

British mercenaries planned assassination of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan

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Confidential documents leaked to the *Sunday Times* reveal that a mercenary outfit with close links to the Special Air Service (SAS) and British Intelligence offered to assassinate Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan.

The fee proposed by Aims Ltd, of Salisbury, Wiltshire to the Turkish government for the assassination was £5.75 million, according to the *Sunday Times* August 22 edition.

Ocalan was abducted from Kenya in February and flown to Turkey, where a show trial in June condemned him to death by hanging. Aims Ltd was one of two British firms that provided military equipment and training facilities to the Turkish special forces who captured Ocalan. The two companies were paid hundreds of thousands of pounds for their role in preparing the ground for his kidnap, according to the *Times* Insight team.

Aims Ltd made the proposal to assassinate Ocalan after it was asked by the Turkish government in 1995 to advise on how best to neutralise him. In a detailed 11-page proposal, the company offered to track and pinpoint Ocalan and arrange for his murder or kidnap. Former SAS soldiers were to be used to train a Turkish hit squad to carry out the attack. The assassination proposal, code-named "Melody", was presented as a simpler alternative to kidnapping Ocalan. According to Aims Ltd, kidnapping and a public trial "would make incredible public relations and prestige for Turkey worldwide. But [it] of course would be a much more dangerous and complicated operation." "Having done considerable research on this, I have come to the conclusion that, when the operation is successfully completed, there will be an outcry worldwide over this matter," it goes on to warn. The simplest option, "of course, is the disposal of the party in a given area".

Noting the possibility of opposition from Turkey's neighbours, Aims suggests that "consideration should be given to the option of cutting off [their] water supplies".

Aims also sought advice on whether the Turkish government would be willing to accept "civilian casualties" as part of its plan to target Ocalan.

"In the event," the *Sunday Times* comments, "the Turks decided against murder. Instead, with the help of the two British firms, as well as Americans and Israelis, it embarked on a plan to kidnap Ocalan and return him to Turkey for trial."

The newspaper also draws attention to the role played by Spire Industries in providing equipment and intelligence to track Ocalan's movements and spy on him.

While the Kurdish leader was staying in Damascus, Syria, miniature cameras "tracked him to the house. They watched him in his bedroom, they even watched him in the toilet," according to a source. Spire is an offshoot of PSI, which two years ago allegedly supplied armoured vehicles and riot control equipment to Indonesia that was used against student demonstrators, according to the *Times*. Sources said that Aims had received at least £123,000 for providing assistance to the Turks, while Spire was paid as much as £650,000.

The Insight team's revelations are embarrassing for the British government for two reasons. Firstly, they prove British involvement in the kidnapping of Ocalan, hitherto attributed only to the Turkish government, the CIA and the Israeli security service Mossad. Secondly, they point to the growing use of private security firms as an extended arm of the secret services MI6 and MI5.

Last May, the Blair Labour government was embroiled in a scandal over whether it had collaborated with the mercenary outfit, Sandline International, in

organising the counter-coup that deposed the military regime of Major Johnny Paul Koroma in Sierra Leone.

Though United Nations sanctions imposed in October 1997 officially banned the supply of arms and oil products to the country, Sandline sold £1.5 million in guns and supplies to the deposed Kabbah government and planned a further sale worth £3.5 million. After an investigation by the Customs and Excise Department, on April 24 Sandline International's solicitors sent a confidential letter to Foreign Secretary Robin Cook stating that the firm had collaborated with leading Foreign Office personnel and Ministry of Defence officials, as well as representatives of the US government. Attempts by the government to deny this statement collapsed, forcing it to shift tack and state instead that it had been correct to restore a “democratically elected” president. At least 10 such mercenary firms were said at the time to operate out of London, with overseas contracts worth more than £100 million and over 8,000 soldiers on their books. No doubt these figure will have grown over the past year.



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