

ERIC MARGOLIS



# Libyan replies

"Ridiculous nonsense," Libya's foreign minister said, looking hurt and bemused.

The Sudanese and Americans had just charged Libya with using a TU-22 aircraft in an unsuccessful attempt to bomb Sudan's radio headquarters at Omdurman. Two U.S. AWACS radar aircraft were on the way to Khartoum; Washington was threatening Libya with "serious consequences" — in short, the regular semi-annual Sudan crisis was again in full swing.

So I went to New York for an exclusive interview with Dr. Ali Treiki, Libya's outspoken senior diplomat. Going to the Libyan UN mission is always a curious experience. One easily gets the feeling that every visitor is being catalogued and photographed by the FBI, CIA, RCMP, New York City Police, Israelis, and God knows who else. The Libyans are not popular.

I asked Dr. Treiki who bombed the Sudanese? "Disgruntled Sudanese air force officers," he replied with a smile. The military-run Sudan and its leader, Gen. Jaffar al-Numieri, had just staged a purge of senior officers. Sudan, Dr. Treiki reminded me, was a mess; there had been at least 27 attempted coups in Khartoum over the past two decades.

"The U.S. is making false charges over Sudan in order to divert attention from its political and military defeat in Lebanon," Treiki went on. The Sudanese were crying wolf, he said, in order to obtain more arms and cash from Washington. Finding Libyans lurking under your bed is not just a Sudanese habit: Even Washington was in an uproar several times in the last few years over bogus reports of mysterious Libyan hit teams trying to infiltrate the Rose Garden.

## No love for each other

Libya and the U.S. are each other's favorite enemy. "It's our sacred duty to fight American imperialism everywhere," said Treiki. "The U.S. is the number one enemy of the Arabs." These feelings were reciprocated by the U.S. State Department, which informed me that Libya's strongman, Col. Moammar Khadafy, is "the world's number one terrorist and a danger to everyone — we have to get rid of him."

This enmity has been played out over the past two years in Sudan and Chad. Both are wretched, impoverished — but strategic — African nations, rent by religious, tribal, political and regional squabbles. Gen. Numieri is a close ally of Egypt and the U.S. The non-Muslim blacks of Sudan's south are in revolt against Khartoum and they are being openly aided by Libya and Ethiopia.

Col. Khadafy calls Gen. Numieri a "puppet of U.S. imperialism" and urges Sudanese to overthrow him. Numieri is not fond of his Libyan neighbor, even though Khadafy saved Sudan a few years ago from a communist coup. The Libyans happily showed me a copy of a speech by Numieri, offering money and help to anyone who would kill Khadafy. Well, we all know Arabs are hotblooded, but what about the U.S. and Libya?

"We have definite proof," charges Treiki, "that the CIA has been given the green light to assassinate our leader and also to kill Ayatollah Khomeini (Iran's leader)." President Reagan, assert the Libyans, has authorized \$20 million for this operation.

Has the CIA ever tried to kill Khadafy? "Yes, many times during his foreign trips." How? "By the use of non-American, third country nationals." Where is the proof? "This is security information that we cannot divulge." A familiar reply, also used by the U.S. State Department when asked to document charges of Libyan terrorist activities.

Warming to this subject, Libya's foreign minister turns to last year's mirror-image crisis over Sudan. With refreshingly undiplomatic speech, he charges, "We have the records of a meeting held in April, 1983, at Khartoum, between CIA Director William Casey and Gen. Numieri. Casey asked Sudan to create incidents as an excuse for the U.S. to invade Libya and overthrow our government. Numieri said he would move only with Egyptian support. But Egypt would not go along with the plan."

## Validity of charge

While I often take Libyan assertions with a few grains of sand, this charge does seem to have some validity. Pentagon sources have leaked reports of a plan to provoke Libya into attacking U.S. aircraft and ships, action that would have resulted in massive air strikes on Libyan ports and airfields.

What about all those Libyans shooting off bombs in England and other parts of Europe? What about the "people's hit squads?" "We have nothing to do with that," answers Treiki. He looks pained and his reply is not convincing.

Is Libya supporting terrorism around the world, as Washington charges? "No, we are against terrorism, we support only legitimate national liberation movements like the Palestinians, the Polisario in Sahara, the African National Congress." Well then, why does Libya give money to the IRA, the Basques, the Corsican and the Red Brigades? "We don't anymore," replies Treiki, as if saying that the young hotheads in Tripoli have finally been restrained.

Relieved to get away from this painful subject, we discuss relations with the U.S. "If the U.S. does not stop its policy of aggression and subversion against Libya, we will have to take action," Treiki said. What sort of action could little Libya take against the U.S.? "You will see, my friend, you will see."

Have the Libyans some new scheme up their burnouses? Last week Col. Khadafy demanded the U.S. let Libya, Egypt and Chad fight out their own squabbles. If the U.S. did not get out of the region, he threatened, North Africa would be in for an earthquake. Khadafy's flair for the dramatic has everyone watching his next move.

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