

Rebels against Qadhafi count on US backing

PATRICK SEALE assesses the Muslim Brotherhood's challenge

TWO months after the shootings outside the Libyan People's Bureau in St James's Square, London, the struggle between Colonel Qadhafi and his opponents continues as virulently as ever.

On 8 May, a dozen young opponents, holed up in a building opposite the Aziziyya barracks in Tripoli where Qadhafi has his home, were killed in a shoot-out with Government troops. This was the first large-scale armed challenge to Qadhafi in his 15-year rule.

Qadhafi accused Muslim Brother hit-teams, operating from Sudan with American support, of being responsible. He struck back with massive repression—opposition sources speak of 5,000 arrests—and it is known that seven Libyans were publicly hanged in the first week of this month.

Coming so soon after the London drama which soured his relations with Europe, the 8 May shoot-out seems clearly to have rattled Qadhafi.

Last week, on the anniversary of the expulsion of American troops from Wheelus Field airbase, he launched one of his wildest attacks against the United States. He warned Washington that if it continued to export terrorism to him, he would retaliate by 'exporting terrorism to the heart of America.' He committed Libya to helping to overthrow 'the dirty American agent,' President Nimeiry of Sudan.

There is no dispute that the group of young militants killed in the Tripoli clash were Muslim Brothers recruited and sent on their mission by the National Front for the Salvation of Libya, an opposition group led by Muhammad Mugarriaf, a 44-year-old Libyan who worked closely with Qadhafi until 1980. His last post was ambassador in New Delhi.

According to opposition sources, the United States moved into active opposition to Qadhafi in that year and encouraged Mugarriaf to set up his National Front with Saudi funds, estimated at £12 million.

Even more significant was the rallying to him of the international leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood which supplied scores of young zealots.

So, in the half light of clandestine Libyan opposition, a movement has taken shape which claims to have American backing, Saudi funds, Muslim hit-men, and bases in Sudan and Morocco.

But far from being welcome among Libyan exiles, this development has caused alarm and bitter dissent. The National Front's main rival, the Manchester-based Libyan Constitutional Union (LCU), believes the United States is backing the wrong horse.

Infighting is an occupational disease of opposition movements, but the LCU, which rejects violence and stands for democratic legality, has some cogent arguments.

The first is that, if the Muslim Brothers use the National Front to seize power in Libya, they will be even more difficult to dislodge than Qadhafi and even more of a threat to Libya's neighbours.



**COLONEL QADHAFI :
Massive repression.**

Secondly, the LCU accuses Mugarriaf of being as intolerant of opposition as Qadhafi.

Thirdly, the LCU believes the abortive attack in Tripoli was an ill-conceived suicide mission which, far from promoting the cause of the resistance, set it back for years by providing Qadhafi with a pretext to clamp down.

Undoubtedly the disputes in the opposition contribute to Qadhafi's durability. Surrounded by his numerous relatives, his tribe, his army, his East German security experts, the fanatical youngsters of the revolutionary committees, and, above all, by the vast, flat Libyan desert so unfriendly to guerrillas, he is a difficult man to overthrow.