

Exiled British spy surrenders to France

Charged with disclosing state secrets, man said in 1997 that Britain assisted in assassination plot

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON - Former British spy David Shayler has stopped running.

Shayler has been in France for almost three years and came home Monday, walking into police custody. He had infuriated Britain's spy agencies with his allegations of incompetence and illegal plots.

No sooner had he been charged with disclosing state secrets than the burly, blunt-speaking former agent was vowing to dig further into his revelations. He claims Britain helped plot to assassinate Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

"I feel good to be back in my own country. I feel good to be free again, and as soon as possible I'm going to pursue the

Gadhafi plot," Shayler told journalists after he was released on bail.

Shayler had worked for Britain's MI5 internal security agency since 1994. He fled to France after an August 1997 article in London's Mail on Sunday newspaper printed his disclosures. He insisted he revealed the information out of patriotism.

The British government has denied the Gadhafi claims.

Shayler returned by ferry from the French port of Calais in a high-profile crossing accompanied by reporters, TV crews and his girlfriend, Annie Machon. Police confronted him as he stepped off the boat in Dover.

"He feels that he needs to

come back and vindicate himself," an emotional Machon told reporters. She said it was "scandalous" that he should be arrested when "all he's done is tell the truth about a very secretive government organization."

Shayler was charged with two counts of breaking the Official Secrets Act and released after surrendering his passport.

The charges were not connected to the Gadhafi allegations, but to disclosures published in the 1997 Mail article. In that article, Shayler said MI5 kept files on politicians, including Home Secretary Jack Straw and former Conservative Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath.

The article also said MI5 tapped the telephone of Peter Mandelson, now Britain's Northern Ireland secretary.

The charges carry a maximum jail sentence of four years. Shayler is to appear before a Bow Street Magistrates Court on Friday for a preliminary hearing.

In a separate civil suit filed in December by the British government, Shayler is accused of breach of copyright and breach of contract for releasing secret documents.

Shayler told reporters that by failing to charge him over the Gadhafi claims, the government is "quite clearly backing down from what was a very draconian and very repressive position."

"I wonder whether this is an attempt to prevent the jury from hearing the whole story," he

said.

In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corp. aired in 1998, Shayler alleged that Britain's external intelligence agency, MI6, had been involved in a plan to kill Gadhafi.

At the time, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook dismissed Shayler's allegations as "pure fantasy."

The Foreign Office, which is responsible for MI6, offered no comment on the charges against Shayler.

In exile, Shayler wrote a novel, "The Organization," which he described as "a gritty thriller" about spies, sex and soccer.

He was required to submit a manuscript to the government to comply with a 1997 injunction barring him from disclosing any information he obtained while working for MI5. Last month, government censors accepted the manuscript unchanged, officials said.

Shayler spent four months in Paris' La Sante prison in 1998 after being arrested on a British warrant.

A French appeals court rejected an extradition bid.

Shayler said Monday he hopes to use European human rights laws to challenge any charges against him.

"It's an absolute nonsense that in this day and age in Britain we have a law which makes it a crime to report a crime," he said.

Disrupters of peace in Mideast arrested

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM - Israeli and Palestinian security forces have arrested 23 Arabs who planned major attacks to disrupt the peace process, including at least one suspect reportedly linked to Osama bin Laden, the United States' most wanted terror suspect, a senior Israeli security official said Monday.

The suspects, who include 20 Palestinians and three Israeli Arabs, all belong to militant Islamic groups, said the official.

Israel's Shin Bet arrested 10 Palestinians and the three Israelis. Yasser Arafat's security forces arrested another 10.

An official in Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office confirmed the arrests and said the prime minister saw the act as a "very important step" in combating terrorism.

The two officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, did not say when the arrests took place.

Israeli radio reports said the men were arrested over a period of months, some dating back to April.

A spokeswoman for Col. Jibril Rajoub, the Palestinian security chief in the West Bank, said he was abroad and unavailable for comment.

Last week, the U.S. State Department issued a travel advisory warning Americans living in Israel and the Palestinian areas to be alert for attacks.

U.S. embassy spokesman Larry Schwartz said he did not know if there was any link between the arrests and the advisory.

Israeli radio reports said attacks planned by those arrested included launching a missile at a Jewish settlement in the West Bank and abducting soldiers.

Israel radio identified one of the ringleaders as Nabil Okal, a resident of the Gaza Strip.

The radio reported that Hamas, the largest militant

Islamic group operating here, sent Okal to Pakistan three years ago to study terror techniques with bin Laden's organization.

Bin Laden, a Saudi militant who is on the U.S. wanted list for the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that claimed 224 lives, is believed to be based in Afghanistan.

The announcement of the arrests comes amid intense diplomatic efforts in the region to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks after the failure of last month's Camp David summit.

That summit collapsed mainly over the fate of Jerusalem, particularly of the holy sites in the Old City.

On Monday, Israeli police and Palestinian guards scuffled at the ultra-sensitive al-Aqsa mosque compound in the Old City.

Two Palestinian guards were hospitalized.

Police said the fighting erupted when a Palestinian tried to force his car onto the mosque compound, the third holiest site to Muslims. Two Palestinians felt ill, fainted and were evacuated to a hospital, Jerusalem spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby said.

Palestinians who witnessed the scuffle said it began when two guards had escorted security chief Rajoub, who was in Jerusalem in the morning, off the site and tried to return, but were prevented by Israeli police, who demanded they show identification.

The Palestinian witnesses said police began beating one of the guards when he refused to show identification, saying his status as a guard exempted him.

That drew other Palestinians into the fight.

"They beat our people for no reason," said the director of the mosque, Adnan Husseini. "This is a clear message that this city won't be quiet unless the Israeli occupation will end."



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