

ROY MEACHUM

Viewpoint



Libya's 'idiot'

1/7/86

It seems that twice a year we are treated to the unseemly spectacle of the media's aggrandizement of Moammar Khadafy. The scruffy Libyan alley-cat becomes transformed into a raging tiger, a threat to world security.

Of course, Khadafy loves the game; he prances and poses and snorts bellicose noises, much to the delight of his fly-specked nation. During these semi-annual Khadafy media festivals, Libyans feel important — not easy. The nation's estimated four million people play secondary roles in their own land.

Foreigners — including Europeans and other Arabs — run the Libyan economy; they give orders to the natives, and not always politely. From time to time, a national reaction to their subservient status causes internal explosions.

To soothe his people's anger, Khadafy periodically expels Egyptian or Tunisian "guest" workers; sometimes their forced emigration is accompanied by trumpeting sounds that prompt international concern. But at their base the mass expulsions have to do with Libya's domestic problems.

Scrambling in the world's oil markets inconvenienced some producing nations: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait trimmed back on existing programs. Libya's losses came out of its economic hide; no provision existed for lean times. During the fat years, Khadafy committed huge sums to buying dignity; he spent and borrowed where he could on grandiose projects.

Libya's self-delusions led to the purchase of several thousand tanks — for an army made up of people with little knowledge of automobiles. On a per-capita basis, Khadafy's forces could be the most over-armed in the world. Despite all that equipment, the Libyan army came a cropper in Chad, fighting against troops with pick-up weapons and virtually no organization to support them.

Khadafy also failed in his attempt to place himself at the head of the anti-Israel movement. Terrorists accepted his money and his weapons; they learned they could not live with his erratic behavior. In time, Khadafy found his offers spurned by Palestinians who discovered they could not trust the Libyan.

Most Arabs call Khadafy *al-majnoon*: "idiot" is the best translation. His crazy ways pose his greatest danger; but Egypt figured out long ago that Moammar Khadafy can be a convenient whipping boy.

Both Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak have used "that idiot" in Tripoli as diversion from their own domestic crises. Khadafy cooperated by staging a series of half-baked plots; each time he wound up with egg on his face. The last incident involved a couple of English "hit men," hired to assassinate a Libyan dissident; its collapse was shown on Cairo TV.

Khadafy himself was the target for abortive schemes — some reportedly backed by U.S. and Israeli intelligence. One recent attempted coup cost the life of the one Libyan Western sources rated the best chance to replace Khadafy.

Of course, each action against the Libyan leader results in an upsurge of support from his own people and from nations like the Soviet Union and Syria. However, there is nothing to indicate Moscow considers him an adornment; past Soviet failures among Arab nations endow Khadafy with symbolic importance.

Send in the U.S. Navy? Bomb Tripoli? The "idiot" in Tripoli is not worth risking a single American life. Killing Khadafy will not stop international terrorism; it won't even slow it down. On the contrary, the Libyan leader's death at U.S. or Israeli hands would give him that respectability that has escaped Moammar Khadafy all his life.

The present media blitz signifies nothing; it glorifies out of all proportion the insignificant head man of a poor and struggling people. Pity the poor Libyans; they live with the "idiot" all the time. For the rest of the world, Khadafy is no more real than the soap opera character that the TV news shows make of him.

Praise for Meachum

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I have read the *Frederick Post* since moving to the Thurmont area some 20 years ago. I have enjoyed your editorials, though not always agreeing with them.

I enjoy Meachum's columns and they come first after the headlines. I don't agree with all his views either, but he has done a lot to liven up the *Post*, and make it more interesting.

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