

Who's the madman now?

The ongoing Irangate scandal is producing increasingly frightening and bizarre revelations. Perhaps most disturbing is how the U.S. almost went to war with Libya.

Readers may recall my insistence over the past three years that many of Washington's fevered claims about Libyan terrorism were either wildly exaggerated or downright false. Moammar Khadafy is no innocent — but neither is he the dangerous fiend that Washington and our unquestioning media claimed. Bombing Libya, I also said, was dangerous folly.

Last spring I advanced the view that the U.S. was being duped into hostilities with Libya by a cabal of hard-right ideologues and pro-Israel hawks on the National Security Council. Anyone in Washington — or here, for that matter — who tried to talk sense about Libya was dismissed as being either soft on communism or pro-Arab. Some of my fellow journalists even suggested that my views on the Mideast were due to advanced dementia.

That was before Irangate. What we are now learning is an incredible tale of deceit, stupidity and disinformation.

(1) At the heart of the scandal is Manucher Ghorbanifar, a sinister Iranian arms dealer. He was the sole source of the claim that "moderates" in the Iranian regime wanted to deal with the U.S. What Robert McFarlane, John Poindexter and Ghorbanifar were really up to was a crazy, utterly unreal scheme to overthrow the Khomeini regime.

(2) Ghorbanifar first surfaced in 1981. He told the CIA that Libya had sent hit teams to kill President Reagan and senior U.S. officials. For this nonsense, he was paid \$500,000 (U.S.). There never were any Libyan hit squads: The whole tale was bogus. But based on this chimera and other carefully planted disinformation the credulous Reagan administration developed a paranoid frenzy to get rid of Khadafy — even by assassination, if necessary.

(3) It is most likely that Ghorbanifar was, and still is, an Israeli agent. He is probably a holdover from the days when Israel's Mossad trained — and some say virtually ran Savak — the Shah's secret police. Israel sees Khadafy as a virulent threat and wanted to get an angry U.S. to remove him.

Punch



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Washington, which gets much of its Mideast data from Israel, was provided with just the right information to convince the NSC hotheads that Libya was the Vatican of terrorism and a world threat. Syria, Iran and Egypt also aided in laying blame for terrorism at Libya's doorstep.

(4) In late 1984, the NSC pushed for plans to stage a joint U.S.-Egyptian invasion of Libya — a fact reported in my columns. I believe that a financially desperate Egypt was offered Libya's oil fields in payment for going along with the invasion. Some 90,000 U.S. troops were to have invaded Libya.

Fortunately, sane minds in Egypt and the U.S. stopped this madness, but just in time. Such craziness could have started World War III.

(5) By 1985, the CIA knew Ghorbanifar was an Israeli agent and that his information was mostly fake. The Israelis must have known of the CIA's views since its own spy, Navy anti-terrorism expert William Pollard, had turned over to the Mossad much of the U.S.'s vital Mideast files.

But the NSC closed its ears to CIA and DIA warnings and shut the rest of the government out of the picture. Facts be damned, get Khadafy, was the order of the day.

(6) The secret NSC cabal that pushed the U.S. into Irangate also was the moving force behind plans to invade Libya or, at least, to kill Khadafy. When the U.S. bombed Libya, I wrote that the raid was a crude attempt to assassinate Khadafy. Now, the truth is leaking out in Washington — Khadafy and his family were, in truth, the target. So low had the U.S. sunk.

(7) Members of this cabal were a collection of hard-righters with links to the Alexander Haig and Jeane Kirkpatrick conservatives and men regarded as pro-Israel hawks: Michael Ledeen, Don Fortier and Howard Teischer. All apparently wanted to see the U.S. go to war with an Arab state as a means of reasserting its Mideast power, and forever cementing the U.S.-Israeli strategic alliance.

These hawks spoke for Israel's hard-right which has forged a close alliance with their fellows in America. Moderates in the U.S. and Israel would never have gone along with such madness.

So, in the name of a crusade against terrorism, the secret warriors on the NSC plotted to redraw the map of the Mideast by fire and sword. In doing so, they very nearly got the U.S. into an illegal war, broke the law by attempting assassination, and got involved in illicit acts from arms deals to car bombings. They also may have dealt a fatal blow to U.S. interests in the Mideast and chances there of peace. And they brought shame and infamy on the good name of America.

In light of these revelations, I wonder how many journalists will still keep churning out stories about "Mad Moammar" Khadafy. One must surely wonder if the real madmen were not in Tripoli but in Washington, D.C.