



ARTYKUŁ

## Muammar Gaddafi's Libya - a forgotten ally of the Polish People's Republic

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The Libyan dictator took power in 1969 and only a few years later began close cooperation with the eastern bloc. He sold oil to the Soviet Union and in turn bought huge amount of weapons.

His openness towards the socialist camp was also profitable for the Polish People's Republic, and the active foreign policies of Edward Gierek's government influenced the establishing of close Polish-Libyan relations.

## Diplomatic relations with Libya

The Polish People's Republic established diplomatic relations with Libya on the embassy level in December 1963, but the first ambassador of this country was accredited in Warsaw no sooner than 14 years later. It was in that time that the close relations between the two states began. These contacts were conditioned by the geopolitical situation. The breaking of diplomatic relations with Israel by the communist states (except for Romania) in 1967, due to the so-called Six-Day War, influenced the tightening of relations with some Arab countries. These countries got more and more allies at the international scene as a result of their anti-Israeli initiatives. It is worth mentioning the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations no 3379 from 1975, backed by the Polish People's Republic, which described Zionism as a sign of racism. The main part of the agreement focused on the Palestine matter. Libya was perceived as one of the main strongholds of the so-called front of firmness on the matter of Israeli politics in the Middle East and in this way was supported by Warsaw.

In 1976, the President of the National Council, Henryk Jabłoński came to Libya on an official visit. One of the results of a meeting he had there was the establishing of regular consultations between the two ministries of foreign affairs. Two years later, along with his impressive entourage, Col. Muammar Gaddafi himself visited the Polish People's Republic. At around this time, his "Green Book", translated into Polish, began circulating in Warsaw printed with the permission of the communist authorities. Gen. Czesław Kiszczak mentioned this:

"Since we were making deals with Col. Gaddafi for several billion dollars, it was hard to blame him for his men smuggling the so-called <<Green Books>> into Poland [...] although many things in these books were not exactly enjoyed by our more conservative comrades, like the religious perspective of Islam".



**13th anniversary of the  
Revolution of September 1969,**

### ***The scheme of international Zionism***

The quickly developing cooperation was held back by the creation of the “Solidarity” movement. The Libyan commander observed the tug of war between the Polish United Workers’ Party and the trade union very closely. He got information on the development of the situation in the Polish People’s Republic from the employees of the People’s Office of the Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in Warsaw – this was the name the Libyan embassy took in May 1980. Employees of the People’s Office described the “Solidarity’s carnival” as the *scheme of international Zionism*. The Libyans, however, did not intend to idly stand by and watch the events transpiring in communist Poland. Michel Mounayer, one of the Arab journalists connected with the Libyan facility, wrote for the “Reality” weekly – an anti-Solidarity newspaper established by Stefan Olszowski, a representative of the party “concrete” [a term used to describe members of the communist party who pushed for swift and violent dealing with the Solidarity movement; translator’s annotation]. Anti-American and anti-Israeli articles were also published in the “As-Sadaka” (“Friendship”) monthly, which had been published since 1981. The paper was created on the initiative of the Society of Libyan-Arab-Polish Friendship and was the “crowning” of its previous activities dating to March 1978. “As-Sadaka” was entirely funded by the Libyan embassy (the budget for propaganda purposes of the Warsaw People’s Office was to be at around 300 thousand dollars in 1981) and served as the official propaganda paper of Gaddafi. It is worth adding that “Solidarity’s” activities were also the subject of talks between the Libyan commander and Leonid Brezhnev during his visit in Moscow in 1981.

The Libyan authorities clearly supported the introduction of martial law in Poland. Gaddafi gave a speech on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1982 expressing unity with the actions of the Military Council of National Salvation. During the visit of Gen. Tadeusz Hupałowski in Tripoli, the Libyan leader expressed his support for the Polish government, at the same time promising to double the number of Polish experts in Libya.

Known for his unconventional behaviour, the author of the “third theory” and “Green Book” addressed the creation of the “Solidarity” movement with reserve. What is interesting, the fourth quarter of 1980 was the time when different opinions on the situation in Poland clashed among the Libyan command. It was then decided by the highest authorities to carefully analyse and investigate the Polish situation. The Libyans were particularly interested in the mass protests which they tried to explain with the theses from the “Green Book”. They searched for “shared points” of the goals of the trade union with the third theory by Col. Gaddafi. One of the effects of such research was the fact Lech Wałęsa was shown on Libyan television several times. However, the attempts to legitimise “Solidarity” through the “Green Book” were quickly abandoned and, on the break of 1980-1981, the stance represented by the former Prime Minister Jalloud prevailed. He believed that any weakening of the socialist camp was not in the interest of Libya, since it prevented it from leading “anti-imperialist” policies. As a consequence, the decision to economically aid Poland was postponed “until the situation was clearly under control” of the government and the Polish United Workers’ Party, so until the opposition was totally beaten. It was decided that this situation came only after December 13<sup>th</sup> 1981.

### ***Your defeat would be your defeat...***

The Libyan authorities clearly supported the introduction of martial law in Poland. Gaddafi gave a speech on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1982 expressing unity with the actions of the Military Council of National Salvation. The decision on the internment of “Solidarity’s” leadership and the former high-ranking party officers, especially Edward Gierek, was the main focus of mass media. During the visit of Gen. Tadeusz Hupałowski in Tripoli, the Libyan leader expressed his support for the Polish government, at the same time promising to double the number of Polish experts in Libya (it was to be raised to 30 000 people). Gaddafi was especially interested in the mechanisms of introducing the martial law. As part of the help, the Polish People’s Republic proposed the creation of Libyan-Polish civilian and military businesses, and even to establish Polish industrial facilities with Polish crews in Libya. When talking with Gen. Hupałowski, Gaddafi said:

“In these difficult times, our hearts go out to Poland. We know, that the American imperialism and its allies had much to do with the events in Poland. We feared for Poland’s fate, that the situation would spiral out of your control. It is good, that you took these steps. Although you did so too late. Your defeat would be your defeat, but your victory will be our victory as well”.

Apart from the words of sympathy and understanding for the decision of Gen. Jaruzelski, the Libyan dictator did not take back his deposits from the Trade Bank which in 1980 amounted to 340 million dollars. “Apart from the purely economic reasons, this was definitely a show of sympathy” – that is how his statement was described in Warsaw.

In September 1982, the author of the “Green Book” came to the Polish People’s Party on an official visit. It was huge support for Gen. Jaruzelski and his people, since Poland was under international isolation after the introduction of the martial law. During the meeting with the government-party leadership, he gave high praise to the steps taken by the generals to stabilise the internal situation. He stressed, that through the “Polish card” imperialism tried to put a splinter in the socialist world. In this situation, Libya’s support for Poland

“is not an act of mercy, but the highest need, as in this way Libya protects itself”.

It explained why the leadership in Tripoli interpreted American sanctions for Poland as “vicious imperialist attacks”. Apart from discussing the political situation, Gaddafi expressed his gratitude for the strengthening of the Libyan defence capabilities and signed deals for the delivery of oil.

Even though, the Libyan leadership’s attitude to “Solidarity” was negative, Polish diplomats accurately noticed that it was difficult to evaluate the actual stance of the Libyan society. To thank Col. Gaddafi for his attitude, the Polish ministry of foreign affairs agreed to organise the International Symposium of the “Green Book” in Warsaw, in October 1983. The co-organiser of the conference from the Libyan side was the *International Centre for Study and Research on the Green Book* in Tripoli. Many, well-known scientists from Poland and abroad came to Poland to the University of Warsaw to analyse “the third theory” of the Libyan dictator.





**Tadeusz Hułapowski. General of the Polish Army, long-time president of the Society of Libyan-Arab-Polish Friendship. He was a member of WRON - a junta of the army of the Polish People's Republic, led by Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, which introduced the martial law against the interests of the Polish nation. Member of the Order of Polonia Restituta. Photography from the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance**

### **Fruitful economical contacts...**

Good political contacts brought profitable trade deals. Libya was one of the main directions of export of Polish technical services. It had large financial means which it got from the oil export. Thanks to that, it could develop a wide program of development of the industry and infrastructure. The communist economy in Poland made a profit on this, since, thanks to the numerous trade deals, the state businesses could make profitable contracts. The employees of "Budimex", "Dromex", "Kopex" or "Polimex-Cekop" built roads, factories, gas and oil pipelines, sugar factories and realised housing contracts. In turn, the Foreign Trade Enterprise "PolSERVICE" sent experts to Libya for individual contracts, including engineers, geologists and chemists. Polish cartographers prepared the regional plan for Tripolitania and detailed plans for 79 Libyan cities. Many Polish doctors and nurses from surgery teams worked in Libya under the contracts realised by the "PolSERVICE".

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In 1978, around 6 thousand Poles worked in Libya, in the second half of 1980 it was around 8.5 thousand, and in 1982 there were already around 14 thousand of them. In the years 1970-1981, the Polish export to this country rose sixteen times and in 1981 amounted to 900 million zloty in foreign exchange and military deliveries. It was a huge cash injection, since the Libyans paid in foreign currency which was very needed for the weakening Polish economy. The fruitful economic contacts even enabled to open up an embassy of the Polish People's Republic in Benghazi. Work in Libya was tempting due to financial reasons, but was not one of the easiest. A hot climate was a nuisance, as well as the location of the Polish camps in the suburbs and the local bureaucracy. City labour offices did not acknowledge the regulations of the Polish labour law, and the often army calls of the local employees paralysed the realisation of many investments. Coordination and management of projects was failing, the pathologies known from communist Poland caused many problems: nepotism, corruption, waste of resources and the lack of responsibility for wrong decisions.

### **... and peculiar atmosphere of cooperation**

The attitude of the Libyans also did not contribute to a good atmosphere of cooperation, as they did not honour mutual, consular agreements and not always kept their end of the bargains. The drop in oil prices around the world also caused temporary financial problems for the Libyan economy. The work and everyday life in the police state was not easy at all which was exemplified by the numerous incidents which cast a shadow over the seemingly perfect relations between the two nations. By the end of 1983, four employees of "Dromex" were arrested by the Libyan police. The grounds for the detentions was the testimony of a Libyan who stole explosive materials and pointed to Poles as possible buyers. The Polish ambassador was not even allowed access to the detainees. They were released only after several interventions of the embassy and the minister of national defence, Gen. Florian Siwicki. It later turned out that they had been kept in jail for seven days and tortured. The arrest of the Poles caused a lot of anxiousness among the export crews. Despite the seeming friendship, Gaddafi's regime showed his true, repressive colours once again.

### **Military cooperation and international terrorism**

The taboo in the Polish-Libyan relations regarded close military cooperation. It was of multilayer character. Polish military experts trained Gaddafi's soldiers both in Poland and in Libya. In the beginning of the 1980s, officers contracted by "Radwar" (installation of radars) came to Tripoli, as well as military experts working at the Centre for Training Helicopter Pilots in Bomba. Poles were engaged in training the Libyan air force and the officers of the navy. Gaddafi bought trucks, armoured vehicles, tanks, AA guns, helicopters, landing ships and

rifles from Poland. On the Polish side, the Central Board of Engineering (CENZIN), located in the Ministry of Foreign Trade, was responsible for the export of the armament, and in Libya the contracts were realised by the Office of the Trade Councillor. Special deals for the deliveries of weapons for Gaddafi's regime amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars and were an important source of foreign currency.

The main part of the agreement focused on the Palestine matter. Libya was perceived as one of the main strongholds of the so-called front of firmness on the matter of Israeli politics in the Middle East and in this way was supported by Warsaw.

The importance of the weapons' trade with the Libyan dictator is best shown by the story from 1978. The economy of the Polish People's Republic, weighed down by Gierek's debts, very much needed a stable currency. Even though, the communist government had earlier made a deal with East Germany to deliver 150 AA rockets "Strela 2M", employees of the CENZIN chose to sell them to the Libyans instead. They paid 30 thousand dollars apiece, while the "fellow" Germans only offered 13 thousand roubles. Everything took place in secret, so the "allies" of the Warsaw Pact did not uncover the actual reasons for the delay in the contract.

For many years, the Libyan dictator was a generous sponsor of international terrorism. Polish weapons were among those sent to the Arab radicals, as Gaddafi ordered them through CENZIN and later gifted to i.e. various Palestinian fractions. It is worth adding, that among those who had their training camps in Libya in the 80s was i.e. Abu Nidal - one of the most dangerous terrorists of the time, who lived for a time in the Polish People's Republic where his company trading weapons was located. Pressured by the Americans, it was closed in 1987, as the US vice president George Bush came to Poland on an official visit. This decision, including the creation of the section of interests of the Polish People's Republic in Israel, meant a slow but consequent change in direction of Warsaw's foreign policies.

Systemic changes brought the end of close political and economic relations with Libya. In 2003, the shared sales amounted to only 11.6 million dollars, which was no more than 0.01 percent of the entire foreign trade profits of Poland. In 2009, these numbers increased to 36.3 million dollars. Compared to the last decade of the Polish People's Party, the economic relations were almost non-existent, similar to political contacts. They never had the chance to be renewed, as on October 20<sup>th</sup> 2011 Muammar Gaddafi died during an escape from the NATO bombing and Libya engaged in a civil war.



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