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Megrahi's Libyan transfer deal buried in Foreign Office news release addendum

The hotly disputed transfer agreement which could see Abdelbaset Ali Mohmad Al Megrahi returned to Libya has been signed virtually in secret, being excluded from the official news release.

An oblique reference is made in an undernote for editors, which omits any reference to Megrahi or the Lockerbie airliner disaster, despite Megrahi being understood to be the only Libyan in custody in the UK.

The agreement, apparently brokered face to face between Tony Blair and Colonel Gaddafi provoked a cross border dispute when Alex Salmond and the SNP accused Westminster of interfering in a Scottish judicial matter.

A news release from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office states that five bilateral agreements have been signed between Britain and Libya, but makes no mention of what they are.

The undernote to editors states only that "The United Kingdom will sign four judicial agreements with Libya today on prisoner transfer, mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, mutual legal assistance in civil and commercial matters, and extradition following a Memorandum of Understanding signed between Tony Blair and Colonel Qadhafi in May 2007."

It adds, " The Prisoner Transfer Agreement (PTA) allows the return of a prisoner to serve out his sentence in his home country where both jurisdictions are in agreement. Prisoners do not have an automatic right to transfer; the consent of the authorities in both states is required before transfer can take place.²

"No individual can be transferred under the PTA signed today until all criminal proceedings in relation to that individual have been exhausted."

The news release reads in full:

"Mr Rammell and his Libyan counterpart will today conclude a set of bilateral judicial agreements agreed under a 2007 Memorandum of Understanding. A Double Taxation Convention will also be signed. Mr Rammell said:

“I will today sign four bilateral agreements with my Libyan counterpart, Abdulatti al-Obidi, which will strengthen our judicial ties, as agreed during Tony Blair’s visit to Libya in May last year. In addition, we are signing today a Double Taxation Convention which will bring benefits to British business in Libya and Libyan investors in the UK - benefits in terms of certainty, clarity and transparency and reducing tax compliance burdens. We are also in the final stages of negotiating an agreement to protect and promote investment.

“UK/Libya relations have significantly improved in recent years, following Libya’s voluntary renunciation of WMD. Today we are partners in the UN Security Council. We also wish to assist Libya to establish closer relations with the European Union to continue and strengthen the reintegration of Libya within the international community. We therefore support the commencement of negotiations between Libya and the EU on a framework agreement which should cover a range of issues including political, social, economic, commercial and cultural relations between the EU and Libya.”

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From Scotsman

Lockerbie bomber's wife condemns way he is treated

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By MIKE THEODOULOU and CLAIRE GARDNER

THE wife of the terminally-ill Lockerbie bomber, Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi, has hit out at the Scottish authorities for not taking better care of him. The Libyan was diagnosed with prostate cancer after hospital tests in September, and his wife, Aisha al-Megrahi, claimed he had been turned away from hospitals because of the security measures required before they could treat him.

She spoke out hours after a court rejected her husband's appeal to be freed on bail because of his illness last Friday.

Speaking to a Libyan newspaper considered close to Seif al-Islam al-Gaddafi, the son of the Libyan leader, Muammar al-Gaddafi, she said: "Hospitals in Scotland refused to take him in because of the increased security involved in transferring him, especially the use of helicopters."

She added that, despite increased surveillance, "he remains handcuffed to the bed when he is examined, which affects his morale badly".

However, the Scottish Prison Service refuted the allegations last night, saying that, on his most recent hospital visit to Inverclyde Royal Infirmary in September, there were no helicopters involved.

Megrahi, a 56-year-old Libyan former intelligence officer, is serving a life sentence, with a minimum term of 27 years, for blowing up Pan Am flight 103 from London to New York over Lockerbie on the night of 21 December, 1988.

The blast killed all 259 people on board and 11 people on the ground.

His lawyers applied for his interim release after announcing that he had prostate cancer, which had spread to other parts of his body.

But on Friday, the Court of Criminal Appeal in Edinburgh, in rejecting the application, said he could live for years, depending on how successful his treatment is. "While the disease from which the appellant suffers is incurable and may cause his death, he is not at present suffering material pain or disability," Lord Hamilton, the Lord Justice-General, said.

Megrahi was sentenced in 2001 by three Scottish judges sitting at an extraordinary tribunal at Kamp van Zeist in the Netherlands.

He is seeking to have his conviction overturned, and an appeal is due to be heard next year.

His lawyers applied for his interim release because of his illness.

Megrahi, who is being held at Greenock prison, voiced deep disappointment after last week's court decision.

"I am very distressed that the court has refused me bail pending the hearing of my appeal, and the chance to spend my remaining time with my family," he said in a statement read out by his lawyer, Tony Kelly.

Tom Fox, the communications director for the Scottish Prison Service said he was unable to comment on individual cases.

However, he said that many prisoners being transported to hospital were handcuffed and taken under escort, as a matter of routine.

"If a prisoner requires hospital treatment, then security arrangements are put in place, as per a security risk assessment carried out on each individual," Mr Fox said.