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Information
from Air Force Marshall Koldunov
on issues related to
"US aggression against LIBYA"

Air Force Marshall Koldunov reported that it was not until 20 April 1986 that a group of Soviet specialists were permitted to travel to LIBYA to study on-site the US acts of aggression and the countermeasures taken by the Libyan military.

Currently the only information available is from the Soviet specialists who were employed in the Libyan military air defense units.

LIBYA has acquired a great deal of modern technology from the Soviet Union, including:

- 4 "VEGA" anti-aircraft missile units units = 24 launch pad
- and
- 86 "VOLCHOV" and "NEVA" anti-aircraft missile units = 276 launch pads.

Thus, LIBYA's air defense alone has

more than 300 launch pads

for various anti-aircraft missile systems.

In addition, there are a large number of Soviet "KUB" and "OSA-AK" anti-aircraft missiles systems and French "CROTALE II" anti-aircraft missile systems in the LIBYAN ground forces.

The following air defenses cover TRIPOLI, the capital:

- 7 "VOLCHOV" anti-aircraft missile units = 42 launch pads
- 12 "NEVA" anti-aircraft missile units = 48 launch pads
- 3 "KUB" anti-aircraft missile units = 48 launch pads
- 1 "OSA-AK" anti-aircraft regiment = 16 launch pads
- 2 "CROTALE II" anti-aircraft units = 60 launch pads

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These air defense forces, which include more than

200 launch pads,
are more than enough to provide assured protection for the capital against air attacks.

On the aggressive acts at the end of March

American aircraft operating from aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean were testing LIBYA's air defenses as early as the end of March.

A first group of three aircraft flew into Libyan airspace from the sea at about 1200 on 24 March 1986.

Qadhafi then ordered that the "VEGA" anti-aircraft missile system be used. Two missiles were launched against the target at a range of 105 km and the target disappeared from the monitor.

The American search and rescue helicopters employed immediately thereafter proved that the target had been destroyed.

The approach of a second group of two aircraft was detected in the evening at about 1800.

The target was destroyed with one launched missile at a range of 75 km.

The Libyans therefore claimed that they had shot down a total of five aircraft.

After more precise analysis and more objective examination, Soviet specialists determined that three aircraft had been shot down.

President Reagan said that there had been no losses.

On the aggression on 15 April 1986

The Soviet Union reported as early as 13 April 1986 that a possible air attack on LIBYA was imminent based on the concentration of the carrier group in the Mediterranean and on other intelligence information.

The Libyans were encouraged to declare "heightened combat readiness" for its military and "full combat readiness" for national air defense forces and resources. Qadhafi and the leadership of the Libyan army did not take this warning seriously and did not respond to it.

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F-111 fighter bombers flying out of ENGLAND conducted the 1st air attack at 0335 on 15 April 1986

The air attack on the capital of TRIPOLI did not come from the sea, that is, it did not come from the MEDITERRANEAN, but from the south across the desert at an altitude of approx. 50 m.

At the same time, aircraft carriers operating in the MEDITERRANEAN launched a large number of unmanned aircraft (drones), which threw Libyan radar reconnaissance into an extremely difficult position.

After the unmanned aircraft were employed, the fighter bombers took off from the aircraft carriers at an altitude of 50 to 70 m while heavy radar jamming was employed.

The first strikes were directed entirely at the air defense system, especially radar stations and "VEGA" anti-aircraft missile control centers.

The 2nd air attack occurred at 0400 against TRIPOLI and BENGASI.
At this time the air defense system had already acted, but with poor results.

The 3rd air attack occurred at 1600 and the 4th air attack occurred on 16 April 1986.
Libya claims that a total of 20 aircraft were shot down during the last two attacks.
However, objective examination by Soviet specialists determined that a total of only 10 aircraft were shot down.
A few of these crashed into the ground, but most of the aircraft went down over the MEDITERRANEAN.

It was very difficult to use the "VEGA" anti-aircraft system during these attacks because the aircraft approached at very low altitudes (50 m).
Qadhafi ordered that the fighters not be used, he prohibited them from taking off; these aircraft include more than 300 fighters, of which 80 alone are MiG-25s.

The attitude on Soviet technology is characterized in that, for instance, all French "Mirage" aircraft are always carefully covered and maintained.
On the other hand, the modern Soviet MiG-25 aircraft are continuously exposed to inclement weather, which has a negative impact on their continuous combat readiness under actual meteorological conditions.

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The American aviation forces used a great number of "HARM" anti-radiation missiles launched from aircraft at a range of 130 km from the target. However, they had only a minor effect because 15 of the 30 missiles used did not reach their targets.
The "Paveway" laser-guided bomb, used for the first time, was launched 60 km from the target.

In addition, "Bullpup" missiles with laser targeting devices were used; 30 to 40% of these did not detonate.

As a result of the employment of the above munitions, a total of five Libyan national air defense anti-aircraft missile units were lost, specifically:

- 2 "Volchov" anti-aircraft missile units
- 1 "NEVA" anti-aircraft missile unit
- 1 "KUB" anti-aircraft missile unit, and
- 1 French "CROTALE II" anti-aircraft missile system unit.

Air Force Marshall Koldunov cited as reasons for the limited effectiveness of the Libyan air defenses, in that only 10 of the 70 aircraft that were used were destroyed:

1. Poor command and control of LIBYA's air defense forces and weapons, lack of a clear mission, and poor interaction.
2. Poor political perspective/morale among the crews and personnel manning the radar stations, missile control stations, and anti-aircraft missile complexes.
Cowardice among some of the crews, who fled their positions in panic during the air attacks.
3. Insufficient level of training among air defense forces and consequently poor mastery of modern Soviet technology.
4. Inadequate organization of radar reconnaissance over the MEDITERRANEAN. Minimum acquisition altitude of radar field was only 250 to 300 m.
This meant that the extremely low-flying American aircraft were not acquired as targets.
(Due to its own arrogance, the Libyan military did not act on requests and recommendations put forth by Soviet specialists to organize the radar field so that it would be possible to acquire targets at altitudes of 50 m and greater).

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5. LIBYA's fighters were not used to engage and destroy the intruding aircraft.

In conclusion, Air Force Marshall Koldunov stressed that there would be a thorough evaluation of the military aspects of the US aggression against LIBYA pending the return of the group of Soviet specialists that had been sent to LIBYA on 20 April 1986.

The information collected and lessons learned from this evaluation will be provided to the Ministers of Defense for the Warsaw Pact nations.

[Translated from the original German by Grace Leonard, for the Cold War International History Project.]