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Trial reveals S. Africa's role in Seychelles coup

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The testimony of Col. Michael Hoare before a South African court on last November's attempted coup in the Seychelles has removed any doubts about the central role of the South African government in planning the failed operation.

While the aging mercenary's allegations were scarcely a surprise, they have nevertheless embarrassed the white minority government in Pretoria. They have also served to raise important questions about cooperation between the U.S. and South Africa in Pretoria's undeclared war against neighboring African states.

Hoare and 42 other mercenaries, primarily South Africans, are on trial in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. They are accused of hijacking an Air India jetliner in a bid to escape from the Seychelles after they were caught trying to smuggle weapons through airport customs in Victoria, the island nation's capital.

Hoare, who led the mini-invasion force, told the court that the South African government had approved the coup attempt and had provided weapons and a training ground in the northern Transvaal to the assault force. Senior representatives of the South African National Intelligence Service (formerly BOSS), he added, had told him that the South African cabinet had approved the coup attempt against the government of Albert Rene in the Seychelles. Hoare also admitted that he had met with an agent of the CIA in Pretoria before the operation in an attempt to enlist U.S. support.

Hoare's admission of contact with the CIA has resulted in a flood of press speculation that the U.S. may be actively involved in a variety of South African covert operations against African nations hostile to the apartheid state. Angola and Mozambique have both charged that the CIA has assisted South African efforts to destabilize their governments by backing internal opposition movements.

A number of observers in the U.S. have been puzzled by South Africa's willingness to permit Hoare to make such damaging allegations about Pretoria's involvement in the coup attempt. However, Hoare's testimony was essentially

only a repetition of statements already made by Martin Dolinчек, a senior South African intelligence officer who was captured in the Seychelles during the coup attempt. Dolinчек told a UN commission, dispatched in March to the Seychelles to investigate the coup attempt, that top South African military and intelligence officials were involved in preparing the operation.

Dolinчек is scheduled to go on trial in the Seychelles in June along with six other members of the assault force who were also abandoned by their fleeing compatriots. According to reports from Victoria, Dolinчек says he will become a state witness in the upcoming trial and "tell all" in exchange for asylum in the Seychelles.

If Dolinчек were to play such a role, it could be a devastating blow to South Africa's covert operations, because of Dolinчек's relatively high position in the South African security apparatus. An expoliceman, Dolinчек joined BOSS in 1968. During his fifteen years with the intelligence organization, he was involved in operations in Zimbabwe as well as in South Africa.

Further, Dolinчек may have been involved also with BOSS's infamous "Z-Squad," a special unit of the agency reportedly formed to terrorize and murder opponents of the apartheid regime. According to the book, "Inside BOSS," by the South African agent Gordon Winter, the Z-Squad often carried out attacks on targeted individuals under the guise of "Scorpio," supposedly an extreme right-wing group. One such target, Winter claims, was the banned academic Richard Turner of the University of Natal. Turner was shot dead in his home by an "unknown sniper" in January 1978. Dolinчек, according to the magazine Africa Now, was the only BOSS official ever to visit Turner at his home to investigate his attitude on politics.

Pretoria's concern over Dolinчек's revelations was underlined last week when South African police staged a raid on three Johannesburg newspapers in an effort to confiscate reporters' notebooks and documents pertaining to Dolinчек.

In addition, according to the Rand Daily Mail, two South African intelligence agents were sent to the Seychelles in March to ascertain how much information Dolinчек had revealed to Seychelles officials. There are even widespread rumors that Prime Minister P.W. Botha may be seeking to arrange an exchange of three young members of the African National Congress (ANC) who have been condemned to death for Dolinчек and the other captured mercenaries.

Dolinчек's confessions have also embarrassed the government of Kenya, which in recent years has been establishing increasingly close security ties to the U.S. The captured South African agent admitted that after the mercenaries seized control of the Seychelles capital of Victoria, the ex-premier of the country, James Mancham, was scheduled to be flown into Victoria from Kenya, along with Kenyan troops.

Mancham, who is currently based in London, was deposed in 1977. He was replaced by France Albert Rene, who quickly reversed Mancham's policy of maintaining close ties to South Africa. Since taking office, Rene has adopted a nonaligned foreign policy, and he has introduced economic policies aimed at lessening the tiny island chain's almost total economic dependence on tourism.

Although there is no concrete proof of an active U.S. role in the coup attempt against President Rene's government, suspicions have been raised because of the historically close ties between the CIA and Hoare, as well as between the CIA and the South African military and intelligence services.

Hoare first achieved notoriety in the 1960s during the CIA-orchestrated operation to establish Mobutu Sese Seko as the chief of state in newly independent Zaire. It was in Zaire, then the Congo, that the myth of "independent," swash-buckling mercenaries was created to conceal the extent of imperialist involvement against independent nations in Africa. The myth—that these forces were somehow acting on their own—has been nurtured by South Africa, Britain, the U.S. and France, all of which have been