

SECRETWARS

WHO'S PAYING THE BILL

ast March, Godfrey Osei, a Ghanian citizen living in New York, dropped from sight taking with him some knowledge eight American mercenaries would dearly love to have: The source of the \$200,000 to \$500,000 with which he hired them, leased a boat and bought weapons for an attempt to overthrow the Marxist president of the West African country of Ghana, Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings.

At presstime, four of these mercenaries are in jail in Brazil counting the days until the Brazilian courts decide whether or not to extradite them to Argentina, the country where the arms, ammunition, landing crafts and other materiel for the aborted overthrow were purchased. The other four American mercenaries, who were also arrested in Brazil, escaped from prison in December. According to a relative of one of the escapees, the four believed that they would have been made "scapegoats for screw up by Argentine intelligence."

Rather than go down quietly as casualties in yet another Reaganera secret war, the men have loudly claimed White House sanction of their plot and have hinted that the National Security Council was somehow involved. While sources at the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence say there is no evidence to support such claims, the mercenaries have racked their memories for clues of United States involvement in the fiasco that ended with their arrest in Rio last March on charges of attempting to smuggle weapons into Brazil.

The U.S. is as likely a candidate as any to launch an attempt to overthrow the Marxist-leaning Rawlings, but there is no proof of it and other governments also would welcome a change in Ghana's government. Since he took over as president of Ghana for the second time in 1982, Rawlings has cultivated friendships with leftist African states, has befriended and accepted aid from Cuba, East Germany and Libya's Muammar Al-Qaddafi and reportedly has let the Cubans train his palace guard and allowed the Libyan troops to set up a base 60 kilometers outside Accra, the capital. Last year, his police arrested a large number of CIA agents and informants in an intelligence coup that unravelled the CIA's network in West Africa, later swapping eight of them in return for a cousin who was imprisoned in the United States.

And with the recent revelations of the White House's National Security Council involvement in the Iranian-Contra arms scandal, this attempted overthrow could be viewed as another manifestation of the "Reagan Doctine's" thrust against leftist states in strategic parts of the world. Many news reports are now detailing U.S. involvement in secret efforts to finance the fighting in the West African country of Angola, as well as the not too secret efforts in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Nicaragua.

The mercenaries were recruited in November and December of 1985 for a quick job that would pay \$10,000. Osei, helped by a Texan named Ted Bishop and a soldier of fortune from New York named Bob Foti, rounded up the weapons and a motley crew of adventurers, most of whom had served as mercenaries with the Rhodesian government before that government's defeat and ouster in 1980. One was a graduate student in international relations from San Francisco State University, another two were working as strike breakers in an Ohio coal mine, one was a parachutist who had been a technical adviser to the movie "Red Dawn," and two were Special Forces veterans who worked in Central America on a "Security" job for a New York dealer in night vision equipment, bullet proof vests and other paraphernalia of war

At least two of the men believed Osei and Bishop met at another company called Bophuthatswana International, which has offices on Madison Avenue in New York City. That the company's name would come up in connection with anything is a bit of a curiosity, since it went out of business in 1982. It was formed in 1980 to be the U.S. promotion arm of Bophuthatswana, a South African tribal homeland. The Company's founder, a commodities trader named Ronald Greenwald, is the same Rabbi Ronnie Greenwald who made 25 trips to the Soviet Union to engineer the release of Jewish dissident. Anatoly Shchransky. But Greenwald, who also met with a KGB agent in South Africa in 1980 to consider swapping Shcharansky for jailed black nationalist Nelson Mandela, says he never heard of Osei and can't imagine how his company became known to the American mercenaries.

"It's outrageous Maybe somebody took one of our cards," he speculates.

supposed "contact" of Bishop at the company, a broker named Solomon Schwartz, says that while he knows Bishop, the mercenaries claim that he was a contact is preposterious. "I do know Ted, but I don't know what that has to do with anything. He did call me from Argentina quite a few times, but that was because we were working on a coffee deal."

Even Osei's identity is in question. He may or may not be the same Godfrey Osei who was jailed in 1983 for an attempt to overthrow President Rawlings. He apparently claimed to be and had been living in New York for two years while trying to raise money for an attempt to overthrow Rawlings.

Osei had little success until mid-1985. About then, he came up with \$175,000. As planning got underway with the weird assortment of American mercenaries, Osei managed to lay his hands on an additional \$325,000, according to people familiar with the scheme. Where it came from, nobody knows.

About the time Osei came up with the money, however, the CIA was working its way out of the mess that had compromised its West African network of informants. Although it is an interesting coincidence that the money was delivered at this time, there's no proof that the agency, or the White House's National Security Council, as he has been alleged, was involved.

After being recruited, the mercenaries say they met in Miami where their passports were stamped with four-year Argentine visas. Then they were flown to Buenos Aires (one of the special forces may have come directly from El Salvador), where they stayed for a couple of weeks in a local hotel

Bishop and Osei arranged for the leasing of a boat, a sea-going tub Nobistor, and the purchase of 150-200 rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, grenades, and ammunition from Argentina's government munitions industry. From another source, they bought seven rubber boats and motors and loaded them on the Nobistor without declaring them to customs authorities.

They set sail for Ghana. Their plans called for meeting a boat filled with about 80 Ghanaian revolutionaries, landing near Accra and storming the governmental compound, rousting President Rawl-

ings and liberating several CIA informants apparently still in prison there. But instead of landing in Ghana, the Nobistor landed near Rio de Janiero, purportedly because of engine trouble. Federal police boarded, searched the ship and found the weapons. The eight mercenaries were arrested, tried for smuggling and sentenced to terms of four and five years last June. In September their convictions were overturned on appeal, and the remaining four prisoners now await extradition to Argentina.

"Did you ever have one of those years when everything goes wrong?" wrote one of now escaped prisoners, Timothy M. Carmody, to a relative in San Francisco. "1986 is definitely the year of the Brazlian cockroach . . . The prison gang that runs this place is called simply Commando, so guess who gives them some technical classes? . . . the rats are enormous."

However absurd their plight, the mercenaries have raised some interesting questions. What were two U.S. Army Special Forces veterans doing among them? What had they been doing in Central America? Why would Bophuthatswana International's name come up? How does one have a four-year visa to Argentina stamped in one's passport in Miami? Where did the money come from? And was this failed operation another inept component of the Reagan Doctrine?

Perhaps only Osei knows the answers, and he is missing.

"I got my own idea where money came from," says Bishop the Texan who helped him buy the weapons. Bishop speculates that the money to overthrow Ghana may have been pilfered from the Ghanaian national treasury. But until Osei turns up, that's just another theory.

Pete Carey is 1986 Pulitzer Prize winner for International Journalism.

A DAWN PRIZE WINNING JOURNA A BY PULITZER PRIZE WINNING FOURNA BY PULITZER PRIZE WINNING JOURNA BY PULITZER PRIZE WINNING JOURNA BY PULITZER PRIZE WINNING JOURNA

DAWN/JANUARY 1987