not going to be long before further memos prove that the Iran arms deal and the Contra arms smuggling are one and the same.

IT'S been a thin week for the Contras altogether. First, a judge in Miami gave permission for two journalists, Tony Avirgan and Martha Honey, to pursue their lawsuit against certain named members of the American foreign policy elite. The suit claims damages for injuries suffered by the pair when a bomb went off at an Eden Pastora press conference. Avirgan and Honey charge that the bomb was placed by Pastora's Contra rivals, armed and trained by the CIA. They also claim that the Contras wanted Pastora out of the way in order to take over the drug-running route on Nicaragua's southern front.

The Contra involvement in the narcotics trade is something that is just waiting to be fully exposed. In a few weeks time, a certain film will appear on a certain network and cause a certain amount of acute, not to say catastrophic, embarrassment.

This news was bad enough for the Contras and their friends and protectors. Worse was the announcement that Arturo Cruz was resigning from the Contra directorate. It had become very clear to the poor old Cruz in the last few weeks that he was doomed to lose every argument with the old Somozieta hatchetmen who hold all the real power in the exile leadership. His time as a sort of democratic figleaf has not been a happy one. His departure will redden many faces at the State Department and in the offices of the cold-war liberal magazines.

Without Cruz, an ex-Sandinista, they have no case for saying that the Contras are a response to the revolution betrayed'. And, since the Contras also knew that Cruz was their only ticket to centrist support, their commitment to an outright counter-revolutionary conservative strategy is thereby demonstrated as extremely strong. It was for the sake of these men, death-squad merchants, drug smugglers and unrepentant hirelings of the ancien régime, that Reagan and his advisors were prepared to violate the American Constitution.

Public bafflement is not the same as public indifference, and the White House will be making a mistake if it tries to sit the whole thing out. I am reminded of the old controversy about whether or not there was 'collusion' over Suez. It may not be long before the Washington Post can throw caution to the winds and start its front page with that famous Tribune headline of 1956: 'They knew'.

Our first advertising feature will appear in the issue of 27 February
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POLITICAL PUBLICATIONS
is back . . .

The government has handed back material from the five Secret Society films seized from BBC Scotland in January. The Special Branch are now settling down to a long investigation of how the BBC-2 Zircon programme was made. In the interests of speed and national security, DUNCAN CAMPBELL offers a handy chronology

IN THE HEAT and fury of the last ten days, the air in the Westminster lobbies has been heavy with talk of treason, treachery and soon-to-be-brought charges against Duncan Campbell and his 'moles' under Section One of the Official Secrets Act — the espionage law, not merely the discredited anti-leaking law, Section Two. From just a few hours before the House of Commons emergency debate on the Special Branch raid in Glasgow, rumours have regularly been smeared around lobbyists and onto front pages, predicting a round-up of 'moles', and commensurate legal vengeance on the New Statesman.

But nothing has happened. Even senior Special Branch officers — whose honest labour of investigation could never have hoped to keep pace with the breathless drama of last week's front pages — quickly described the rumour campaign as 'malicious, unfounded and ridiculous'. After just a few hours on front pages, predicting a round-up of 'moles', and commensurate legal vengeance on the New Statesman.

But even the name Zircon is in itself a breach of security. It is a stringent and long-standing rule of allocating highly classified codenames that they should never, ever, bear any relation to the project which they describe. With occasional justification, this rule is broken — the most celebrated breach was Winston Churchill's selection of Operation OVER LORD in 1944 as the codename for the Allied re-invasion of Europe.

But Zircon goes too far, and without any justification, in this, the most sensitive area of all intelligence work. Zircon is a gemstone and mineral of the element Zirconium; it is, according to geological dictionaries, an 'accessory mineral of more acid igneous rocks'. One such rock is called Zircon.

In 1984, ...
July 1986

On 2 July, Jolyon and I had lunch with the former Defence Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Frank Cooper. GCHQ’s new intelligence satellite was discussed at length, and Sir Frank agreed to a film interview on the condition that he was fully informed about the exact nature of the programme. He was so informed, and no doubt also passed this news on to his old Ministry. The name Zircon wasn’t mentioned to Sir Frank, however, to avoid a repeat of the embarrassment it had caused Sir Ronald Mason. Two weeks later, on camera (and as used in the untransmitted Zircon programme), Cooper told us that he thought the satellite’s major purpose was to keep up appearances with the Americans.

The day after the interview with Sir Frank Cooper, Thursday 17 July, as the Special Branch raids on the New Statesman had revealed, I had lunch with the Attorney General, Sir Michael Havers. The year before, at a first meeting, Havers had asked me if I would take seriously any request from him not to reveal something which he considered would damage a valid security interest. I said I would — provided the security interest could be properly explained. He agreed.

When I met Sir Michael Haver on that day, six weeks had passed since the Ministry of Defence had been informed of our programme on Zircon. By 17 July, the Ministry’s two most senior executives knew, and had passed on, the salient facts about the Zircon enquiry. If the matter seriously disturbed the Ministry (as much as they now say), an Officials Secret Act enquiry should already have been launched. As the senior government Law Officer, Havers would know of the enquiry. If the leak wasn’t serious, there would be no enquiry, and Havers wouldn’t know about the programme, Sir Michael Havers didn’t know.

I nevertheless told Sir Michael that many of the Secret Society programmes would be sensitive, and not be pleasing to some of his colleagues. But he accepted this assurance, which was a continuation of the previous undertaking I had given him. I had told Sir Michael that one of the programmes was particularly sensitive and would be likely to ‘send Cheltenham into orbit’ (a reference to GCHQ). Sir Michael acknowledged with a smile that GCHQ, like M15, were absurdly obsessed with secrecy. We exchanged jokes about a senior M15 official.

August 1986

In August 1986, BBC-2 Controller Graeme MacDonald officially unveiled the Secret Society series. The launch provoked anxiety in the Corporation about the Official Secrets Act. I therefore wrote to the Head of Television (in Scotland) about the Act, noting my conversations with and undertakings to Sir Michael. The programmes would not damage security, I said, and:

I had met the Attorney General and he was amenable in principle to appearing in the ‘powers’ programme … The Attorney’s willingness to appear, knowing full well the likely nature of the Secret Society programme, should clearly indicate that prosecution under the Official Secrets Act was not a possibility.

Copies of this letter have been taken by the Special Branch from my house, and from the BBC.

September 1986

In September 1986, we interviewed two American experts on space intelligence, Dr John Pike and Prof. Jeffrey Richelson. They provided detailed and convincing explanations why the nature of a project like the Zircon satellite could never be concealed (an opinion confirmed this week by a former Deputy Director of the CIA itself). This evidence was of particular importance, as it was for our programme to show BBC viewers that the revelation of Zircon’s existence does not damage national security. The American experts more than fulfilled that task.

October 1986

Soon after 7 October, the Ministry of Defence finally took notice of our enquiries. On that day, the Defence Select Committee Chair Robert Sheldon MP. Sheldon had been told nothing about Zircon, he agreed — and so the Zircon programme’s thesis was then finally proven. Sheldon naturally immediately initiated enquiries with the Defence Ministry, who had to admit that Zircon had by then been under way for almost four years. From Sheldon, the Ministry soon learned that the whole purpose of our programme was to expose the breach of the ‘Chevaline’ agreement to disclose the costs of major defence projects to parliament. So Defence Ministry Permanent Secretary Sir Clive Whitemore placed a telephone call to the BBC.

But despite the new level of official anxiety, there was still no Official Secrets Act inquiry. On 20 October 1986, I had a lengthy telephone call with Sir Michael Havers about other matters. He did not raise anything to do with Zircon, or the Secret Society series.

November-December 1986

The final seal of official acceptance on the programme came from the BBC’s most senior legal and editorial officials. At three meetings from 10 October onwards, the BBC solicitor reviewed the Zircon programme and raised no objections. On 6 November, BBC Assistant Director General Alan Protheroe viewed a ‘rough cut’ in Glasgow. The national security implications were discussed at length, but Protheroe pronounced himself ‘satisfied’ that it would not damage national security. The few editorial and legal concerns, all based on security grounds. He then authorised the making of a final videotape, which he viewed in Glasgow on 4 December. The factual basis (as opposed to the security implications) of the Zircon programme was once again examined. Then it was ‘cleared’ for BBC transmission. I never had any problem with Zipper’ (the BBC name for the Zircon programme), Protheroe said ‘it’ll make a great first programme.

It is now apparent that the banning of the Zircon programme stemmed entirely from Defence Ministry and GCHQ pressure, and not from the normal exercise of the BBC’s judgement on security matters. And, in December 1986, despite the Defence Ministry’s full knowledge, the government hadn’t even whispered about any alleged breach of the Official Secrets Act. They still hadn’t launched a security investigation.

What is now taking place is not an inquiry into supposed Official Secrets Act offences, but an officially decreed charade of consultation and public relations. Meanwhile, inside Whitehall, the real problem now for Cabinet Ministers is to ensure that any moles that may be found turn up in some other Minister’s Department.