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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

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July 16, 1986

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: NSPG on Libya, March 14, 1986

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
The Vice President  
Secretary of State George Shultz  
Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger  
Secretary of Treasury James Baker  
Chief of Staff Donald Regan  
National Security Advisor, John M. Poindexter  
Attorney General Edwin Meese  
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral  
William Crowe  
John McMahon, Deputy Director, CIA  
Donald Fortier  
Craig Fuller  
Howard R. Teicher

DATE, TIME March 14, 1986  
AND PLACE: 11:05 a.m. - 12:09 p.m., White House  
Situation Room

John Poindexter opened by stating that over the past several weeks we have taken various actions against Libya. "We are planning to conduct a Freedom of Navigation (FON) challenge in the Gulf of Sidra to demonstrate that we do not accept Qadhafi's claim to the Gulf. The FON is tentatively scheduled for the last week of March. Qadhafi is threatening a retaliatory attack if the so called "line of death" (32-30 North) is crossed. The issue for decision right now is how to respond if Qadhafi carries out his threat."

John McMahon noted that Qadhafi's internal troubles have been exacerbated due to U.S. pressure, although Jallud alleges that the U.S. lacks resolve due to its failure to retaliate against terrorist attacks. The biggest impact that the economic sanctions had on Libya was to freeze \$750 million out of \$5.8 billion. There are continuing problems in Libya with foreign workers and service personnel. With respect to Libyan military action, CIA estimates that Qadhafi will attack the U.S. if 32-30 is crossed. Qadhafi has ordered a shoot down.

The CIA thus believes that Qadhafi will try to intercept U.S.

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As Amended  
Sec. 1.4(e)

forces while intensifying his conduct of terrorism.

[REDACTED]  
"There will be terrorism whether we go into Sidra or not."

Cap Weinberger stated that U.S. forces operated in the FIR many times since 1981. We are now proposing a very extensive challenge. "We want to be sure to penetrate with air and surface assets. We are going on the assumption that there will be a reaction."

Admiral Crowe described the exercise. The CVBGs will be ready on March 23. We should remain flexible on dates with a 10-day window. We can stay longer if circumstances require. We will issue NOI 24 hours in advance; the exercise will include 24 ships and 2 SSNs. Blessed in leadership. Kelso and Jeremiah planned retaliatory strikes. All have combat experience. There should be twelve E-2Cs and EA6-Bs in addition to normal air wing complement. Navy can manage any risks at sea. Pointed to arcs/radius of Libyan SAM network. Forces will be under surveillance all the time. First penetration will be by air at night. Emphatic but non-provocative. We will manage the risks by staying out of SAM envelopes. We concur with CIA view of risk. Two subs will monitor Libyan ports.

The President asked if we could mine the area.

Admiral Crowe responded that the ocean floor is too deep for bottom mines. Turning to the ROEs, he noted that Libyan air performance has improved and there is a different envelope than in 1981. There is risk, which will increase the longer the exercise continues, especially if U.S. forces enter mainland Libya. The Rules of Engagement are based on right of Self Defense. In the presence of hostile threat, our response will be proportional to the attack or threat. CINCEUR wants supplemental rules with the authority to preempt if necessary. Any evidence of hostile intent will be determined by all source intelligence. The Battle Group Commander can decide when to respond to an attack. If we let the Libyans have the first shot, we will probably lose some people. A lock-on of our forces is not enough. "I recommend we approve CINCEUR request. We should give authority to hit if SA-5's are fired. If the Libyans enact a harsh response, we should consider action at sea, with possibly a decision point to retaliate ashore."

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As Amended  
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George Shultz stated that he felt confident in our capabilities after listening to Secretary Weinberger and Admiral Crowe. He has prepared a timeline for diplomatic and Congressional notifications and public diplomacy, which could be adjusted to events. Belgium, the United Kingdom, Italy, Federal Republic of Germany, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt as well as the Soviets will receive simultaneous notification so there will be no illusions about what we are doing. With reference to Congress there will be a potential War Powers Act problem when we move in closer. As for going below 32-30, if things start to happen we can't wait to brief Congress.

Weinberger said that he had great reservations about Congressional notification. A Freedom of Navigation challenge is not an invasion. After the initial penetration we don't want to convey anything other than FON.

Shultz stated that any notification should not have the capability to destroy the operation. Timing need not be mentioned.

Poindexter suggested not briefing it under the War Powers Act.

Weinberger stated that what we want to do is avoid being date-specific.

Donald Regan stated that it was possible that the moment we penetrate it could be considered a hostile act. How would we explain that to Congress unless we notify them simultaneously with penetration.

Shultz suggested Sunday, March 23 7-8 a.m. EST. "The big issue here is what do we do if we are fired on?"

Weinberger responded by saying what we did in 1981 - fire back. He then summarized the ROEs, emphasizing that U.S. forces could shoot first to defend themselves if an attack appeared imminent.

Crowe stated that if the Libyans launch an SA-5, the rules are off.



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Shultz stated that Libya is an enemy. Qadhafi is an enemy and a terrorist. "We should be ready to undertake action to hurt him, not just fire back. Our forces should plaster him and the military targets." We need to undermine the confidence the Libyan people have in Qadhafi. It would therefore be beneficial for Secretary Weinberger to pre-authorize what the military will be able to do.

Crowe said that we will be ready if they fire. But if we go ashore, we are crossing a political line. It is a different world in the Mediterranean.

Shultz replied that it would be a better one if Qadhafi is "put in a box."

Ed Meese stated that there are three phases to consider - at sea, in the air, and on land. There are two issues: what is our response and when to notify Congress and other countries. If we act differently in this circumstance we will either set a precedent or heighten the perception that the U.S. is trying to provoke Qadhafi. If we go below 32-30 and nothing happens - why notify anyone?

James Baker asked when does the President declare war on anybody? Somewhere along the way you are at war. Isn't it better to declare war than be vulnerable to Congress?

Shultz explained that we have an awesome array of power. If we get fired on for exercising our absolute right, it will be over in a day. Military targets are the key. If Qadhafi loses the Libyans' allegiance, that's a positive step. It is more likely, however, that Qadhafi will use terrorism against a travelling Secretary of State.

Weinberger said that if we are engaged and end up leveling Tripoli, we will be accused of being non-proportional.

The President disposed of the two issues. "If hostile actions occur or appear imminent, we will attack the air bases where the planes or SAMs came from, whether they fire or not. If there are losses to the U.S., the Commander has the right to choose non-military targets. Many would like to eliminate Qadhafi so we don't want to crystalize support."

Weinberger replied that the President needs to make final decisions. "You've given authority for local commanders to take proportionate action."

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Weinberger turned to the possible need for UK-based F-111's and said that he would ask Mrs. Thatcher.

Regan raised the question of leaks. Would we still continue?

Weinberger said yes, emphasizing that this is FON.

The President turned to the oil infrastructure. "If we hit the pumping stations, the Allies would be faced with the loss of their nationals, and they might pull them out."

Weinberger said that is why strikes against economic targets are not automatic.

The President reaffirmed that "automatic strikes will be conducted against bases and missile sites."

Crowe said if the Libyans come out, we will smash them.

The President said he feels we should punish them by taking out SA-5s.

Regan asked about coordination with other countries.

Shultz said it doesn't seem likely, especially the French.

The President directed the consideration of further military targets if U.S. forces take casualties.

Crowe agreed.

Poindexter summarized the decision and directed the preparation of an NSDD. The meeting adjourned at 12:09 p.m.

Prepared by:  
Howard R. Teicher