

Retired Scottish police official says Lockerbie evidence was planted

By Steve James
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A retired Scottish police officer claims that the US Central Intelligence Agency planted evidence leading to the conviction of Libyan Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed Al Megrahi for the 1988 murder of 259 people onboard Pan Am Flight 103 and 11 residents of the town of Lockerbie, Scotland.

According to the August 28 edition of *Scotland on Sunday*, a member of the Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland (ACPO) has told the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission that a fragment of an MST-13 timer circuit board central to al Megrahi's conviction was planted in order to implicate Libya for the atrocity. The anonymous source, as a member of the ACPO, would have to have achieved the rank of assistant chief constable or higher.

The article also quoted an unnamed source close to al Megrahi's legal team who said that the retired police officer had approached them after their client's last appeal against his conviction failed in 2002. The officer had apparently failed to come forward earlier for fear of breaking ranks or being vilified. The article also stated that at the time the policeman became aware of the planted evidence, there had been no expectation of a trial.

When al Megrahi was convicted in 2001 at the trial at Camp Zeist in the Netherlands, the officer maintained his silence, since he considered that al Megrahi would be acquitted at the subsequent appeal. The appeal failed, and the officer felt he "had to come forward."

The MST-13 timer fragment was a key component of the case against al Megrahi and his co-accused, Al Amin Khalifa Fhimah, who was acquitted. The timers were manufactured by Swiss electronics company MeBo. MeBo owner Edmund Bollier had previously sold a number of the long-delay timers to the Libyan government.

Discovery of the timer fragment helped in the construction of the evidential and circumstantial chain implicating the Libyan government in the early 1990s. This in turn was the basis for al Megrahi's conviction in early 2001. The piece of circuit board was supposed to have been discovered months after the crash, in a shirt fragment found many miles from most of the wreckage.

Bollier has consistently claimed that the MST-13 fragment could not have been part of a batch he sold to Libya on account of its colouring and the type of soldering employed. Evidence that emerged at the Camp Zeist trial indicated that the CIA itself had a version of the MST-13 before 1988.

Should the anonymous officer's statement that the CIA planted the timer fragment be confirmed, it would throw al Megrahi's conviction into doubt. At the very least, it would suggest that the fragment was planted in order to make a case against Libya in the absence of substantive evidence. This latest revelation again raises the possibility that the case against Libya was fabricated for political reasons bound up with US policy in the Middle East.

Scotland on Sunday says of the retired police officer's claims, "He has supported the evidence provided to Megrahi's lawyers by a former CIA agent that senior figures in United States intelligence wrote the script to incriminate Libya for the bombing."

Prior to early 1990, and for more than a year, the official line of Washington on the Pan Am Flight 103 bombing was moving towards blaming the Iranian and Syrian governments and their associates in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command. But in 1990, the line changed towards blaming Libya.

This shift took place against a background of

diplomatic manoeuvres in preparation for the US-led war in the Persian Gulf, which took place between January 16 and April 6, 1991. Washington's efforts to secure the backing of the regimes in the Middle East for war centred on securing the support of Syria and Iran, which were viewed as a potential focus for popular anger towards America and its Arab allies.

Several commentators, most exhaustively Ian Ferguson and John Ashton in their book "*Cover-Up of Convenience*," argue that Syrian support for the US attack on Iraq was in part bought in exchange for dropping Damascus as a target in the Lockerbie case. On November 14, 1991, the Scottish Crown Office and the US State Department issued indictments against al Megrahi and Fhimah. That same day, then-US President George H. W. Bush (the father of the current US president) announced that "the Syrians took a bum rap" on Lockerbie. Then-UK Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd simultaneously announced that no country other than Libya was being held responsible.

The retired police officer's statement has been submitted as part of al Megrahi's last line of appeal against his conviction and 20-year jail sentence. The Review Commission decision on whether al Megrahi has grounds for a fresh appeal is not expected until late next year.

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