

Irangate about to blow up in Europe?

by Umberto Pascali

In early summer 1984, the late CIA director, William Casey, had a long telephone conversation with someone in London. Object of the call: to organize an illegal shipment of 5,000 TOW (the deadly efficient antitank missiles), to Iran for an amount of £34 million. After that call, individuals acting on behalf of the U.S. government were put in contact with Iranian arms dealers. Meetings took place in Paris, Frankfurt, Zurich, and London between the end of 1984 and the beginning of 1985. Banking accounts were opened in Paris, where the U.S. embassy was involved in the "deal."

Lt. Col. Oliver North personally took care of the "performance bond" (the money the seller has to deposit in a neutral bank as a guarantee if he wants to do illegal business with the Iranians). It was also North who "advised" using a Hong Kong and San Francisco based weapons dealer, Horace Hsu, as the supplier. It was North's idea to have Hsu buy the weapons from several sources and ship them through a port in Portugal.

These and other details on a new and unsuspected level of Irangate are not the elements of a journalistic scenario, but testimony given starting April 18 at London's Old Bailey by Michael and Leslie Aspin, two British brothers who had run mercenary operations since the 1970s through companies like Delta Instrument Logistic Supplies and Services of Norwich, Great Britain. The older brother, Leslie, became somewhat famous in the 1970s, after coming back from Angola where he "worked" as a mercenary with the FNLA, a "freedom fighters" formation organized by the CIA, which dissolved for lack of training, strategy, sense of purpose, and military stamina.

If the allegations made at Old Bailey are borne out, they will reopen the Irangate scandal with a bang, because they will at least prove that North lied to Congress. They would also trigger the "European Irangate," the still unknown side of that scandal which, many observers think, would get to the real bottom.

Michael Aspin is a defendant together with three others, accused of having tried to sell to the Iranians missiles that "did not exist." In other words, they are accused of fraud. Naturally, the two brothers will try every means to show that they actually were selling real missiles or, at least, were sponsored by an official U.S. agency. Are they lying? Are they just using the names of William Casey, who died last May, and North, who is the "fall guy" anyway?

Some observers in London tend to endorse this hypothesis, though they cannot explain the fact that Aspin has sup-

plied some proof. For example, Michael testified that on Dec. 21, 1985, when he was freed after two days in jail, he went directly to his club, the Sloane, and placed a telephone call to Oliver North. That call can be traced. It also appears credible that Aspin, as he said, knew Edwin Wilson, the former CIA agent now serving time for selling weapons and explosives to Libya's Qaddafi. It is also credible that the Aspins were in touch with Ed Wilson's associate, ex-CIA Director for Operations, Ted Shackley. Shackley is the individual who, with Michael Ledeen, according to the official versions, began contacts with Iranian spokesman Manucher Ghorbanifar in 1984.

The astonishing thing is that no press, with a couple of very partial exceptions, has reported any of this. This is astonishing, even considering that British law is very strict against "interference" in ongoing trials.

The impression in the British capital is that a ruthless test of strength is taking place between that part of the elite that wants to help certain devastating revelations to emerge, and others who want to maintain the cover-up. Few insiders in London doubt that the real culprits of the Iran-Contra scheme are yet to be exposed—and few doubt that the outcome of the U.S. presidential elections may be affected by this "debate."

The LaRouche question

One individual mentioned as working with Aspin is Gary Howard, of the former Peregrine International mercenary organization, and, according to declassified NSC and FBI documents, the person who was to infiltrate organizations linked to presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche. According to trial records, Howard's British connection is a London based investigative journalist, Paul Halloran. Michael Aspin testified that he took part in a meeting in Halloran's office with people sent by Oliver North, including Howard. Also presented to the jury was the tape of a conversation between Howard and Aspin concerning the \$4 million "performance bond."

"What bank will this come from, Gary?" "One of the Chases," said Howard. "It's being worked officially now, is it?" "No, it's being worked unofficially. We can't play this kind of game officially to my knowledge." "You mean you are getting the support of your government?" And Howard: "You have got it."

It is also indicated that Halloran has worked for the CIA for the last six to seven years. Obviously, the key point now is not people like Howard or even North, who can be comfortably "sacrificed" in order to cover the "higher level" of the conspiracy. But it is not clear whether the small fishes are continuing to trust the hungry big fishes or are going to talk. According to some reports, within the next few weeks many revelations will surface, including a few concerning the Iranian Cyrus Hashemi, who died in London while involved in U.S.-Teheran arms deals.