

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 arranged by the Egyptian secret service.

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.

Arrest of two Egyptians in Libya. The day after the attempted hijacking in Egypt, Libyan authorities on Aug. 24, 1976, arrested two Egyptian aircraft security men after they had been forced to leave the American charter plane on which they were travelling 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 the 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 Muhammed al-Kholy, had confessed on Tripoli television to having spied to provide Egypt with information about the Libyan Air Force.

Military and Diplomatic Developments, July-August 1976 - Mutual Accusations of Troop Build-ups - Colonel Kadhafi's Threat to break Diplomatic Relations

In a speech to students in Tripoli on July 24, 1976, Colonel Kadhafi accused the Egyptian President of plotting against his regime and of moving troops "from the front line with the Zionist enemy" and massing them on 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 matter again, "the bridges will be cut and there will be no further meeting with Sadat ever".

Earlier in July 1976, Egypt and Sudan had accused Colonel Kadhafi of supporting a coup attempt on July 2 against President Nemery of Sudan [rt 27883 A]. After the attempted coup the heads of state of Egypt and Sudan had in July 1976 signed a 25-year defence pact [ibid.], when it was reported that the two countries had agreed that they would be prepared "if necessary" to launch a "heavy military operation" against Libya. It was also understood that President Nemery, President Sadat and King Khaled of Saudi Arabia had decided (during their meeting in Jeddah in July 1976 [ibid.]) that Colonel Kadhafi should be "overthrown by whatever means possible" and that they had concluded a pact which involved a Saudi Arabian promise to provide financial backing for the other two countries to change the regime in Libya.

Among reports in August 1976 that Egypt (and also Sudan) had been building up forces along the border with Libya, *Al Ahram* of Aug. 13 said that Egyptian troops, tanks and anti-aircraft weapons had been moved to "protect the border and prevent saboteurs from infiltrating into Egypt". The newspaper also asserted that Colonel Kadhafi had set up camps near the border to train saboteurs for operations against Egypt and that "a big power [i.e. the Soviet Union] is providing advisers and [i]mports" for these actions. However, Colonel Kadhafi denied the existence of these camps and said that he would complain to the Arab League about the Egyptian troop concentration.

In an interview with *Le Monde* published on Sept. 1, 1976, the Libyan leader said that President Sadat "is playing with fire" by sending the troop enforcements, and added: "The Egyptian head of state continues to make hysterical statements and calls me a madman, while I have always treated him with the utmost courtesy. . . . Nothing justifies his warmonger-jexcept, perhaps, the critical situation he faces in his own country."

In an interview with the Kuwait newspaper *Al Seyassah*, published on Aug. 13, President Sadat had accused Colonel Kadhafi—"the madman of Libya" of plotting to overthrow the entire Arab world, adding that "Kadhafi's file is in our hands" and that "we will inform Arab governments of what he is planning for them". The Egyptian President had endorsed the *Al Ahram* reports of training camps for terrorist activities in Libya and had claimed that mercenaries were being trained at four Kpate bases on the Egyptian-Libyan border in preparation for invasions of Sudan, Chad, Tunisia and Egypt. In the same interview President Sadat had accused Colonel Kadhafi of having been involved in the hijacking of the French Airbus to Entebbe in Uganda the previous June (see 27188 A).

Improvement in Relations, September-November 1976 - Mediation Attempts by Mr Arafat

In the light of Colonel Kadhafi's remarks of July 24 [see above], there was considerable speculation, particularly in the press, that Colonel Kadhafi would announce Libya's intention of breaking diplomatic relations with Egypt in a speech to be made on Sept. 1, 1976, to mark the seventh anni-

versary of the overthrow of King Idris [see 23569 A]. In this speech, however, the Libyan leader, although critical of President Sadat's regime, said he would not break off diplomatic ties and intended no threat to the 250,000 Egyptians working in his country.

Colonel Kadhafi 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-Yusuf* on Sept. 4, 1976, Colonel Kadhafi repeated his call 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.

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 at a press conference held in Tripoli on Nov. 9 Mr Arafat said that as a result of his efforts the two leaders had agreed in principle to meet.

The Palestinian leader 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 "open 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 before 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—see 28354 A), 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 lift 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 a base for terrorism against the Libyan people". Egyptian reports said that the premises were ransacked and the charge d'affaires, Mr Nabih Dyrouti, assaulted.

After his return to Egypt later in the month Mr Dyrouti 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 offences (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