

Efforts to end probe of Diana crash fail

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Mohamed Al Fayed, the father of the late Dodi Fayed and the owner of the Ritz Hotel in Paris, has hired a retired French police chief, Pierre Ottavioli, to assist attorneys who are working with French investigative magistrate Hervé Stephan, on the ongoing probe of the Aug. 31, 1997 car crash that claimed the life of Princess Diana, Dodi Fayed, and driver Henri Paul, and seriously injured bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones. Contrary to an Associated Press wire story, the Al Fayed family has not launched its own independent investigation of the crash. Under French law, civil parties to an investigation, including relatives of the deceased, have full access to the magistrate's file, and can recommend areas of investigation. Ottavioli, 75, is the former chief of the French National Police's Criminal Brigade.

The hiring of Ottavioli came as efforts were under way to force investigating magistrates Hervé Stephan and Marie-Christine Devidal to prematurely shut down their investigation into the crash—perhaps as early as January-February 1998. On Dec. 15, the French magazine *Voici* published a story, based on an Agence France Presse wire, claiming that the magistrates had run out of leads, and had concluded that they would never be able to locate the missing Fiat Uno that collided with the Mercedes carrying Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed. Since Nov. 4, French magistrates have been searching for a Fiat Uno turbo, manufactured sometime during 1984-89. After a month of cover-up, French police admitted that the fatal crash in the Place de l'Alma tunnel was caused by a collision between the Mercedes and the missing Fiat. They subsequently admitted, based on the scratch marks on the side of the Mercedes, that the Fiat was weighted down, suggesting that the car had been modified to function as a ram-vehicle.

The *Voici* story, claiming the "imminent" shutdown of the probe, was immediately picked up by two of the House of Windsor's most loyal press organs, the *Daily Telegraph* and the London *Times*.

In a particularly vicious article, the *Times*'s Susannah Herbert quoted an unnamed French Justice Ministry official saying, "The feeling is that everything that can be done has been done. France has never known such a thorough investigation into a traffic accident. The police have interviewed hundreds of people, examined every scrap of evidence. It's now time to draw a line underneath the inquiry because it is going nowhere."

Herbert then returned to the now thoroughly discredited French government cover-story, explaining the crash as a case of reckless drunk driving: "The impending closure of the criminal investigation," she wrote, "reported in this week's *Voici* magazine, leaves the field to the various insurers involved, who are now likely to focus on the civil responsibility of Henri Paul, the driver of the Mercedes, who also died in the crash. Blood tests have *proved that M. Paul was over the alcohol limit when driving* and the car tracks show that he was speeding at the time of the crash" (emphasis in original).

As *EIR* first reported on Nov. 21, forensic experts who have reviewed the autopsy report on Paul have concluded that the blood samples tested were so badly contaminated that the results are utterly unreliable. Furthermore, a half-dozen witnesses have told French police that the Mercedes carrying Diana and Dodi was attacked by other vehicles, including the Fiat Uno. A sketch drawn by French police on the day of the crash, and first reported on by the Associated Press on Dec. 3, 1997, clearly showed that the Mercedes collided with a second vehicle.

New witnesses

Within hours of the publication of the *Times* and *Daily Telegraph* stories, French officials came out with official denials that the investigation was about to be shut down. The entire story was disinformation!

Further, according to several of the paparazzi who remain possible targets of French prosecutors, new witnesses have come forward in the past several weeks to provide crucial new evidence to the investigating magistrates. According to these sources, at least two witnesses who arrived at the tunnel immediately after the crash, told French authorities that they saw two men running from the Mercedes to a car that was parked at the exit of the Place de l'Alma underpass. They fled the tunnel before the first emergency rescue crews arrived.

These new accounts conform to reports from another witness, Gary Hunter, a British attorney who was staying at a nearby hotel. Hunter told *EIR* that he had seen two cars—a small dark-colored car and a white sedan—speeding past his hotel approximately two minutes after he heard the tunnel crash. Hunter believed that the two cars were fleeing a crime scene. Hunter tried, unsuccessfully, to tell his story to French police; eventually, he filed a report with Scotland Yard.

The Hunter account may also shed further light on statements recently made by Rees-Jones. On Dec. 19, Rees-Jones was in Paris, providing information to French magistrates. He has told the Swiss daily *Blick* that he recalls that the Mercedes carrying Diana and Dodi was being followed by a white Mercedes. Hunter told *EIR* that he believes that one of the two cars that sped past his hotel right after the crash was a white Mercedes.

These new leads suggest that the official probe has not reached a dead end—despite the anxious wishes of the British royals and their favorite media barons.