

# The crash: Unanswered questions abound

by Rüdiger Rumpf and Jeffrey Steinberg

Shortly after midnight, on Sunday, Aug. 31, Princess Diana and her friend Dodi al-Fayed left the Ritz Hotel on Place Vendôme in Paris, in a Mercedes Benz 280-S. The driver of the vehicle, Henri Paul, was the deputy security director of the hotel, which is owned by Dodi al-Fayed's father. Paul was a highly trained driver and a skilled pilot, who had served in the French Air Force. The fourth passenger in the car was Trevor Rees-Jones, a bodyguard employed by the al-Fayed family.

At approximately 12:35 a.m., the Mercedes crashed into a post inside a tunnel under Place de l'Alma, along the Seine River. The driver and Dodi al-Fayed were killed instantly. Princess Diana and Rees-Jones were both seriously injured. After some effort, they were extracted from the wrecked car, and brought to Pitié Salpêtrière Hospital. At approximately 4 a.m., doctors pronounced Princess Diana dead. Rees-Jones is expected to live, but it is unclear at this time whether he will be able to provide any details about what happened in that crucial 35-minute period, from the time that the Mercedes left the Ritz Hotel, chased by a group of paparazzi photo journalists in cars and on motorcycles, and the point that the crash occurred.

These are the verified facts, known so far to *EIR*: Virtually all of the news coverage in the American and European press in the five days following the tragic car crash has been shamelessly irresponsible. Most of the purported details of the tragedy reported in the media have been discredited altogether, or placed in doubt by contrary eyewitness accounts.

Lyndon LaRouche underscored this problem in an interview with "EIR Talks" on Sept. 2. "There is a smell of a homicide case," he said, "and probably even willful murder, willful assassination. We'll just have to wait and see; but it's going to be difficult, because the cover story, lies, mythologies, and fairy tales about this are going to abound. It takes a cool head under these circumstances, to follow a case like this."

*EIR*'s European security specialists, familiar with the Paris streets and the tunnel where the tragedy played out, have conducted a preliminary assessment of the known facts. What emerges from that review is that the most crucial facts are still unknown, and, until they are established, it is all but impossible to come up with a satisfactory conclusion about what occurred. It is impossible to determine whether the incident was a highly professional assassination or a tragic accident. All that is appropriate at this time, is to highlight the anomalies and raise the crucial questions.

**The final hours:** At approximately 8:30 p.m. on Saturday,

Aug. 30—four hours before the crash—Princess Diana and Dodi al-Fayed were seen shopping on the Champs-Élysées, after which they dined at the Ritz Hotel. Earlier in the day, they seemed unconcerned about the media swarms, as they were out and about in the city streets. At the conclusion of the meal, the Land Rover in which they had been traveling around Paris earlier in the day, left the hotel with al-Fayed's regular driver behind the wheel. Apparently, this was an attempt to draw the group of 30 paparazzi, gathered in front of the hotel, into pursuing the decoy vehicle, while the Princess and al-Fayed left in a hotel car by a rear exit. What prompted this switch in security procedures?

The decoy operation failed, and not surprisingly. According to several of the paparazzi who were detained by the police following the crash, they regularly received tips on Princess Diana's whereabouts, travel routes, and so on, from "secret service," and, "British tabloids" were also regularly providing them with advance details about the Princess's itinerary.

**The driver:** Accusations that the driver, Paul, was drunk, have been a subject of great controversy. The al-Fayed family has said that they will request a second autopsy, to determine the amount of alcohol in his bloodstream. By profile, Paul was an experienced, professional security specialist, with no prior record of drinking problems. His last assignment in the French Air Force was as a captain, in charge of security at the air base in Rochefort, Brittany. A longtime friend of Paul's, Marcel Douzier, while categorically rejecting the idea that Paul had been drinking the night of the tragedy, observed, "There must have been something irregular."

**The chase:** After leaving the Ritz Hotel, the Mercedes made a series of turns, eventually turning at the Place de la Concorde into a straight stretch of road approximately 2,200 meters long, leading into the tunnel under Place de l'Alma, where the crash occurred. At the entrance to the tunnel, the road makes a slight turn to the left and slopes down about four meters. Contrary to initial reports, which identified the car as a Mercedes 600 model, the vehicle was a model 280-S, which has 200 horsepower—i.e., it is not a very fast vehicle, especially compared to the 600. To have achieved the high speeds reported in much of the media, Paul would have needed to accelerate the car throughout the entire straight-away, leading into the left curve and downward descent. Yet, most of the motorcycles and scooters chasing the Mercedes were incapable of keeping up with even the slower model. At high speeds, even the slight curve and downward descent into the tunnel would pose a challenge to a skilled driver. If this account is accurate, what provoked the flight?

What actually occurred during those minutes, is one of the key unanswered questions. Some eyewitnesses have reported seeing a motorcycle cutting in front of the Mercedes just before the left curve; other witnesses have reported that they heard a noise resembling a gunshot, seconds before the crash. Yet other witnesses have reported that blinding lights flashed shortly before the crash.