

DRAFT

TO: Cabinet Office London
FROM: White House

TS VIA CABO CHANNELS

For Charles Powell

FROM: John M. Poindexter

The following is the President's reply to the Prime Minister's message of April 9 regarding Libyan terrorism.

Dear Margaret:

Thank you for your thoughtful message regarding my proposed response to Qadhafi's terrorist campaign. I have carefully reflected upon the questions you raise and the comments you make.

Your reservations rest on the fear that a U.S. military response will, first, set off a new cycle of revenge and counter-revenge and, second, strengthen Qadhafi rather than weaken him. These are understandable concerns, but my own view of the matter is as follows.

First of all, the "cycle of violence" began a long time ago. Qadhafi's terrorist campaign was planned before the Gulf of Sidra events, and indeed Qadhafi's policy of terrorism and subversion is not new at all. Britain has been the victim herself. Qadhafi does not need excuses; "provocations" merely provide the occasion for doing what he was doing anyway. I know that you have

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seen the intercepted communications between Tripoli and various People's bureaus passing on explicit instructions for Libyan-directed terrorist violence aimed at inflicting maximum numbers of casualties in several countries. A passive response by the West will only encourage Qadhafi and his radical allies to step up their attacks against our interests, and our people. Indeed, in a sense there has been no "cycle" of violence: It has been a one-sided pattern of radical terrorism without any firm, serious, or decisive Western response.

Second, it is precisely this lack of firm Western response that builds up Qadhafi and his prestige. He can claim he faced us down; he can point to the continuing Western commercial relations with Libya as proof that there will be no firm response. He has paid no serious price for his policies. This is what allows him to claim success or vindication. This failure to respond undermines all moderate governments in the Middle East while discouraging those forces within Libya that may contemplate replacing Qadhafi. Our failure to respond must come to an end.

Third, there is ample legal justification for responding with force against a deliberate policy and practice by a foreign government, with the direct participation of government officials, to use lethal force against citizens of other countries. Practically, given the failure of other approaches, we see no alternative means to stop the growing attacks and casualties. Moreover, we believe that the Libyan people and

armed forces will not wish to pay the escalating price for Qadhafi's contrived terrorism.

Therefore the principal objective of U.S. action will be to strike at Qadhafi's primary headquarters and immediate security forces, rather than the Libyan people or even troop concentrations of the regular armed forces who may themselves be disenchanted by Qadhafi's increasingly reckless role. Despots like Qadhafi place no value on the lives of others. We wish to expose his ultimate vulnerability, while highlighting his personal accountability.

I have no illusions that these actions will eliminate entirely the terrorist threat; but it will show that officially sponsored terrorist actions by a government -- such as Libya has repeatedly perpetrated -- will not be without cost. The loss of such state sponsorship will inevitably weaken the ability of terrorist organizations to carry out their criminal attacks even as we work through diplomatic, political, and economic channels to alleviate the more fundamental causes of such terrorism.

Let me re-emphasize that I intend to minimize actions against those elements in Libya that in the future may lead Libya back into the community of civilized nations. Strikes would be conducted against specific targets providing direction and support to Libyan terrorism, against the forces providing security for Qadhafi, and against military assets that enable Qadhafi to continue his adventures in Africa. Every effort would be made to avoid collateral damage to civilians. Economic assets would not be targeted at the present time. Our actions would be completed

expeditiously, although our forces would be ready to take further protective steps as necessary in response to hostile Libyan actions. I am also seeking the indirect support of other European allies in the conduct of this operation.

You mention the parallels to the situation in Ireland and effect on world opinion. Quite frankly, I do not see a parallel between the situation with Qadhafi's state sponsored international terrorism and the situation in Ireland. The Government of the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland both cooperate with your government and others in efforts to stop the PROVOS and INLA. This is quite the opposite of Qadhafi's policy and action. In the short term, I am sure there will be agitation in the Arab world. Yet nearly every friendly Arab country has told us in recent weeks that the removal of Qadhafi or some decisive blow against Qadhafi would be a "blessing" for humanity. It is half-way measures that have left some of our Arab friends embarrassed and uncomfortable. It is clear that nothing will more weaker moderate Arab friends than the perception that radical policies succeed. As we told David Goodall during the March U.S./U.K. talks on terrorism, there have been no withdrawals of Arab funds or investments from the U.S., no loss of trade and not even a serious hint that there would be any such action vs. the U.S. as a result of our earlier action vs. Libya. Nor has there been any substantive new Arab support for Libya.

The same will no doubt be true after our next actions. It would be as true of the UK and Europe as of the U.S. were there to be a stronger policy on their part. With the possible exception of Syria, there is no real Arab support for Libya. Many Arab leaders urge us to get rid of Qadhafi. Our action will demonstrate to those Arabs who fear him (and therefore support him publicly) that he can no longer intimidate or terrorize them at will. Nothing will bolster them more than the perception that radical policies incur a stiff price and that the West is capable of firm action in defense of its interests. Nothing, I might add, would do more to create an environment in which moderates in the region would feel more comfortable in taking risks for peace.

As for European opinion, I feel obliged to say that this is a crucial moment in Atlantic relations. American tourists, servicemen, and diplomats have been brutally murdered by terrorists. You should not underestimate the profound effect on the American people if our actions to put a halt to these crimes continue to receive only luke-warm support or no support at all from our closest allies whom we have committed ourselves to defend -- even when Europeans themselves are victims of the same criminal acts.

The United States feels a special responsibility because we are the only Western power in a position to act decisively. I do not feel I can shrink from this responsibility.

With warmest regards,



Ron