

Officials to Block Qaddafi Gift to Farrakhan

By RICHARD W. STEVENSON
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Clinton Administration officials said today that they would almost certainly reject an application from the Nation of Islam and its leader, Louis Farrakhan, to be allowed to accept a donation of more than \$1 billion from Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi of Libya.

Mr. Farrakhan defended the gift today and said he would mount a vigorous fight if the Government barred it.

"We will fight for what we believe is our legal right," Mr. Farrakhan told a news conference in Chicago, "and I will go across the nation stirring up not only my own people, but all those who would benefit from it."

"We are not terrorists," Mr. Farrakhan said. "We are not trying to do anything against the good of America. What we want to do is good for our people and ultimately good for our nation."

A number of people affiliated with the Nation of Islam said they believed they would have a strong case that a rejection would be an unconstitutional infringement on religious freedom.

Colonel Qaddafi pledged \$1 billion to the Nation of Islam after meeting with Mr. Farrakhan in Libya in January. Mr. Farrakhan has described the pledge as a "humanitarian" gesture, and last week he formally asked the Office of Foreign Assets Control at the Treasury Department for the necessary permission to receive the money. The United States, which has long labeled the Qaddafi Government a supporter of terrorism, bars nearly all economic ties with Libya.

After his news conference today, Mr. Farrakhan left on a return visit to Libya, where he is scheduled to receive a award from Colonel Qaddafi. Officials said Mr. Farrakhan's application to the Treasury Department includes a provision to receive the \$250,000 honorarium the Libyan award carries in addition to Colonel Qaddafi's \$1 billion pledge.

"Considering who we're dealing with here, a betting man would not be wise to bet on license approval," said one Government official familiar with the application. "He would bet the ranch on litigation thereafter."

It is unclear whether Colonel Qaddafi has \$1 billion to give Mr. Farrakhan, or whether he would follow through on his pledge if the United States gave its approval. Mr. Farrakhan has said he would use the money for voter registration drives, charitable contributions and economic development opportunities for black people.

After meeting with Mr. Farrakhan in January and making the \$1 billion pledge, Colonel Qaddafi was quoted by the state press agency as saying: "Our confrontation with America used to be like confronting a fortress from outside. Today we have found an opening to enter the fortress and to confront it from within."

Since 1986, the United States has effectively barred the transfer of any money between Libya and the United States, citing evidence that Libya has been involved in terrorist incidents. Although the sanctions held out the possibility of exceptions being made for "humanitarian" reasons, new regulations that took effect earlier this month placed an additional hurdle in Mr. Farrakhan's way by barring, without a special exception, the approval of donations from any state previously designated as supporting terrorism.

The new regulations were the product of an amendment to antiterrorism legislation signed this year by President Clinton.

Representative Peter T. King, a Long Island Republican and a longtime critic of Mr. Farrakhan, today condemned the Nation of Islam leader's reported plans to travel again to Libya, and Mr. King asked the State Department to revoke Mr. Farrakhan's passport so that he would not "disgrace his country."

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., the head of the National African American Leadership Summit and a supporter of Mr. Farrakhan, said that if the Treasury Department rejected the Nation of Islam's application it would be unconstitutional and a threat not just to the Nation of Islam but to all religious and charitable organizations.

"If the Government begins infringing on the Constitutional rights of the Nation of Islam, it infringes on the Constitutional rights of everyone," Mr. Chavis said. "The Nation of Islam is a legitimate religious body that has done an outstandingly good job in the African-American community in terms of fostering self-help and empowerment."

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