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### A New Libya?

Perhaps. But the U.S. response to reform must be linked to more Libyan progress.

By Tom Lantos

Saturday, January 31, 2004; Page A21

In December 1988, agents of the Libyan government committed a horrendous crime: taking 270 lives with the explosion of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. It was the deadliest of numerous acts of terrorism committed by the Libyan regime in the 1980s. Now Libya's ruler, Moammar Gaddafi, says his country is ready to reform -- no more terrorism, no more weapons of mass destruction. Should we believe him? The United States has just taken possession of equipment and documents from Libya's nuclear weapons and missile programs as part of the country's agreement to rid itself of weapons of mass destruction, but can we expect this kind of follow-through to continue?

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I just returned from Libya, where I met at length with Gaddafi and senior members of his government. Gaddafi told me I was the first official representative of the U.S. government with whom he has met since the departure of the last U.S. ambassador decades ago. While camels and goats grazed outside, we sat in his vast but sparsely appointed tent, pitched symbolically near the untouched remains of the

Gaddafi house that the United States had bombed in 1986 in response to the bombing of the La Belle discotheque.

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Gaddafi told me that he wants to improve relations with the United States, and to reveal and destroy all of Libya's weapons of mass destruction and related programs. Senior officials in his government confirmed Libya's bold policy decision as well, and American non-proliferation experts on the ground assisting the Libyans with removing and destroying their WMD capacity are impressed with the progress that has been achieved in just a few weeks. Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, confirmed just days ago that information provided by Libya in the past few weeks will help uncover international arms smuggling networks that aided Libya and many other rogue nations. Meanwhile, the State Department tells Congress that Libya no longer is involved in terrorism.

Why have Gaddafi and the Libyan government made this sudden about-face? Based on my meetings, Gaddafi has decided that Libyan security can be better assured by a positive relationship with the United States and the West than through a risky and expensive policy of developing weapons of mass destruction. Libya's leaders also acknowledged that their nation is facing growing economic difficulties that can only be resolved by an end to sanctions, a redirection of resources into development and Libya's close integration into the world economy.

The issue now facing the United States is whether we can disregard the outrageous track record of the Libyan regime for the past 31/2 decades. Libya is responsible for many deaths resulting from acts of terrorism over the years and for much regional instability. So while we must welcome signs that Gaddafi may be altering his behavior, we must also remain alert to the possibility that what we are witnessing is not true reform. We can "trust, but verify," but we must be skeptical, and relentless in verifying.

While we should respond quickly to Libya's dramatic and historic decision, the U.S. response must be measured and directly linked to continued Libyan progress. In light of the verifiable initiation of WMD dismantling, the United States should immediately lift the ban on travel by U.S. citizens to Libya, and move quickly to establish an American diplomatic presence there.

But removal of Libya from the terrorist list, elimination of U.S. sanctions, and full normalization of relations with the country should be considered only after Libya has verifiably completed the dismantling of its WMD program and agreed to long-term monitoring procedures. A public apology by the Libyans for the Pan Am 103 bombing and a significant improvement in the human rights situation in Libya would help pave the way for these steps.

The gains from the Libyan example are potentially enormous. Terrorists will have one less refuge in the world. The Middle East will be made less volatile by the defusing of Libya's WMD threat. Rogue states will be encouraged to abandon terror and to shed WMD, as they see that by doing so, they can enhance their security and normalize ties with the United States. The Muslim world will better understand that we are engaged in a war on terror, not a war on Islamic states. Countries and corporations selling WMD equipment and materials to rogue states will be intimidated by the fear of exposure and punishment. And the United States will have demonstrated that historic changes

for the better can be wrought by peaceful means, always America's preferred option whenever possible.

Libya still has much to accomplish before we can remove it from the terrorist list or fully lift economic sanctions. But if Libya does its part completely and verifiably, we must treat this as a new chapter in U.S.-Libyan relations. There is too much at stake to do otherwise. When the U.S. flag flies over our embassy in Tripoli once more, we will have demonstrated yet again our commitment to a more peaceful and stable world.

*Rep. Lantos (D-Calif.) is the ranking member of his party on the House International Relations Committee. He is also founder and co-chairman of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus.*

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