



DANIEL MORGAN GRADUATE SCHOOL  
*of*  
NATIONAL SECURITY

*presents*

“Countering WMD: The Libyan Experience”

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I have been asked to talk about the U.S. experience in countering Libya’s WMD programs. I wrote a short book on this topic, a case study that came out in 2009. It’s not a well-known book. In fact, if everyone in this room were to buy a copy, it would double my sales.

In the book I lay out the chronology, the lessons learned, and the motivations of the Libyans in giving up their WMD programs. First and foremost, this was an intelligence success story—one that was made possible by our intervention in Iraq, which ironically was based on what many consider to be a major intelligence failure. I ask that you to keep that in mind as I walk through my remarks.

Let me start with the chronology. Sometimes it’s good to have the facts before you. In March of 2003, Saif Gaddafi was a part-time graduate student at the London School of Economics, my alma mater, where he was working on his PhD. He had been working on it for a good number of years and living the London lifestyle to the fullest. At this time, he approached a friend of his, who happened to be a British agent. Gaddafi, knowing that he was a British agent, told him that Libya would like to “clear the air” about rumors that Libya had WMD programs. This was in March of 2003, and what was happening in the region at this time? We [the United States] were moving hundreds of thousands of forces into the region to enforce UN Security Council Resolutions on Iraq WMD.

The British agent then notified our intelligence officials. That led to a series of trilateral (U.S., U.K. and Libya) meetings in various European capitals over the summer. The dialogue was pretty much the same at each meeting. The U.S. and the U.K. intelligence officers would tell the Libyans that we needed to send a team of experts into Libya to investigate our concerns. The Libyan response was always the same; they stated that they would get back to us.

In August, the trilateral group agreed that their next meeting would be in Tripoli, and there was a commitment that the U.S. and U.K. representatives would see Colonel Gaddafi. At that meeting, Gaddafi agreed “in principle” that the U.S. and U.K. could send experts into Libya but there was no agreement on specific dates. A few days later that all changed because of the interdiction of the ship, the *BBC China*.

The *BBC China* was carrying thousands of centrifuge parts that were made by the A. Q. Khan network in Malaysia. The U.S. and the U.K.—and once again this was a joint U.S.-U.K. success story—together had

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thoroughly penetrated the network. One actual result was actionable intelligence that designated which shipping containers on the *BBC China* had the centrifuge parts.

For a number of years the A.Q. Khan network had been getting larger and bolder as it grew. So the decision was now made to interdict the ship and, at the same time, take down the network.

This is another interesting parallel and intersection of different actions, one that was critically important to the outcome. The ship is a German vessel and we had just established the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). We called the Germans and they said, “We will divert the ship; where would you like it to go?” Then we called the Italians and asked if we could bring the ship into one of their ports. The Italians said that they had just joined PSI, and they responded with a quick go ahead. There was no hesitation; it was a very proactive response on both the German and Italian sides. Once the ship was in port, we unloaded the containers; we took photographs, and presented that evidence to the Libyans back in Tripoli. The Libyans knew immediately that we had the goods on them and we received an immediate response of “Okay, now you can send your people into Libya.” Again, this was no accident in terms of cause and effect.

So we sent a team in, a joint U.S.-U.K. team, a small team of experts. These were experts in missiles, nukes, chemical and biological weapons. This mission spanned between ten and twelve days in October. The response was very cautious on the part of most Libyans who were interviewed. When the experts returned to London and Washington, they did an assessment and both the U.S. and U.K. came to the conclusion that more information was needed before they could draw any final conclusions about Libya’s WMD programs. For this reason, the U.S. and U.K. asked Libya to agree to a second experts’ visit. Libya quickly agreed and the teams returned to Libya in early December.

For this second visit, the contrast was stark in terms of how the U.S. and U.K. team members were treated. The Libyans took them to facilities we didn’t previously know about; the Libyans were very open in the interviews; and there was a general sense that the Libyans really were coming clean at this point. Personally, what sealed it for me—and I was probably more skeptical than any others on the policy side at least—was when the team was departing they were handed a shopping bag containing diagrams of a nuclear weapon. These diagrams came along with their other purchases from A.Q. Khan.

It was at that point that the President decided that we were going to go to the next step and meet at the policy level. Further, the decision was made not to inform the State Department; the general feeling was that if we did, this information would leak within ten seconds. Also, the decision was made not to inform the Pentagon because we were sure it would leak in *five* seconds. On the intelligence side, knowledge of the policy meeting was also very compartmentalized; and while a good number of people were involved both operationally and in terms expertise, there was significantly less concern about information leaking because—at least sometimes—intelligence professionals can keep a secret.

Given that there were only five or six people on the policy side that were knowledgeable about the Libyan inspection visits, and given the fact that stuff tends to roll down hill, I was designated as the policy person to go to London and deal with the Libyans. My background was in arms control. In that realm, you usually have interagency backstopping for months before any negotiation session. You also have talking points and fall back positions and all that. I didn’t have any of that. Instead, the President provided the most general of guidance: don’t screw this up.

I was accompanied by my Intel colleagues, for whom I have enormous respect. We held the opening session early in the morning at the Foreign Office. Across the table for the Libyans was Ambassador Obeidi, their Ambassador in Rome who later became the National Security Advisor for Mr. Gaddafi.

There were a number of others including Mr. Gaddafi's interpreter, who was likely there to watch the Libyan side. Also, there was Moussa Koussa, who was the head of Libyan external intelligence. He is a very interesting guy, a guy who had gone to school in Michigan; he has two daughters that were born there, so they are dual citizens. He is very conceptual and urbane. He was also called the "Envoy of Death" in his country because he killed people who opposed the Gaddafi regime. He was clearly the authority in the room because when Mr. Obeidi was asked any question, he would always ask to confer with and defer to Moussa.

We opened up the talks with a few words from my British colleagues. Then Ambassador Obeidi stated that the Libyan delegation was there to seek relief from sanctions. Then I did what I had seen Marshal Akhromeyev do at my first arms control summit meeting years before.

That was 1987. The Undersecretary of Defense had retired and the Assistant Secretary had departed without a replacement. So I, as the Deputy Assistant Secretary, was the only guy left standing to represent the Defense Department at the summit. I went into the meeting, and there was a long table with maybe thirty people on each side. My sense is that something odd happens when Americans become arms control negotiators. I am not a psychiatrist or psychologist, but I will never forget the scene. The head of the U.S. delegation read his talking points providing our latest concessions designed to move the talks forward. Marshal Akhromeyev simply folded his folder and said "that's not enough." One would think that would be the end of the meeting but instead it led to the U.S. side requesting a short break in order to discuss what more we could give to the Russians.

That moment was a real lesson for me. So, many years later, in the negotiations with Libya, I simply closed my folder and said "that's not why we are here." My British colleague, feeling that the meeting was not headed in the right direction, decided to call a pause.

We took a pause for a couple of hours and then reconvened in a much different setting. It was in the Travelers Club in central London, one of those gentleman's clubs right out of central casting. We spent the next six hours talking about the public statement that we insisted the Libyans make. We made clear that they needed to admit publicly that they have a nuclear weapons program, as well as a chemical weapons program, and that they will eliminate them. The Libyans had brought with them a draft statement that talked about the fact that it was the Christmas season and no one should have WMD.

So we had to move from there to phrasing like "Libya has a nuclear weapons program, and we are going to give it up." It was tough getting there, but the Libyans were in a tough situation. Three days before our meeting, Saddam had been lifted from his spider hole. Some of you will remember the images that were broadcasted all over the international media for many days. It was certain that Colonel Gaddafi did not want to be that guy in the spider hole. They also thought that what we were doing was trying to trick them in the sense that as soon as they made the announcement that they had a nuclear weapons program, we were going to hit them hard. They felt that they were damned if they do and damned if they don't.

At the end of the day, we got the statement we wanted after six hours of tough negotiations. However, it occurred to me at the table—as I was thinking about parallels to North Korea and Iran—that the word "abandon" which we used in the text could have different meanings. So I said to the Libyans that we needed to have their commitment that this word meant literally giving over their program to us. What it means is that we are going to come over and remove all of your nuclear equipment out of the country, and we are going to bulldoze your chemical munitions and get rid of your chemical agent.

The Libyans did not want to go there. They first said "You know our position." In response, I said "that's not good enough." The President sent me here to negotiate; I have to be able to guarantee the outcome to

him that we know exactly what these words mean. The Libyans then said, “Your intel colleagues know our position on this.” I repeated that we have to agree on what the word abandonment means. I took out a piece of paper and wrote down that, on the nuclear side, we were going to take away all centrifuge parts, all special nuclear material, all-material associated with conversion. We went down the list, and then to chemical weapons. We had come to the conclusion that they didn’t have an active bio program.

Then an odd thing happened. One of the Libyans said that Libya would like to join the MTCR, the Missile Control Technology Regime. Now, I have been around arms control and non-proliferation for a long time. I am thinking to myself, they don’t export missiles, what is this about? They said that they would really like to be members. I responded that, if you are members, then you have to abandon missiles over 300 hundred-kilometer range and 500 kilogram payloads. They agreed. So as a go-along, we got their long range SCUD missiles. When we sent over a ship, we packed these on board along with hundreds of tons of nuclear equipment and shipped all of it back to the United States.

The next day, on December 17, we returned to Washington and the Libyans went back to Tripoli. Gaddafi was reportedly climbing the walls. He was anxious because he felt that, if he didn’t agree to the London statement, he would get hit and if he did agree, he would still get hit. To reassure him, Prime Minister Blair called him and stated that the Americans won’t strike if the Libyans fulfill all of their commitments. We then worked through a few other issues and went back and forth on some changes in the draft. Finally, on December 19, the Libyans were set to make their statement. It was supposed to be Colonel Gaddafi making a televised announcement, but they called and said that Gaddafi had a sore throat so he couldn’t do it. In the end, the foreign minister gave the statement and the Gaddafi followed with a written statement. After that, Prime Minister Blair and then President Bush broke the news to the world.

When we met again in London in January to make the final arrangements to get everything removed, the Libyan head of negotiation, Ambassador Obeidi, took me aside. He said, “You know, we were stunned at how tough you were with us in the December negotiations but that was the best thing that could have happened to us.” It turned out that the day after the public announcements, Saif Gaddafi came back into the picture. In a television interview, he stated that Libya was going to put all of their nuclear equipment into storage and perhaps use it in the future in a peaceful program. This was a one-time statement that we never heard again because the Libyans had already agreed to have it removed.

Let me now talk about motivations. One motive was the possibility for sanctions to be removed. The first time I went to Tripoli, I was struck by how things were so dilapidated. You go to the airport and it’s really run down; there are airlines that you have never heard of. The Libyan oil industry was hurting in terms exploration, extraction, etc. The Libyans needed our technology in key areas. I am convinced the removal of sanctions was a motivator. I am also convinced that sanctions alone, which had been applied for many years, would never have achieved the outcome we got – and specifically the removal of all nuclear equipment and longer range missiles.

Another motivation was the sense among the Libyans that things needed to change. Libya was seen as the clown prince of the region. Nothing seemed to work for them; pan-Arabism hadn’t worked as well as pan-Africanism. They wanted to be a more normal country. While it may be hard to fit that image with anyone’s current view of Gaddafi, I think there was this sense of legacy that was driving them. This was probably coming more from his sons, particularly Saif, but others within the country as well.

A third motive—one that surprised me—was the desire to work with the United States to combat Islamic extremism. The Libyan government felt that, as a secular government, it was a target of Islamic fundamentalism; and who better to work with after 9/11 on counter-terrorism than the United States? In fact, we did establish that relationship, and it developed in a very positive way. I remember Moussa

Koussa asking me to come out to his facility one evening. We spent a couple of hours together talking about his concerns about U.S. policy, particularly possible U.S. support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Let me just say he was pretty perceptive for the time.

The fourth motivation has to do with the nuclear weapons program itself. As I said, with the interdiction of the *BBC China*, we started to take down the A.Q. Kahn network, the lifeline for the Libyan program. Without the support of the network, they couldn't continue their program effectively. But also, once they revealed publicly that they had a nuclear program, the Libyans again felt very vulnerable to attack. They still didn't quite believe that we weren't going to attack them. When President Reagan sent the 111's over in response to the disco bombing in Berlin in the 1980's it had a real effect on them.

That takes us to what I think is clearly the main Libyan motivation, which was not to be next on the U.S. target. I remember no discussions at any time while serving on the NSC staff about using military force against Libya. It just wasn't part of the discussion, but the Libyans convinced themselves that they were next on the target list after Iraq. Gaddafi said this over and over. He was very public about that. Gaddafi said, "I don't want Libya to be Iraq, I don't want to be Saddam Hussein. I want to avoid that fate." Clearly, it was that more than anything else that explains the outcome.

Now, very briefly, let me touch on some of the main lessons learned from the Libyan experience. As you think about these lessons, think about Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. These cases are all different; they are all unique in different ways. Yet, some lessons apply across the board while others are probably unique to Libya.

The first lesson is the need to be perceived as serious about non-and counter-proliferation. There is no question that in 2003 the United States was seen as serious about countering WMD. It wasn't just Iraq; it was a series of initiatives we had taken like PSI and the G-8 global initiative. It was a number of other things we were doing domestically, such as getting out of the ABM treaty and deploying missile defenses against rogue type countries.

A second lesson is the need to have a strategy to deal with combating WMD. It was the first time we had a comprehensive national strategy, published in December of 2002. This strategy went well beyond the policy guidance of the previous administration, which was based solely on prevention, including export controls, supporting the NPT regime, and implementing the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction programs. All of which are very important, all which in our strategy we said, we need to redouble our efforts. These are essential; but we believed, based on the facts—and North Korea was Exhibit A—that we weren't always going to be successful in prevention, so we also had to protect against proliferation threats. Therefore, we needed to support interdiction actions and to be much more forward leaning. We needed to have new capabilities. We needed to have to new concepts. For example, we had to think differently about offenses and defenses in deterring adversaries.

We needed a broader national, whole-of-government strategy for dealing with the threat. So we have prevention, protection, and response because we also believed that we would not always be successful in protecting against a strike. We had to be able to deal with the effects through what we call "consequence management," and also attribution.

We needed to, in the context of this broad strategy, bring together all of the tools of statecraft. When you think about Libya, you think about intelligence, about the economic tools that were applied, about diplomacy, about first and foremost military force. Not that we used military force, but the perceived threat of force was uppermost in the minds of those whose policies we were trying to influence.

There are ten lessons learned in the case study that I mentioned earlier. I'm not going to touch on all of them. The first two I mentioned apply to any proliferation challenge, while some of the others are unique to Libya. One that was unique to Libya, was the need to conduct negotiations in secret. It was essential to prevent leaks because there was no way that, if it did leak, Gaddafi could have done what he ultimately decided to do.

Some of the lessons may seem almost counterintuitive, like the need to avoid bargaining with the Libyans. When Obeidi offered his opening remarks seeking relief from sanctions, that's opening up a bargaining game. That's not what we were there for. I'm convinced that had we gotten into the bargaining, we might still be at the table. Again, my sense is that—and this is not a Republican or Democrat thing—we just don't do well in arms control negotiations. If you like, we can talk about New START or any of the other arms control agreement other than START II, which was a good agreement which the Russians didn't ratify. Most arms control agreements have not coincided with our basic interests.

Let me talk about one other lesson because I don't want to leave you with the wrong impression. This was the need to ensure that the Libyans could save face. This was, for the President, a way of establishing an alternative path for proliferators to take. Iraq was one path and Libya another. If you agreed to give these weapons up, you did so peacefully, and you did so in a definitive manner, then we would actually be willing to help the Libyan people, as President Bush said in his announcement. In fact, we did reward Libya, even though they always complained that they got a bad deal. They complained that they spent 100 million or 200 million dollars on this program and didn't get anything in return. But we did relieve sanctions after they stopped their support for terrorism and we did provide commercial access to key technologies. The Libyans did benefit politically and economically from this arrangement.

The idea was to have a second path for countries that had pursued WMD capabilities, so that the United States would not have to go to war every time it had to confront a proliferator. But it wasn't through a phony type of arrangement, like the Iran nuclear agreement. It was through an agreement that actually dealt with the threat.

