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Lockerbie and UTA DC-10 attacks: Palestinian group Abu Nidal suspected

The judges investigating the Rue des Rosiers bombing have been informed of the alleged involvement of Youssef Ali Qassim al-Farah, alias “Doctor Kamal,” in the explosions of the two planes in 1988 and 1989. Documents from the archives of the Gaddafi regime and previously unpublished testimony confirm his role.

[Karl Laske](#) and Vincent Nouzille

September 18, 2025, at 5:57 p.m.

By making public in July their final indictment in the Rue des Rosiers bombing case (committed on August 9, 1982, and attributed to the Abu Nidal terrorist group), magistrates from the National Anti-Terrorism Prosecutor's Office (Pnat) let slip a piece of information that was crucial for the families of the victims of two other attacks, the UTA DC-10 and Lockerbie.

One of the leaders of the Abu Nidal group, Palestinian Youssef Ali Qassim al-Farah, *alias* “Doctor Kamal,” who is believed to still be alive, is thought to have played a key role in the explosions of the UTA plane ([170 dead in 1989](#)) and the Pan Am plane over Lockerbie, Scotland (270 dead in 1988).

In both cases, in which Libyan responsibility has been established, the involvement of this terrorist group in the preparations was not known.

Abdallah Senoussi, Youssef Ali Qassim al-Farah, alias Dr. Kamal, and Abu Nidal. © Photomontage Mediapart with Dario Lopez-Mills/AP via SIPA and Guillou/SIPA

On page 103 of their final indictment on the Rue des Rosiers bombing, the Pnat magistrates note Dr. Kamal's involvement as revealed to them by Atef Abubaker, spokesperson for the group from 1985 to 1989, who became a fierce denouncer of the crimes committed by Abu Nidal and one of the main witnesses for the prosecution in the case.

“Once the organization [Abu Nidal] had moved to Tripoli, Dr. Kamal's particular responsibility was the day-to-day relationship with the Libyan intelligence services,” the prosecutors wrote. “Atef Abubaker indicated that during this period [Dr. Kamal] was

responsible for external operations with the Libyans from 1986 to 1990. He participated with Senoussi in the attack on the UTA DC-10," they continued.

Questioned twelve times between 2011 and 2023 in the investigation into the Rue des Rosiers attack, Atef Abubaker helped identify the alleged members of the commando unit. But despite his revelations about the Libyan attacks, he was not subsequently questioned in the judicial investigation into the DC-10 attack, nor in the Lockerbie investigation.

When questioned today by Mediapart about the involvement of the Abu Nidal group in the UTA and Lockerbie attacks, his former spokesperson was categorical: "Yes, the Abu Nidal group was involved, alongside the Libyans, in these attacks," he said.

A joint operations committee

As the families of the victims of the UTA DC-10 prepare to commemorate the 36th anniversary of the attack on Friday, September 19, and with the verdict in the Libyan financing case due in a few days, the courts seem determined to reopen the investigation into the 1989 attack, backed by new evidence, in particular documents from the unpublished archives of Abdullah Senussi, Gaddafi's brother-in-law and former head of Libyan intelligence, who has been imprisoned in Libya since 2012.

Among these documents, made public by Samir Shegwara, a Libyan who took part in the 2012 uprising (co-author of the book *L'Assassin qu'il fallait sauver* [The Assassin Who Had to Be Saved] with the journalists who signed this article), a note stamped "top secret," dated October 2, 1988, specifically attests to the Abu Nidal group's participation in a meeting with Abdullah Senussi to prepare a wave of attacks against Western aircraft.

"A meeting was held in the presence of members of the operations division and the Revolutionary Council," states this Libyan document. However, the "Revolutionary Council" is none other than one of the aliases of the Abu Nidal group, whose official name was Fatah-Revolutionary Council.

The note also mentions the intervention of the "Doctor" during this meeting, which was supposed to determine the starting point for a first suitcase bomb, with the primary target being a French UTA airliner flying from Paris to Africa.

"It was agreed to choose the route from Zagreb in Yugoslavia via Zurich and then Paris. Regarding the use of Zagreb airport, the proposal was made by the Doctor himself in order to facilitate procedures, according to him," the top-secret memo reads.

Based first in Iraq, then in Syria until the mid-1980s, the Abu Nidal group, named after the dissident from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) who created his own structure in 1974, found support from Colonel Gaddafi in 1985. It began working closely with the Libyan secret services on several terrorist operations abroad, such as the attacks

on the airports in Vienna (Austria) and Rome (Italy) in December 1985, and the bombing of the La Belle discotheque in West Berlin in April 1986.

The Abu Nidal group then moved its headquarters to Libya in 1987 and opened a training camp there, which, with Gaddafi's approval, became a breeding ground for Libyan clandestine operations.

“At that time, the Libyan services, which were effectively led by Abdallah Senoussi, set up a joint operations committee with the Abu Nidal group,” Atef Abubaker, who was himself based in Tripoli during those years, told Mediapart. Together, they were able to organize operations sponsored by the Libyans. For example, the Libyans had little experience with explosives. Members of the Abu Nidal group trained them in this, in conjunction with instructors from East Germany. This was particularly the case for Abu Agila Khair, alias Masud. ”

The latter, the alleged bomb maker in the Lockerbie bombing, is awaiting trial, which is set to begin in April 2026 in the United States.

Regarding terrorist operations, Atef Abubaker adds this important detail: *“This joint committee was led on the Libyan side by Abdallah Senoussi and on the Abu Nidal side by a key figure nicknamed Dr. Kamal, who represented the group in Tripoli. ”*

”Dr. Kamal,” a loyal follower of Abu Nidal

The profile and background of the “doctor” were pieced together by the prosecutors of the Rue des Rosiers bombing, who, without incriminating him, devoted several pages to him in their closing arguments. Youssef Ali Qassim al-Farah was born in 1944 in Khan Younès, in the Gaza Strip. Having joined Abu Nidal's group when it was founded in 1974, he was in charge of the Hit training camp in Iraq until 1979, where the future members of the Rue des Rosiers commando unit were trained.

“His nickname ‘Doctor’ did not correspond to any particular qualification; it was just a false honorary title given to him by Abu Nidal,” recalls Atef Abubaker. Ali al-Farah married the sister of Atef Hammouda, the organization's chief financial officer.

See also

[*“I will not spare those who have committed crimes in the name of the Abu Nidal group.”*](#)

August 3, 2025

According to several witnesses, he was the representative of the Abu Nidal group in Yugoslavia before taking charge of special operations, in other words, attacks and other terrorist actions abroad. He is said to have been in contact with a Palestinian named Zeid Safarini for a mission in Rome. Safarini was convicted in the United States for his

participation in a failed attack in Karachi, Pakistan, in September 1986, on a Pan Am plane that the commando unit was supposed to blow up in flight.

He then continued to rise through the ranks of Abu Nidal's entourage. *"In 1985, Dr. Kamal moved to Tripoli as the group's representative to Gaddafi. And after Abu Nidal ousted his intelligence chief, Abdelrahman Issa, in 1987, Dr. Kamal became the group's strongman in Libya, alongside one of his friends, Azmi Hussein. He was Abu Nidal's loyal servant,"* explains Atef Abubaker, who saw him regularly at meetings in Libya. *"He was one of Abu Nidal's trusted men,"* confirmed the German intelligence service (the BND) in a note dated 1991.

In France, "Doctor Kamal" also became known to officials at the Directorate for Territorial Surveillance (DST, predecessor of the DGSI), who met him several times during negotiations for a "secret pact" between the French services and the Abu Nidal group after the Rue des Rosiers attack, and [detailed](#) in declassified counterintelligence documents dating from 1983 to 1986. According to Atef Abubaker, the DST even photographed him in the company of prostitutes at the Moulin Rouge in Paris...

As proof of his rank, the Doctor assisted Abu Nidal during a summit meeting organized in Algiers in June 1987 with the DST. Upon their return, DST officials described him as a "tall, slender" man with "curly gray-white hair," "a pronounced bald spot in the middle of his head," and "a relatively European, even Anglo-Saxon appearance."

The booby-trapped suitcase test

Another document from the Senoussi archives mentions the presence of the "Doctor" during a session of explosive tests on suitcases, which took place on October 4, 1988, two days after the previous summit meeting. The report on these tests is explicit: *"Several scanner tests were carried out, to be sure, one of which was attended by Lieutenant Colonel Abdallah Senoussi, the Doctor, and delegates from the technical administration supervising the preparations. The Doctor appreciated the technical process by which the suitcase was prepared."*

According to Atef Abubaker, *"the Doctor mentioned in these documents is Dr. Kamal."* *"Dr. Kamal represented the Abu Nidal group at that time in Tripoli in the joint committee. He was, therefore, very close to Senoussi. Moreover, he was the only leader with that nickname in the upper echelons of the Abu Nidal group in Libya at that time."* Finally, *"the Doctor was a former military instructor in the camps in Iraq and knew about explosives. This explains his presence during the tests."*

It cannot be ruled out that the Abu Nidal group *"supplied these booby-trapped suitcases"* to the Libyans, according to Atef Abubaker. These tests would have determined, in his opinion, that *"700 to 800 grams of explosives were enough to destroy an airplane."*

The fact that the "Doctor" advised using Zagreb airport as the departure point for the suitcase bomb is another identifying factor. "Dr. Kamal knew Yugoslavia very well,

having lived there in the early 1980s,” notes Abubaker. The Libyan services followed the “Doctor’s” advice to the letter. In mid-October 1988, they sent one of their own, Abdelbasset al-Megrahi—who would be the only person convicted in the Lockerbie case, dying in 2012—on a reconnaissance mission to Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia. Two handwritten documents from Senoussi’s archives, written by al-Megrahi upon his return, give an account of this trip.

The Libyan agent explains that, according to his contact on the ground, “*everything is under control*” for the upcoming operation, and that after informing Abdallah Senoussi, the “*Doctor*” should probably also be kept in the loop. However, at the end of November 1988, unforeseen obstacles appear to have slowed down these preparations in Yugoslavia, forcing the Libyan services to change their plans. Here again, the “*Doctor*” is informed, as is Abdallah Senoussi, a further indication of his involvement in these preparations, particularly in the country he knows well and where he recommended taking action.

According to Atef Abubaker, Dr. Kamal may also have participated in a key mission to Malta on October 8, 1988. According to a report by the Libyan services, agent al-Megrahi and bomb maker Abu Agila Khair, alias Masud, traveled there accompanied by two other individuals to bring in “all the components for the operation,” in other words, one of the future attacks. One of these companions, who held a North Yemeni passport, has not been identified. The second carried a passport in the name of Mohammed Youssouf Ibrahim, described in the report as a member of the “*Revolutionary Council*,” in other words, the Abu Nidal group.

According to Atef Abukaker, these two men were none other than Dr. Kamal himself and a Palestinian named G. A., who allegedly played an active role in transporting booby-trapped suitcases to Tripoli and then Malta.

See also

[Rue des Rosiers: revelations about the “secret pact” between Mitterrand, the DST, and the Abu Nidal terrorist group.](#) July 31, 2025

Explicitly cited in Abdallah Senoussi’s documents as having taken part in the choice of targets and technical preparations, Dr. Kamal may therefore have played a role in supervising the execution of the attacks. The Libyans finally decided to strike a Pan Am aircraft over Lockerbie on December 21, 1988. Then a DC-10 belonging to the French airline UTA on September 19, 1989, in the Ténéré desert.

According to Atef Abukater, Abu Nidal’s former right-hand man was still alive until recently in the Gaza Strip, under the protection of armed groups linked to Fatah (which rules the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank). Despite the war raging in Gaza, the Palestinian could end up being of interest to French judges who have reopened the investigation into the DC-10 bombing, as well as to the Scottish and US judicial authorities in charge of the Lockerbie investigation.

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