

35. LIBYA

Background

Although the extent to which the Government of Libya is responsible for Middle Eastern terrorism is unclear, there is little doubt that since 1969 Libya has given material support and sanctuary to certain groups using terrorist tactics in Europe, in the Middle East and in North Africa. Such support for terrorism, in addition to Libya's military occupation of northern Chad, has increased tensions between Tripoli and governments in the West.

Tensions with the United States have been particularly acute since the Reagan Administration took office. The United States challenged Libya's unilateral claim to the Gulf of Sidra as territorial waters, its forces downing two Libyan planes after Libyan fighters fired on US interceptors over the Gulf on 19 August 1981. When Libyan troops moved into Chad in 1983, the United States and France jointly provided military support to Chad government forces. The shooting of a policewoman by a Libyan diplomat outside the Libyan Mission in London, on 8 May 1984, led Britain to break off diplomatic relations with Tripoli. The wave of terrorist activities following the formation of the Pan-Arab Command in March 1985 (consisting of Libya, Iran and Syria), particularly the 23 November 1985 highjacking of an Egyptair jetliner and the attacks on El Al counters at the Rome and Vienna airports on 27 December 1985, further heightened tensions between Libya and the West.

On 24 March 1986, the United States reported that Libyan forces had fired six surface-to-air missiles on US forces carrying out exercises in the Gulf of Sidra. US forces responded by disabling two Libyan naval vessels and by attacking ground missile facilities on the coast.

A bomb exploded in a West Berlin discotheque frequented by US servicemen