

U.S. military engaged in risky provocation

It comes as no surprise that fighting has finally erupted off the Libyan coast in the Gulf of Sidra. For the past six weeks, U.S. aircraft and ships have been trying to provoke the Libyans into military action.

The fighting bears a striking resemblance to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the non-existent enemy attack that served as a pretext for direct American military action in Vietnam.

Once again, the U.S. appears to be tumbling into war. Yesterday, it claimed its huge fleet of three aircraft carrier battlegroups had been "threatened" by Libya's tiny navy while conducting "peaceful naval exercises" in the Gulf of Sidra.

U.S. naval aircraft then attacked and sank one Libyan fast-attack craft and damaged a second with Harpoon missiles. HARM anti-radar missiles reportedly knocked out at least one battery of Soviet-supplied SAM-5 long-range, anti-aircraft missiles.

Peaceful naval exercises these were not. One wonders how the Americans would react to a 45-ship Soviet fleet operating menacingly 30 miles off Norfolk, Va. The U.S. intent is clearly to goad Libya into military action.

The U.S. seems heedless of the dangers posed by the presence of some 2,000 Soviet military advisers in Libya, or to Soviet warships off the Libyan coast.

Ironically, at the very moment U.S. forces were threatening Libya, came reports that Nicaraguan troops had entered Honduras, a close American ally. Congress, which refuses to do anything about Marxism in Nicaragua, is beating the war drums over far-off Libya.

There are powerful elements in Washington determined to push the U.S. into a war against Libya — or, for that matter, against Syria and Iran. The U.S. Navy and its ambitious secretary John Lehmann are eager to pound the Libyans and just about any other Arabs who fail to co-operate with U.S. Middle Eastern policy.

A lot of American supporters of Israel would be delighted to see the U.S. go to war with an Arab state. It is no coincidence that the navy yesterday

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tested two of its newest missiles — the Harpoon and HARM — for the first time in real combat. No coincidence either that U.S. aircraft attacked Soviet-supplied SAM-5 missiles, the object of much interest at the Pentagon. Trying out new weapons on handy enemies is a trick the U.S. learned from Israel.

Bashing Libya, a nation of 3½ million, may be safe, jolly and politically popular. It is also exceedingly short-sighted. Little by little, the U.S. may be blundering into a far larger and bloodier war.

Now, 21% of America's naval power is poised to attack Libya. We should recall that three aircraft carriers also lay off the Gulf of Tonkin and that U.S. Marines landed in Vietnam ostensibly to halt "terrorism."

The U.S. can certainly hurt Libya, but Col. Khadafy will survive and become a hero in the Mideast, Africa and Asia.

Our media depict Libya as a poisonous nest of terrorists; to much of the rest of the world, Khadafy is merely an eccentric being bullied by Americans. Just as the British-French-Israeli aggression against Egypt in 1956 turned Gammal Abdul Nasser into a Third World champion, so U.S. belligerency gives Khadafy far more stature than he deserves.

In fact, the U.S. is taking the worst possible action. The American armada, for all its power, cannot conquer Libya or throw out Khadafy. Bombing Libya would only enhance Khadafy, run the risk of a dreadful clash with the Soviets, and create more anti-U.S. sentiment in the Mideast.

For the U.S., Libya may become one of those places easy to enter and almost impossible to leave.