

# Deception over Lockerbie

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"By way of deception, shalt thou wage war" – Motto of the Mossad, Israel's Intelligence Service

The scenes of flag-waving Libyans welcoming home Abdel Baset al-Megrahi, the man known as the Lockerbie bomber, further discredited Muslims in the minds of many. For those whose knowledge of the story is derived mainly from TV news, it appeared to be a callous celebration of mass murder, lending credence to the belief that "Islam" and "terrorism" are virtually synonymous. A closer look at the facts surrounding the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, however, reveals a pattern of deception by those who have most to gain from making Muslims look bad.

While the news reports dutifully recorded the protestations of outrage by Barack Obama, Gordon Brown and others at what appeared to be an unseemly hero's welcome for a convicted terrorist, they neglected to mention that Libyans were celebrating the release of a countryman whom they believe had been wrongfully imprisoned for eight years. Also omitted from the reports was any indication that informed observers of Megrahi's case in Britain and elsewhere are likewise convinced of his innocence.

Robert Black, the University of Edinburgh law professor who was the architect of the trial at Camp Zeist in the Netherlands, says that "no reasonable tribunal could have convicted Megrahi on the evidence led," and calls his 2001 conviction "an absolute and utter outrage." Prof. Black likens the Scottish trial judges to the White Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* who "believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." Hans Köchler, a UN-appointed observer at the trial, states that "there is not one single piece of material evidence linking the two accused to the crime," and condemns the court's verdict as a "spectacular miscarriage of justice." And Dr. Jim Swire, whose daughter Flora was one of the 270 killed on December 21, 1988, dismisses the prosecution's case against Megrahi and fellow Libyan Lamin Khalifa F'hima as "a cock and bull story."

According to that "cock and bull story," Megrahi, the head of security for Libyan Arab Airlines (LAA), conspired with Lamin Khalifa F'hima, the station manager for LAA in Malta (who was acquitted), to put a suitcase bomb on a flight from Malta to Frankfurt. At Frankfurt, the lethal suitcase had to be transferred to another flight bound for London Heathrow. Then in Heathrow Airport, it would have to be transferred for a second time onto the ill-fated Flight 103 destined for New York.

But for that rather implausible scenario to be true, the Libyans would have to have had an inordinate faith in the reliability of baggage handlers in two of Europe's busiest airports at one of the busiest times of the year. Less optimistic would-be bombers would surely have slipped the bomb-laden suitcase on board in London. Fueling suspicions that this is indeed

what happened, investigating police were told by a security guard at Heathrow that the Pan Am baggage storage area had been broken into on the night of the bombing.

The reported break-in at Heathrow was part of 600 pages of new and deliberately suppressed evidence that Megrahi's defense could present at an appeal, which in 2007 the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission, after a three-year investigation, recommended he be granted.

But before that appeal could be heard, the compassionate release of Megrahi, suffering from terminal prostate cancer, conveniently spared the potential embarrassment of all those involved in his dubious conviction. More significantly, it also averted awkward questions being raised, in the likely event of the Libyan being acquitted, about who actually planted the bomb, and why.

## Reel Bad Muslims

Many of those who doubt Libya's responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing, perhaps not surprisingly in the current climate, tend to suspect other Muslim countries of involvement. The most popular theory is that Iran hired the Syrian-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC) led by Ahmed Gibril to avenge the “accidental” shooting down by the USS Vincennes on July 3, 1988 of Iran Air Flight 655, which killed all 288 civilians on board.

Others believe that Abu Nidal, the founder of the infamous Black September terrorist group, may have been involved. If they're right, it raises disturbing questions about who was ultimately responsible for the Lockerbie atrocity. In his fine biography of Nidal, *A Gun for Hire*, British journalist Patrick Seale confirms long-held suspicions that many in the Middle East have had about the “Palestinian terrorist” who did more than anyone to discredit the Palestinian cause. “Abu Nidal was undoubtedly a Mossad agent,” Seale asserts. “Practically every job he did benefited Israel.”

Interestingly, one theory which has the PFLP-GC collaborating with Abu Nidal on behalf of Iran, has been espoused by a former Mossad staffer, Yuval Aviv, whose New York-based investigative agency, Interfor, prepared a report for Pan Am's insurers on the Lockerbie bombing.

Writing under the pen name Sam Green, Aviv also authored *Flight 103*, a fictional account of the Lockerbie tragedy he claims is “based solidly on real-life facts,” in which the vengeful Iranians enlist a Palestinian terrorist, Ahmed ‘The Falcon’ Shabaan, to do their dirty work. Aviv, who inspired Steven Spielberg's *Munich*, hopes his director friend will convert his Lockerbie tale into another Hollywood blockbuster.

Hardly any mainstream commentators, however, have questioned the trustworthiness of a former Mossad agent, who retains close ties with the intelligence service, fingering Palestinians and Iran for a terrorist attack which killed 189 Americans, thereby blackening the reputation of two of Israel's greatest foes in the minds of those it wishes to convince that the U.S. and Israel face a common enemy.

## Dirty Tricks

Not everyone in the media has been as naive about Israeli machinations though. Writing in

the Guardian just before the trial of the two Libyans, veteran American journalist Russell Warren Howe, in an excellent article titled “What if they are innocent?” analyses whether the Iranian government, Palestinian terrorists or Israeli intelligence were more likely perpetrators. Howe concludes, “Even if Megrahi and F’hima are found guilty of the most serious charges, there would still be a need for a new investigation: to decide what was Israel’s possibly major role in mass murder and deception of its main benefactor, the US.” Howe is suggesting that even if the Libyans, or other Arabs, had actually planted the bomb, they may still have been duped into doing so by Israeli agents.

Intriguingly, Howe cites a reference in Gordon Thomas’ book on Mossad, *Gideon’s Spies*, to a Mossad officer stationed in London who showed up in Lockerbie the morning after the crash to arrange for the removal of a suitcase from the crime scene. The suitcase, said to belong to Captain Charles McKee, a DIA officer who was killed on the flight, was later returned “empty and undamaged.”

Moreover, the idea of Libyan responsibility, Howe notes, seems to have originated in Israel. Again, he quotes Thomas, who says that a source at LAP, Mossad’s psychological warfare unit, informed him that “within hours of the crash, staff at LAP were working the phones to their media contacts urging them to publicise that here was ‘incontrovertible proof’ that Libya, through its intelligence service, Jamahiriya, was culpable.”

It may also have been Mossad disinformation, Howe suspects, that induced the U.S. government to believe the Libyans were guilty. The day after the Lockerbie bombing, U.S. intelligence intercepted a radio message from Tripoli to a Libyan government office in Berlin that effectively said, “mission accomplished.”

Two years earlier, a similar message intercept had induced Ronald Reagan to order air strikes against Libya, killing over a hundred people, including Qaddafi’s two-year-old adopted daughter. But the message had been faked by Israel, according to Victor Ostrovsky, a former Mossad case officer, who described the operation in *The Other Side of Deception*, the second of two exposés he wrote about the Mossad after leaving the service.

Operation Trojan began in February 1986 when the Mossad secretly installed a communications device known as a “Trojan” in an apartment in Tripoli. The Trojan received messages broadcast by Mossad’s LAP on one frequency and automatically transmitted them on a different frequency used by the Libyan government. “Using the Trojan,” Ostrovsky writes, “the Mossad tried to make it appear that a long series of terrorist orders were being transmitted to various Libyan embassies around the world.” U.S. intelligence, as anticipated by the Israelis, intercepted the bogus messages, and believed them to be authentic — especially after receiving confirmation from the Mossad.

Within weeks of the Trojan being installed, two American soldiers were killed in an explosion at La Belle Discothèque, a nightclub in West Berlin frequented by U.S. servicemen. Assuming that Libya was responsible, nine days later the U.S. dropped 60 tons of bombs on Tripoli and Benghazi. Few suspected that the Americans had been tricked into the “retaliation” by Israel, whose subterfuge had punished Qaddafi for his support of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and further alienated the U.S from the Arab world.

Not all Americans are oblivious to Israeli wiles, however. Commenting on the Israeli intelligence service’s penchant for deception, Andrew Killgore, a former U.S. ambassador to Qatar, wrote in the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, “Mossad’s specialty was dirty

tricks...Its modus operandi had always been the same: pull off a dirty trick but make it appear somebody else had done it."

As part of any new investigation to establish whether or not the Lockerbie bombing was another one of the Mossad's "dirty tricks," detectives might want to interview Issac Yeffet, the former chief of security for the Israeli airline, El Al, who in 1986 was commissioned by Pan Am to survey its security at a number of airports worldwide. As Killgore, in a separate article for the Washington Report, suggestively noted: "Yeffet may have been successful in maintaining perfect security for El Al at Ben-Gurion Airport. But his efforts at Heathrow Airport in London, one of the airports he surveyed for Pan Am, and to which he and his employees had full rein, failed to save Pan Am Flight 103."

Still protesting his innocence, the dying Megrahi told reporters on his release, "The truth never dies." That may be so. But as long as the Western media continue to believe that only Israel's enemies would blow up a civilian airliner, the truth about Lockerbie is unlikely to ever reach a very wide audience.

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