership the Libyan people has got a new direction and he is still very popular among his own people.*

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people have nourished and developed a patriotic and nationalistic feelings, so any opposition that will work under foreign guidance or protection will have to lose supports in Libya. Thirdly, although Colonel Gaddafi is a controversial figure and is disliked by many, both from within and outside the region, there is no denying the fact that under his leadership the Libyan people has got a new direction and he is still very popular among his own people.

So with the present political system and practice it is very difficult to foresee any immediate change in Libya either in its leadership or in external posture. But again in the backdrop of

51. *International Herald Tribune*, 21 April 1986, P. 1

52. For details about Libyan opposition see, Lisa Anderson, "Qadhdhafi and His Opposition", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 2, Spring 1986. PP. 225-237.



unpredictable nature and volatile character of Arab politics nothing can be taken as granted.

### Conclusion

The US military attack on Libya has added a new dimension to the on going tendency of using force in international affairs by passing the United Nations. In fact since mid 1970s when the superpowers were trying to influence the issues and events of international politics in their favour, the options for using force have been increased. It also appeared that a tacit consensus prevailed between the superpowers as and when required. And when one used force elsewhere rightly or wrongly the other was either ambivalent, played a low key role or was totally indifferent to the issue. It was demonstrated in the case of Grenada and recently in Libya.

The US actions in Libya and consequences also proved that Europe, inspite of its on-going tendency for pursuing an independent policy, is still dependent and ultimately has no option than to support the USA. But at the same time in the case of Libya Europe seemed to be more divided than ever and although finally they accorded support to the USA, it widely varied in degree and intensity.

The US military action in Libya again reaffirmed that the Arab world is too divided and the leaders are too engaged in personal feuds, mutual disputes and bilateral and regional conflicts that they can not create any meaningful resistance to any external attack either individually or collectively.

The US raid in Libya seem to have failed to draw wider attention of international community and the reactions of the world public opinion were rather insufficient and ineffective. It was mainly because ; (a) The reaction from the Arab world itself was cool and many Arab leaders, being afraid of their own



public opinion, were not in favour of making the Libyan issue an international one. (b) Lack of proper and effective publicity and propaganda of the issue (c) Colonel Gaddafi's world wide controversial image.

At the end it can be said that if the events of Kampuchea, Afghanistan, Grenada, Lebanon and Libya will continue it will make a mockery of the UN Charter, erode the present structure of international relations and seriously undermine the process of peaceful resolution of disputes between and among nations.