
The Operation Paget inquiry report into the allegation of conspiracy to murder

Diana, Princess of Wales
and Emad El-Din Mohamed Abdel Moneim Fayed

Overview

by Lord Stevens of Kirkwhelpington
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Overview

In January 2004, as Commissioner for the Metropolitan Police Service I was asked by the Coroner of the Queen's Household and the County of Surrey, Mr Michael Burgess, to investigate a number of matters surrounding the car crash in Paris on 31 August 1997 in which Diana, the Princess of Wales, Mr Dodi Al Fayed and Mr Henri Paul died and Mr Trevor Rees-Jones was seriously injured. The Operation Paget report of that investigation which has been wide-ranging and thorough will, I hope, assist the present Coroner in charge of the case, Lady Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, to decide the scope of her inquests. This overview addresses the key issues that have emerged from what has been a most complex and challenging investigation.

The nature of this investigation has been unprecedented. I decided that only a thorough, methodical and detailed investigation would answer these extremely serious allegations. A dedicated team of New Scotland Yard Detectives from the Metropolitan Police Specialist Crime Directorate has worked on the case from the moment I took charge of the investigation. I want to thank them all for their dedication especially the Senior Investigating Officer and his deputy.

Scope of the investigation

Together, we have examined and taken account of the French investigation but it has not been our role to pass judgement on French procedures and processes. I do, however, recognise that there are differences in the two systems. I must also make it clear that it is not our role to prejudge those matters that will be heard in the Coroner's court. It is for Lady Butler-Sloss to decide the questions of who the deceased were, and where, when and how they died.

The primary purpose of the investigation has been to assess whether there is any credible evidence to support an allegation of conspiracy to murder.

Much has been written about the circumstances leading up to the crash and the effectiveness of the French investigation that followed. We have been acutely aware of the responsibility placed upon us to approach this investigation with an open mind and to ensure that the outcome was not predetermined.

This inquiry has largely concentrated on a number of separate claims made by Mr Mohamed Al Fayed and his legal team in documents and public appearances over the nine years since the crash. At the heart of Mr Al Fayed's allegation is his belief that the crash was not an accident but murder. Furthermore, that this murder was the result of a conspiracy by the 'Establishment' and, in particular, by HRH Prince Philip and the Security and Intelligence Services because of the relationship between Mr Dodi Al Fayed and the Princess of Wales. Mr Al Fayed and his legal team have also expressed concern that the investigation, by the French authorities, was carried out in such a way as to prevent the truth from emerging.

I have personally ensured that every reasonable line of enquiry has been undertaken in order to evaluate fully any evidence that might support this extremely serious allegation.

We have had excellent cooperation from the French authorities throughout. They have shared the dossier containing the findings of their enquiries to date, carried out enquiries on our behalf, given us exhibits and provided much other practical support to my team. Our understanding of the French inquiry has led us to draw two principal conclusions. First, the differences in procedures between the French and English legal systems in themselves provide answers to some of Mr Al Fayed's questions. Second, Mr Al Fayed has brought to our attention his concerns about the French investigation and some of these have received wide publicity. They do not alter our conclusions in any way.

Representatives from Government, including the Secret Intelligence Service and the Security Service, have all given me their full cooperation and assistance, whether or not allegations were specifically made against their organisations. Some of these allegations of conspiracy to murder have been made against named individuals in the full glare of publicity. Myself and the two senior members of the team have personally examined MI5 and MI6 records. We have had unprecedented access to everything we wished to examine. We have contacted the American intelligence services and they have assured us that they have no relevant information that will in any way affect my conclusions. I am satisfied that no attempt has been made to hold back information. We are confident that the allegations made are unfounded. The relevant issues are detailed in the report.

I have been in communication with HRH Prince Philip, HRH Prince Charles, and HRH Prince William. I have spoken with Prince Charles and I have corresponded with Prince Philip and Prince William. I have always said that the direction of the investigation would be governed by the evidence. I have seen nothing that would justify further enquiries with any member of the Royal Family.

I know that this report will be the subject of closer scrutiny than anything I have done before and people may continue to raise issues - it is inevitable. However, that has not stopped the Metropolitan Police from taking the exceptional step of publishing this report. Not only do we believe that it is the right thing to do, but we also believe that the public should have the opportunity to view the investigation in its entirety. This will allow for properly informed debate about the evidence rather than discussions based on theory and speculation.

Scale and nature of the investigation

The team has interviewed over 300 witnesses, some for the first time. They have carried out over 500 actions and collected more than 600 exhibits. They have gone wherever necessary in order to pursue their enquiries. More than twenty International Letters of Request have been submitted to the French authorities.

These enquiries, however, have not been carried out in order to re-investigate the French Inquiry. The team has scrutinised all the statements taken from eyewitnesses at the time in order to assess if there was any possible evidence that might inform the investigation. They have not re-interviewed these witnesses. They did, however, manage to locate and interview two new eyewitnesses and full accounts have been taken from them. The evidence they provide has further informed our assessment.

Eyewitness accounts taken in France were done in accordance with the French legislation and procedures. The French authorities considered that after this length of time and so much media coverage, the proper place for these accounts to be heard was at the inquests. Many of these witnesses have agreed to attend. Both Coroners, Michael Burgess and Lady Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, have agreed that this is the correct and most appropriate course of action. I agree.

The recollections of eyewitnesses, so many years after such a fleeting and traumatic event, have to be dealt with very carefully. We have included in our report extracts from a very informative analysis by a respected psychologist. He explains these issues in detail. His full report will be made available to the inquests.

The team has drawn, during the course of the investigation, on some of the finest independent experts. We would like, in particular to thank two of them who have been with us throughout the investigation:

- Professor Robert FORREST, is a Consultant in Clinical Chemistry and Toxicology. He has provided expert opinion concerning the analysis of Henri Paul's post-mortem samples.
- Dr Richard SHEPHERD, is a Consultant Forensic Pathologist and Home Office Pathologist. He has given me his expert opinion on the medical condition and injuries of the Princess of Wales, Dodi Al Fayed and Henri Paul following the collision.

The team has taken advantage of the latest forensic and technical developments in the years since the crash. In February 2005 we, together with the French Judiciary and Police, carried out what I believe, is the largest and most comprehensive survey and reconstruction of the scene of an incident ever. We used the specialist skills of surveyors, photographers and computer modellers to collect data from 186 million points and reproduce the scene of the crash and surrounding area to within an accuracy of one centimetre. This three-dimensional model and a validated model of the Mercedes, were used by the world-renowned Transport Research Laboratory to simulate and recreate the crash.

This groundbreaking work has been of crucial importance in reaching our conclusions. It will be available for the Coroner to consider at the inquests and will be, I hope, of lasting benefit to many other future investigations whether in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Since 1997 Mr Mohamed Al Fayed has also employed a number of experts. They too are eminent in their respective fields. I am most grateful to him for the many questions he and they have raised and for the information they have provided to the investigation. Mr Al Fayed has kindly made many of their reports available to the team and we have included a great deal of their content in the report. My team and the experts we have employed have met Mr Al Fayed's experts and I have encouraged constant dialogue between them at all times.

The findings of the investigation

Our investigation into the overall allegation of conspiracy to murder has examined the following key areas: the motive for the alleged murder and the opportunity and capability to carry it out.

Our conclusion is that, on all the evidence available at this time, there was no conspiracy to murder any of the occupants of the car. This was a tragic accident.

Motive

I and the team have spoken to people about sensitive matters, some of a deeply personal nature. We have spoken to close relatives, friends and the doctor of the Princess of Wales. All were very willing to help me in any way they could. I am most grateful for their cooperation and assistance.

We are not prepared to go into detail as much of what we have been told was on the understanding that it would be accorded proper sensitivity. However, we are certain that the Princess of Wales was not pregnant at the time of her death. Our conclusions were strengthened by forensic tests carried out on blood recovered from the Mercedes car.

From the evidence of her close friends and associates, she was not engaged and she was not about to get engaged.

Opportunity and capability

To stage an accident in order to murder the occupants of the car would in my opinion require careful, meticulous and coordinated planning. The team carried out a detailed and thorough investigation of the events leading up to the collision; from the very first beginnings of the relationship between the Princess of Wales and Mr Dodi Al Fayed in St Tropez in July 1997, to the particular sequence of events which took place a few weeks later in Paris on the evening of 30 August 1997. The paparazzi were intent on following their every move from the moment they knew of the relationship and were aware of their plans to travel to Paris on Saturday 30 August. Having been informed by contacts, they were waiting for them at the airport and followed them to the Ritz Hotel.

At 7pm that evening Dodi Al Fayed and the Princess of Wales left the Ritz Hotel to go to Dodi Al Fayed's apartment in rue Arsène Houssaye. They had no intention of returning to the Ritz Hotel that night. We are also certain that Henri Paul had no intention of returning to the Ritz Hotel after he went off duty shortly after their departure. For a number of reasons the plans of all three individuals changed. The Princess of Wales and Dodi Al Fayed had planned to dine at a well-known Paris restaurant and at about 9.40pm they were being driven there. It was because of the attention of the paparazzi during this journey that Dodi Al Fayed instructed his chauffeur to drive instead to the Ritz Hotel. They arrived there at 9.50pm. This was unexpected and consequently the night duty security officer called Henri Paul's mobile telephone and told him of their arrival. Henri Paul apparently expressed surprise but immediately returned to the hotel. All of the evidence we have examined indicates that this was entirely in keeping with Henri Paul's conscientious approach to his work.

Much has been made of Henri Paul's 'missing three hours' between leaving the Ritz Hotel and returning on that Saturday evening. No one can be sure exactly where he was during those three hours, but it is clear that, until he was telephoned at 10pm by the Ritz Hotel night duty security officer, he cannot have known that he would be returning to the Ritz Hotel and nor did anyone else.

Once back at the Ritz Hotel, Dodi Al Fayed had a conversation with his father. Mohamed Al Fayed recalls that Dodi informed him of his wish to return to the apartment in rue Arsene Houssaye in order to present the Princess of Wales with an engagement ring. Dodi Al Fayed had purchased a ring for her that afternoon from Repossi Jewellers. The Princess of Wales was not with him at that time and we believe she never saw that ring. I do not know whether Dodi was going to ask her to marry him that night. I cannot say what the Princess of Wales' response would have been. However, we have spoken to many of her family and closest friends and none of them has indicated to us that she was either about to or wished to get engaged. Her last conversations with friends and confidantes were to the contrary. Prince William has confirmed to me that his mother had not given him the slightest indication about such plans for the future.

At around 10.20pm Dodi Al Fayed passed a message to Henri Paul through the night duty manager. Another car would now be required to take the couple back to his apartment in rue Arsène Houssaye. This car was to depart from the rear of the Ritz Hotel.

The car, the driver and the point of departure all therefore changed within a very short space of time. This left no opportunity, in my opinion, for anyone to put into action any plan, particularly one that would have required so much preparation and so many people to effect it.

At around 12 20am on Sunday 31 August 1997 the Princess of Wales, Dodi Al Fayed and Trevor Rees-Jones left the Ritz Hotel in a Mercedes driven by Henri Paul. As we now know Dodi's chauffeur driven car and backup vehicle were to depart from the front of the hotel shortly afterwards.

The French investigation traced and identified many eyewitnesses including drivers and their vehicles. There may be other eyewitnesses who have not come forward but I am confident that on the evidence we have a full and comprehensive picture of events can be constructed.

We know that the car travelled at excessive speed during the final part of the journey while against being followed by the paparazzi. We know the route it took. We can say with certainty that the car hit the kerb just before the thirteenth pillar of the central reservation in the Alma underpass, at a speed of 61 to 63 miles per hour. This is about twice the speed limit on that section of road. What exactly happened at the end of that journey is a matter for the inquests to decide. However, we conclude that nothing in the very rapid sequence of events we have reconstructed supports the allegation of conspiracy to murder. In particular, following the work done by police collision investigators and other experts, we are confident that any theories concerning flashing lights inside the Alma underpass can be discounted as the cause of this crash.

The Fiat Uno

We believe there was a glancing contact between the Mercedes, driven by Henri Paul, and a white Fiat Uno just before the Alma underpass. Much has been made of a French photojournalist, Mr James Andanson. It has been alleged that he was the driver of the Fiat Uno and an agent of the security services.

We are completely satisfied that this Fiat Uno did not belong to James Andanson nor was it driven by him that night. James Andanson committed suicide in May 2000 and shortly afterwards the photographic offices he shared in Paris were burgled. The French conducted a full investigation into his death and we agree with their conclusion that James Andanson took his own life. Despite claims to the contrary, the burglary was fully investigated and known professional criminals arrested. There is no evidence that James Andanson was an agent of any security service.

In August 1997 James Andanson did own a white Fiat Uno, a popular make and model of car at that time. However, it was nine years old, in a state of disrepair, had been driven over 360,000 kms and was registered in his own name. He openly part-exchanged the car for a Fiat Punto at a local garage later that year.

James Andanson's widow has given the team her full cooperation and assistance for which I am grateful. We are satisfied James Andanson was at home with his wife on the night of Saturday 30 August 1997, before flying to Corsica on a photographic assignment the following morning.

Who was driving the white Fiat Uno and why they did not come forward are questions we have considered. The French investigation carried out a major search for the Fiat Uno but could not locate the car. After this length of time it is very unlikely that we shall do so. Failing to render assistance to a person in danger is an imprisonable offence in French law. This may have deterred witnesses from coming forward and giving their account.

After the accident

We are convinced that the French authorities took all reasonable steps to save the lives of those involved in the accident. We have seen the surgeons and medical staff who worked so hard that night to try to save the lives of those involved in the crash. I believe they did everything humanly possible to do that. Much has been said about the embalming of the body of the Princess of Wales and that this formed some part of the conspiracy. We have found the explanation for this and understand why it was done. Again the details are in the report.

It is clear that the Mercedes was travelling at excessive speed as it approached the Alma underpass. Henri Paul had consumed alcohol that evening. After returning to the Ritz Hotel he drank two Ricards in the Bar Vendôme. This alone would have given him an alcohol level near to the French drink/driving limit, which is lower than the limit in this country. When Henri Paul returned he could not have known he would be driving the Princess of Wales and Dodi Al Fayed later that night. On the CCTV he does appear to be walking round the hotel normally but the tests on the forensic samples taken at both his post-mortem examinations show him to have had an alcohol level of around 1.74 grams per litre at the time of the crash - this is around twice the British drink/drive limit. We are satisfied from the DNA testing carried out on samples in France and by experts in the United Kingdom that those blood samples tested belonged to Henri Paul. Henri Paul had been drinking but how much he had consumed is questionable. There has also been speculation surrounding the abnormal levels of carboxyhaemoglobin in Henri Paul's blood. The team, after meticulous research, has identified an explanation for this high reading. This information was shared with Mohamed Al Fayed's team. It concerns how and from where the sample was taken and we have worked together to find an answer.

Conclusion

I have no doubt that speculation as to what happened that night will continue and that there are some matters, as in many other investigations, about which we may never find a definitive answer. However, I do not believe that any evidence currently exists that can substantiate the allegation of conspiracy to murder that has been made. Various legal cases are currently being pursued by Mr Al Fayed through the French courts. They are unlikely, in my opinion, to have any bearing on my conclusion, that there was no conspiracy or cover up.

Three people tragically lost their lives in the accident and one was seriously injured. Many more have suffered from the intense scrutiny, speculation and misinformed judgements in the years that have followed. I very much hope that all the work we have done and the publication of this report will help to bring some closure to all who continue to mourn the deaths of Diana, Princess of Wales, Dodi Al Fayed and Henri Paul.