

Justice Department covers for murder

The following release was issued on March 31 by NSIPS, the publisher of EIR.

New evidence disclosed in court proceedings has demonstrated conclusively that the U.S. Department of Justice is engaged in a continuing coverup of the 1980 assassination of a prominent anti-Khomeini spokesman.

The coverup is believed to stem from the Carter administration's agreement during the Iranian hostage crisis to protect the Ayatollah Khomeini's terrorist agents operating within the United States. An immediate result of this policy was the July 22, 1980 assassination of Ali Akbar Tabatabai at his home in Bethesda, Maryland, by black American Muslims who were deployed by Iranian agents in the United States. The actual assassin—David Belfield a.k.a. Daoud Salahuddin—was allowed to escape to Geneva, Switzerland, and thence to Iran.

Recent efforts by attorneys for this news service to subpoena U.S. government documents concerning the assassination have met with a stone wall erected on the claim of "state secrets," a legal privilege properly applied only to military and foreign policy information requiring the utmost secrecy. (See *EIR*, March 29.)

Subpoenas issued to various U.S. agencies in the civil case *Hashemi v. Campaigner Publications, et al.* were met by a formal claim of "state secrets" privilege, even though much of the subject matter of the subpoenas simply involves reports on domestic law enforcement investigations carried out by the FBI. Nevertheless, the Justice Department has claimed that "because of the sensitivity of the information at issue," no FBI documents whatsoever can be publicly disclosed. Even the affidavits from the FBI and Justice Department in which the "state secrets" privilege is asserted have been put under a "secret" classification.

A year after the Tabatabai assassination, conspiracy indictments were brought against the escaped Belfield and three other black Americans; two were eventually convicted. But the known Iranian conspirators and controllers of the operation were never arrested or brought to justice.

During the criminal prosecutions of the Tabatabai assassination conspiracy, testimony was given which established that the conspiracy was launched in the Iranian Interests Section of the Algerian Embassy, and that the direct orders to kill Tabatabai were given in the Iranian Interests Section. (After the closing of the Iranian embassy, Iranian "diplomats" and agents operated out of the Algerian embassy in

Washington.) It was further established that David Belfield was employed as a security guard in the Iranian Interests Section.

The individual identified by numerous sources during 1980 as Belfield's controller and as the person who gave the assassination orders was Iranian-born Bahram Nahidian, a Washington rug-dealer believed to be the station chief for Khomeini's secret police, the Savama. Nahidian is also a leader of the "Islamic Education Center" in Washington, often frequented by those indicted for the Tabatabai killing; Belfield in fact had given the Islamic Center as his address.

Nahidian's deposition

In a deposition taken on March 24 in the Hashemi case, Nahidian testified as to his close association with Belfield and others indicted for the killing, describing Belfield as "a very good [Muslim] brother." He also disclosed that Belfield is now in Iran. Nahidian further testified how he recruited U.S. black prisoners into the Muslim Brotherhood, which included giving "Islamic" training in prison to Horace Butler (a.k.a. Ahmed Rauf), one of those convicted in the Tabatabai murder case. In the court-ordered deposition, taken by attorney Daniel Aharoni on behalf of the Campaigner and *EIR* defendants, Nahidian described himself as very close to all the leaders of the revolution in Iran, particularly parliamentary leader Ibrahim Yazdi, and told of many meetings with the Ayatollah Khomeini in order "to regain my strength." He also revealed that during the Iran hostage crisis he was invited to have lunch with a top White House official, and then was invited to meet President Carter, an offer he claims to have refused.

Edward Spannaus, litigation representative for Campaigner, *EIR*, and other defendants in the Hashemi case, charged that the U.S. Justice Department is engaged in a flagrant coverup of its own and the Carter administration's role in protecting Iranian terrorists in the U.S. "There is absolutely no reason for the Justice Department to claim that files concerning a straightforward murder investigation should be withheld under the 'state secrets' privilege, unless the murder was carried out under the protection of the Justice Department and State Department in the first place. During 1980 *EIR* charged that the Civiletti Justice Department was covering up for the assassins of Ali Tabatabai, and that they had given Khomeini agents a 'license to kill' within the United States.

"Now, the fact that the Justice Department is refusing to disclose lawfully subpoenaed FBI files in its possession concerning the Tabatabai assassination and Iranian terrorism, proves just how right we were in 1980. The fact that these documents are being sought as evidence by U.S. citizens, citizens who are defendants in a libel suit brought against them by an acknowledged Khomeini agent and Iranian citizen, leaves no room for doubt where the sympathies of the Justice Department lie."