

PanAm 103 Over Lockerbie

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“And on the most exalted throne in the world sits nothing but a man’s arse.” Montaigne

If there’s anyone out there who is not already thoroughly cynical about those on the board of directors of the planet, the latest chapter in the saga of the bombing of PanAm 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland might just be enough to push them over the edge.

Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi, the only person ever convicted for the December 21, 1988 bombing, was released from his Scottish imprisonment August 21 supposedly because of his terminal cancer and sent home to Libya, where he received a hero’s welcome. President Obama said that the jubilant welcome Megrahi received was “highly objectionable”. His White House spokesman Robert Gibbs added that the welcoming scenes in Libya were “outrageous and disgusting”. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said he was “angry and repulsed”, while his foreign secretary, David Miliband, termed the celebratory images “deeply upsetting.” Miliband warned: “How the Libyan government handles itself in the next few days will be very significant in the way the world views Libya’s reentry into the civilized community of nations.” ¹

Ah yes, “the civilized community of nations”, that place we so often hear about but so seldom get to actually see. American officials, British officials, and Scottish officials know that Megrahi is innocent. They know that Iran financed the PFLP-GC, a Palestinian group, to carry out the bombing with the cooperation of Syria, in retaliation for the American naval ship, the Vincennes, shooting down an Iranian passenger plane in July of the same year, which took the lives of more people than did the 103 bombing. And it should be pointed out that the Vincennes captain, plus the officer in command of air warfare, and the crew were all awarded medals or ribbons afterward. ² No one in the US government or media found this objectionable or outrageous, or disgusting or repulsive. The United States has always insisted that the shooting down of the Iranian plane was an “accident”. Why then give awards to those responsible?

Today’s oh-so-civilized officials have known of Megrahi’s innocence since 1989. The Scottish judges who found Megrahi guilty know he’s innocent. They admit as much in their written final opinion. The Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission, which investigated Megrahi’s trial, knows it. They stated in 2007 that they had uncovered six separate grounds for believing the conviction may have been a miscarriage of justice, clearing the way for him to file a new appeal of his case. ³ The evidence for all this is considerable. And most importantly, there is no evidence that Megrahi was involved in the act of terror.

The first step of the alleged crime, sine qua non — loading the bomb into a suitcase at the Malta airport — for this there was no witness, no video, no document, no fingerprints,

nothing to tie Megrahi to the particular brown Samsonite suitcase, no past history of terrorism, no forensic evidence of any kind linking him to such an act.

And the court admitted it: “The absence of any explanation of the method by which the primary suitcase might have been placed on board KM180 [Air Malta to Frankfurt] is a major difficulty for the Crown case.” 4

The scenario implicating Iran, Syria, and the PFLP-GC was the Original Official Version, endorsed by the US, UK, Scotland, even West Germany — guaranteed, sworn to, scout’s honor, case closed — until the buildup to the Gulf War came along in 1990 and the support of Iran and Syria was needed for the broad Middle East coalition the United States was readying for the ouster of Iraq’s troops from Kuwait. Washington was also anxious to achieve the release of American hostages held in Lebanon by groups close to Iran. Thus it was that the scurrying sound of backtracking could be heard in the corridors of the White House. Suddenly, in October 1990, there was a New Official Version: it was Libya — the Arab state least supportive of the US build-up to the Gulf War and the sanctions imposed against Iraq — that was behind the bombing after all, declared Washington.

The two Libyans were formally indicted in the US and Scotland on Nov. 14, 1991. Within the next 20 days, the remaining four American hostages were released in Lebanon along with the most prominent British hostage, Terry Waite. 5

In order to be returned to Libya, Megrahi had to cancel his appeal. It was the appeal, not his health, that concerned the Brits and the Americans. Dr. Jim Swire of Britain, whose daughter died over Lockerbie, is a member of UK Families Flight 103, which wants a public inquiry into the crash. “If he goes back to Libya,” Swire says, “it will be a bitter pill to swallow, as an appeal would reveal the fallacies in the prosecution case. ... I’ve lost faith in the Scottish criminal justice system, but if the appeal is heard, there is not a snowball’s chance in hell that the prosecution case will survive.” 6

And a reversal of the verdict would mean that the civilized and venerable governments of the United States and the United Kingdom would stand exposed as having lived a monumental lie for almost 20 years and imprisoned a man they knew to be innocent for eight years.

The Sunday Times (London) recently reported: “American intelligence documents [of 1989, from the Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)] blaming Iran for the Lockerbie bombing would have been produced in court if the Libyan convicted of Britain’s worst terrorist attack had not dropped his appeal.” Added the Times: “The DIA briefing discounted Libya’s involvement in the bombing on the basis that there was ‘no current credible intelligence’ implicating her.” 7

If the three governments involved really believed that Megrahi was guilty of murdering 270 of their people, it’s highly unlikely that they would have released their grip on him. Or is even that too much civilized behavior to expect.

One final note: Many people are under the impression that Libyan Leader Moammar Qaddafi has admitted on more than one occasion to Libya’s guilt in the PanAm 103 bombing. This is not so. Instead, he has stated that Libya would take “responsibility” for the crime. He has said this purely to get the heavy international sanctions against his country lifted. At various times, both he and his son have explicitly denied any Libyan role in the bombing.

Humankind shall never fly

All those angry people. Yelling at the president and members of Congress about how the proposed government health plan, and Obama himself, are “socialist”. (See the poster of Obama as the Joker character from Batman with “Socialism” in large letters, as the only word.⁸) These good folks wanna get their health care through good ol’ capitalism; better no health care at all than godless-atheist commie health care; better to see your child die than have her saved by a Marxist-Stalinist-collective doctor who works for the government. But these screaming, heckling Americans — like most of their countrymen — might be rather surprised to discover that they don’t really believe what they think they believe. I wrote an essay several years ago, which is still perfectly applicable today, entitled “[The United States invades, bombs, and kills for it, but do Americans really believe in free enterprise?](#)”

A common refrain, explicit or implicit, amongst the recent health-care hecklers is that the government can’t do anything better or cheaper than private corporations. Studies, however, have clearly indicated otherwise. In 2003, US federal agencies examined 17,595 federal jobs and found civil servants to be superior to contractors 89 percent of the time. The following year, a study to determine whether 12,573 federal jobs could be done more efficiently by private contractors found in-house workers winning 91 percent of the time, according to an Office of Management and Budget report. And in 2005, a study of tens of thousands of government positions concluded that federal workers had won the job competitions more than 80 percent of the time. All these studies, it should be kept in mind, took place under the administration of George W. Bush, who, upon taking office in 2001, declared it his top management priority that federal workers should compete with contractors for as many as 850,000 government jobs. ⁹ Thus, any pressure to influence the outcome of these studies would have been in the opposite direction — putting the outside contractors in the best light.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Boys of Capital have been chortling in their martinis about the death of socialism. The word has been banned from polite conversation. And they hope that no one will notice that every socialist experiment of any significance in the twentieth century — without exception — was either overthrown, invaded, corrupted, perverted, subverted, destabilized, or otherwise had life made impossible for it, by the United States and its allies. Not one socialist government or movement — from the Russian Revolution to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, from Communist China to the FMLN in El Salvador — not one was permitted to rise or fall solely on its own merits; not one was left secure enough to drop its guard against the all-powerful enemy abroad and freely and fully relax control at home.

It’s as if the Wright brothers’ first experiments with flying machines all failed because the automobile interests sabotaged each test flight. And then the good and god-fearing folk of the world looked upon these catastrophes, nodded their heads wisely, and intoned solemnly: Humankind shall never fly.

The continual selling of the Afghanistan war

“But we must never forget,” said President Obama recently, “this is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity. Those who attacked America on 9/11 are plotting to do so again. If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans. So this is not only a war worth fighting. This is fundamental to the defense of our people.” ¹⁰

Obama was speaking to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the ultra-nationalist group whose members would not question such sentiments. Neither would most Americans, including many of those who express opposition to the war when polled. It's simple — We're fighting terrorism in Afghanistan. We're fighting the same people who attacked New York and Washington. Never mind that out of the tens of thousands the United States and its NATO front have killed in Afghanistan not one has been identified as having had anything to do with the events of September 11, 2001. Never mind that the "plot to kill Americans" in 2001 was hatched in Germany and the United States at least as much as in Afghanistan. What is needed to plot to buy airline tickets and take flying lessons in the United States? A room with some chairs? What does "an even larger safe haven" mean? A larger room with more chairs? Perhaps a blackboard? Terrorists intent upon attacking the United States can meet almost anywhere, with Afghanistan probably being one of the worst places for them, given the American occupation.

As to "plotting to do so again" ... there's no reason to assume that the United States has any concrete information of this, anymore than did Bush or Cheney who tried to scare us in the same way for more than seven years to enable them to carry out their agenda.

There are many people in Afghanistan who deeply resent the US presence there and the drones that fly overhead and drop bombs on houses, wedding parties, and funerals. One doesn't have to be a member of al Qaeda to feel this way. There doesn't even have to be such a thing as a "member of al Qaeda". It tells us nothing that some of them can be called "al Qaeda". Almost every individual or group in that part of the world not in love with US foreign policy, which Washington wishes to stigmatize, is charged with being associated with, or being a member of, al Qaeda, as if there's a precise and meaningful distinction between people retaliating against American aggression while being a member of al Qaeda and people retaliating against American aggression while NOT being a member of al Qaeda; as if al Qaeda gives out membership cards to fit in your wallet, as if there are chapters of al Qaeda that put out a weekly newsletter and hold a potluck on the first Monday of each month.

In any event, as in Iraq, the American "war on terrorism" in Afghanistan regularly and routinely creates new anti-American terrorists. This is scarcely in dispute even at the Pentagon.

The only "necessity" that draws the United States to Afghanistan is the need for oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian Sea area, the establishment of military bases in this country that is surrounded by the oil-rich Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf regions, and making it easier to watch and pressure next-door Iran. What more could any respectable imperialist nation desire?

But the war against the Taliban can't be won. Except by killing everyone in Afghanistan. The United States should negotiate the pipelines with the Taliban, as the Clinton administration unsuccessfully tried to do, and then get out.

The revolution was televised

You will not be able to stay home, brother.

You will not be able to plug in, turn on, and cop out.

You will not be able to lose yourself on skag [heroin] and skip out for beer during commercials.

Because the revolution will not be televised. ...

There will be no highlights on the eleven o'clock news

The revolution will not be right back after a message

The revolution will not go better with Coke

The revolution will not fight the germs that may cause bad breath

The revolution will not be televised, will not be televised

These are some of the lines of Gil Scott-Heron's song that told people in the 1970s (which, I maintain, were just as '60ish as the fabled 1960s) that a revolution was coming, that they would no longer be able to live their normal daily life, that they should no longer want to live their normal daily life, that they would have to learn to be more serious about this thing they were always prattling about, this thing they called "revolution".

Fast Forward to 2009 ... Gil Scott-Heron, now a ripe old 60, was recently interviewed by the Washington Post:

WP: In the early 1970s, you came out with "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," about the erosion of democracy in America. You all but predicted that there would be a revolution in which a brainwashed nation would come to its senses. What do you think now? Did we have a revolution?

GS-H: Yes, the election of President Obama was the revolution. 11

Oh? So that's it? That's what we took clubs over our heads for? Tear gas, jail cells, and permanent police and FBI files? Published a million issues of the underground press? To get a president who doesn't have a revolutionary bone in his body? Not a muscle or nerve or tissue or organ that seriously questions cherished establishment beliefs concerning terrorism, permanent war, Israel, torture, marijuana, health care, and the primacy of profit over the environment and all else? Karl Marx is surely turning over in his London grave. If the modern counter-revolutionary United States had existed at the time of the American revolution, it would have crushed that revolution. And a colonial (white) Barack Obama would have worked diligently to achieve some sort of bi-partisan compromise with the King of England, telling him we need to look forward, not backward.

Yugoslavia

During 1998-1999, the United States used the Kosovo conflict to reaffirm its hegemonic role in Europe. US officials deliberately undercut a potential diplomatic solution to the Kosovo war; instead of using diplomacy to resolve the conflict, the United States sought a military solution in which NATO power could once again be demonstrated. The resulting air war, in 1999, succeeded in fully establishing the continued relevance of NATO, thus affirming US hegemony in Europe and undercutting European proclivities for foreign policy independence.

– David Gibbs, “[First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia](#)”

There’s no issue of the recent past that has caused more friction internationally amongst those on the left than the question of what really took place in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. Gibbs’ new book explores many of the myths surrounding this very complicated and controversial slice of history, particularly those dealing with the supposed humanitarian motivation behind the Western powers intervention and the many alleged Serbian atrocities.

Notes

1. Washington Post, August 22 and August 26, 2009 ↵
2. Newsweek magazine, July 13, 1992 ↵
3. Sunday Herald (Scotland), August 17, 2009 ↵
4. “Opinion of the Court”, Par. 39, issued following the trial in the Hague in 2001 ↵
5. Read many further details about the case at <http://killinghope.org/bblum6/panam.htm> ↵
6. The Independent (London daily), April 26, 2009 ↵
7. Sunday Times (London), August 16, 2009 ↵
8. Washington Post, August 6, 2009, p.C2 ↵
9. Washington Post, June 8, 2005 and March 23, 2006 for this citation plus the three studies mentioned ↵
10. Talk given at VFW convention in Phoenix, Arizona, August 17, 2009 ↵
11. Washington Post, August 26, 2009 ↵

William Blum is the author of:

- * *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2*
- * *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*
- * *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*
- * *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*

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