

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Did Claiborne Pell save Qaddafi's life?

Charges levied against Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) by one of his colleagues at a press conference here on April 30, if true, would constitute evidence of a capital crime. Only if the term "treason" were interpreted by the courts as reserved strictly for times of officially declared war, might such a judgment be averted.

Representative Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) declared that he has numerous eyewitness accounts from journalists that, following a secret briefing from the President at the White House just hours preceding the April 14 U.S. raid against Libya, Pell went back to Capitol Hill and tipped off the press to the impending military action, by telling them, far in advance of an official announcement by the White House, to "watch out for a special announcement by the President on national television at 9 o'clock tonight."

According to Gingrich, this tip-off, which was witnessed by several network TV correspondents, combined with indications of the location of U.S. planes and ships, was a sure signal that an attack was going to occur within hours.

The leak gave Libya's Colonel Qaddafi enough time to put his planes into the air, shut down his radar, and move himself out of danger prior to the attack. This is a more credible conclusion than the media reports—denied by the White House—that the United States had "goofed" by noti-

fying the Soviets an hour in advance of the raid.

If Gingrich is right, it is hard to imagine more reprehensible behavior on the part of a high elected official of government. Pell was included in the special briefing by the President and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger to select members of Congress, by virtue of his being the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The briefing was in keeping with Weinberger's policy on such matters (see a review of his article on U.S. strategic military policy on page 60). However, the White House, said Gingrich, was "being very, very careful to create the impression that nothing out of the ordinary was happening that day."

Pell's decision to "spill the beans" was apparently a personal one, according to Gingrich. Gingrich aide David Shed told this reporter that originally Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) was also suspected of leaking advance notice that "something was up." But, according to Shed, Gingrich decided to drop his accusations against Byrd after consulting with the eyewitnesses from the TV networks and determining that Byrd did not, in fact, leak any advance notice, himself. (This reporter, however, recalls viewing network news footage of Byrd rolling down the window of his car to tell reporters, prior to any official announcement or news of the raid, that the President would be on television that night).

Gingrich has called for a Senate investigation, and will be circulating a "Dear Colleague" letter for this purpose. He did not indicate what he thought the penalty should be, should his accusations against Pell stand up, beyond calling for "appropriate sanctions."

One such appropriate penalty might be to strap Pell to a warhead aboard the next F-111 bound for Libya, aimed straight at the oilfields.

### Soviet SDI goals 'different than ours'

Lieutenant-General James Abrahamson, director of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), told this reporter at a press conference here April 29 that "one must not confuse the objectives of the U.S. SDI program with that of the Soviets."

This followed a discussion of the Soviets' intensive two-decade-long effort at developing a laser-based strategic defense system.

When asked to elaborate on his statement, Abrahamson did not answer directly, but said that the Soviets are proceeding to develop nuclear-tipped warheads for their "point" ABM defense. To defend against incoming U.S. missiles, they envision detonating nuclear explosives in the lower atmosphere, above targets on their own soil.

The implication of this is that the Soviets perceive their strategic defense program as an adjunct to an offensive, first-strike system, whose purpose would be to take out a "second strike" retaliation from the United States. This would cohere with the evaluation of Soviet strategic doctrine presented in the Pentagon's recent *Soviet Military Power 1986* report, that the Soviets perceive that a nuclear war can be fought and won.

Abrahamson contrasted this Soviet concept to the U.S. SDI approach, which is "strictly defensive," and in which enormous progress is being made in certain areas, although, he added, there are many areas in which the Soviets remain ahead.