

# An Official Inquest Has British Royals Frantic

by Jeffrey Steinberg

After a delay of more than six years, the British Royal Coroner has initiated a formal inquest into the deaths of Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed, in an Aug. 31, 1997 Paris car crash. The mere launching of the probe could spell political disaster for Prince Charles and also for Prime Minister Tony Blair.

On Jan. 5, Royal Coroner Michael Burgess briefly convened and adjourned the inquest, to allow investigators from Scotland Yard to launch the first British probe of the Paris car crash. By law, that probe should have been launched within days of the burial of the Princess of Wales and Dodi Fayed, the son of billionaire Mohamed al-Fayed, back in September 1997. But the British authorities chose to wait until the French investigation was completed, and all appeals exhausted. For the British Royal Family, the hope was that, with time, the issue would quietly disappear and the “official” inquest would be an after-thought, grabbing little public attention.

Instead, Royal Coroner Burgess sent shockwaves through Buckingham Palace when he asked London Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens to oversee the probe. Stevens has a reputation as a top-notch serious, professional investigator, who does not shy away from controversy. He led the 14-year probe into the role of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the British Army, MI5, and MI6 in the assassinations of republican activists in Northern Ireland, resulting in the arrests of 144 people and the prosecutions and convictions of 94 people, as of April 2003.

A Jan. 7, 2004 London *Times* article reported that Stevens would model his Diana probe on the Ulster investigation: “Last night police sources said that Sir John had decided the case was so important and sensitive that the police operations should be modelled on investigations he carried out in Northern Ireland into links between the security forces and loyalist terrorists. Sir John oversaw the lengthy investigations and appointed a senior officer to run the inquiry day to day in Belfast.”

Indeed, as soon as he was appointed to head up the Diana-Dodi probe, Stevens named Deputy Assistant Commissioner Alan Brown to take charge of the investigation. Scotland Yard Commander David Armond, a leading member of its anti-terrorism branch, is also going to play a working role in the probe, which is expected to last 12-15 months. A senior British law enforcement source close to the Diana-Dodi case confirmed that the investigative team is of the

highest caliber, and the appointment clearly reflects a British institutional move that is not under the control of the House of Windsor.

A senior American intelligence source, with long-standing ties into the City of London, described the Diana-Dodi probe as a move “to settle the Royal succession once and for all—and Prince Charles is likely to be dumped, in favor of his son, Prince William.” He added, “This is a strategic move of the highest order, on the part of the Club of the Isles. It has more to do with the global policy conflicts and crises. The British institutions are giving themselves maximum maneuvering room between continental Europe and the United States.”

## Royals ‘Devastated’

The *Times* also reported on Jan. 7 that “senior members of the Royal Family reacted with incredulity” to the announcement of the probe by the Royal Coroner. Prince Charles has become a central figure in the probe, following the release of a 1996 letter written by Princess Diana to her butler Paul Burrell, charging that her ex-husband was scheming to kill or severely injure her in a car crash. Charles “was devastated” by the probe announcement, a friend told the *Times*.

Three days later, the *Times*, in front-page stories, revealed that Diana’s letter “claiming that her husband planned to kill her in a car crash is likely to leave detectives with little choice but to interview the Prince of Wales, too. . . . Police sources say that the letter has a clear allegation, no matter how extraordinary, that there was a plan to harm” Diana.

Even more alarming, from the Royals’ standpoint, the *Times* reported, “In the political establishment, there are those who believe that we don’t know the whole truth about how that crash happened. People want to know why it has taken six-and-one-half years and why the Coroner has chosen this precise moment to open the inquest. There must be some compelling reason we don’t know about.”

Anthony Holden, a Royals biographer, told the *Times*, “There is no doubt that the French inquiry was in many ways unsatisfactory. There are several legitimate, not to say sinister, questions that need to be answered.” *Times* reporter Ben MacIntyre added his own, blunter comment: “The French investigators stonewalled, hiding behind the rules and creating an atmosphere in which errors or omissions begin to look like something more sinister. . . . The Diana stonewall has become a grassy knoll,” a reference to the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, which was also the subject a malicious cover-up, the Warren Commission report.

Of course the Warren Commission publicly released a final report, with a 26-volume appendix, containing many of the “raw” investigative reports and evidence. At the close of the two-year probe into the deaths of Princess Diana, Dodi Fayed, and driver Henri Paul, investigative magistrate Hervé



*The new, official British investigation into the death of Diana Princess of Wales in 1997, could have greater political impact even than the demonstrations against the Royals just after her death.*

Stephan issued a terse, one-page statement, concluding that the Paris crash had been a garden variety case of drunk driving on the part of Henri Paul. Judge Stephan refused to even indict any of the paparazzi for violating France's strict "good samaritan" law, which demands that passersby stop and aid accident victims.

### **Henri Paul's Blood**

Indeed, one of the most controversial features of the French cover-up has already exploded in the British press. The Jan. 10 *Times* revealed that British investigators are already convinced that the French bungled the probe into chauffeur Henri Paul's allegedly drunken condition at the time of the crash. The only "evidence" pointing to alcohol as a factor in the crash was the purported Paul blood sample. However, as the *Times* noted, British police are concerned that the French authorities never conducted a DNA test on the blood, to confirm it actually came from Henri Paul!

This issue is of vital importance because the same blood sample showed near-fatal levels of carbon monoxide. Henri Paul would have been incapable of driving a car with such

high levels of carbon monoxide in his bloodstream. Further challenging the blood sample evidence, video footage from the security cameras at the Ritz Hotel, where Paul, Princess Diana, and Dodi Fayed were, just prior to the fatal car ride, showed no evidence that Paul was suffering either drunkenness or carbon monoxide poisoning. Someone suffering from acute carbon monoxide poisoning would be in excruciating pain, and would be suffering from loss of balance. Paul, in contrast, was seen in the security videos, just moments before he took the wheel of the Mercedes, fully in control, and appearing as sober as a church mouse.

### **Other Points of Inquiry**

A London source close to the inquest reports that Sir Stevens and his Scotland Yard team will dissect the entire French probe, reviewing the more than 6,000 pages of evidence gathered by the French police. Among the other anomalies that are certain to come up in the British probe:

- The nearly two-hour lag, from when French emergency medical teams arrived on the scene of the crash in the Place d'Alma Tunnel, and when Princess Diana was finally brought into a hospital emergency room. In the intervening time, the Princess bled to death. A leading French doctor, who helped establish the Paris emergency response procedures, told *EIR* shortly after the crash that Princess Diana was showing obvious signs of internal bleeding, and needed to be rushed into surgery. Under the French emergency response procedures, which are run by the Army, this doctor reported that Princess Diana should have been in surgery in less than 30 minutes from the time the rescue team arrived—and she would have survived.
- The missing white Fiat Uno. A number of eyewitnesses, including an off-duty senior French police official, all saw a white Fiat Uno collide with the Mercedes carrying Diana and Dodi at the tunnel entrance. The car fled the scene and, despite a nationwide hunt, was never found by the French authorities. One year after the crash, Judge Stephan had written an interim report, in which he declared that the probe could not be concluded without solving the mystery of who was behind the wheel of the Fiat. One suspect, James Andanson, a paparazzi who owned a white Fiat Uno (which he repaired and sold months after the Paris crash), died in a mysterious fire several years after the August 1997 crash, in what French authorities arbitrarily called "a suicide."

These are but the most egregious of the unanswered questions surrounding the deaths of Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed. The key question goes back to Princess Diana's own words to Paul Burrell: Did the British Royal Family and elements of British and/or French intelligence assassinate the "People's Princess"? Whether the Stevens team ever gets around to that question or not, the next 12 or so months promise to be another "Annus Horibilus" for the House of Windsor.