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Gadaffi 'plotted Lockerbie Bombing With Abu Nidal'

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COLONEL GADAFFI, the Libyan leader, personally ordered the December 1988 Lockerbie bombing to "seek revenge on the Americans", a senior aide to Abu Nidal, the notorious Palestinian-born terrorist, claimed yesterday.

The aide said he was present at a meeting in Libya in April 1986 between Gadaffi and Abu Nidal at which they discussed "punishing" America for a raid it had just carried out on Tripoli. The Libyan leader, whose adopted daughter was killed in the American attack, declared: "We would like to avenge the deaths of our sons and daughters and to kill the largest number of Americans possible."

Gadaffi rewarded Abu Nidal for the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 by paying \$ 15m to his group, the Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC), the aide said. The money was transferred from the Libyan Arab Foreign Bank to an account in Athens and then on to Zurich.

The aide, who broke with Abu Nidal several years ago, also revealed that the bomb was timed to go off over the Atlantic rather than over mainland Britain in order to minimise possible evidence.

"The reason it exploded over Lockerbie was the delay in the flight taking off from Heathrow," he said.

All 259 people on board the Boeing 747 and 11 on the ground were killed.

The claim was made after it emerged last week that Abu Nidal, who was 65, had been shot dead in Baghdad. Iraq claimed he had committed suicide. The aide said Abu Nidal, who moved to Iraq in 1999, was killed on August 14 on the direct orders of Saddam Hussein after plotting with the Kuwaitis to topple the Iraqi leader and replace him with his half-brother Barzan.

The claim will be an embarrassment to the British government, which has caused concern in America with its recent diplomatic overtures to Libya. Earlier this month, Mike O'Brien, the Foreign Office minister, became the first member of the government to visit the country for 20 years.

The aide, who declined to be named, said Gadaffi had left Abu Nidal and his group to plan details of his revenge for the American attack on Tripoli with Abdullah al-Senussi, Libya's unofficial head of intelligence. President Ronald Reagan had ordered the strike on Libya in retaliation for a Berlin nightclub bombing in which two US soldiers died.

The group responded with the botched hijacking of Pan Am flight 73 in Karachi on September 5, 1986, which ended in the death of 22 passengers.

At a further meeting with Abu Nidal in August 1987 - also attended by the aide - Gadaffi asked whether blowing up an American airliner could be executed "in a more innovative manner that would ensure its success". Abu Nidal proposed "blowing up the aircraft remotely" to decrease the possibility of human error.

A first attempt was made in March 1988 to blow up a Pan Am plane on a flight from Belgrade to Frankfurt. It failed after a bomb packed in a radio-cassette recorder given to an unsuspecting Algerian did not explode as planned.

The Libyans accused Abu Nidal's explosive experts of tampering with the device. The terrorist leader was told that his subsequent mission only entailed providing Gadaffi with the device; the Libyans would select the target.

The source said Abu Nidal and his explosives expert, Khalail **Salahat**, gave al-Senussi a suitcase containing a radio-cassette recorder packed with Semtex and a detonator. Al-Senussi passed the bag to

Abdel Basset al-Megrahi and Al-Amin Fhimah, security officers for Libya's airline in Malta. Al-Megrahi was jailed for life after being convicted last year by a Scottish court in the Netherlands of involvement in the bombing; Fhimah was cleared.

The revelations have added to demands for an independent public inquiry into Lockerbie. Jim Swire, spokesman for the families of the British victims, said: "This is certainly interesting, but if someone does have evidence of this kind, they should come forward to the relevant authorities to explain it."

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