



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [HM Government support for UK victims of IRA attacks that used Gaddafi-supplied Semtex and weapons](#), HC 49

Wednesday 26 October 2016

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Members present: Mr Laurence Robertson (Chair); Tom Blenkinsop; Lady Hermon; Kate Hoey; Danny Kinahan; Jack Lopresti; Dr Alasdair McDonnell; Gavin Robinson.

Questions 458-512

Witness

I: Rt Hon Jack Straw, former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Examination of Witness

Rt Hon Jack Straw, former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Q458 **Chair:** Mr Straw, good morning. Thank you for joining us for this evidence session, which we hope is towards the end of our inquiry into Her Majesty's Government's support for UK victims of IRA attacks that used Gaddafi-supplied Semtex and weapons. Is there a brief opening statement that you would like to make, or shall we just go into questions?

Jack Straw: You can go into questions. That is fine.

Chair: One of the reasons we wanted to talk to you is that, while we are looking forward to how compensation might be achieved, we feel that we need to look backwards a little bit in order to clarify the situation. You were Foreign Secretary during the time when Libya was brought in from the cold, or the relationship was changed. Could you give us a background to that and what was going on then?

Jack Straw: Yes. You are familiar with most of the background. We were all aware that, in the 1980s and early 1990s, Libya was probably the most serious state sponsor of terrorism in the world; that included its culpability for the Lockerbie bombing, as well as the continuous supply of Semtex and other material to the Provisional IRA.

I should just say, Mr Robertson, that I have a personal issue with the Provisional IRA, just so we are clear about where I am coming from, because I was in a case at the Old Bailey in March 1973 where there was a bomb scare, as there often was. We were turned out of court and the bomb went up and I just suffered a small shard of glass in my behind. I have never, ever forgotten that experience. Of course it was tiny compared to the killings and serious injuries and trauma that people—mainly in Northern Ireland, but also some on the mainland—suffered but, if you have that experience, you do not ever forget it. I can remember exactly where I was as we walked out of court; I looked over and saw this green Cortina, which I had walked past at lunchtime, and then—bang. I had no sympathy for the Provisional IRA before that happened, and I had still less after that happened.

We were always aware of Libya's record of fomenting terrorist violence and supplying the terrorists. I was tangentially involved in the Tony Blair peace process, but only tangentially. As Home Secretary, it fell to me to release a number of prisoners who were in UK jails, including one or two who had been responsible for the Old Bailey bombing, which was interesting, but that was post the deal. I thought that what Tony Blair and Mo Mowlam achieved in 1998 was astonishing and laid the ground for almost everything that has followed since then, and no one should take away from Mr Blair the effort it took and the beneficial consequences that have followed.



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Wind forward to 2001 when I became Foreign Secretary. Amongst other briefings, I was given briefings about the concerns about Libya and what we thought—but we were not certain—about their chemical weapons holdings and undisclosed nuclear facilities, which, over time, could have allowed them to develop a nuclear weapon, though not immediately by any means. This has now been declassified. In the course of 2003, our intelligence services became aware, through an intermediary of Colonel Gaddafi's, that he wanted to reach an accommodation with the United States, the United Kingdom and other western powers and, in the cliché, come in from the cold. Very secret negotiations continued with the Gaddafi Government through the summer of 2003. My recollection is that these accelerated in the autumn, and we got the beginnings of a deal.

I just ought to say, because it is a long time ago—13 years ago—that there are some things that you cannot quite remember, and there are other things that are stuck in your brain. I will not ever forget what happened on the evening of 19 December 2003, when this deal was finally announced, because it fell to me formally to announce it with my opposite number, the then Foreign Minister of Libya. I was in my constituency in Blackburn, and we were due to announce it in the early evening, and then I was going off to do another constituency engagement, as we all have done.

However, there was some last-minute glitch from the Libyan side. This went on and on, and I remember being stuck in my study in Blackburn talking on various telephones until finally, at about 10 o'clock in the evening, we issued the announcements. That was itself historic, and it ensured that the very severe danger that the Gaddafi Government had not only posed but had created over many previous years was likely to end, as indeed it did.

Q459 Chair: I know you are not responsible for Mr Blair's actions or recollections, but in a letter to us, he said, "The issue of compensation for the victims of Libyan-sponsored IRA terrorism", made possible by the provision of material from the Gaddafi regime, "was not raised with me in government, as far as I am aware."

Jack Straw: I am not responsible for what Mr Blair says, nor he for what I say, but just so we are clear about this, I very strongly support what he did in respect of the IRA peace process, and we worked very closely together on Libya.

The issue of compensation for the victims of PIRA terrorism was not raised with me either, so far as I can recall. I know that you have been in touch with the Foreign Office, as I have. They can find no record suggesting that it was raised. Famously, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but the fact that we cannot find any papers ties in with my own recollection that this was not raised.



May I just say this? When you are involved in negotiations of this kind, which was to deal with a very serious and continuing danger that the Gaddafi regime had caused over many, many years, you have to make a decision about what you are going to concentrate on. If the issue of PIRA terrorism compensation had been raised, of course we would have taken that into account, but as it happened, it was not raised. In these negotiations, you have to decide what to put, as it were, in your basket of demands and, as with many negotiations, you have to concentrate on what it is you really want and not make the best the enemy of the good. The target there was to make Libya safe and make the rest of the world safe from Libyan threats.

To use a parallel example, in all the negotiations in which I was intensively involved with Iran when I was Foreign Secretary over its alleged holdings of nuclear facilities, which it was claimed could lead to their manufacture of nuclear weapons and a delivery system, there were of course people saying that we should raise human rights with them and things like that, and I am concerned about human rights in Iran, as in other countries. However, we knew that, if we wanted to get to an agreement on the nuclear issue, that was what we had to concentrate on. That did not mean that we were brushing the other issues aside, but rather that they had to be pursued in a different way.

Q460 Chair: I understand that, but Mr Blair again expressed the importance he attached to the Libyan decisions to accept responsibility and pay compensation over Lockerbie. The frustration is that it seems that the Lockerbie incident, which was directly carried out by the Libyans, was recognised and compensated for, as far as it can be, but the issue of Libya supplying weapons and Semtex for the IRA to use was not discussed. That is part of the frustration that we feel.

Jack Straw: Of course I understand the frustration of members of the Committee, if that is the case, Mr Robertson; and also, obviously, the concern of those who were severely injured, and the relatives of those who were killed in the PIRA terrorism. The Foreign Office, both in their official memorandum and through Mr Ellwood, has explained that there was a different legal base. The Libyans had accepted wholly their responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing, as they had for the killing of WPC Fletcher. Although they admitted that they supplied the Semtex, there was no parallel acceptance of responsibility, still less an acceptance by them of a case for compensation for those victims. That was their responsibility.

The question that I had to deal with—and, with respect, the Committee has to deal with—was: what would have happened had we raised that? We could have raised that, had it been put on our agenda. Looking back at the papers and thinking about this as far as I can, the Libyans were saying, “This is not our direct responsibility. We have owned up to supplying the Semtex, but it was not we who planted it at the Old Bailey or used it in different ways. Our liability,” as we lawyers would say, “was



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too remote in that situation.” They then said, “What’s your next point?” Our next point was that we wanted a deal with them by which they owned up to the chemical weapons holdings, their undeclared nuclear facilities and all the rest of it. Even if we had put it on the agenda, I think we would have had to say, “Yes, it is on the agenda for a future discussion”, but we did not believe that it should get in the way of this agreement because, had we refused an agreement on the WMD agenda with the Libyans, it would not have helped the victims of IRA bombings for a second. It simply would have meant that Libya continued to be dangerous. That was a dilemma not only for me but, I suggest, also for the Committee.

Q461 **Kate Hoey:** Nice to see you, Jack. I am still not really clear and I just want to push you a little further on what Laurence has asked. Was there an actual decision taken within the Foreign Office that you were not ever going to raise this or was it just that no one actually put it into any kind of importance, or was it that you measured it against Lockerbie and the Fletcher family situation and decided that this was not something that you actually felt was necessary to push in order to get an agreement and to get that rapport with the Libyans?

Jack Straw: I am dealing here with recollection and you will appreciate the paucity of written records on this. First of all, it was not that we had forgotten about PIRA terrorism. Mr Blair never forgot about it. He had invested huge amounts of capital not only in the Good Friday agreement of 1998 but also in keeping that agreement together, which itself took an astonishing amount of effort. In my case, I was equally concerned as a member of Cabinet and, as I said, I had a small scar on my backside to remind me about PIRA terrorism and, much more importantly, the trauma that I suffered at that bombing.

Trying to piece the events together, the truth was that, because of the Good Friday agreement and because of the criminal injuries compensation arrangements on both sides of the Irish Sea in the mainland and in Northern Ireland, the issue of further compensation from Gaddafi in respect of their supply of Semtex was not high on the agenda. I do not want to suggest that it therefore was not important but, at that stage, as an immediate political issue, it was a quiescent issue. I made a statement to Parliament about the results of the 19 December agreement—your clerk can no doubt access it—and I do not recall this issue of compensation for PIRA terrorism being raised very much or at all.

Q462 **Kate Hoey:** Do you recall the question from Martin Smyth when he asked a written PQ to you in June 2004 as to whether you would raise at the United Nations the issue of compensation by Libya for victims of their sponsored terrorism in the United Kingdom, where Bill Rammell responded with, “There are no plans to raise this issue in the United Nations at this time”?



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Jack Straw: I do not recall that written PQ, though I have a very good memory. Moreover, in that particular case, since Bill Rammell was the person who answered it, I do not recall ever seeing the draft. I do have an extremely good memory but it is not perfect.

Q463 **Kate Hoey:** Are you saying then that the reason this was never raised and was not raised in the visit that the Prime Minister then made just before he resigned was because no one ever asked about it?

Jack Straw: It was not that no one ever asked but, if you are going to raise something at the Security Council, you have to decide what it is you are raising and what kind of support you would get from others.

Q464 **Kate Hoey:** Why were the deaths of 3,500 victims of Libyan Semtex less important? That is how it comes across, not just to us but to the victims.

Jack Straw: If you do not mind me saying, that is an outrageous suggestion against members of the Government that you supported and that I served. Why did Mr Blair devote more time and attention to the Good Friday agreement and its implementation than on almost any other issue that I can think of? Because he was profoundly concerned about the deaths of those 3,500 people and all the destruction that it had caused and the wrecked lives. Where the issue arises about what representations you make, you have to make a judgment about how and where you make representations that can help. Our judgment at the time—and, as I say, I do not think I ever saw that PQ but I would have supported it—was that it was not going to get anywhere to raise it in the Security Council, so we did not.

Q465 **Kate Hoey:** With respect, what we are talking about is whose judgment it was that this distinction would happen between victims of one atrocity and another.

Jack Straw: I have tried to explain that, Ms Hoey. The difference is that, in the case of Lockerbie and in the case of WPC Fletcher, the Libyans accepted culpability for what had happened because they were directly responsible for those acts of terrorism. If you went to a British court on this issue and sought to argue liability for those two sets of matters and liability in respect of PIRA terrorism, you would have greater difficulty, if the Libyans were to resist—which I suspect they would—in showing that there was a clear chain of causation between the supply of terrorism and the actual injuries and deaths which resulted. That is the difficulty. That is what the Libyans were resisting and that is why an overall judgment had been made that we were not going to get very far pursuing that.

Q466 **Kate Hoey:** Did you discuss that particular aspect in any way with the Prime Minister or was it swept—

Jack Straw: You are making an assumption that we said that it did not matter.



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Kate Hoey: No, I am asking.

Jack Straw: You were about to finish by saying “swept aside”. This issue was never swept aside, alright? Mr Blair devoted the 10 years that he was Prime Minister to securing peace in Northern Ireland.

Kate Hoey: Nobody is contesting that.

Q467 **Chair:** Can I just clarify something, Mr Straw? With regards to the Yvonne Fletcher case and with regards to Lockerbie, was pressure put on the Libyans by Her Majesty’s Government to accept responsibility or did they just one day come out and accept responsibility?

Jack Straw: The responsibility for Lockerbie went back to 1995 and this issue of compensation generally for outrages either perpetrated by the Libyans or for which the Libyans contributed—this is to PIRA bombings—was central to the negotiations that took place under the John Major Government in the mid-1990s. You will know this because it is in the memorandum that was put before you by the Foreign Office in paragraph 4 but it is worth reading. It says that in 1995, Libya provided information to the United Kingdom Government about the material and financial support it had provided to the Provisional IRA. The UK Government—John Major’s Government—stated on 20 November 1995 that, while there remained gaps and omissions in that information, they were satisfied that they had largely met their expectations and that it was a positive step towards Libya’s renunciation of terrorism. There was no evidence to suggest that Libya had continued its support to the IRA. Libya has since then considered the issue closed.

You asked about the difference between Lockerbie and PIRA terrorism. Libya, under a United Nations Security Council resolution, accepted responsibility for the Lockerbie attack and agreed to pay compensation. There was no such UNSCR which bound Libya to pay compensation to the victims of its support for the IRA. That is the difference.

Q468 **Lady Hermon:** Mr Straw, it is extremely good of you to come along because, in fact, I agree entirely with the tribute that you paid to Mr Blair about the peace process in Northern Ireland and about the magnificent achievement of the Belfast agreement signed on Good Friday. However, as you know, unfortunately Mr Blair, for whatever reason, has declined to come before the Committee, so I do appreciate that you have come. Do you talk with him? Do you meet with him?

Jack Straw: Yes, he is a friend. I do talk to him. I last saw him about three months ago.

Q469 **Lady Hermon:** Do you mind if I ask, as I feel like I am prying into a personal conversation: does he explain to you why he appears to be so reluctant to come before this Committee and to speak on what is a very sensitive and very controversial issue? As you will know from the public gallery, there are many victims and relatives of victims of IRA Gaddafi-sponsored violence at the Committee today.



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Jack Straw: I have not had that conversation with him.

Q470 **Lady Hermon:** You also served—I think with distinction—as Foreign Secretary during Gordon Brown’s time as Prime Minister.

Jack Straw: For about the five years that I was Foreign Secretary, Mr Blair was Prime Minister. Then I was translated to become Leader of the House for a year and then under Gordon Brown I was Lord Chancellor.

Lady Hermon: Forgive me. Do you still meet with Gordon Brown?

Jack Straw: I have not seen Mr Brown for quite a while. I do not think I have seen him since the last election.

Q471 **Lady Hermon:** So we do not know why neither of them have appeared.

Jack Straw: I see Mr Blair from time to time and he is a friend, but it is not the kind of issue that would immediately be raised and, with respect, you would have to ask them—I am sure you have—about their reluctance to appear. Anyway, you have me.

Lady Hermon: Exactly, and we have a long list of questions here.

Jack Straw: The moment that Mr Robertson phoned me, I said that I would come and the same would apply to any other Select Committee.

Q472 **Lady Hermon:** Yes, which is why I expressed my genuine gratitude for the fact that you did, without any hesitation, agree to come. We appreciate that very much. I was trying to take some notes while you were speaking earlier in response to questions from my colleagues. You said that, because of the peace process in Northern Ireland and the Belfast agreement, the compensation schemes on both sides of the Irish Sea meant that the UK did not prioritise compensation for the victims of Gaddafi.

Jack Straw: They had received compensation through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, which is called something different in Northern Ireland. I have been trying to piece this together and I have talked to one former British diplomat and had email correspondence with Foreign Office officials. I have talked privately to one former British diplomat who dealt a lot with Libya just to piece together what had happened. I understand why, with the benefit of hindsight, you are now asking why compensation for PIRA victims was not raised. I understand that. When I got the telephone call from Mr Robertson, I tried to think about this because, at first blush, it looks as though we should have raised it. However, as I say, piecing this altogether, the answer was that those victims of the PIRA terrorism had received compensation, however inadequate they may have regarded that.

Now, I come back to this point: critically, whilst in respect of WPC Fletcher and in respect of Lockerbie, they were explicit and total about their acceptance of their guilt, they were very far from that in



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respect of PIRA terrorism on the basis—and this is me paraphrasing—that there was a remoteness of causation.

It was not an active issue at the time. Ms Hoey has pointed to a written parliamentary question put down by Martin Smyth in the summer of 2004. I was half-expecting her to say, “When you made your statement”—back in I think early 2004, because I am pretty certain that we were already out for the Christmas break after the announcement on 19 December—“you were bombarded with questions from it”, but I do not recall that I was, nor do I recall being bearded in the lobbies or the tea room about this issue by those with a concern for this issue. As colleagues who were around at the time will know, I always made myself available. If colleagues from whichever party wanted to talk to me when I was a Minister, and indeed afterwards, in the tea room or in the lobbies, I would always make myself available. If they stopped me and asked if I would do something, I went and made a note about it straightaway and got it done. I would have remembered. Ms Hoey and I have known each other for 49 years.

Kate Hoey: Thank you for reminding me how old we are.

Jack Straw: How young we were when we met. She was never slow in coming forward to have a go at me about various issues. I would have remembered if it had been raised with me, I think.

Q473 **Lady Hermon:** Would it surprise you, Mr Straw, to know that victims of Gaddafi-sponsored IRA violence, certainly in England, did not receive compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme? Many of them do not appear to have received any compensation whatsoever.

Jack Straw: I did not know that. I thought from the briefings that they had.

Lady Hermon: No, they had not.

Jack Straw: This is whether the terrorism occurred in Northern Ireland or on the mainland, is it?

Lady Hermon: There are in fact two separate schemes but they are complementary—in fact they are quite similar—that operate in Northern Ireland and also separately operate in GB; but a number of victims have not received any compensation at all.

Jack Straw: Sorry to ask you a question, again, but why is that the case? I am very, very familiar with the compensation scheme that operates in England and Wales because I had to deal with it for over seven years as Home Secretary and then as Lord Chancellor, and the criteria were very clear.

Lady Hermon: We actually have not got to the bottom of that but what is intriguing is that, when Gordon Brown took over as Prime Minister—

Jack Straw: Yes, he set up this unit.



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Q474 **Lady Hermon:** He set up this unit. Do you mind me asking what the unit was initially called and what its remit was about?

Jack Straw: I can tell you what it was called.

Lady Hermon: Initially.

Jack Straw: I do not know. I thought about this when I saw this in the papers. It did not directly, as I recall, involve the Ministry of Justice. It may have done at an official level but it was a unit set up in the Foreign Office and I assume that they were working very closely with the Northern Ireland Office. Officials in my Department would have known that. However, I do not recall it being on my radar expect that, at the bottom of my box, there could have been—I have no recollection of this—a letter which had gone around to colleagues saying what was going to happen.

Q475 **Lady Hermon:** This particular unit, as you will understand from the evidence we received, is supposed to assist individual victims to seek individually, in Libya, compensation for the injuries and the damage and the death caused by Gaddafi-sponsored IRA violence. Could you explain, in the roles that you have held within the Government, why it is that the British Government have consistently refused to espouse the compensation claims of these individuals? It is literally impossible for an individual victim to take themselves out to Libya, even with the assistance of the Foreign Office unit, to negotiate compensation. It is completely unreasonable. Why on earth would the British Government have done that?

Jack Straw: You have had the 11 rules that apply to international claims. I am not here to justify them but just to say that they exist and that is the reason given by the Foreign Office. "Espousing" is a term of art. Supporting claims is different and certainly when I was Foreign Secretary, and indeed in my other positions, if I thought that it was justified to support claims by UK nationals with foreign governments, I did so and I raised these issues. There is a formal issue, and you would need to ask Foreign Office lawyers rather than me to explain the full background to this.

Q476 **Lady Hermon:** Yes, but, when you were at the Foreign Office with the 11 points and principles, those were the criteria established in customary international law about governments espousing claims. Would you like to point to one of those criteria that is not satisfied and is not met in the case of Gaddafi-sponsored IRA violence? To my mind, there is not and it actually satisfies all of them.

Jack Straw: Can I say that, in any event, if the issue had been raised with me in an active way by those concerned about PIRA terrorism, I would not have said "I am not going to do it because of these 11 rules"? I would have gone on and done it. Again, we are dealing with recollections of things that happened. It is 15 years ago since I became Foreign Secretary and 10 years ago since I ceased to be



Foreign Secretary; and the paper records are deficient. As I say, I have a good memory. I do not even remember seeing those 11 criteria before and I was never one to find an excuse for inaction. I just was not. If somebody had raised this with me, I would have talked to them. The officials are a varied bunch but most of the Foreign Office officials, including the lawyers, are very good and wanted to help. They are human beings apart from anything else. Bear in mind that, aside from the fact that human beings just care about other human beings—these families have been wrecked—there were a number of members of the British diplomatic service who had been killed by PIRA bombs and PIRA actions. There was very great sympathy about that and about the pursuit of compensation.

However, as I say, it comes back to this issue about the level of culpability of the Gaddafi regime and the fact that they decided, in the light of decisions made bilaterally in 1995 by the John Major Government, that the matter was closed and they were not willing to re-open it. I think John Major did great work to lay the foundations for what became the Good Friday agreement and I am not gainsaying what he and his colleagues did but that is what they did and that then set the seal on the subsequent scope for action by the British Government.

Q477 Lady Hermon: Fast forwarding to the current time, this Committee has conducted this inquiry and it has received a considerable amount of media coverage. David Cameron and the coalition Government came in in 2010, six years ago. Since the criteria for espousal of the claim for compensation—all of those 11 criteria—are satisfied, are you surprised or disappointed that the current Government has not espoused the claims on behalf of the victims?

Jack Straw: There is a difference between espousal, which is a formal term, and support. I know that Mr Ellwood came to give evidence to you.

Lady Hermon: Yes, he did, twice.

Jack Straw: I happen to have high regard for him and for the concerns that he has. I have not read, with apologies to him, all of his evidence but I did not get the sense from him that he was not bothered or that he was indifferent about what had happened here nor that he was majoring on these 11 points. As I say, for legal reasons of international customary law, the advice received by Ministers is that these claims would not quite come under this. I do not know why they do or they do not but that is not a reason for not doing anything.

However, as I say, the frustration for me, and I suspect for Mr Ellwood as well, is that it was very difficult to make progress on this because of the chaos in Libya, going back to when the Gaddafi Government was there and wanting better relations between 2003 and 2011, and because of what had been decided in the past, including by the Major Government in 1995, as well as—sorry to repeat myself—because of this central problem



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that the Libyans were not accepting the same level of culpability as they did in respect of Lockerbie or WPC Fletcher.

Lady Hermon: Thank you. I know other colleagues want to ask some questions. Thank you, Mr Straw; I appreciate that.

Q478 **Chair:** Just on any government's take on this, going back way before Mr Blair came to power, I distinctly remember a meeting I had in 1985, 31 years ago, with a Foreign Office official who confirmed that Libya was helping the IRA. This goes back to before your responsibilities but it seems puzzling. I was a relative unknown then but, even then, it was recognised that Libya were helping the IRA. How has it been almost ignored for all that time?

Jack Straw: It has not been ignored.

Chair: Nothing has been done about it.

Jack Straw: It was known, although getting clear proof at that stage was extremely difficult. It was much later on that clear proof emerged and then admissions from the Libyan Government, which led to the 1995 Security Council resolution and the beginnings of them coming in from the cold. Yes, it was known in the intelligence circles and many allegations were made publicly but they were resisted by the Libyans, as I recall, which made it difficult to pursue it.

I may also say—and this is part of the story that is often forgotten—that at the time there were very powerful people in the United States, including in the United States Congress, who were giving tacit support to the Provisional IRA and, in some cases, more active support and who were making life extremely difficult for the British Government to pursue these issues internationally. I am delighted now that all of these people, some of whom I could name, are now saying what a great thing the Good Friday agreement was, as indeed it was, but, if you listened to the views of these people in Washington and around the country in the United States in the 1980s and early 1990s, you would be forgiven for thinking that all the killings were caused by British security forces and none by the IRA.

Q479 **Danny Kinahan:** Thank you very much, Mr Straw. We are very grateful for you coming today and particularly grateful for all the work that was done in the past in Northern Ireland and getting us there. The consequences and other things might not be quite so good. I just want to start with the point that there was also another question at the time from David Burnside to Paul Murphy where he answered by saying that the Government are aware.

Jack Straw: Sorry to ask you, Mr Kinahan, but what date was that, please?

Q480 **Danny Kinahan:** That was 1 April 2004. Obviously, the Foreign Office knew. I am more concerned as to why the Libyans felt that the thing was



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closed. What had given them the impression that the deals were done?

Jack Straw: First of all, the advice would have been that the Libyans were not going to re-open these issues as they felt that the issue of their culpability for the supply of Semtex and materials had been settled in 1995. The second thing goes back to something I said right at the beginning: I do not recall this being an active issue on the agenda in the autumn of 2003. We were discussing, at that stage in secret, what we should do about the Libyans if we finally persuaded them to own up to their chemical weapons holdings and their undisclosed nuclear facilities. Our focus was absolutely on getting the Libyans to admit to these holdings and then to get inspectors in and have all of the chemical weapons and nuclear facilities dismantled and made safe under international supervision.

As I said right at the beginning, even if this had been raised as an active issue with me—and my recollection is that it was not and I am struck that I may be about to be ambushed on this but no member of the Committee has been able to suggest anything to the contrary—I might well have said, “Look, let us just concentrate on getting the Libyans to agree to give up their chemical weapons and their nuclear holdings and then we can move on to this on a different track”.

Q481 **Jack Lopresti:** Given the enormity of these discussions and the ramifications of giving up their WMD programme and halting a nuclear programme, which to me are vast issues for the Libyan Government and for Gaddafi, it is difficult to actually believe that, whilst all that was on the table—their international standing and their ability to wage war in the future—they were not prepared to discuss compensation to victims of IRA Semtex; they were prepared to negotiate away the WMD capability but they were not prepared to talk about compensation. They were not exactly struggling for money. I cannot recall the Gaddafi regime being short of a few quid at the time.

Jack Straw: No, they were not struggling for money and indeed, as you know from evidence to your Committee, \$9.5 billion to \$10 billion of their assets have been frozen. That regime was not short of money. You would have to ask them.

Jack Lopresti: You were at the discussions.

Jack Straw: I was. It simply was not an active issue on the agenda, but Lockerbie was and WPC Fletcher had been but that had been resolved; although, interestingly—I think I am right in saying this—the level of compensation that the Libyans paid in respect of WPC Fletcher’s murder was that prescribed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. I am told that the Libyans were surprised about its relatively low value, paid up and then regarded it as closed.

Q482 **Danny Kinahan:** If I can take you back to what we were discussing, it seems to be that you were happy in getting a deal with Libya because of the threat of nuclear and chemical attack. I had not heard about the



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nuclear or chemical issue until today so one question would be: did we have proof or was that what the inspectors were to find out in terms of whether that actually existed? Were there commercial deals like the ones with Shell and BP that also meant a great deal? Was there a silent promise that there would be no more terrorism or no more backing? Were questions raised or was there a large sum of money sitting here in our economy from Libya? For all those sorts of reasons, is that why victims came last?

Jack Straw: Victims did not come last and that is shown from the fact that the Security Council resolution that followed the deal in 2003 included undertakings about compensation for the victims of the Lockerbie bombing. I have sought to explain why the Libyans believed that there was a difference in their culpability for that compared with victims of PIRA terrorism. In no sense did victims of PIRA terrorism come at the back of the queue. The question here was a practical one about how far that was involved in the negotiations.

Mr Kinahan, I was very pleased about the deal we struck with the Libyans. It was a great testament to the professionalism of British intelligence above all. The Foreign Office can provide you with details, as can the chemical weapons agency and the IAEA, that they had substantial holdings of chemical weapons and they had undisclosed nuclear facilities that were principally concerned with the production of uranium, which, if they had been able to continue with over a period of years—not the following day—could have led them to develop a capability for a nuclear weapon. Our assumption—and it was not gain-said by our sources in Libya—was that Gaddafi wanted these facilities in order to develop a nuclear weapon. There was no suggestion that they wanted to try to develop a nuclear power station. Given the small size of their population and their huge hydrocarbon resources, it would have been eccentric to have done that.

I have not been through all the papers but you were asking whether there was commercial bait dangling in front of my nose in those negotiations, and those of our intelligence officers, in the autumn of 2003 which would mean that we were going to cut corners. “No” is the answer. Again, the papers may show otherwise but we were focusing on that deal in order to remove a serious, palpable threat from Libya to the rest of the world. It was after that, once we got the deal, that part of the deal was that commercial relations would open up, and then the British Government sought to facilitate those commercial relations for British companies about which I am completely unapologetic: that is what the British Foreign Office is partly there to do.

Q483 **Danny Kinahan:** If we go then to the point that the victims are not being looked after at the moment, there is no funding there and we are advised by the Foreign Office lawyers that we cannot do anything about it because their view is that, if we used the assets that have been frozen, there will be legal challenges in the future, is there another way in lieu?



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Is there any advice you can give us as to how to get through the UN and the EU to get the assets, or part of them, released?

Jack Straw: The only advice that I can give is that, if you are able to get agreement from the other four permanent members of the Security Council to use part of the frozen assets for the purpose of compensation, then that could happen. You also may know that, in the Security Council, you need nine votes and no vetoes of the five permanent members.

Within the EU, this is an area of foreign policy so it still requires unanimity, so you would have to get all 27 to agree. It is perfectly possible to get broad agreement inside the EU—I personally did it on a number of occasions—but sometimes it is difficult. That is the route to that.

Q484 **Gavin Robinson:** Good morning, Mr Straw. In one of your final answers to Mr Kinahan, you explicitly said “no” to the proposition that commercial considerations were in play in autumn 2003. Did that change as time progressed?

Jack Straw: Once we got a deal, Mr Robinson, over Gaddafi’s chemical and nuclear holdings and there was a normalisation of relations, for sure, as a matter of record, we encouraged British companies to open up commercial arrangements with Libyan companies. Why would we not have done so?

Q485 **Gavin Robinson:** In fairness, that is not the question. Your explicit “no” was to the notion of a proposition that compensation or the request for compensation was set aside because of commercial reasons. I was asking whether that changed as time progressed.

Jack Straw: The issue of compensation was never set aside because of commercial considerations. I have tried to explain, so far as I have been able to piece together the story, why it was not an active issue on the agenda. If it had been, we would have pursued it.

Q486 **Gavin Robinson:** Can I just suggest that your answers so far in relation to piecing those pieces together are quite ambiguous. Can I run through them with you once again, if you don’t mind? Until 19 December 2003, the conversations that you were having were, until that point, secret; is that right?

Jack Straw: Yes.

Q487 **Gavin Robinson:** So there was no occasion, up until that point, that any representative from Northern Ireland or anyone representing the victims’ interests would have seen the vehicle through which they could have advocated that cause. Is that correct? They would not have known about your engagement with the Libyan Government and they would not have known you were discussing with Gaddafi and therefore the opportunity was not there or was not available until 19 December 2003.



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Jack Straw: They were secret and, so far as I recall, there were no leaks.

Q488 **Gavin Robinson:** So, rather than suggesting that you did not face this clamour or call for compensation, nobody was aware of the opportunity to raise it with you.

Jack Straw: Mr Robinson, it would not have stopped people saying that, because there was an understanding from the time of the Iraq War that things might change in Libya. The fact of our intelligence, which had been developed on Libya, and the demarche of Libya, which was made by US and UK intelligence services in the autumn of 2003, was indeed very secret, but the fact that Gaddafi was getting nervous following the invasion of Iraq—and he admitted that in an interview with CNN on 22 December 2003—was known.

I understand where you are trying to lead me but I am afraid that I am not going to be led there. If there had been a “clamour”, in your words, that would certainly have arisen from 10.00 pm on the evening of 19 December 2003.

Q489 **Gavin Robinson:** Since then we know that we have had parliamentary questions from Martin Smyth, parliamentary questions from David Burnside and parliamentary questions from Iris Robinson, my colleague at the time, who elicited this response from the Prime Minister. He said, “Her Majesty’s Government had discussed a wide range of issues with Colonel Gaddafi including international and regional security issues, including terrorism.” Were you involved in those discussions or did the Prime Minister not include you in discussions about terrorism with Colonel Gaddafi?

Jack Straw: What date was that?

Gavin Robinson: The answer came in April 2004, so here you can clearly see parliamentary interest in April 2004 following the revelation of your secret discussions, but the Prime Minister is indicating that there had been discussions of terrorism. Were you not involved in those? Did he cut you out of those?

Jack Straw: Mr Robinson, there is a world of difference between parliamentary interest—you have been able to identify three written questions over a six-month period—and a “clamour”, which was your word. There was no clamour. I cannot say why there was not, but there was no clamour. That is the truth.

Was I involved in discussion of terrorism? Of course I was, all the time. After all, why would I not have been? I had just been Home Secretary for four years. I was Foreign Secretary. As Home Secretary, I was responsible for security services; as Foreign Secretary, I was responsible for Secret Intelligence Service and GCHQ. Of course I was involved in the discussions.



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Q490 Gavin Robinson: Sure, and never once during that period of time did it occur to you, during those secret discussions with the Libyan Government, that there were victims in mainland GB, in your constituency, right across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, who were interested in looking to pursue the notion of compensation.

Jack Straw: I have told you that, in a minor way, I was a victim myself of PIRA terrorism so it was not something that I was going to forget. Of course I was concerned but I have done my best to explain to the Committee why this was not an active issue at the time. You obviously feel that it should have been.

Gavin Robinson: You are going to go over old ground.

Chair: I am going to let the witness answer.

Jack Straw: I think that, if you would have been in my position, you might have come to the same conclusion as I did. Hindsight is a wonderful thing but this is not one of those areas where I would say that I would have done things differently. I do not think I would have done anything differently because it was not an active issue for the reasons that I have explained, which go back to the 1995 agreement for which I was an adornment on the Opposition front bench, not a member of the Government.

Q491 Gavin Robinson: On five separate occasions today, you have extolled the benefits of the Good Friday agreement and the peace initiative in Northern Ireland. What is the association between the peace process in Northern Ireland and the quest for compensation?

Jack Straw: If there had not been a peace process, there would have been hundreds, if not thousands, more victims of terrorism on both sides. The arrangement that the John Major Government came to in 1995, by which Libya agreed to stop its supply of Semtex material to the PIRA, was an essential precursor to the negotiations with PIRA. As you know far better than I do, there were plenty of people in PIRA who wanted to carry on, as they saw it, their war against the Brits. One of the reasons why more sensible people within PIRA decided they needed to start negotiating—as well as, I may say, letting off bombs when they could—was because they were running short of material and it was more difficult for them to get it because this wonderful ready supply of high explosives and good weaponry had dried up. There is a fundamental connection between these two.

Q492 Gavin Robinson: I want to then put it to you because the supply chain had stopped in 1995, so that was no longer an issue, but there is a view that Her Majesty's Government was reticent to pursue compensation for IRA victims because it ran the prospect of Sinn Féin withdrawing their support for one-sided compensation as a result of the Northern Ireland peace process.

Jack Straw: There may be a view about that. I certainly never recall ever seeing anything to corroborate that view but bear in mind—and it



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sounds unlikely—I was not involved to any significant degree in the peace process. I did consequential things like release of prisoners who were in English or Welsh jails and other stuff but it was Mr Blair, Jonathan Powell, officials from the Northern Ireland office and Mo Mowlam.

Q493 **Gavin Robinson:** You mentioned declassified intelligence reports that suggested to you that Gaddafi wanted to be brought in from the cold.

Jack Straw: I did not actually say that they were declassified. I said that a crucial piece of information has been declassified, which was that this emerged in 2003. I did not say that particular pieces of intelligence were declassified. I have no idea whether they have or have not been declassified.

Q494 **Gavin Robinson:** The view came from intelligence services sources that Gaddafi wished to be brought in from the cold.

Jack Straw: Yes, he did.

Gavin Robinson: Are you not suggesting, in common negotiation terms, that our Government had the whip-hand in those discussions? He wanted to build the relationship with us and he wanted to raise his reputation in international standing and he wanted to get to a better relationship with the United Kingdom. We were not needing to plead with him; in fact, he was reaching out the olive branch to us.

Jack Straw: There is no question that, following the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Gaddafi felt increasingly vulnerable and wondered whether a United States/UK-led coalition might take military action against his regime because of its holdings of WMDs and for other reasons. I can send it to you if you wish, but if you look at what Gaddafi said in a very revealing interview on 22 December, three days after this deal was announced, you will see provenance for that.

He was concerned and what happened was that individuals on his behalf started to say to the British Government, through intelligence arrangements, that, in the cliché, they wanted to come in from the cold. What you are asking, Mr Robinson, is what was in it for us.

Q495 **Gavin Robinson:** You gave an analogy earlier that suggested that this was some way akin to the negotiations you had had with Iran where we were pleading for something from another state. Here we have a situation where Libya is pleading with us to be brought in from the cold, and I am suggesting that that gave us a whip-hand in those discussions rather than feeling that we needed to give all and gain nothing for victims in the UK or other interests.

Jack Straw: Each situation is different but there are analogies. What we wanted from Gaddafi was his agreement to hand over his chemical weapon holdings and his nuclear facilities and to put those under international supervision. Why did we want to do that? We wanted to make the world safer. As it happens, although we did not tell him this, neither the US nor the United Kingdom had any plans to take military



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action against Libya except in completely egregious, unanticipated circumstances. However, as I say, he did not know that and he was getting worried. That was a huge prize to ensure that one more country had dismantled its illicit WMD holdings and therefore the threat he was posing to international security and to his neighbours was significantly reduced.

Now, it may, with the benefit of hindsight, seem very easy for Gaddafi to have done this but he had to take account, as anybody would regardless of how nasty a dictator he was, of what this would do for his position within the politics of the regime in Libya. It was a two-way street. It is not an exact parallel to Iran but, in the case of Iran, we wanted Iran to agree to complete openness about its, as then undeclared, nuclear facilities, and, in return, Iran wanted access to all sorts of things that they were being denied at that stage.

Q496 Gavin Robinson: From your perspective, from a position of strength, when did we, from 2003, grow to fear Gaddafi and the Libyan regime?

Jack Straw: Once that threat had been removed, certainly during my period as Foreign Secretary which only lasted another three years after this, we did not fear him.

Q497 Gavin Robinson: Not just touching on your position as Foreign Secretary but perhaps further into your ministerial career, whilst the quest for compensation continued, the British Government grew more and more reluctant with the notion that we would pursue compensation from Libya. You mentioned that you had spoken to a former British diplomat. Can I ask you: was that Sir Vincent Fean?

Jack Straw: You can ask me, and it was a private conversation.

Q498 Gavin Robinson: I will put to you that we have taken evidence from Sir Vincent Fean and, in 2008, in private discussions with Tony Blair, he indicated that to pursue compensation from the Gaddafi Government would not only be a huge mistake but it would be to shoot ourselves in the foot as George Bush did in his pursuit for compensation. Further than that, when you as Justice Secretary were involved in the release of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, Sir Vincent Fean was advising at that time that to allow Megrahi to die in a Scottish jail would be to allow the Libyan Government to have "cut us off at our knees" in our UK interests in Libya.

I am trying to get a picture of how, from a position of strength in negotiations with Libya, we got to a position of fearing Libya and their consequences and not pursue the rights for victims.

Jack Straw: Mr Robinson, I am not sure that any evidence that I give will persuade you from some clear conclusions that you have given but I will try.

Gavin Robinson: I put it to you to listen to your view.



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Jack Straw: You include a long list of assertions. Just allow me to answer, if I may. First of all, Sir Vincent Fean is a very fine diplomat but he is responsible for what he says in evidence; I am not responsible for what he says. Secondly, you are wrong to say that I was involved in the release of Megrahi; I was not.

Q499 **Gavin Robinson:** Were you not involved as Lord Chancellor or as Justice Secretary?

Jack Straw: I was absolutely not. This was a decision made entirely independently by the Scottish Justice Minister. I can tell you exactly where I was when I found out about it. I was sitting on the terrace of the holiday home that my wife and I had rented in Italy and the wi-fi signal was very poor and this popped up on the screen that Megrahi had been released. I had absolutely nothing to do with the decision.

Q500 **Gavin Robinson:** But the substance of what I was asking was more about Her Majesty's Government's position of strength with Libya's Government moving to one of fear. It is the case that Sir Vincent Fean was not only giving that advice at the time that to allow Megrahi to die would be to cut UK interest off at the knees, but he was advising you in that capacity according to—

Jack Straw: He was not advising me. He is responsible for his own evidence and it is up to you to weigh up all the evidence. He was not advising me and I did not fear Libya once we had removed the basis of the fear.

Q501 **Chair:** I do not know how much you have stayed in touch with events in Libya since but one of the reasons Minister Ellwood has given us for not being able to pursue compensation at the moment is because of an unsettled Libyan Government. There is no Government there that is fully recognised even by its own parliament. Is that your understanding of how it rests at the moment?

Jack Straw: Yes. I seek to follow events in Libya. I am not as directly involved today as in respect of, for example, events in Turkey and Iran that for other reasons I take a close day-to-day interest in but it would, in any circumstances, be very difficult to pursue a claim for anything against a state like Libya as long as there was no certainty about who was in charge. That is the difficulty. It will at some stage settle down but I suspect it is going to be a long time.

Q502 **Chair:** If and when that happens—it could be next month, next year or five years from now, though we hope it is sooner rather than later—is it your view that, given everything you know now, Her Majesty's Government should pursue compensation on behalf of the victims?

Jack Straw: I obviously have very great sympathy for the victims. Whether and how the British Government should pursue it is something that, if it came to a point where it was a possibility, I would certainly want to think about very carefully. If people made representations to me



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for help, I would talk to officials and Ministers in the Foreign Office about this. I am sorry that I am being cautious here but there is one thing worse than not pursuing a matter and that is making a pretence of pursuing something and winding up the relatives when you know that you will hit a brick wall. I am not saying that you would hit a brick wall, and that is one of the judgments that you would have to make, but it would be cruel to the families if, in order to get the Government off the hook, they said, "Okay, we will go through the motions" and then say, "Sorry". That is not the kind of approach that I wanted to adopt.

Q503 **Chair:** If you were Foreign Secretary now—

Jack Straw: If I were Foreign Secretary, life would be altogether better and peace would have broken out around the world.

Q504 **Chair:** If you were the Foreign Secretary and you oversaw our exiting from the European Union and so on, would you want to pursue this case or would you take the view that this is a new Libyan Government and we have to draw the line somewhere? How would you view the case?

Jack Straw: I would look at it. The fact that you would have other stuff on your agenda, like Brexit, should not paralyse you from pursuing other matters that are not directly to do with Brexit. We had 9/11 and then Afghanistan and then the Iraq War on our agenda and we pursued lots of other issues.

Q505 **Jack Lopresti:** If you were Foreign Secretary, would you have supported the intervention that the last Government took in Libya?

Jack Straw: I did support it at the time, as I recall, in the House from the back benches. With the benefit of hindsight, if it had been possible for there to have been a deal struck with Gaddafi, that would have been better but the truth was that the country was falling apart because of the way that Gaddafi was behaving. There is much to be said, though it is not the purpose of this inquiry, about what has happened since then, Mr Lopresti. Putting in ground troops would have made a big difference but, not least because of the experience in Iraq, putting Western ground troops into Libya was not an option and so we have had to live with the consequences. The judgment I made at the time—and you have to make judgments prospectively, I am afraid, and do your best—is that I supported Mr Cameron and Mr Hague.

Q506 **Kate Hoey:** Obviously, we are really genuinely grateful that you came along because quite a lot of other people did not seem to want to. Do you think it would be better now if the Government were to recognise every victim of Libyan Semtex, as my colleague mentioned, across the UK as a group by being supported financially and by being helped, rather than being told, more or less, "You are on your own", and "If you want to get some kind of compensation with the Libyan Government, off you go", and "We will help you a little bit and set up this unit"? Is it not now an opportunity for the Government to make a redress by saying, "Look, we recognise that, because of the decency of lawyers who have done a lot of



this work for free, we will now help you as a group and deal with you as a group”?

Jack Straw: It would be very easy for me, as a retired MP, to say, “Yes” but if you ask me what I would have done as a Minister—which I think is more important and will give you an easier answer—I would say that I will see what the Committee has to say in its report and then think about this. Certainly, if that was a recommendation and it was clear that it had the weight of the whole Committee behind it, I can see that there is a strong case for doing so, but I would wait for the Committee’s report.

Q507 **Lady Hermon:** I just have a couple of questions to ask. The victims are getting older—we are all getting older—and becoming more infirm. We have spent a lot of time looking at the past because we needed to understand what had happened but we also have to look at the present and what we can do to best support the victims. I am surprised that a number of victims have Labour MPs as their representatives. Would you agree to raise this as an urgent matter, a matter of considerable importance, with the current leader of the Labour party, who is not in the same league as Tony Blair? Would you take it upon yourself to raise this? We are talking about victims here across England.

Jack Straw: I know you are. Lady Hermon, since I am a friend of yours, if you want me to write to Mr Corbyn to say you are concerned about this, I will do so.

Lady Hermon: I am very concerned.

Jack Straw: There will, for sure, be Labour MPs who are supporting these victims because the victims will be their constituents. The fact that they are Labour does not disqualify them from supporting them.

Lady Hermon: Absolutely not.

Jack Straw: There is another way for a communication from you to go to Mr Corbyn, which is for you to write to him but, if you want me to write, I will do so and we will both of us await the reply with interest.

Q508 **Lady Hermon:** I would certainly await any reply to me with great interest. That would be a first. There are two very serious points here. What do we do for the victims at the present time? What do we do for them? You mentioned Brexit and there are other issues that the Government has to pursue as well. At the present time, there is something in the region of £9 billion of Libyan frozen assets in the UK. There is a UN resolution, which you mentioned in the early part of your evidence, that is implemented by one EU regulation. We are about to exit, if we listen to the Prime Minister who keeps telling us that Brexit means Brexit, and we should be out of the European Union by spring 2019, so that regulation will collapse. We are therefore left with a UN resolution. Would you advise that the current Government seek—as you have explained to my colleagues the unanimity and that no-one should veto this—a release of the Libyan assets through an amendment or



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change to the UN resolution since the EU regulation will fall?

Jack Straw: I referred to the £9 billion before so I am aware of that. My understanding is that it would not be possible, given the Security Council resolution under which the money has been put into escrow, to release it for compensation. What I would say, if I was a Minister, is that I would want to see what your Committee had to say and, if there was a strong recommendation from the Committee, then I would actively seek to do that.

The other thing, just to reassure you, Lady Hermon, about Brexit—and I am not sure of your opinion on Brexit but it certainly was not my idea—is that we will not in legal terms fall over a cliff on the day that we leave the European Union because all EU law will just be incorporated into UK domestic law until it is changed. If you go to India, and I know India very well, they are still operating many laws that were passed under the British Raj in the 19th century. In the so-called great repeal Bill, which is an interesting title, the small print is that, far from all this legislation being repealed, it will continue in force.

Chair: We will not go too far into this, if you do not mind.

Jack Straw: I am happy to stay here all day but I would draw your attention to the fact that I have been giving evidence for an hour and 22 minutes.

Chair: That is relatively short by the way, given this Committee. Are there any further questions?

Q509 **Gavin Robinson:** Mr Straw, I would just like to give you an opportunity to clarify a comment about al-Megrahi and his release. Documents suggest that there was a prisoner transfer arrangement with Libya and that you had initially agreed with the Scottish Government's position that Megrahi should be excluded from that. Three months later, you then advised that such an exclusion was not worth the risk of damaging our "wide-ranging and beneficial relationship with Libya". Is that correct?

Jack Straw: Yes, and that does not mean that I was responsible for his release because the whole point, if you read on, is that the reason it made no difference was because, even if I signed, which I did, a prisoner transfer agreement with the Libyans that did not specifically exclude Megrahi from its operation, that did not mean that Megrahi would be released under the prisoner transfer agreement because the responsible Minister in the appropriate jurisdiction—in this case Scotland—had an absolute right over whether to release him under the PTA. That is well illustrated from the fact that Megrahi was not released under that prisoner transfer agreement. Instead, he was released on compassionate grounds under prerogative rights that the Scottish Government had inherited, which were absolutely nothing to do with me.

Q510 **Gavin Robinson:** It is more about your comments about damaging our "wide-ranging and beneficial relationship with Libya", given the



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comments of Sir Vincent Fean and others, which mirror yours, that there was a reticence to pursue compensation because to do so would be like shooting ourselves in the foot, like George Bush did.

Jack Straw: Whether you had Megrahi mentioned as specifically excluded or not was a distinction without a difference. Either way, the Scottish Government retained their absolute veto over whether Megrahi could be released, and he was never released under the prisoner transfer agreement. He just was not.

Gavin Robinson: That is an irrelevant issue.

Jack Straw: It was the issue because that was what I signed, so of course I was concerned at that stage about securing reasonable relations with the Libyans. That was a shared agenda and, yes, I was concerned to see that British companies were able to gain the benefit of this huge amount of work that we had put in diplomatically. If I had not been, I would rightly have been criticised for the fact that I was handing over commercial opportunities to the Americans, the French, the Italians and the Germans. That is the world we live in.

Chair: I think we will draw it to a close there.

Q511 **Lady Hermon:** I just want to come back to the question that I had asked. Mr Straw, how are we going to help the victims of Gaddafi-sponsored IRA violence moving forward? They are getting older and becoming more infirm. I suggested the frozen assets. I also suggested a letter from your current party leader. My comment about Labour MPs is to do with the fact that, while some of them have been very helpful—and likewise some Conservative MPs have been very helpful—to victims in their constituencies, not all of them have been. How do we help the victims, many of whom are present in the public gallery today?

Jack Straw: I understand that. You help the victims by this kind of inquiry. You have developed, collectively, far more expertise than I have on this. You put forward your recommendations and they ought to be considered by the Government and, hopefully, actively supported.

Q512 **Lady Hermon:** Amongst those recommendations, what would be your suggestion?

Jack Straw: Lady Hermon, I was asked to give evidence on a specific set of issues about my position as Foreign Secretary and I have done my best both to research it and to answer your questions as carefully and as fully as I can. If you wanted me to provide a memorandum of what needs to be done next on compensation, I would need to think about it. I am not going to come out with a list of clichés off the top of my head.

Chair: You would be very welcome to write to us if you do come to some conclusion.



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Jack Straw: I may or may not. It is easy to say that something must be done—that is the easiest phrase in the world in government—but the question then is: what should be done?

Chair: We would welcome a letter from you, if indeed you want to do that.

Jack Straw: I will not promise that.

Chair: That is fine. Mr Straw, it has been a very useful session. Thank you very much indeed for joining us.