

Big Hands, Big Ideas

By Eugene L. Meyer
and William A. Elsen

Washington Post Staff Writers

"With these hands, I will destroy," Marshall Soghoian often proclaimed, according to a longtime associate.

Soghoian, 46, an electronics expert charged by the government with being an unregistered foreign agent for the African country of Zambia, is described as having big hands and big ideas.

But former associates and members of Soghoian's family, interviewed since his arrest by the FBI Aug. 29, paint a confused portrait of the man.

Soghoian himself has maintained public silence on the case on the advice of his attorneys.

Soghoian was indicted here last week on a charge of possessing an illegal electronic bugging device, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Harold J. Sullivan indicated that the government expects additional indictments.

In arguments presented at Soghoian's first bond hearing, Sullivan said that government evidence indicated "potential violations" by Soghoian of two espionage provisions of the U.S. Code.

The government of Zambia has acknowledged that Soghoian acted as its agent in purchasing annually about \$1 million worth of U.S. electronic equipment for shipment to Zambia. Prior to shipment, the equipment was stored in a Hyattsville warehouse leased by Zambia. Soghoian recently made a \$17,000 cash payment to extend the lease through next July 31.

Soghoian was born in Binghamton, N.Y., the son of Shnorig Soghoian, a refugee from Turkish massacres in Armenia prior to World War I, and her husband, Zadoor who died eight years ago. They moved to Hopewell, Va., when Marshall was two months old and to Richmond five years later.

He was the oldest of five children, all of whom finished college, and his parents owned and operated a five-and-dime store in Richmond.

Marshall, his mother recalls, "used to fix radios

Reaching From Here to Zambia

when he was 10 or 12. He loved radios. Then he started on television sets, then closed circuits and things like that."

Clara Andonian, a cousin who lives in Silver Spring, remembers that "as a child, he had his chemistry set in his basement . . . He had high ambitions as a child in the electronics field."

Soghoian graduated from the University of Richmond with a B.S. degree in chemistry and physics, and a growing extra-curricular interest in electronics.

He started a Richmond company, Research Instruments Corp., and held a variety of contracts, from supplying sound systems for public schools to installing closed-circuit television on the U.S.S. Forrestal, a Navy aircraft carrier. He has told associates that he helped build the Armed Forces radio network in Europe after World War II.

Mort Herrick, who worked with Soghoian on several projects during the 13 years ending in 1969, remembers him in the 1950s as a freelance electronic troubleshooter who, for \$50 an hour, would put a small radio station with technical difficulties back on the air.

Herrick recalls several occasions on which Soghoian, seemingly quite serious, would hold his hands together away from his body and say, "With these hands, I will destroy."

Cecil Peters, who worked for Soghoian in 1968 on the Forrestal job, says the company had about \$50,000 worth of contracts at the time. Peters remembers Soghoian as "kind of wild . . . a very unpredictable kind of person."

Owning his own company fulfilled one of Soghoian's early ambitions, but the Zambian connection was to elevate him from small-time operator to international mystery man, a characterization his associates say he relishes.

Soghoian and the Zambians met through Michael Doud Gill, a Washington public relations man and nephew of the late President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Gill, 37, met Zambian officials in 1967 when they inquired about purchasing his town house at 2139 R St. NW, used as the embassy of Ghana until 1964. The Zambians located elsewhere, but Gill and then Ambassador Rupiah Banda became friends.

During the 1968 Republican National Convention, Gill's houseboat was docked near the Doral Hotel in Miami Beach and served as an unofficial gathering place for many Nixon supporters. Among Gill's visitors on the boat was Herbert Broyhill, a building consultant who brought with him Marshall Soghoian. Broyhill, brother of Rep. Joel Broyhill (R-Va.), could not be reached for comment.

Soghoian volunteered to help during the campaign. Gill, who became assistant national chairman of United Citizens for Nixon-Agnew, accepted the offer. While Soghoian was helping with preparations for the 1969 inaugural, he met Banda,

Gill's Zambian friend.

That Banda, the black African diplomat, and Soghoian, the Armenian-American from Richmond, hit it off was ironic. According to Gill, Soghoian had refused to work with blacks on the inaugural.

Herrick, now a service representative with a Richmond department store, said Soghoian made a "big show about how much he was going to help black people" in Zambia but often spoke of blacks with vituperation.

Soghoian's mother said from her Richmond home recently that her son is a humanitarian. "He tells me he is helping black people," she said.

Whether Soghoian's alliance with the Zambians was altruistic or self-serving may never be known. What is known is that Banda extended an invitation to Gill to visit Zambia after the inauguration and asked that Soghoian also come along.

Banda wanted Soghoian along, Gill says, to look at a plan for a communications link between the Zambian capital of Lusaka and Zambian embassies in Bonn, London, New York and Washington. Gill hired Soghoian as his technical director, provided they received the contract to build the system.

Once in Zambia, Gill says he spent about 50 hours with President Kenneth Kaunda, a native of neighboring Malawi raised in Zambia. "We were treated royally, to say the least, although Soghoian was in the background at this point," Gill said.

Kaunda, Gill recalled last week in an interview at his town house, said "he was convinced that although his political philosophy of hu-

manism was correct for Zambia, he needed assistance from abroad."

Kaunda listed importation of meat and oil, liquefaction of coal, and construction of offices, roads and hospitals as areas where foreign expertise and capital were required, Gill said. The visit, which lasted a week, was cut short by the death of President Eisenhower on

March 28, 1969, and Gill returned for the funeral.

In early June, 1969, Herrick said, he and Soghoian put together 24 kits of "crude" bugging devices, which were carried by a courier named Nick from Richmond to Gill's Washington town house. There the devices and the equipment were packed in three large steamer trunks, secured with padlocks, Herrick said.

Herrick said that he, Gill and Soghoian took the trunks to Dulles airport where Banda and the trunks were boarded on an airplane under a blanket of diplomatic immunity.

Gill acknowledged that the trunks were packed at his house but said he can document that he was out of the country at the time. He denied prior knowledge of, or any role in, their shipment.

Gill said Soghoian had told him earlier that President Kaunda had hired Soghoian to conduct a de-bugging operation in the president's headquarters, the State House. It is not clear whether such a sweep was made.

At the time, Gill recalled, Kaunda once referred to his fear of "the yellow giant," which Gill understood to be Red China. The Zambians already had contracted with the Chinese to build the Tan-Zam railroad line to neighboring Tanzania's Indian Ocean capital of Dar es Salaam.

The rail line, scheduled for completion next year, is expected to relieve one of Zambia's major problems since the country gained independence from Britain in 1964. Landlocked Zambia has no port cities to ship copper, which accounts for more than 90 per cent of its exports.

Kaunda also is known for his support of African nationalist guerrilla movements. That has infuriated his southern neighbors, chiefly white-ruled Rhodesia, with whom Zambia's relations have been tenuous since 1964.

Gill also said the Zambians were "bugging each

other," a reference to internal disputes.

Gill eventually secured proposals to do public relations work for Zambia and build two communications systems, the external one linking Lusaka with its embassies, and the internal one, described as a "security system" to keep Kaunda in direct contact with his police and military officials throughout the country.

It is not clear whether either system ever became operative.

The external system contract was for \$336,225; the internal system contract for \$1.6 million. Gill said he received nearly \$400,000 in payments on both. Soghoian's job, Gill said, was to deal with American electronics manufacturers and to ship equipment to Zambia.

Soghoian's initial payment was to be \$25,000, which Gill said was made by check, plus expenses. After being paid on June 12, 1969, Soghoian, conspiring with Banda, systematically "stole" the contract from him, Gill charged.

Soghoian, on Gill's behalf, hired Herrick, his old Richmond associate, and Alphonso E. Rettig, a Chilean national who now operates an engineering firm in suburban Maryland.

Herrick said Soghoian told him that he "hoped to do good things there (Zambia) and that it would snowball and all black African nations would have him doing the same thing."

It was Herrick, hired by Soghoian on Gill's behalf, who first alerted Gill in Zambia to Soghoian's alleged plans to steal the contract. Herrick said he did it "as a matter of honor."

Soghoian, Herrick said, was "playing fast and loose"

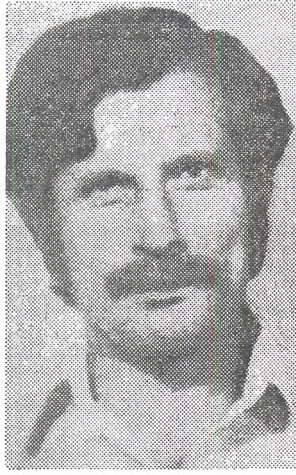
with one faction in Zambia politics, and trying to wrest the contract.

"Soghoian told me what he was doing. He wanted me to go along," Herrick said. "I was pressured by Soghoian and approached by the Zambian government Banda put personal pressure on me to go along, as a steady influence on Soghoian."

Herrick said Soghoian



MICHAEL DOUD GILL



MARSHALL SOGHOIAN

The two main actors in a Byzantine tale of questionable international shipments of electronics gear.

talked expansively of projects he had in mind for Zambia, including construction of an "electronic wall around Zambia, so no one could penetrate it.

"To me, it was a snow job. I didn't pay any attention to it," Herrick said. "Soghoian throws out snowstorms. Whether this stuff is true or not, I don't know. He has enormous ability and a tremendous ego need."

Gill said he agreed to Soghoian's request for \$125,000 for deposits with suppliers before being informed by Herrick and others of Soghoian's alleged plan to assume the contract. Gill said he never got his money back.

Gill added that Soghoian misrepresented to the Zambians the company's profit margin, claiming Gill was making more than double the 10 per cent allotted by the contract. Gill also said that Banda and Soghoian then began visiting American suppliers and telling them Gill no longer held the contract.

"The last time I saw Soghoian he was with the ambassador, and Soghoian apparently was working both ends against the middle," said Robert A. Waters, president of Waters Manufacturing Co. of Wayland, Mass.

Samuel M. Fisher, now a Philadelphia accountant, recalls meeting Soghoian "once or twice" and Banda

in Fisher's former capacity as president of Trylon Inc., a financially troubled electronics firm that went out of business in Elverson, Pa., in June, 1970.

Trylon provided antenna equipment for the Zambian communications networks and also sent several technicians to Zambia to help install equipment, according to Gill and Fisher.

Trylon also is named by one source as the company that was to supply in 1969 engineering and equipment for an electronic jamming device to be used against Rhodesian aircraft frequencies.

"I think we had proposals other than those for the internal external networks, but we had no such contract (for jamming equipment). I was also told there could be substantial additional orders from us. I know there were discussions about other antenna companies," Fisher said.

"Soghoian had some strange ideas," said Fisher, who did not elaborate.

Fisher said he remembers most vividly a telephone conversation Aug. 9, 1972, with Soghoian, who said he was calling, Fisher said, from Washington's Embassy Row Hotel where Soghoian rented two adjoining rooms.

Fisher, who said he has a transcript of the conversation, said Soghoian was calling to complain that some Trylon equipment in Zambia did not work. "He told me we had sold it in the knowledge that it wouldn't work. He said he was in difficulty of one sort or another," Fisher said.

Fisher, who denied the equipment was defective when sold, said Soghoian, who identified himself at the time as one of Zambian President Kaunda's advisers, threatened legal action against Fisher.

"Then he said something

really weird," recalled Fisher, who said he was reading from a transcript of the conversation. He remembered Soghoian saying:

"Back in Zambia they have certain flowers. Merely by taking a breath of them, sometime they might want to get even with a person they will send or have delivered this flower . . . that throws off an odor that creates a longtime disease like or worse than leprosy.

"You should be careful about what you do in the future."

Later in the conversation, according to Fisher, Soghoian "told me, he just wanted me to be aware of what was done in Zambia."

A botanist at the Smithsonian Institution said such a plant "probably does not exist, although some plants of Zambia can be used to create a concoction that could cause a paralysis. He said the plants would have to be eaten or drunk.

Since going to work for the Zambians, Soghoian has evidenced no money problems. U.S. government court documents say he has been seen with as much as \$30,000 in cash and that he has told American businessmen that he operates on a budget in excess of \$20 million.

In a search of Soghoian's two adjoining rooms at the Embassy Row hotel here and of his safe deposit boxes, federal investigators found several cashiers checks, some uncanceled, ranging in face value from \$10,000 to \$300,000.

Investigators reportedly are now interested in exactly what was shipped to Zambia, or elsewhere abroad; what equipment is still in the warehouse, and whether the Zambians obtained proper export licensing for all shipments.

Government attorneys have said that Soghoian had

"on a number of occasions between 1969 and the present" chartered entire planes to transport "abroad" equipment procured in the United States.

The State Department acknowledged last week the existence of two export licenses obtained one year ago for or by Soghoian through the department's Munitions Control office. The office regulates shipment of, among other items, electronic surveillance equipment. On one license, sources said, it is a notation that Soghoian would hand-carry some of the equipment.

Sources in the Commerce Department, whose Export Control office also licenses shipment of electronic equipment, say that several export licenses to Zambia have been granted recently.

Neither department would specify what items were approved for export on the licenses. One source cautioned, "It's not unknown to misdeclare (on the license application)."

Federal investigators also have been checking the presence of what tenants in the Hyattsville warehouse the district have described as "a lot" of automobiles bearing diplomatic license plates near the Zambian warehouse at 5352 46th Ave.

Nine days ago, reporters saw at the warehouse a car registered by Washington police as a 1971 Oldsmobile belonging to the Republic of Zaire. The car was denied that any car of such make or license plate belonged to his embassy.

The State Department will say only that the warehouse constitutes a "murky area" as to whether it is protected by diplomatic immunity because a Zambian official signed the original lease July 1, 1969. Immunity would prevent investigators from entering the building without the Zambians' permission.