

LIBYA: ROAD AHEAD PERILOUS

Breakthrough on Weapons Creates Regional Opportunities for United States

WASHINGTON, Dec. 30, 2003 — A CSIS analyst made the following statement today regarding the developing situation in Libya:

Jon Alterman, director, CSIS Middle East Program (202-775-3295; jalterman@csis.org): “Libya’s apparent willingness to be open and transparent about its existing WMD programs is a remarkable achievement for the Bush Administration, but an even more remarkable opportunity. If pursued skillfully, the administration could use the Libyan opening to turn back proliferation throughout the Middle East. The administration could do so partly through providing regional states with a positive example of a ‘reformed rogue.’ It could also exploit the information gained from the Libyans to disrupt proliferation supply networks and gather intelligence on those networks.

“But Libya faces a rocky road ahead. Proliferation experts are certain to pursue uncomfortable questions with their Libyan counterparts, and to do so aggressively. There have been too many unanswered questions about Libyan proliferation efforts for too long to expect anything less than a top-to-bottom investigation, not only within the Libyan programs themselves, but also with anyone coming into contact with those programs. Further, American political leaders will be wary of embracing a still-unpredictable Libya in an election year, and especially one in which issues like terrorism and defending oil interests have become so politicized. The process of U.S.-Libyan negotiations has not come to a conclusion; it has merely embarked on a far more active phase. Like assembling most holiday presents, putting it all together will take far longer than expected.”

[A CSIS report on a Nov. 17 conference, “Is it Time to Engage Libya?” can be accessed at <http://csis.org/mideast/index.htm> in the “Highlights” box. The meeting brought together a diverse array of independent experts to assess whether there are openings for constructive engagement with Libya, and if so, how that process should be structured. The conference was the first multi-sectoral examination of Libya to be held in Washington in years.]

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