

The 'Marie Antoinette factor' in the Diana murder coverup

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On July 2, 1999, a Paris appeals court rejected a petition from Mohamed Al Fayed, to compel Judge Hervé Stephan to expand his investigation into the Aug. 31, 1997 fatal car crash that claimed the lives of Princess Diana, Dodi Fayed, and their chauffeur, Henri Paul. For nearly two years, Judge Stephan has been investigating the causes of the fatal car crash. Now, with some important allegations emerging, that could link officials of the British intelligence services and members of the British royal family to the wrongful deaths, the judge has decided to shut down his probe, without questioning three possibly key witnesses, or attempting to access classified U.S. government documents that could shed further light on the events in Paris two years ago.

The decision by the Paris appellate court to allow Judge Stephan to submit his final report and recommendations—unless reversed by a higher court—will almost certainly wed the French government to a monumental coverup of the death of Princess Diana, a coverup desperately desired by the British royal family.

After her death, Princess Diana was given a solemn burial by her family, accompanied by a general mourning for her among the English population. The interment of those accomplices who seek to cover up the fact of her wrongful death, after the fact, will be much less generous. The latest turn toward burying the truth of the case, in French proceedings, is one of that type of event which recalls the impact of the case of the "Queen's Necklace" in preparing the doom of France's Louis XVI monarchy.

In other words, it is France that is now once again on trial, as it was during the days of Marie Antoinette. And once again, the French leadership is in the process of failing the test of history.

Then . . .

In 1785, following its defeat in the American Revolution, the East India Company-centered British oligarchy was desperate to prevent the spread of republicanism on the European continent. France, as the first modern European nation-state, and as a bastion of support for Benjamin Franklin and other American Revolutionary leaders, was the primary target of Lord Shelburne, his Jeremy Bentham, and others in the "Venetian Party" of London.

Through a series of intrigues, involving a lewd collection

of East India Company allies and assets—including the Duke of Orléans, Lord George Gordon (of the famous London "Gordon Riots" of 1779), Marat, Danton, and other leading Jacobins—the France of the Marquis de Lafayette was brought down in a frenzy of self-cannibalism and violence, leading to the dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte.

France was saved from post-Napoleon dismemberment by the military-defense actions of France's Maj.-Gen. Lazare Carnot; but the exile of Carnot, by Britain's Duke of Wellington, prevented Carnot from being appointed, with support of the Prussian military, as President of France. Wellington's puppet, the Restoration monarchy, was appointed instead of the patriot Carnot, and France descended into that spiral of degeneracy culminating in the regime and disgrace of Napoleon III.

The early seeds of that doom were sown in 1785, when a notorious Venetian agent, Count Alessandro Cagliostro, orchestrated the famous "Necklace Affair," which began the process of discrediting King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, in the eyes of the French public. Napoleon himself commented later that the manipulations of the French court by Count Cagliostro marked the opening phase of the French Revolution, an event from which France has never recovered.

. . . and now

If the French courts and Judge Stephan move forward with their coverup of the wrongful deaths of Princess Diana, Dodi Fayed, and Henri Paul, France will sink deeper into moral quicksand. In contrast, a full airing of what is known about the events surrounding the Aug. 31, 1997 car crash in the Place de l'Alma tunnel in Paris, while damaging to some French officials, and devastating to the British monarchy, would transform the political landscape of Europe, very much for the better.

There are rumblings even in Britain against the coverup. On June 22, 1999, Charles Wardle, a Conservative member of Parliament, raised several questions about the Paris events, and subsequent British government actions against Mohamed Al Fayed (see *Documentation*). Wardle reviewed many of the unanswered questions about allegations of British intelligence activities in Paris around the time of the fatal crash, and the efforts by the late Tiny Rowland, longtime boss of the

Lonrho African raw materials cartel, to have Mohamed Al Fayed wrongfully prosecuted and prevented from obtaining his British citizenship. A British appeals court has also launched a review of the Home Secretary's rejection of the Al Fayed citizenship petition.

What is known

No competent investigation can be concluded into the events in Paris on Aug. 30-31, 1997, until a number of vital, unanswered questions have been resolved, with full public disclosure.

1. What was the role of the still-missing white Fiat Uno, which forensic evidence and eyewitness accounts have confirmed, collided with the Mercedes 280-S, causing the fatal crash? The Fiat sped out of the Place de l'Alma and disappeared, along with the driver. At least one qualified police witness saw the Fiat waiting at the entrance to the Place de l'Alma tunnel, seconds before the crash.

2. What factors contributed to the delay of two hours in getting Princess Diana, still very much alive, to the La Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital? She died moments before being wheeled into surgery. High-ranking French police and Interior Ministry officials were on the scene, or at the hospital, directing the emergency medical response and the initial investigation.

3. What role, if any, did three senior British intelligence officials, alleged to have been in Paris prior to and after the crash, play in the Aug. 31 events? Newspaper accounts in Britain, published before the crash, reported that the Royal Consort, Prince Philip, had personally ordered an MI6 campaign against Dodi Fayed.

4. What is contained in the more than 1,000 pages of U.S. files from the National Security Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, and Defense Intelligence Agency on Princess Diana? A Federal District court judge in Washington, D.C. has ordered the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency to turn over the relevant files to attorneys for Mohamed Al Fayed, but a protracted court battle is expected, before any of the classified material is released.

Documentation

MP demands probe of Crown, MI6 actions against Al Fayed

On June 22, 1999, Conservative MP Charles Wardle raised a parliamentary question about the role of the London Metropolitan police, MI6, and other British government agencies, in wrongfully targeting Mohamed Al Fayed, for his persistent

efforts to get to the bottom of the Paris car crash of Aug. 31, 1997. Excerpts follow.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): In this debate I intend to question the accountability of the Metropolitan police over their arrest of Mohamed Al Fayed last year. I shall also question the accountability of the security services, which influenced the decision to arrest him because he had openly challenged their role over the death of his son in Paris. . . .

Well before that arrest was made, those senior police officers and the Crown Prosecution Service had in their possession clear evidence that Rowland had paid hundreds of thousands of pounds into the Jersey bank account of the key prosecution witness and his common-law wife, but the police refused to consider that evidence until after the extremely damaging and high-profile arrest of Al Fayed. Shortly before he died, Rowland admitted his covert payments to the key witness in the discovery process for the civil action that he began after the police case collapsed.

Al Fayed's counsel, a former first Treasury counsel who regularly prosecuted for the Crown, insisted that the payments should first be investigated, on the ground that, if there had been payments, they would jeopardize the entire validity of the prosecution and no arrest should properly be made. Burton Copeland, Al Fayed's solicitor, showed Scotland Yard that Rowland's allegations that valuables had been stolen from his deposit box [at Harrods, which is owned by Al Fayed] were weak in the extreme. Rowland was unable to verify that he had ever owned what he claimed to be stolen—let alone that he had placed it in the box 30 years earlier. Burton Copeland gave Scotland Yard the details of Rowland's payments to Robert Loftus, a disaffected ex-employee of Harrods, but the police deferred the investigation of payments to Loftus, arrested Al Fayed, and released him on bail which was periodically renewed amid frenzied media speculation. . . .

Why did the police, who had done little or nothing about Rowland's patently false allegation from May to November 1997, suddenly acquire fresh enthusiasm for the case at the end of that year? Why did they arrest Al Fayed with a prior tip-off to the media in March 1998, despite having known for weeks about the bribery of the key witness, to which Rowland himself later admitted? . . .

Significantly, Al Fayed's solicitors now have in their possession a note from Rowland's solicitors, Cameron Markby Hewitt, reporting that Rowland told them on 2 February 1996 that he had been involved in activities for MI6 immediately after the war and had committed various unlawful acts.

The Scotland Yard and Home Office grapevine—which no one in Whitehall will discount—makes no secret of one interpretation of events. It is that Al Fayed had incurred the wrath of the Security Service, and its stringers in the press and elsewhere, after the tragic deaths in August 1997 of Diana, Princess of Wales, Dodi Fayed, and their chauffeur Henri

Paul. Al Fayed had given offence by his increasingly vocal protest that the Security Service . . . had not been sufficiently open about its activities in Paris when the tragedy occurred. The grapevine quotes a top police officer as saying:

“I don’t care what the evidence is. I want that man arrested.”

Eventually, the Metropolitan Police admitted to Al Fayed’s solicitors that the only offense they could find had been criminal damage to a paperclip. Bail was lifted and proceedings dropped, but the media humiliation had served its purpose. The press hatred and dishonesty had known no bounds. It had been open season for the media, thanks to Rowland’s lies. . . .

There are other sources of information that indicate a cover-up of events before and after the Paris tragedy that raise questions of accountability for the Security Service as well.

I do not subscribe to conspiracy theories. I draw no conclusions about what happened on that fateful day. I have no inclination to question the conduct or anticipate the outcome of a French judicial inquiry into a car crash in France. Judge Stephan has proved to be more than a match for the British press by declaring that the Mercedes was travelling at 62 mph, and not 113 mph as was previously reported as fact in Britain. It is possible, but not certain, that the judge will admit fresh evidence that throws doubt on Henri Paul’s blood test. It is not known whether the final report, which is likely to be published in the early autumn, will be detailed or not.

It is surely inconceivable that once the French report has been produced, there will not be an opportunity in this country as well to explore questions about the circumstances leading to the sudden and violent death of the Princess of Wales and the man the entire world could see was her lover. The overwhelming public response at Diana’s funeral could leave no doubt about the natural justice of allowing some form of British inquiry. The hostile response from some quarters to awkward questions about the Paris tragedy can never put the lid on worldwide demands for a thorough explanation of events.

It would be better for Parliament to treat with the questions and deliver the answers than to allow suspicion to fester and speculation to grow. It is in this context that other sources of information should be considered, in so far as they throw light on accountability.

The first of these additional sources which challenge Security Service accountability was the Princess herself. As with the other sources that I shall list, there have been those who devalue what she had to say. Her detractors have already called her manipulative and obsessive, but it would be unwise to dismiss what she said on holiday in the south of France.

I told the Home Secretary in my letter of 23 July last year that Al Fayed’s much-publicized ideas about a conspiracy in Paris originated from what Diana repeatedly said to him of her fear and resentment at the way she was treated. I have no

reason to doubt what I have heard of what Diana said in St. Tropez. In any case, there are many others in whom she confided in a similar vein — for example, Andrew Morton, Martin Bashir, Maggie Rae, Debbie Frank, and so on.

Diana’s remarks to Al Fayed concerned the royal household’s antipathy to her; its habitually close links with the security services; the manipulation, interference and control, as she saw it, exercised by officials of the household; her conviction, based on what she said that she had been told, that Barry Mannakee’s death was not an accident; and her apprehension that she, too, would be assassinated. . . . [Mannakee was a former bodyguard of the Princess who became a personal friend, was dismissed from service with the royal household, and soon after died in a motorcycle crash.]

If there is to be clear accountability, there are many questions to be answered. For example, what prompted Scotland Yard to arrange the much-publicized arrest of Al Fayed when it already knew that Rowland had bribed the key witness? Did Veness [Assistant Commissioner in charge of the case] discuss the safety deposit box allegations with the security services? Have the security services recorded with the Home Office an opinion about Al Fayed’s citizenship re-submission? If so, what did they say and when? Has the royal household ever expressed a view to the Home Office about Al Fayed’s citizenship?

Do records exist of the royal household’s communications with the security services relating to the Paris tragedy? Why was Mannakee transferred out of royal protection duty and what is known about the circumstances of his death? Which members of the royal household made threats to Hewitt [Al Fayed’s lawyer]? What reasons does [Diana’s private secretary] Jephson give for his advice to Hewitt? Was Henri Paul employed by MI6? Are there assassination plans on file at MI6?

To whom and to what extent does MI6 account for its operations? What were the operational duties of the undeclared MI6 officers in Paris at the time of the tragedy? Were any of the paparazzi pursuing the Mercedes employed by MI6? What records of telephone messages, telegrams, and memorandums exist on MI6 files concerning the events before and immediately after the Paris tragedy?

There are a great many more pertinent questions that should be dealt with openly and frankly in some form of parliamentary inquiry, to be conducted either by the Intelligence and Security Committee or by a special Select Committee appointed for the purpose. . . .

If the Government or Parliament itself do not launch an inquiry, they will be shutting the door on precisely the sort of openness about the security services already advocated by the Liaison Committee and now being recommended by the Home Affairs Committee. . . . Worse still, if an inquiry is refused and factual evidence implicating the security services in any way in the Paris tragedy trickles out later, the House will be seen to have failed in its responsibilities.