

Cwmwl o Hlwr

(3 pages).

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Singer in London

2 April 2000 The Observer

MI6 plotters in new Libya spying fiasco

Leading Gadaffi spy made a fool of handlers who tried to recruit him for Britain

by Antony Barnett
and Martin Bright

THE TWO MI6 officers at the centre of an alleged plot to assassinate the Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi were involved in a second intelligence disaster, *The Observer* can reveal. They allowed one of Gaddafi's top spies to enter Britain in 1993, hoping to recruit him. But the plan backfired spectacularly. Khalifa Bazelya, one of Gaddafi's most loyal intelligence officers, kept his MI6 handlers sweet by handing them tidbits of useless information. But Bazelya used the cover provided by Britain to monitor and intimidate Libyan dissidents. He also gathered information to aid Gaddafi's chemical weapons programme.

The revelations of the fiasco presided over by the two MI6 men will increase pressure on the Government to initiate a full inquiry into the activities of MI6 officers involved in Libyan operations during the mid-Nineties.

Ministers were made aware of the bungled operation in 1995. They ordered the expulsion of Bazelya, who was working in the Saudi embassy.

While Bazelya was working in London, Ali Abuzaid, a leading member of the Libyan opposition living in the UK, was stabbed to death in his grocery shop. There is no evidence linking Bazelya to

this crime, but fears among Libyans in London that Abuzaid's murder was a political assassination sparked a crisis in the intelligence community.

In December 1995, shortly after the murder, Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind expelled Bazelya for 'activities incompatible with his diplomatic status'.

The fiasco began after the two MI6 officers, codenamed PT16 and PT16/B, arranged for Bazelya to get security clearance to work in the Saudi embassy in 1993 as head of the Libyan mission - Tripoli and London did not have full diplomatic relations. His appointment was approved by Rifkind. He was admitted to Britain, although he had been accused of gun-running and espionage in Africa.

MI6 believed it could use him to gather information about Gaddafi and Libyan-backed terrorism and, in particular, events surrounding the bombing of PanAm flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988.

But Bazelya ran rings around his MI6 handlers. While they were trying to 'turn' him, surveillance by MI5 and Special Branch revealed that Bazelya was intimidating Libyan dissidents, recruiting informers and collecting information on chemical weapons.

Bazelya was one of three Libyan diplomats based in the Saudi embassy. His country's own embassy had not been used since

diplomatic relations between Britain and Libya were cut off in 1984 after the killing of police-woman Yvonne Fletcher in a hail of bullets fired from the building.

He visited universities where MI5 believed that Libyan students on science courses would provide Gaddafi with information to advance its weapons programme.

According to dissidents now in the UK, Bazelya offered to set up a Libyan community centre and told his countrymen he was trying to open up communications between exiles and the Gaddafi government. But many of them suspected he had other motives.

Ashur Shamis, a leading Gaddafi opponent in London, said: 'A lot of people were convinced, but I always felt he was up to something else.'



Rifkind: Approved Bazelya's appointment to work for Libya in London.

Huda Abuzaid, the daughter of the murdered dissident, said last night: 'I am amazed that MI6 even thought they could recruit him. I was never convinced that there was no connection between my father's death and his expulsion. No one has ever been arrested for Ali Abuzaid's murder.'

Former intelligence officer David Shayler, who was running MI5's Libya desk in 1995 said: 'Before Bazelya came to Britain, it was quite obvious to the desk officers at MI5 that he was not recruitable.'

The Observer contacted Bazelya's office in Cyprus, where he is now the Libyan ambassador, but he has so far not responded. Throughout the Nineties the British security services were desperately seeking information about the Lockerbie bombing. It was immediately after the failed attempt to recruit Bazelya that MI6 is alleged to have become involved in a plot to murder Gaddafi.

According to a top secret MI6 document that appeared on the Internet in February, it was at this time that a Libyan source codenamed 'Tunworth' approached MI6 about a plot to topple Gaddafi. PT16/B was MI6's direct link with Tunworth. PT16 was his boss.

It is thought that the plotters offered to hand over two men suspected of Lockerbie the bombing in return for British support.

David Shayler, page 31