The release of Libyan Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed Al Megrahi, convicted for the 1988 bombing of PanAm 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, is expected today.

Megrahi was found to be suffering from terminal cancer in October last year, and is said to be only likely to live a few more months. After he dropped his appeal against conviction and sentence in Scotland, his lawyers petitioned for his release to Libya—either on compassionate grounds or as part of a prisoner transfer deal.

The Scottish administration intended directly to oppose his release and make clear that it would prefer Megrahi to die in Greenock jail, in Scotland, where he has been incarcerated since 2001. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who is known to have soft spot for the Lockerbie victims, has made clear that “people can be assured that the justice secretary’s decisions are not based on any other factors than the clear evidence and on no other factors than the clear evidence.”

At stake is, firstly, the possibility of resolving the political fallout should Megrahi’s conviction be proved to be invalid and, secondly, and more important still, lucrative trade relations with Libya.

Megrahi was the only person found guilty of the Lockerbie bombing at a jury trial held in Camp Zest in the Netherlands in 2001. His decision to end his appeal against conviction, made under tremendous pressure, puts an end to the series of trials, appeals and hearings that has continued since the 27-year minimum sentence. His possible release comes after intense discussions within the Brown government and direct talks with Libya.

The trial process was organised as part of a drive to re-open Libyan oil fields to US and UK oil companies, while avoiding further investigation into the unanswered questions surrounding the Lockerbie bombing itself. Megrahi’s conviction was followed by the Libyan government accepting responsibility for the attack and the payment of billions of dollars in compensation to the families of the 270 victims. In the intervening years, Libya has been the focus of an oil bonanza for corporations once excluded by the former Libyan regime of Colonel Muammar Gadhafi.

The ruling clique in Tripoli has been lured by US, European and Russian administrations seeking oil deals, geo-political favours, arms sales and military bases.

The claim that Megrahi was solely responsible for the Lockerbie bombing is absurd on its face. His co-accused, Fhimah, was acquitted in 2001 on the basis of there being no evidence against him. Megrahi has consistently maintained his innocence, but could do little more given his inability to directly critique the Libyan government.

In 2007 the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission (SCCRC), the organisation tasked with investigating miscarriages of justice, announced that in their opinion there was “no reasonable basis” to place Megrahi in Malta where he had been identified as allegedly purchasing clothing later found to have been wrapped around the bomb. The review agreed that a miscarriage of justice may have taken place and authorised a further appeal. The 800-page SCCRC report has never been published.

Key items, in addition to the disputed identification of Megrahi by Malta hotel personnel Tony Cassar, that might be explored in open court at an appeal include the break-in at Heathrow airport adjacent to where PanAm 103 was parked on the evening prior to the attack. In addition, in 2007, in an affidavit sworn by Ulrich Lampert, manufacturer, along with Edmund Bollier of MST13, to whom the Lockerbie attack is alleged to have been contracted, and suggest he was in London with an un-primed bomb.

It notes that in return for Libya being blamed for the Lockerbie attack, US planes were allowed to use Iranian airspace during the US 1991 attack on Iraq. The report concludes, “We have never seen a criminal investigation in which there has been such a persistent disregard of an alternative and far more persuasive theory of the case.

Megrahi’s ill health has provided an opportunity to bury the issue once and for all. All Scottish National Party members of the Scottish parliament, Christine Grahame, warned in the press that she had seen a leaked mail from the Scottish justice department warning that “senior Scottish officials” were exerting undue pressure to have Megrahi drop his appeal.”

Release to Libya would only end such difficulties if Megrahi’s continued silence could be counted upon. A number of exchanges have been reported between leading British figures and the Libyan government to smooth Megrahi’s release. A spokesman for Lord Peter Mandelson, the UK business secretary, hinted that “fleeting conversation about the prisoner” had been held between Mandelson and Gadhafi’s son and likely successor. In addition, Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, has travelled at least three occasions to Libya as a trade representative, while Gadhafi’s junior has stayed at Buckingham Palace. Palace courtiers conceded that the prince and Saif al-Islam had “quite possibly” discussed Megrahi.

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US-British conflict over release of Libyan convicted of Lockerbie bombing

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The Chairman, Board of Directors, Management and Staff of Agribank wishes, The President of the Republic of Namibia, His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba a Happy and blessed 74th Birthday!

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