

British arms trader: CIA sanctioned Irangate deals

The following document is a statement that was addressed to the Tower Commission, which was set up by President Reagan to investigate the Irangate affair in 1986-87. The document was written on May 1, 1987, by Leslie Aspin, a British arms dealer. Aspin's brother, Michael, is currently serving a sentence in a British prison, having been convicted in May 1988 of fraudulent dealings, in what were purportedly arms sales to Iran. In his own defense, Michael Aspin claimed, and presented documents to back up this claim, that he was, in essence, acting in the belief that what he was doing was an operation sanctioned by the American government. He presented evidence that promises of official American support for his attempts to sell arms to Iran, were given to him by a U.S. intelligence operative named Gary Howard.

Leslie Aspin's document points to the fact, that many of the actors subsequently prosecuted and jailed in the Irangate "cleanup," which occurred in the first weeks and months after the original Irangate revelations were made public, were acting, or thought they were acting, on behalf of the U.S. government. His document indicates that the arms sales for which his brother has been jailed, were "sanctioned" by the United States.

The document specifically points to the role of then-CIA director William Casey, in requesting the help of international arms dealers to sell Iran TOW missiles, as part of arms-for-hostages deals. Although accurate as far as *EIR* can tell, Leslie Aspin's statement does not take into account the full command-structure behind the Irangate affair, presumably because Aspin is not aware of the total picture. However, the document reveals the extensive, and witting, involvement of government agencies of the United States in setting up Iran arms sales.

In recent weeks, other actors, including arms-dealer Her-

mann Moll, have come forward with important revelations about the real story of Irangate. In an exclusive interview with the *Middle East Insider* newsletter, Moll expressed his view, that then-Vice President George Bush was "the head and the main organizer" of, and "100% behind," crucial arms deals to Iran.

The Aspin statement

This document is reproduced in its original form, except that typographical errors have been corrected and subheads have been added.

My name is LESLIE ALAN ASPIN and I reside at 47 Desmond Drive, Olcant, Norwich, Norfolk. It is the 1st May, 1987.

In June, 1984, I was contacted by a Mr. Casey who was then head of the C.I.A. in the United States of America. I met Mr. Casey through a Mr. Lenard Katz, who is ex-Chief of narcotics advocate in Europe, retired. He requested me to assist in the sale of Tow missiles to Iran, in exchange for hostages held. These hostages were being held in Lebanon.

So in June, 1984, I started a series of meetings in London, I suppose there were probably 6 to 8 meetings all told in that month, one of them being at the U.S. Embassy, Grosvenor Square. During these meetings I was given phone numbers of Col. Oliver North—202 355 5387, and Richard Secord—703 893 2545 or 2549. I was also in contact with Rob Owen and Dave Ginman, and I could contact them on 215 688 5708, but my first contact with Rob Owen and Oliver North was in 1983. During these series of meetings it was discussed

as how one could get the hostages released, the ways of doing it, some of them improper, some of them proper. I decided that my best bet was to swap Tow missiles for hostages as we knew they desperately wanted, that's the Iranians, the Tow missiles. I therefore contacted a Mr. Ben Banerjee, who is a registered licensed arms dealer. We have several meetings at his home, and in London. I was being paid expenses only and I had to obtain a commission, if necessary, from Banerjee, for any profit that I was likely to make, but because of his greed, the deal did not mature to pay me, but I understand that he made huge profit and in my opinion it was his greed that led to the failure to release the hostages.

The route for this deal was to be Lisbon to Iran, so after many phone calls and meetings I took Banerjee to Lisbon in October, 1984, and November, 1984. Each time we booked into the Ritz Hotel. I then contacted a Mr. Jonas Botto of Bravia, which is a member of the National Industries of Defence, and Mr. Tony Lopez, whose address I had received from my brother, along with his phone number. After meetings with them and various phone calls, it was decided that they would help me to put the mechanics of all this together, i.e. the arrival in Lisbon of the Tow missile, a transfer for military craft to Tehran. I also took Banerjee at this time to the Director of National Armaments, which is the National Industries of Defence. I had an agreement drawn up between National Industries of Defence and Ben Banerjee's company, B.R.&W. Industries Ltd., Longbarn House, Ravenstone, Olney, Bucks., MK46, 5AS. This was on the 6th October, 1984, the reference number was P442. I enclose a copy of this for your attention. I also enclose the Certificate signed by General Alvares, which has a serial number 333118/84 S.AQ, and again this is for Tow missiles and I enclose a copy, as it is also addressed to Ben Banerjee.

At the same time, I had an agreement made out for Delta Partners, so if Ben Banerjee fell down on his job or tried to deceive us in any way, I could drop him and carry on the work with that company, although I must confess, it was Banerjee's British license that we needed for this to carry any weight behind it. At one meeting in the Ritz, I introduced Banerjee to a Mr. George Rachelle, a German, and a Mr. Costas Gasparis, Greek. At this meeting it was agreed that I would go to Zurich and meet with a Mr. Ghorbanifar who would act on behalf of the Iranians. On my return to England I made a full report of what had happened to the U.S.A., that is to say, I phoned Oliver North's office and I spoke to Colonel Earl on 202 356 5387 and informed him of what had happened. I also gave my brother, Michael, the agreement that was made out to Delta and told him of my progress, and my progress with Botto, who was his connection and also Tony Lopez, who was also Mike's connection.

I then went to Zurich on the 14th November, 1984, with Ben Banerjee, where we booked into the Opera Hotel. I enclose a letterhead from them. A Mr. George Rachelle arrived, who, in fact, lives quite near to the hotel, along with

Mr. Otto Schaller, who is ex-U.S. Army officer, although he is German and is also a member of the C.I.A. His phone number is 49 7158 2456 and he lives at 34 Garton Strasse, 7303 Neuhausen, Stuttgart. He was also at that time acting as Mr. Ghorbanifar's aide-de-camp and escorting him everywhere; they had, in fact, just come from Hamburg, where Mr. Ghorbanifar had been conducting meetings with the Mullahs, that is to say the religious leaders who were over-seeing this affair, live in a villa, just outside Hamburg.

Meetings with Oliver North and company

The meeting at the Hotel Opera went well, with Mr. Ghorbanifar. Banerjee supplied his invoices for Tow, which Mr. Ghorbanifar accepted. That night Ben and I had a meeting with Col. North and Bill Buckley, who was head of C.I.A., Lebanon. Ben at this stage was 100% sure of official U.S. backing on the project, as he had now met with North again, this seemed to give him more confidence. He had previously met North, when North was a C.I.A. agent in Sweden. After Ben had left I was given details of bank accounts and the names of companies I could use, plus I was told to go to Paris to open more accounts with Banerjee, in the name of Devon Island. The air transportation was to be carried out by a subsidiary company of Southern Air Transport, a company run by a retired U.S. Air Force General. His phone number was 703 893 2545 or 48. The companies were CSF Compagne Services Fudisaries [sic], Blake Resources and Devon Island. An account had already been opened in Credit Suisse, for Blake resources, that account number was 386430221. Devon Island was to open its account in Paris at the Bank of Credit & Commerce, of which I believe you have the business card of the manager who we met at a later date. Ben and I flew to Paris, we then opened the accounts. North and Mr. Ghorbanifar were there. We were met by the representative of the bank and driven in a black limousine to the Hilton Hotel, where the bank has rooms at its permanent disposal. I remember very clearly on the way to the hotel that Ben used the phone in the car, in the bank's car that is, to phone his wife in England. The accounts that were open were, number 1 account—10 243 8625 into which US\$5,000,000 was placed, number 2 account - 10 243 9725, the interest account number 3 - 10 24 400 25, that account only had the signatures of North and Banerjee. On all of the others, I was a co-signatory along with Banerjee and Ghorbanifar.

We returned to the United Kingdom over the next few days. Mr. Ghorbanifar phoned me and said he had a problem and we would have to travel to Hamburg, where the two Mullahs lived to sort it out. I phoned the U.S.A. 202 356 5387 and spoke to Col. Earl, North's assistant, and explained the problem to him. I also advised my brother that there were problems, as he at that time was to start to arrange the insurance, as this had been a problem and the Mullahs were concerned that their money would not be covered in the event of

a disaster with the aircraft which, under the circumstances, could possibly be blown up in mid-air by Iraqi agents or other parties. Ben Banerjee had agreed to this as well.

I had various meetings in Hamburg, Paris, Frankfurt, Zurich and London. The dates in my passport as follows—I visited Lisbon on the 18th October and the 4th November. I visited Zurich on the 14th November. I visited Paris on the 15th November, 1984, 28th November, 1984, 30th November, 1984 and the 6th December, 1984. I visited Hamburg on the 20th November, 1984, 4th December, 1984. I visited Frankfurt on the 12th December, 1984, 19th December, 1984, 16th January 1985. I also made various trips during this period in military aircraft to and from bases in Europe, in which case my passport was not stamped. I enclose a photostat copy of my passport stamps.

At various times during these meetings was a gentleman by the name of William Buckley, Oliver North, Manjur Ghorbanifar, George Rachele, Otto Schaller, Ben Banerjee and myself, Les Aspin. All the meetings were conducted for example, in Hamburg at the Campinski Hotel, which is also known as the Atlantic Hotel, in the Sheraton Hotel, Frankfurt, at the Hotel Opera in Zurich, the Hilton Hotel in Paris, the Churchill Hotel in London and the Portman Hotel in London, Lyon Traill Attenborough's offices and also in a private villa, just outside Hamburg. This is where the two Mullahs in fact lived, who had the final word on most things. At this time I readvised my brother that there were still problems with the insurance and he should arrange it as soon as possible, as the Mullahs were pushing for a copy of the document. Again, Ben Banerjee agreed to this. One of the most important meetings was on the eve of the 5th December, at the Frankfurt Sheraton. Because of the morning of the 6th a car arrived to pick me up from the Iranian Embassy in Bonn. I went in the car to Bonn, with a letter given to me by Mr. Ghorbanifar. I gave this letter to the Ambassador, Mr. Mohammed Javed Salari. He asked me to wait for possibly one or two hours, for the paperwork to be completed. I went to a Chinese restaurant just next door to the Embassy and had a meal. When I returned to the Iranian Embassy I was given a letter for Ben Banerjee and three End Users Certificates. The first one being for 20,000 Tow missiles, the second one being for 5,040 pieces of .75 cal 9 mm pistol and 10,000,000 rounds of ammunition, and the third one was for 10,000 Uzi sub-machine guns. I should mention here that 40 CZ pistols had already been delivered via Vienna as a trial run to prove Ben Banerjee's capabilities. At this meeting I also requested that the Tow requisition be made out for Delta, still keeping in my mind that Banerjee could double-cross us. That night I flew to Paris and met Ben at the Hilton Hotel in Paris, where I photocopied all the documents and gave the originals to Banerjee. The following day he deposited them at the Bank of Credit & Commerce, and we returned to England.

Another 'small problem'

In the middle of December, Mr. Ghorbanifar phoned me

to say that there was a small problem yet again, and could I arrange to have Ben Banerjee and company to attend meetings in London, where Mr. Riazi the Prime Minister would be, but unfortunately, Mr. Riazi had the flu, but at various meetings where I tried to keep the group separate, he gave a political speech and assured one and all that everything was okay, and that he was still trying to arrange for the release of hostages. At this time, Ben Banerjee put the price of the Tow missiles up, against my advice. By this time, my brother had arranged the insurance, etc., but in January Mr. Ghorbanifar came to London where Banerjee picked him up at Heathrow Airport and bought him to Lyon Traill Attenborough, where he gave me his own cheque, which I then gave to Banerjee. It was during this meeting that my brother Michael walked in, and I said "enough is enough, you will now have to carry on this without me." One must bear in mind that the paperwork process that was now going to be dealt with I was not familiar with, and that I had completed my part of the operation and my brother was now well enough to carry on by himself in any case. At this meeting there was a William Harper, Ben Banerjee, and various other people, including Ghorbanifar. Prior to this, I had several meetings at Lyon Traill Attenborough's office with William Harper present. During one of these meetings I had Banerjee there with a representative from Lisbon for the National Industries of Defence, from which we were again reassured that the doors were open for the flights to come in.

During this period of time, another company was formed called Kennard International SA, Apartado 6-4298, Estafata, Eldorado, Panama City, Panama. An account was opened in the Indo-Suez Bank, 39 Ali Shaffar, Luxemburg. The account number was 8961. The telex number of the Bank is 1254. The telephone number is 010 352 47671 and the manager of accounts was a Mr. Schiltz. At the same time Mr. Schiltz was made aware, by tested telex from Morgan Guaranty, New York, that money could arrive there for departure to Indo-Suez Bank in favour of account number 8961.

I am also sending you the letter from Scope to Mr. Ben Banerjee, confirming that in [whited out] for supply 5,000 Tow, and other equipment. I include a letter, which is a covering letter from the Iranian Embassy in Bonn. This clearly states that Mr. Banerjee and Mr. Ghorbanifar were involved in the supply of Tow missiles, and I also include a letter from the Iranian Embassy in Bonn, which is for 20,000 units of Tow, and confirming that funds are available. I also include a letter which is from Bravia to Ben Banerjee, confirming, once again, the Tow missiles. I also confirm that Bravia gave an identical letter to Delta, which I handed to my brother. I also confirm that the letter from Bonn, which is addressed to Messrs. B.R.&W. Industries, in which it confirms the Frankfurt meetings, was also given to my brother Michael, address to Delta, and I would also confirm that one of the documents that I have seen that apparently was produced as police evidence, document number 61-LE/20, is in fact a forgery. The 10,000 pieces of Uzi 9 mm have been

added, this is not one of the original documents or copy of the original documents that I brought back from Bonn.

I also include some airline tickets, boarding cards, hotel receipts, and it will be interesting for you to note that on the back of these boarding cards, I visited the Duty-Free Shop and it gives the dates in which the flights were actually on, if that cannot be checked with the flight carriers.

I would also like to confirm at this stage, that because of the Iranians keep changing from FOB CIF, in particular this was Mr. Ghorbanifar, it caused so much confusion along with Banerjee increasing the price, which in my opinion led to the downfall of this.

I was working with the CIA

The reason I am making this statement is because next week in the United States of America there is going to be a Senate Committee hearing, when I think most of this information will be disclosed at some point, and I wish to get my side of the story out, including telephone numbers and account numbers, which at this moment have not been made available to the general public, and there is no way I could have this information unless I had participated in this transaction.

I would also like to clarify that my dealings were solely with the C.I.A. and my brothers with the Defence Agency, who were both in contact at various times with each other.

I would also add that I am still working with the C.I.A., which puts me in a very invidious position in as much as I am still working toward the possible release of the hostages, by arranging transactions in other types of equipment, mainly radar and missile systems.

I categorically state that unless a High Court Judge personally directs me to speak to any British officials, including the police, I will not be available to anybody and this is the only statement that I am going to make.

The statement that I have made to the police I believe I told them what they wanted to know, what they wanted to hear, which I have been very, very wary of, because various documents have turned up since then, in the hands of American officials, so it is obvious to me that their security is not what it should be and there is no way I could entrust myself or the knowledge that I have, information, into the hands of the British police. In particular, not to help certain persons further their career, or for this information to be used for political scandal, in particular, against the President of the United States.

I would much prefer the British police to think of me as an idiot and a bit player in this whole affair.

Also bearing in mind that during the course of these transactions one of the parties involved was taken hostage himself in Lebanon, and eventually tortured to death, and he was head of the C.I.A. in Beirut at that time.

Once again, I say, my name is Leslie Alan Aspin, I reside at 47 Desmond Drive, Olcant, Norwich, and this is the end of my statement.

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