Subsequently, the Egyptian Prime Minister asserted that the hijackers had acted on the orders of Colonel Kadhafi and had been promised a total of $250,000 if they brought the plane to Libya successfully. However, Libyan Government spokesmen stated that the men were members of a hitherto unknown guerrilla group called the "Abdel Nasser Movement" and denied the allegations of Libyan involvement; they also condemned the hijacking as an "irresponsible action" which had endangered the lives of innocent people, and asserted that there was no doubt that the incident had been inspired by the Egyptian secret services.

Six men were put on trial on Sept. 7 accused of having participated in the hijacking; the three hijackers themselves were subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment, while the three others accused, a Jordanian and two Palestinians (one of whom was tried in absentia), were acquitted. At the trial all denied Libyan involvement in the hijacking.

Amidst of two Egyptians in Libya. The day after the attempted hijack- ing in Tripoli, a group of Egyptian authorities on Aug. 24, 1976, arrested two Egyptian aircraft security men after they had been forced to leave the American charter they were travelling on at a stop-over at Sabha airport, some 400 miles south of Tripoli. ARNA reported that the men had been detained after it had been discovered that they were in possession of arms and explosives, and alleged that men had been sent to Libya to commit acts of sabotage and assassination. Egyptian authorities protested strongly, the Cairo press claiming that the two Egyptians concerned were security guards on a routine flight. Both men were subsequently released by the Libyan authorities.

Also on Aug. 24, 1976, Libya alleged that an Egyptian intelligence agent, Mr. Muhammad al-Kholy, had confessed on Tripoli television to hving spied to provide Egypt with information about the Libyan Air Force. Mr. Kholy was subsequently released by the Libyan authorities.

In a speech to students in Tripoli on July 24, 1976, Colonel Kadhafi accused the Egyptian President of plotting against his name and of moving troops "from the front line with the Zionists" to "the Egyptian-Libyan border against the Libyan Arab people". He said that if Egypt had not "returned to reason" by Sept. 1, when he would broach the border with Egypt, Libyan authorities would be forced to take action. The Libyan leader also asserted that Colonel Kadhafi had set up camps near the Egyptian border to train saboteurs for operations against Egypt and that aircraft weapons had been moved to "protect the border and prevent saboteurs from infiltrating into Egypt". The newspaper Al Seyassah, published on Sept. 1, 1976, the Libyan leader's speech, endorsed the proposal to break relations with Egypt.

In November 1976 it was disclosed that Mr. Yassir Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), had been mediating to resolve the conflict between Egypt and Libya, and that a press conference held in Tripoli on Nov. 9 Mr. Afr act said that as a result of his efforts the two leaders had agreed in principle to meet.

The Libyan authorities had, in the light of Colonel Kadhafi's remarks of July 24 [see 2708 A], disclosed that if the decision had been his alone then he "would not have hesitated to break off relations with the Egyptian Government for its malevolent campaign and plots against Libya . . ."; however, "the decision was not for me but for the people to make" and "they decided not to break with Egypt". He added that Libya's dispute was not with Egypt but with President Sadat, and he could "see no reason why he and the Egyptian leader "should not meet to settle our differences".

In an interview with the Egyptian weekly Rose al-Youm on Sept. 4, 1976, Colonel Kadhafi repeated his demand for a meeting with President Sadat—whom he still considered "a father"—of no longer than five hours in a neutral country.

Confirming on Sept. 21, 1976, that Egypt and Libya were negotiating through diplomatic channels, Mr. Abdel Kader Ghoka (who had succeeded Mr. Ramadan as Libya's chief diplomatic representative in Cairo) said that consultations between himself and Egyptian officials had been going on for some time, that all concerned were "optimistic" about an improvement in relations in the near future and that a meeting between the two heads of state was "not impossible".

Also in September ARNA reported that Libya had released 23 Egyptians detained on suspicion of committing acts of espionage and sabotage in Libya.

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The Libyan leader had said that his attempts to bring about reconciliation were due to his belief in the role which could be played by Egypt and Libya united in the interest of the Arab nation and the Palestinian cause in particular. He also expressed his hopes that the proposed meeting would "mark a new chapter in relations between the two brothers and would be auspicious for the unity of the Arab nation".

It was stated that Egyptian and Libyan officials would meet in Cairo by the end of November to prepare for talks between President Sadat and Colonel Kadhafi (although this meeting did not in fact materialize).

New Crisis in Egyptian-Libyan Relations, March-May 1977 - Prohibition on Free Movement across Border - Expulsion of Egyptian Workers from Libya

After the arrest as reported in Cairo on March 11, 1977, of five people who were said to have admitted being Libyan agents sent to Egypt to carry out sabotage operations during the Afro-Arab summit held in Cairo from March 7 to 9, reports of the relations between the two countries further deteriorated when on March 25 MENA announced that the Libyan Government had banned Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi and Tunisian citizens from entering Libya. Three days later it was reported that the Egyptian Government had, in retaliation, prohibited the free entry of Libyans to Egypt, although the Egyptian Government's decision to limit this restriction was subsequently announced by Mr. Ismail Fahmi on April 21.

A group of Libyan students and workers occupied the Egyptian relations office in Benghazi on April 9, after a protest march to condemn "Sadat's conspiracy against the Libyan Arab people". According to ARNA, the occupation had occurred after "the masses had discovered that the offices were nothing but a den of spies and saboteurs against the Libyan people". Egyptian reports said that the premises were ransacked and the charge d'affaires, Mr. Nabih Doryouti, assaulted.

After his return to Egypt later in the month Mr. Doryouti accused Colonel Kadhafi of organizing the occupation to "divert attention" from recent executions of officers and civilians (including one Egyptian) who had been sentenced to death for activities against the state and other officials (see 28338 A).

The following day (i.e. April 10) over 200 young Egyptians surrounded the Libyan relations office in Alexandria shouting pro-Egyptian and anti-Libyan slogans. The crowd stoned the building and set fire to it before being dispersed by the police.

After these incidents, both countries sent notes to the Arab League headquarters in Cairo criticizing the other's behaviour, and both demanded that their note be circulated to the other