

Chronology of Libya's Disarmament and Relations with the United States

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On December 19, 2003, long-time Libyan President Moammar Gadhafi stunned much of the world by renouncing Tripoli's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs and welcoming international inspectors to verify that Tripoli would follow through on its commitment.

Since then, inspectors from the United States, United Kingdom, and international organizations have acted with haste to dismantle Libya's chemical and nuclear weapons programs as well as its longer-range ballistic missiles. The United States has rapidly taken steps toward normalizing bilateral relations, which had essentially been cut off in 1981.

Libya's decision has been welcome news at a time when the international nonproliferation regimes are under stress. Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control Stephen Rademaker stated May 2 during the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference that Libya's choice "demonstrates that, in a world of strong nonproliferation norms, it is never too late to make the decision to become a fully compliant NPT state," noting that Tripoli's decision has been "amply rewarded."

Tripoli's disarmament has also been a success story for the U.S. intelligence community, which has recently been harshly criticized for its failures regarding Iraq's previously suspected WMD programs.

The factors that induced Libya to give up its weapons programs are debatable. Many Bush administration officials have emphasized the invasion of Iraq, as well as the October 2003 interdiction of a ship containing nuclear-related components destined for Libya, as key factors in Tripoli's decision. But outside experts argue that years of diplomatic efforts were more important.

The following chronology summarizes key events in the U.S.-Libyan relationship, as well as weapons inspection and dismantlement activities in Libya since its 2003 pledge.

1970s

May 26, 1975: Codifying a commitment to forswear nuclear weapons, Libya ratifies the NPT seven years after it was first signed by the regime of King Idris al-Sanusi.

December 2, 1979: A mob attacks and sets fire to the U.S. embassy in Tripoli. Embassy officials are subsequently withdrawn and the embassy shut down.

December 29, 1979: The U.S. government places Libya on a newly created list of state sponsors of terrorism. Countries on the list are subject to a variety of U.S. sanctions.

1978-1981: Libya purchases more than 2,000 tons of lightly processed

uranium from Niger. The Soviet Union completes a 10 megawatt nuclear research reactor at Tajura.

1980s

July 1980: Libya's safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) enters into force. Such agreements allow the IAEA to inspect certain nuclear-related facilities within a country to verify that the government is not misusing civilian nuclear programs for illicit military purposes.

Libya subsequently pursues clandestine nuclear activities related to both uranium enrichment and plutonium separation. Both plutonium and highly enriched uranium can be used as fissile material in nuclear weapons.

May 6, 1981: The United States closes Libya's embassy in Washington and expels Libyan diplomats.

August 19, 1981: U.S. aircraft shoot down two Libyan combat jets that fired on them over the Mediterranean Sea.

January 19, 1982: Libya ratifies the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). The BWC prohibits states-parties from developing, producing, and stockpiling offensive biological agents.

January 7, 1986: President Ronald Reagan issues an executive order imposing additional economic sanctions against Libya in response to Tripoli's continued support for international terrorism, including two December 1985 attacks at airports in Rome and Vienna. The order bans most Libyan imports and all U.S. exports to Libya, as well as commercial contracts and travel to the country. Libyan assets in the United States are also frozen. Reagan authorizes the sanctions under the authority of several U.S. laws, including the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

April 15, 1986: U.S. forces launch aerial bombing strikes against Libya in response to Tripoli's involvement in an April 5 terrorist attack that killed two American servicemen at a Berlin disco.

December 21, 1988: Pan Am Flight 103 en route from London to New York explodes over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all 259 people on board and 11 bystanders on the ground. In November 1991, investigators in the United States and United Kingdom name two Libyan officials as

prime suspects in the bombing.

September 19, 1989: The French airliner UTA Flight 772 bound for Paris explodes, killing all 171 people on board. Investigating authorities find evidence of terrorism and indict two Libyan suspects in 1991.

1992

January 21, 1992: The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 731 demanding that Libya surrender the suspects in the Pam Am bombing, cooperate with the Pan Am and UTA investigations, and pay compensation to the victims' families.

March 31, 1992: The Security Council adopts Resolution 748 imposing sanctions on Libya, including an arms embargo and air travel restrictions.

1993

November 11, 1993: The Security Council adopts Resolution 883 which tightens sanctions on Libya. The resolution includes a limited freeze of Libyan assets as well as a ban on exports of oil equipment to Libya.

1995

July 1995: According to the IAEA, Libya makes a "strategic decision to reinvigorate its nuclear activities, including gas centrifuge uranium enrichment."

Gas centrifuges can enrich uranium for use in nuclear reactors as well as for fissile material in nuclear weapons.

1996

April 1996: Libya joins the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone by signing the Treaty of Pelindaba. The treaty prohibits member states from developing, acquiring, and possessing nuclear weapons, but has not yet entered into force. Libya has not yet ratified the treaty.

August 5, 1996: The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) becomes law. The act authorizes the president to impose sanctions against foreign companies that invest more than \$40 million a year in Libya's oil industry.

1999

April 5, 1999: Libya hands over two suspects--each reportedly linked to Libyan intelligence--to Dutch authorities for trial in the bombing of Pam Am Flight 103.

Immediately following the handover, as well as France's acknowledgment that Tripoli had cooperated with French officials investigating the UTA bombing, the Security Council suspends sanctions against Libya originally imposed in 1992.

May 1999: Libyan officials offer to eliminate their chemical weapons programs during secret talks with the United States, according to Martin Indyk, then assistant secretary of state. In a March 10, 2004 *Financial Times* article, Indyk reveals that U.S. officials insisted Libya reach a settlement with the Pan Am victims' families, as well as accept responsibility for the bombing, before Washington negotiate with Libya about its chemical weapons.

1999-2000: U.S. intelligence agencies begin to obtain new information that Libya is "reinvigorating its nuclear, missile, and biological [weapons] programs," according to a March 31, 2005 report from the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction. By 2000, "information was uncovered that revealed shipments of centrifuge technology from the [proliferation network run by former Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan] were destined for Libya," the report says.

Following the suspension of UN sanctions, Libya also begins increasing its efforts to obtain chemical weapons. According to a 2003 CIA Report, Tripoli reestablishes "contacts with sources of expertise, parts, and precursor chemicals abroad, primarily in Western Europe."

2001

January 31, 2001: Three judges hand down verdicts in the Pan Am trial. One man, Abdel Baset Ali Mohamed Al-Megrahi, is found guilty of 270 counts of murder. The other suspect, Lamem Khalifa Fhimah, is acquitted.

November 19, 2001: Speaking at the BWC Review Conference, Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton states that Libya may be violating the treaty by actively seeking to develop or deploy offensive biological weapons. This is the first time the United States has accused noncompliant states by name at a diplomatic conference.

2002

May 6, 2002: Bolton indicates in a speech to the Heritage Foundation that Libya and Syria received dual-use technology that could be used for producing biological weapons through trade with Cuba. Dual-use goods are items having both civilian and military uses.

August 3, 2002: President George W. Bush signs the "ILSA Extension Act of 2001" which extends the provisions of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act for an additional five years and lowers the \$40 million investment threshold for the possible imposition of sanctions to \$20 million.

2003

February 12, 2003: CIA Director George Tenet, in written testimony to Congress, notes "Libya clearly intends to re-establish its offensive chemical weapons capability."

Libya has also continued its nuclear weapons program. "By 2003... Libya had been identified both as a prime customer and as one already in receipt of nuclear-related material," according to a 2004 British intelligence report.

Early March 2003: Libyan intelligence officials approach British intelligence officials and offer to enter negotiations regarding the elimination of Libya's WMD programs. The subsequent negotiations, which include U.S. officials, are kept secret.

Former National Security Council official Flynt Leverett later writes in a January 23, 2004 *New York Times* article that Washington offers an "explicit quid pro quo" to Tripoli regarding its WMD programs. U.S. officials indicate that the United States will remove its sanctions on Libya if the latter verifiably dismantles these programs, according to Leverett.

The meeting occurs prior to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq later

that month.

April 5, 2003: Bolton says in an interview with Radio Sawa that the March 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq “sends a message” to Libya, as well as Iran and Syria, “that the cost of their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction is potentially quite high.”

September 12, 2003: In a 13-0 vote, the Security Council formally lifts sanctions imposed on Libya. The United States and France abstain. The Security Council’s action comes in response to Libya’s August 15 agreement to compensate the victims of the Pan Am attack, as well as Tripoli’s formal acceptance of responsibility for that bombing.

Libya agreed September 11 to offer additional compensation to the families of the 1989 UTA bombing victims. Libya first agreed in 1999 to pay the families, but agreed to increase the amount after the Pan Am victims were promised more. A final agreement is reached in January 2004.

U.S. Ambassador James B. Cunningham explains that the United States will not lift sanctions because of “serious concerns about other aspects of Libyan behavior,” including Tripoli’s WMD programs. Cunningham states that “Libya’s continued nuclear infrastructure upgrades raise concerns.” He accuses Tripoli of “actively developing biological and chemical weapons.”

Testifying before the House International Relations Committee four days later, Bolton reiterates his previous threat stating that countries developing WMD “will pay a steep price for their efforts.”

October 4, 2003: German and Italian authorities interdict a ship en route to Libya containing centrifuge components manufactured in Malaysia. Bush later touts the interdiction as a key intelligence success during a February 11, 2004 speech at the National Defense University. Some U.S. officials subsequently assert that the interdiction played a major role in convincing Libya to come clean on its weapons programs.

December 19, 2003: Libya’s Foreign Ministry publicly renounces the country’s WMD programs. Tripoli promises to eliminate its chemical and nuclear weapons programs, adhere to its commitments under the NPT and BWC, as well as accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Libya also promises to limit the range and payloads of its missiles to conform to guidelines set by the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Additionally, Libya agrees to conclude an additional protocol to its IAEA safeguards agreement. The protocol expands the IAEA’s authority to check for clandestine nuclear activities. Libya invites inspectors to verify compliance with the agreements and assist in the dismantling of its weapons programs.

U.S. and British officials hail the announcement. Bush says that “far better” relations between Washington and Tripoli are possible if the latter fully implements its commitments and “demonstrates its seriousness.” Bush promises U.S. help to “build a more free and prosperous” Libya if the country achieves “internal reform.”

December 27, 2003: IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei visits Libya to begin the process of assessing and verifying Libya’s nuclear dismantlement activities.

2004

January 4, 2004: The *London Sunday Times* publishes an interview with Gaddafi’s son, who reports that Libya obtained designs for a nuclear weapon from the Khan network.

January 6, 2004: Libya ratifies the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which prohibits the explosive testing of nuclear weapons. The treaty has not yet entered into force.

Tripoli also accedes to the CWC. Under the convention, Libya must completely destroy its chemical weapons stockpiles and production capacity by April 29, 2007.

January 18, 2004: U.S. and U.K. officials arrive in Libya to begin elimination and removal of WMD designs and stockpiles. Assistant Secretary of State for Verification and Compliance Paula DeSutter later tells the Senate Foreign Relations Committee February 26 that the Libyan officials are “forthcoming about the myriad aspects” of Libya’s WMD programs.

January 24, 2004: Representative Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), the ranking minority member of the House International Relations Committee, becomes the first U.S. lawmaker to visit Libya in decades.

January 27, 2004: U.S. officials airlift about 55,000 pounds of documents and components from Libya’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs to the United States. The nuclear-related material includes uranium hexafluoride (the feedstock for centrifuges), two complete second-generation centrifuges from Pakistan, and additional centrifuge parts, equipment, and documentation.

On March 15, Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham calls the airlift “only the tip of the iceberg,” representing just 5 percent of the total amount of material the United States will eventually recover from Libya.

February 4, 2004: Khan reveals that, for two decades, he secretly provided North Korea, Libya, and Iran with technical and material assistance for making nuclear weapons.

February 20, 2004: The IAEA releases a report detailing Libya’s noncompliance with its safeguards agreement and outlining Tripoli’s nascent nuclear program. Specifically, the report describes Libya’s gas centrifuge-based uranium-enrichment program, imports of nuclear material, and designs of facilities for uranium conversion. Libya’s IAEA safeguards agreement required Tripoli to report some of these activities, but the government failed to do so.

The report says that Libya ordered 10,000 advanced centrifuges and received two of them in 2000. Moreover, the report discloses that Libya secretly separated small amounts of plutonium from the spent fuel of the Tajura Research Reactor during the 1980s.

Although the report states that Libya received nuclear weapons design documents from the Khan network, the IAEA cites no evidence that Libya ever undertook steps to build a nuclear weapon.

February 26, 2004: The United States lifts its Libya travel ban. U.S. citizens are allowed to make travel-related expenditures in Libya, and businesses may enter negotiations to re-acquire pre-sanctions holdings inside Libya. The Libyan government is also invited to open a diplomatic interests section in Washington.

DeSutter tells the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the same day that Libya’s decision to abandon its weapons programs should become “a model for other proliferators to mend their ways and help restore themselves to international legitimacy.”

February 27, 2004: The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the international body charged with verifying CWC compliance, confirms that Libyan officials provided a “partial initial

declaration of their chemical weapons stockpiles” and promised a complete declaration to the organization by March 5, 2004.

The OPCW begins oversight of chemical weapons destruction activities in Libya.

February 28, 2004: At the end of an African Union summit, Gaddafi calls upon other states to abandon their WMD programs. Nuclear weapons, he says, make states less secure.

March 4, 2004: The OPCW reports that “[o]ver 3,300 [empty] aerial bombs, specifically designed to disperse chemical warfare agent, have been individually inventoried, then irreversibly destroyed under stringent international verification.”

March 5, 2004: Libyan officials submit a complete declaration of the state’s chemical weapons stockpile and facilities. According to the OPCW, the declared stockpile includes approximately 23 metric tons of mustard gas and more than 1,300 metric tons of precursor chemicals, but no filled munitions.

March 8, 2004: The United States, with assistance from British and IAEA officials, arranges for 13 kilograms of highly enriched uranium, a fissile material, to be airlifted from Libya to Russia for disposal.

March 10, 2004: Libya signs an additional protocol to its IAEA safeguards agreement and reaffirms a December 29 commitment to behave as if the protocol had already entered into force.

DeSutter tells the House International Relations Committee that the United States has removed five 800-km range Scud-C missiles from Libya, as well as additional missile and centrifuge components.

The IAEA Board of Governors adopts a resolution declaring that Libya’s past clandestine nuclear activities “constituted noncompliance” with its IAEA safeguards agreement. Nonetheless, the board welcomes the cooperation and openness of Libyan officials since December 2003 and recommends that ElBaradei report Libya’s noncompliance to the Security Council “for information purposes only.” The IAEA is required to report noncompliance with safeguards agreements to the Security Council, which can then take action against the offending state.

March 23, 2004: Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William Burns meets with Libyan officials, including Gaddafi, in Tripoli. A State Department spokesperson calls the meetings “constructive” and reflective of the “step-by-step normalization” of relations between Libya and the United States. Burns is the most senior U.S. official to visit Libya since 1969.

April 22, 2004: In response to the March IAEA resolution, the Security Council issues a president statement “commending” Libya for its cooperation with the agency.

April 23, 2004: The White House terminates the application of ILSA with respect to Libya. Press Secretary Scott McClellan also announces that the Treasury Department has modified sanctions imposed under the authority of IEEPA. McClellan notes that “the resumption of most commercial activities” between Libya and the United States will now be permitted.

May 13, 2004: Libya announces it will end military trade with countries it deems “source[s] of concern for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.” U.S. officials explain that the Libyan announcement

follows a private agreement for Libya to end all its military dealings with Syria, Iran, and North Korea. However, the Libyan foreign ministry later denies that the announcement is aimed at Syria.

May 26, 2004: Libya submits its initial declarations required by its additional protocol arrangement with the IAEA.

May 28, 2004: ElBaradei issues a report to the IAEA board detailing the agency’s progress in verifying Libya’s declarations regarding its nuclear program. According to the report, “Libyan authorities have provided prompt, unhindered access to all locations requested by the [a]gency and to all relevant equipment and material declared to be in Libya.”

Speaking to the board June 14, ElBaradei says questions remain regarding the origin of nuclear material Libya imported during 2000 and 2001, as well as the source of enriched uranium particles found on Libya’s centrifuge equipment. The agency has contacted other governments to investigate entities involved in providing nuclear technology to Libya.

June 28, 2004: Announcing that Washington and Tripoli will resume direct diplomatic ties, Burns inaugurates a new U.S. Liaison Office in Libya.

September 20, 2004: The United States lifts most of its remaining sanctions on Libya. Bush terminates the national emergency declared in 1986 under IEEPA, as well as revokes related executive orders. This action ends the remaining sanctions under IEEPA and ends the need for Treasury Department licenses for trade with Libya.

The United States also permits direct air flights between the two countries, as well as unfreezes Libyan assets in the United States. Additionally, Bush waives prohibitions on extending certain U.S. export assistance programs to Libya and on the ability of U.S. taxpayers to claim credits for taxes paid to Libya.

Libya is still subject to some sanctions as it remains on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. These sanctions include prohibitions on arms exports and Department of Defense contracts. The United States also is required to oppose loans from international financial institutions to such countries and impose export controls on dual-use items.

Two days later, DeSutter tells the House International Relations Committee that verification of Libya’s disarmament tasks is “essentially complete,” adding that the United States, working with the United Kingdom, has completed verifying “with reasonable certainty that Libya has eliminated, or has set in place the elimination of” its weapons programs.

Libya must still destroy its stockpiles of chemical weapons agents and its medium-range Scud B missiles.

August 30, 2004: ElBaradei issues another report to the IAEA board stating that information Tripoli has given to the agency about its past nuclear activities “appear[s] to be consistent with the information available to and verified by” the IAEA.

According to the report, the IAEA continues to investigate several outstanding issues regarding Libya’s nuclear weapons program, particularly assistance Tripoli received from the Khan network. Cooperation from other countries is “essential” for determining the role of the network in supplying Libya, the report adds.

—*Research assistance by Scott Stinson*