

Belgium arrests tied to Iran-Contra scandal

by Dean Andromidas

Belgium has been rocked for the last month by the uncovering of the pedophile ring responsible for the murder of four young girls, and by the arrest of 20 people in connection with the 1991 killing of senior Belgian politician André Cools. But this is only the tip of the iceberg of an extensive political-criminal complex in Belgium, which can be described as the Belgian equivalent of Italy's infamous "Propaganda-2" scandal in the early 1980s. Indications are emerging that this political-criminal complex has international connections, including to the Iran-Contra operations of George Bush and Oliver North during the 1980s.

On Aug. 17, acting on information given by local citizens, Belgian police rescued two young girls held captive by the pedophile Marc Detroux. It was soon discovered that Detroux was heading a pedophile ring. Within days, authorities unearthed the bodies of four young girls. While the case began as yet another horrible child sex ring scandal, it soon expanded into proportions that have overturned the population's faith in their own government. Within two weeks, over 30 people, including police and judicial authorities, were arrested.

Among those arrested was Jean Michel Nihoul, who, operating out of an office on the prestigious Avenue de Louis in downtown Brussels, coordinated the financial side of both the pedophile ring, as well as a stolen car ring, with which Detroux was also discovered to have been involved. Nihoul was said to have financed seven properties in Belgium from which Detroux operated. He also had a villa somewhere in the Caribbean. Some of the proceeds from these and other operations, found their way into foreign bank accounts and real estate. A Belgian intelligence source told *EIR* that Nihoul had been a target of investigation as early as 1973, for financial fraud, money laundering, prostitution, and other crimes.

At this time, Nihoul was close to right-wing politicians of the Christian Socialist Party, whose activities were tied to the World Anti-Communist League. In the 1980s, he was involved in an ecological cult called Eco Vie, whose leader, Jan Williams, a Canadian who founded the cult in France, was thrown out of the country when the group was found to be a cover for criminal activity, including pedophilia. Williams ended up in Belgium, where Nihoul allegedly financed his purchase of a castle outside of Liège, where he became en-

gaged in similar activity. Williams was eventually extradited to a third country.

Also questioned, but not arrested, was Casper Flier, a Dutchman and convicted drug-trafficker who had at one time specialized in the illegal trade of paper used in the forging of currency and securities.

From child sex ring to Murder, Inc.

No sooner had these arrests exposed a level of corruption that many believed would lead to the highest political levels, than the government announced the arrest of the alleged murderers of Cools, followed by over 20 more arrests. Among those arrested were two former ministers, Alain Van der Biest and Guy Mathot, who were also leaders in the Belgian Socialist Party of the Francophone region of Wallonia. Cools's son, the Liège-based attorney Marcel Cools, called for the resignation and investigation of former Belgian Justice Minister Melchior Wathelet, now Belgium's judge at the European Court of Justice, for leading the obstruction and cover-up of an earlier investigation. That earlier, 1991 investigation, had identified the same suspects now under arrest, and had been led at the time by the same investigative judge who is now overseeing the Marc Detroux pedophile case.

The population generally has not been ready to accept the government's version, that there is only a very minor link between the two cases.

The international dimensions

Some people in Belgium, and, no doubt, in Great Britain and the United States, would like to confine this scandal within the borders of Belgium, even if it means breaking the country apart between its Flemish- and French-speaking halves. Nonetheless, tremendous evidence points to a scandal with international dimensions.

Cools was shot to death after he had threatened to reveal vast political corruption schemes involving arms deals, drug trafficking, and illegal financial operations. Among these cases was the Augusta helicopter affair, which last year led to the resignation of NATO Secretary General Willy Claes.

The Belgian press reports that prosecutors are trying to develop a case around the theory that the motive for killing Cools involved the corrupt concerns of only the small circle of conspirators now under arrest. But, is that enough to explain the vast network of corruption that appears to reach into the highest levels of the Belgian judicial system, if not the government? It has been alleged that the murder is linked to a scandal involving kickbacks to the Walloon Socialist Party by the Italian helicopter manufacturer Augusta, which was supplying helicopters for the Belgian Army. That scandal was also linked to similar corruption scandals around former Italian Prime Minister and Socialist Party head Bettino Craxi. But that scandal came to light only after Cools's assassination, and was exposed by the same judicial authori-

ties responsible for the cover-up of the earlier investigation.

The investigative magistrates have been busy looking into kickbacks to politicians from weapons purchases to their own governments, and calling it "political corruption." Nonetheless, these same arms companies were involved in illegal arms sales to warring Iran and Iraq, which were initiated with the full backing of the Reagan-Bush and Thatcher governments in the 1980s. In many cases, these same politicians, now under threat of long jail sentences, were not only involved in those Iran-Iraq deals, but are clearly in a position to name the names. In the early 1980s, Augusta was exposed in a deal to sell a large number of helicopters to Iran. That deal reportedly involved U.S. intelligence operative Michael Ledeen, who was at the time adviser to then NATO commander Gen. Alexander Haig.

Most informed observers agree that Cools was in a position to name the names in some of these Iran-Iraq arms deals. Only a few days before his murder, and after conducting his own investigation in Geneva and Lucerne, Switzerland, Cools had announced to the press that he would make some startling revelations upon his return from a vacation in Paris. He was murdered in Liège before he could make those revelations.

While the official line of the government is that the pedophile case and the Cools murder are only "very indirectly" linked, nonetheless, many of those arrested in both affairs were: 1) leading members of the Socialist Party in Belgium's Wallonia region, and 2) members of the Masonic lodge in Liège. The latter is affiliated with the Grand Orient Lodge of Belgium, and has among its membership 40% of the top leaders of the Wallonia branch of the Belgian Socialist Party, as well as leading members of the elite of Wallonia and French-speaking Brussels. The Belgian lodge is affiliated with the Grand Orient Lodge of France, which is in turn dominated by the French Socialist Party. The Belgian Socialist Party is so close to their French colleagues that, in recent days, leaders of the party, including Robert Colligan, the prime minister of the Wallonia region, and Claude Eerdekens, the parliamentary party leader, in response to criticism from some of the Flemish parties, threatened to secede and become a department of France.

Furthermore, NATO's political and military headquarters are located in Belgium, and a vast array of official, semi-official, and private intelligence "sub-organizations" played a crucial role in the arms shipments and other activities related to the Bush-North Iran-Contra operations, and to the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq War. In the context of these arms-trafficking operations, which drew upon NATO arms depots, a number of leading politicians and military figures in Europe were killed, including Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme and former Schleswig-Holstein Gov. Uwe Barschel. Reportedly, Banque Bruxelles Lambert, Belgium's second largest bank, played a role in financing the Iran-

Contra-linked arms deals, such as one called "Operation Demavand"

The 'Mendez case'

Liège, where Cools was political boss, is one of Europe's arms-producing centers. Fabrique Nationale (FN) is located there. The nearby Bierset airport, of which Cools was a member of the board, was repeatedly mentioned as a transshipment point for arms to the Middle East and other international destinations. According to Belgian press reports, an earlier attempt to investigate the Detroux pedophile ring had been blocked by corrupt judicial authorities, who feared it might lead to the so-called "Mendez case." Mendez, a director of FN, was killed in 1986, in the same year as a spate of Iran-Contra-related murders. It is believed that Mendez specialized in producing false "end-user certificates," that would give phony destinations for weapons actually bound for Iran and Iraq.

Mendez, in turn, was linked to the so-called "Brabant gang," which, in 1986, was responsible for several brutal attacks on supermarkets which left tens of innocent bystanders dead. Although the murders are still officially unsolved, in 1990 it was alleged that the gang was part of the infamous NATO-linked "Gladio" operation. In a recent interview shown on Belgian television, the alleged leader of the gang, who is now living in South Africa, claimed that these killings were intentional, that among the victims were individuals who "knew too much." They allegedly knew of a Mossad-linked arms deal involving an Arab country; the operation was based in Belgium and financed by drug money from the Netherlands.

Confirming Belgium's role as a key player in the international arms trade, one expert told *EIR*: "Lots of arms activities are funneled through Belgium; it is very convenient to do so, especially if you're dealing with prescribed lists of high-technology goods. It's no accident that Gerald Bull [a British arms manufacturer who was later assassinated] and his group were organizing all their activities, in the 1980s, through Belgium."

Our source went on: "The country has a very corrupt bureaucracy, which always facilitated illegal arms shipments. International arms dealers always found Belgium to be the best place to operate." He pointed out that both French firms and British Aerospace used Belgium. "The throughput of arms activity magnified enormously in recent years," he continued, "including from eastern European and Russian sources of arms. Many arms dealers have worked out of Brussels. It's all quite carefully worked out. It's the European center for doing this, with good access to most markets, and good access to the port of Rotterdam."

He added one further element, although he claimed not to know of any concrete leads to George Bush or his family: "Look into Texas arms dealers. A lot of private

arms dealers from Texas have used Belgian end-user certificates, and have had offices in Belgium, since it is much easier to do a lot of this from Belgium than from the United States.”

‘Cools knew too much’

Concerning Cools, a former executive of a leading British arms company with subsidiaries in Belgium, the expert was more specific. “You have to understand that André Cools knew Gerald Bull, who was assassinated outside his Brussels home in 1990. [That case] has never been solved,” he said. Bull was the director of Space Research Corp. (SRC) in Belgium, and his assassination was attributed to the Israeli Mossad. Bull was the builder of the so-called supergun for Saddam Hussein. But this same source said, “Don’t believe the story that the Israelis killed him. That supergun project was really only a red herring. Bull was involved with much more important and financially lucrative projects. He was killed because he knew too much.”

Bull’s SRC was involved in a range of projects, including sales of artillery pieces, munitions, and even the construction of entire weapons and munitions plants for the Iraqi arms industry. These projects not only gave him access to relevant information, but in many cases involved leading British, American, and Belgian firms. His assassination occurred at the time President George Bush was building his Gulf War coalition against Saddam Hussein. That coalition was built over a significant number of dead bodies of those who knew the real secrets of who was arming Iraq—i.e., that it was George Bush and Margaret Thatcher’s own governments.

In addition, Société Générale de Belgique, the largest semi-official Belgian holding company with interests in various Belgian munitions plants, was part of the vast number of arms and munitions companies dominated by British and American companies linked directly to policy circles of the administrations of Bush and Thatcher. PRB, the Société Générale’s munitions producer, was part of the international munitions cartel exposed in the late 1980s for selling billions of dollars’ worth of munitions, also from NATO stocks, to Iran and Iraq. Many of these shipments took place with the cooperation of the notorious East German trading company, IMES, headed by Stasi agent Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski. The latter’s commitment to communism and the Warsaw Pact, did not prevent Oliver North from buying AK-47 assault rifles from IMES for the Contras.

The integration of the Belgian side of this operation with Great Britain was underlined by one British arms manufacturer. “When I was in the Brussels office of Société Générale, I felt I was in the British Colonial office,” he said. “I guess it goes back to Cecil Rhodes, when the Belgians, with their colonies in Africa, cooperated so well with the British.” This source pointed to Hervé de Carmoy, a French Trilateral Commission member, who, in the 1980s, was the international director of the British Midland Bank. Operating through Mid-

land International Trade Services, de Carmoy, with the backing of Kissinger Associates, was engaged in financing massive arms shipments to Iraq. In 1988, six months before the end of the Iran-Iraq War, de Carmoy became co-chairman of Société Générale, representing the largest French shareholding of the time. In this capacity he traveled several times to Baghdad on business related to the substantial amount of dealings Société Générale had with Iraq, including large munitions sales by PRB. De Carmoy later sold PRB to the British firm Astra Holdings, whose board included directors close to the Thatcher wing of the Conservative Party.

Another major arms-trading firm was the tobacco company, Casalee. Owned by John Bredenkamp, a British citizen who learned the art of sanctions-busting when he began smuggling weapons in the 1960s for Ian Smith’s Rhodesia. While based in Antwerp, Casalee was a major supplier of munitions to both Iran and Iraq throughout the 1980s. By the end of the 1980s, Casalee moved his base to Britain, where Bredenkamp is said to be within Margaret Thatcher’s close circle of friends. Today, Casalee has been taken over by American International Tobacco Co., whose board of directors includes Lawrence Eagleburger, former secretary of state in the Bush administration, who has returned to his roost at Kissinger Associates.

More mysterious deaths

Cools’s murder was not the last of the mysterious threats and deaths. In February 1995, a small Brussels shopkeeper received over his fax machine a document that appeared to deal with “negotiations to rebuild the Iraqi armaments industry,” according to Italian press reports at the time. The bewildered shopkeeper turned the fax over to the authorities. It was later discovered to have been mistakenly sent from the offices of one Alfons Puelinck, who was put under arrest. It was also revealed that Puelinck was involved in the Augusta kickback scheme, but his accomplice was a Syrian arms dealer, Mohammed Bashi, with whom he was partners in the company Kasma, and whose Swiss bank accounts were said to have been used to transfer the kickbacks.

That same year, Belgian Gen. Jacques Lefebvre died, officially declared a suicide. In 1993, in Italy, Sergio Castellari, was found dead. Castellari had been a director of Italy’s Public Industry Ministry. Although also officially declared a suicide, that decision was reversed one year later, when his death was discovered to have been linked to the Augusta affair.

Despite attempts to separate the Cools and the Augusta corruption cases from the pedophile case, one British arms dealer told *EIR*, “I don’t think this pedophile affair is going to be confined to Belgium. Remember, there are at least two leading British politicians who had been involved in arms deals and are pedophiles.” Although names were not mentioned, he said that at least one of them was currently holding a very high position in the European Commission in Brussels.