

“Trade before Justice”

By Zulaikha Abdullah

Britain’s recent negotiations with Libya and the release of Abdul-Basit Ali Al-Megrahi, the only person convicted for the worst ever terrorist atrocity on British soil, (the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in which 270 were killed), has been viewed by many as another sordid example of Britain’s capitalist endeavours to secure its geopolitical and economic interests.

As a pre-condition of his release, Al-Megrahi was made to drop his appeal against conviction and since then has single-mindedly sought to clear his name. Had his conviction, based on hearsay and unproven circumstances, gone to appeal it would have undoubtedly been overturned and been the source of untold embarrassment to the governments involved in the whole fiasco. Not to mention the implications for a judicial system that may be seen to produce politically expedient convictions. Nevertheless, Obama branded the jubilant Libyan homecoming staged for Al-Megrahi as ‘objectionable’ while Brown professed ‘anger’ and ‘repulsion’ at the scenes - a glaring indictment of our government’s skewed moral compass.

Until recently, Libya has been a pariah state; the internationally reviled sponsor of state terrorism, and its refusal to take responsibility for Lockerbie meant a decade of sanctions and isolation. However, in what has been hailed, by some, as a success story and a triumph of temperance over radicalism, the once despised Colonel Gaddafi is now being arduously courted by all. Of course this is less on account of his purported turn-around than because he controls the world’s sixth largest oil reserves.



In a deal to help legitimise the lifting of sanctions against it, Libya agreed to accept responsibility for the bombing on the basis of international law which stipulates that a state assumes responsibility for the actions of its employees. It also agreed to hand over the 'Lockerbie bomber' and to pay billions of dollars compensation to the victims of Libyan-linked terrorism and their families...and all shall be forgiven.

Could it be that Gaddafi is not only being brought in from the cold, but that he is being brought into the fold; the inner sanctum of those to whom the dictum "violence employed by ourselves or by our friends is, by definition, excluded from the category of terrorism" is applicable? The ranks of Israel, whose extensive record as an ardent perpetrator of state terrorism cannot realistically be denied, but is nevertheless consistently and assiduously ignored. Gratuitous state sanctioned violence against civilians is a self-professed long standing policy of the state, referred to by its former Prime Minister Moshe Sharett as '[Israel's sacred terrorism](#)' and stretches way back into the pre-state era.

Is it plausible to imagine a time when Libya will be quietly excused from culpability in the same way that Israel has, in terms of events such as the little known [Lavon Affair](#) - the foiled 1954 secret Israeli mission code named 'Susannah' which, had it succeeded, treacherously sought to blow up American and British targets in Egypt and thereby instigating America to go to war with Egypt on the side of Israel; or the state sanctioned attacks by Israel on the [USS Liberty](#) in 1967 in which 34 American Navy personnel lost their lives when unmarked fighters and torpedo boats attacked them; or the bombing of the British headquarter at the [King David Hotel](#) in Jerusalem in which 92 lost their lives; or the shooting down of a [Libyan Airliner](#) in 1973 after it flew over Sinai in a sandstorm, killing 108; or Israel's ongoing efforts to destabilise neighbouring governments? - All this without even touching upon the countless wanton and deliberate attacks on and



massacres of civilians in Arab villages such as those in [Qana](#), [Qibya](#), [Deir Yassin](#) and [Kfar Kassem](#), that claimed the lives of tens of thousands of human beings. Between 1978 and 2000, 15,000 civilians were killed in Lebanon alone. Last but not least is Israel's 60 years of ongoing terrorism perpetrated against the Palestinian people to include every category of atrocity culminating in war crimes during their recent assault on Gaza.

On second thoughts, Libya is a mighty long way off from even approaching the impunity afforded Israel, and would take decades to play catch up in the terrorism stakes. Even when considering Gaddafi's dubious role as our brand new ally in the 'war on terror', as improbable as this may seem, it still pales in comparison to Former US president Bush conferring with Former Israeli Prime Minister [Ariel Sharon](#) on 'fighting terrorism' despite the fact that Sharon was found, by a formal Israeli commission, to have personal responsibility for the brutal massacre of civilians at [Sabra and Shatilla](#) refugee camp in Lebanon.

Then, of course, there's the issue of Gordon Brown's support for the campaign that seeks to secure Libyan compensation for British victims and families of IRA bombings during the 80's and 90's. Based on reports that initially, he personally vetoed official pressure in this regard for fear of imperilling business relations, it has been argued by some that the government's stance highlights a preoccupation with trading relations at the expense of justice.

The British compensation demand arises from the claim that Libya supplied weapons, including the Semtex explosives used by Irish Republican bomb makers in atrocities such as the Enniskillen bomb in 1987, the Manchester bomb in 1996 and several explosions in London. Brown's backing follows in the footsteps of intervention from the



White House on behalf of US victims who have agreed multi-million dollar payouts with Libya.

Some have asked, what if in the same spirit we were to apply this argument, which has Brown's blessing, to 'Operation Cast Lead' in which 1,400 Palestinians, mainly women and children, were killed during the Israeli offensive on Gaza earlier this year?

[David Milliband](#) has already confirmed that a frigate which depends on U.K military supplies was likely used to shell Gaza during the war. This contravenes both UK and European statutes on the sale of weapons which prohibit their aggressive deployment against civilian populations. Other reports state that British arms were 'almost certainly used by Israeli forces in Gaza', while retired Israeli army officials categorically confirm the use of British equipment in the Occupied Territories. As such, it has been asserted that they are being used to fuel human rights abuses and violations, violations of international and humanitarian law and for purposes of internal repression and inflicting terror.

The Palestinian organisation, al-Haq, has filed a lawsuit against the British government arguing, in a similar vein to the IRA victim's campaign 'that British arms sales facilitate Israeli operations in impoverished Gaza'. If we were to take into consideration, strictly the number of children killed during the conflict [300 according to UNICEF], and award each family compensation at a level equivalent to that being paid to their US counterpart [\$10 million], then Britain should be liable for a pay out in the region of \$3 billion... just for starters.

It has been observed that despite the recent imposition of minimum sanctions on exports to Israel, Britain continues to license tens of millions of pounds worth of equipment for sale there. Additionally, it exports to Israel via other countries. In 2002



the decision to allow British electronic Head-up Displays, or HUDs to be incorporated into American F-16 fighter aircraft for onward sale to Israel was

announced. Just four months previous to this they had been used in raids on Gaza and the West Bank with clear evidence of their use against civilians.

Hermes 450 UAV (pilot-less aircraft) whose engines are manufactured in Lichfield near Birmingham was reported by the UNRWA in Gaza to have been used during the conflict. Israel has been reported to routinely use them in carrying out assassinations in Gaza.

According to several reports, other British weaponry and components approved for sale in Israel include surveillance systems, night sights, range finders, weapons sights and military communication equipment, combat aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, general purpose machine guns and armoured fighting vehicles among others.

It has been suggested by some, that the British debacle over Al-Megrahi was fuelled by economic interests; by a desire to secure oil contracts and trade deals at the expense of morality and justice - be that justice for the victims and their families or justice for Al-Megrahi himself. Is renewed diplomacy between our government and Libya honestly due to a transformation in their politics or is it just another example of British *realpolitik*? - Pragmatism at its very best.

An observable trend in thought is that, if Libya ought to compensate victims of IRA bombs and their families, then is Britain similarly liable in the case of Gaza? Similarly, if Britain and its allies feel justified in attacking Iraq and Afghanistan for supplying material aid and assistance to terrorism, then isn't that giving license to some around the world to feel justified in attacking them for doing the same in the case of Israel?



There is no doubt that the definition of terrorism should be fairly applied across the board but some have suggested that Israel is often excluded from such definitions, regardless of their actions, while other countries are branded as terrorists more freely. If that is the case perhaps we ought to just change the definition of state terrorism.

...And the US ought to give Libya back its money.

