

Reopen the Bulgarian file

On the anniversary of the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II, Muriel Mirak-Weissbach demands a reopening of the blocked investigation.

Nine years ago, on May 13, 1981, an assassin came from afar raised his Browning 9 mm pistol above the heads of the thousands of pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square, and unloaded its charge against His Holiness John Paul II. As the Pontiff collapsed into the arms of his attendants, a courageous American nun held the killer tight until security guards took him into custody. Thanks to her presence of mind and determined will not to allow his escape, the outlines of a vicious conspiracy were brought into public view, linking secret services of many countries, networks of drug runners, and illegal arms traffickers together in one of the most heinous terrorist plots in modern history.

Nine years later, the would-be assassin, a young Turk named Ali Mehmet Agca, sits in a heavily guarded Italian prison. The broad outlines of the plot in which he was drafted to be a crucial actor, have been identified and dubbed the "Bulgarian trail." Some of his higher-ups have also been brought to justice, some have disappeared. But the masterminds of the plot remain not only in freedom, but at the very apex of political power in Moscow, among other locations. Nor have they given up on the policy goal they were pursuing by trying to eliminate the highest representative of Christendom. The tug-of-war continues, in Poland, in Ukraine, in the Baltic states.

Had the full truth behind the 1981 *attempt* been brought to light and the political consequences fully drawn, the process unfolding in the nations of Eastern Europe, as well as the attendant struggle with and among the great powers, would surely have followed a different track. In the interests of rerouting some of the ongoing processes in a more fruitful and healthy direction, it would be most appropriate to reopen the Bulgarian file. It is not only in the interests of the nascent Eastern European democracies, and of the Pope, but also of the freedom-loving populations of the Western world, that the full truth emerge at long last.

The creation of a killer

In 1968, a high-level military and political official of Czechoslovakia, Gen. Maj. Jan Sejna, defected to the West. In 1971, a man who could have been his counterpart in Bulgaria, code-named Stefan Sverdlev, also defected. Between the two, in accounts given independently one of the other,

they have provided a picture of how the Soviet KGB has built up a network of capabilities deployed to assure the destruction of the West. Their debriefings described the broad scenario or *modus operandi*, of which the Agca deployment was a case in point.

The gist of their reports was that the Soviets, on the heels of the Chinese, set up a worldwide network of drugs and terrorism, which they used to undermine the West. The plan, originally adopted by Moscow in 1955-56, involved the institution of training camps in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.), at which operatives received basic training in drug running, infiltration of mafia networks in the West, and terrorism. According to the division of labor established in the late 1950s, the Bulgarians were responsible for the Middle East, Golden Crescent, Syria, and Lebanon, whereas the East German regime of Walter Ulbricht and, later, Erich Honecker, was accountable for Western Europe and Scandinavia. The Czechs received the franchise for overseas operations extending via Cuba, into Latin America.

By 1967, the Soviets had a worldwide network in place. Dossiers had been gathered by their intelligence operatives on thousands of politicians in the West. The drug trade was flourishing. Bulgaria had become the transshipment point for opium and morphine coming out of Asia and the Fertile Crescent, which they moved overland into Western European markets. In exchange, the Bulgarians, working through individuals such as the Syrian Henri Arsan, and his Stipam front company in Milan, Italy, moved weapons to pay for the drugs they received. The organized crime network that provided the logistics for the drugs-for-weapons trade, was the so-called Turkish mafia, which became, to all intents and purposes, an arm of the Bulgarian secret services, which used its state-owned firm, called Kintex, as the front for export and import. Kintex was run by the Bulgarian intelligence service KDS, which in turn took its orders from the KGB. Two names which were to become notorious in the Kintex grouping were Serge Ivanov Antonov, a Rome-based official of the Bulgarian airline company as well as the deputy director for the travel agency Balkan Tours; and, mafia boss Belik Celenk. Both Antonov and Celenk were to be indicted on charges of conspiracy to kill the Pope. Celenk will turn out

to have been the person who offered Ali Agca 3 million deutschemarks to kill John Paul II.

Enter Ali Agca

Agca was one of many—thousands, or tens of thousands?—of individuals picked up and recruited by the mafia, in this case the Turkish mafia, to play his assigned role in the worldwide destabilization drama. After receiving training at a radical Palestinian camp in Lebanon under the control of Hafez al-Assad's Syrians, Agca was deployed into the right-wing milieu of the Grey Wolves, in order to acquire a right-wing persona which would serve him well when the time came for him to take center stage. On Feb. 1, 1979, a prominent Turkish journalist, Abdi Ipekci, was murdered, and Agca, as if on cue, popped up to confess to the crime. He was promptly sentenced and sent to prison, where he became known as the top Turkish terrorist. Five months later, he managed a miraculous escape, which could only take place with the full support of agents inside the tightly guarded prison. The day after he found his new freedom, he penned a letter to a local newspaper, announcing that he would kill the Pope. Then he appeared in Sofia, Bulgaria, of all places, where he stayed in an expensive hotel for two months. There he received orders for his next exploit: killing the Pope. Before appearing in St. Peter's Square, Agca crisscrossed Europe, carefully making contact with Grey Wolves organizations wherever he could, the better to establish his identity as one of their members. When he had made his hit in St. Peter's Square, and was apprehended by the authorities, the story that emerged was one relating to a "neo-Nazi, fundamentalist Turkish assassin," a perfect cover for a communist Soviet-Bulgarian job.

The original plan probably contemplated Agca's escape (which the feisty American nun prevented) or his immediate elimination. The fact that Agca was taken into custody meant that a time bomb had begun ticking. Perhaps Agca thought his patrons would spring him from prison in Italy, as they had done in Turkey after the fabricated guilty verdict regarding Ipekci's murder. At any rate, they did not. Agca stayed in jail, and the longer he stayed, the more the wick on the time bomb burned. In May 1982, Agca indeed began to sing. By November, the elements of his confession found support in evidence emerging from three closely related investigations going on in Italy: that of Carlo Palermo, who was looking into the arms-for-drugs trade run through Kintex; that of Ferdinando Imposimato in Rome, who was wrapping up his investigation into the Bulgarian connections to a bizarre case of kidnapping of American NATO Gen. James Lee Dozier; and that of Carlo Martella, the judge in Rome commissioned to follow the Agca case.

That was late 1982. All three investigations documented footprints leading to Sofia, headquarters of a Bulgarian network which exploited elements of the Turkish mafia, for operations of destabilization and terrorism ultimately ordered

by the Soviet KGB.

What was the motive?

Why should the secret service of the second most powerful nation on Earth, the Soviet Union, run the extraordinary risk of being found out, by engineering, commissioning, and directing the assassination of the foremost leader of the Christian world? That the Soviet state and its leaders are cultural adversaries of Western philosophy, as embodied in Western Christendom, is no surprise. That had been the case since the violent break of the Muscovites with the results of the 1439 reunification of the Church around the Western Augustinian notion of the *Filioque*. But that they should go so far as to try to kill a Pope might seem a bit far-fetched. Can religious or philosophical differences go so deep?

The answer lies in the fact that it was not only a religious or philosophical conflict, albeit the epistemological and moral roots indeed represent the deeper grounds for such decisions. On the surface, the problem was quite simple: A Polish Pope had ascended the throne of St. Peter's and was determined to wield his holy staff in the interests of the higher principles of freedom and human dignity, regardless of what that might spell for delicate political equilibria in the world at large. From the moment John Paul II became Pope, the Soviet KGB had targeted him. They knew what he could and would do with his new vestiture. "When the Holy Father began defending Solidarnosc, Yuri Andropov ordered his assassination." That is the succinct form in which Miroslav Lubachivsky, a leader of the Ukrainian Church in exile, put it. And, at least on one level, so it was.

The simple fact of the matter is, Pope John Paul II defied the laws of the Soviet universe, as no other pontiff had done. He emerged on the stage of world history just as the first cracks were beginning to appear in the hitherto solid edifice of socialism. His mission threatened to turn upside-down not only the power relations hitherto existing in Eastern Europe, but, therewith, the entire postwar "stability" regime which has governed relations in the last 45 years.

The first thing the new Pope did—unheard of in recent Church history—was to visit a Catholic state behind the Iron Curtain, his native Poland. In June 1979, he did, to the delight of 6 million Poles who turned out to greet him. He minced no words, but denounced the state of censorship existing in the East, and spoke "before the whole Church, before Europe and the world, of those often forgotten nations and people, to cry out with a loud voice and to embrace all these nations and peoples." He called for "respect for the objective rights of the nation, such as the right to existence, the right to freedom." And he made no bones about who was responsible for the ugly state of affairs in Eastern Europe. "No country should ever develop at the cost of enslavement, conquest, outrage, exploitation, and death."

Although the Pope was addressing his home church, in Poland, and providing support for Solidarnosc, the trade

union movement of his homeland, the substance of his message was not only "Polish," and everyone, particularly in the Catholic community behind the Iron Curtain, read his words as addressed as well to them. In Lithuania, also a Catholic country, his words were not ignored. A Catholic committee for the Rights of Believers came into being shortly after his being elected Pope, vowing to resist violations of the right to religious worship. In an official act, the Lithuanian clergy declared its loyalty to the Pope, something which obviously sent shivers through the Kremlin. By May 1981, when the assassination attempt took place, this Lithuanian Catholic community had explicitly stated that it recognized only the Pope as its ultimate authority, and not the bosses in Moscow. The Pope followed suit: He declined to name Church authorities accepted by the Soviets, and persisted in recognizing, for example, Bishop Stepanovicius, who had been exiled, as the cardinal there.

If the Pope's work had sparked a resistance in Lithuania and Poland, no less could be said of Ukraine. In 1980, he convoked a bishops synod of the illegal Uniate Church, and promoted its fight for religious freedom. In Latvia too, he appointed a cardinal, Bishop Vaivods. His commitment to religious freedom and respect for human rights extended into the Catholic community in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere.

This Pope was becoming a thorn in the side of a communist empire which, for other reasons, was flagging. When the strikes broke out in Poland in 1979-80, and Solidarnosc received the support of the Pope, who made known that, if necessary, he would martyr himself for the cause of his people, the Kremlin was in a box. Would they let their back be broken so easily? Or, would they fight back, with the only weapons they have at their disposal: assassination, intrigue, subterfuge?

The lessons for today

It is a great fortune, not only for John Paul II as an individual, but for the world at large, that the assassination attempt nine years ago did not succeed. Pope Wojtyla has proven to be one of the pillars of reason in a world increasingly characterized by pusillanimity and stupidity. He has brought the message of hope to millions behind the Iron Curtain, to masses of starving human beings in Africa, and to multitudes in Asia and Latin America. Despite the attempts on his life—not only in 1981, but also a year later in 1982—he has not let up in his effort to seek justice for the peoples of the world. He has penetrated the heart of the enemy. He also brought the "man with the mark of the beast," Mikhail Gorbachov, to his knees, during his audience in Rome.

But that is not the only lesson to be drawn from the events of May 1981. There is no doubt that this Pontificate will continue in its mission, informed, as it is, by the brutal vicissitudes of political conflict. But the question to be posed to the nations and peoples of the Western world, regardless of their particular religious beliefs, is another.

At the end of 1982, as the investigations of three Italian magistrates were coming to a close, it seemed clear that the Bulgarian connection to the Soviet terrorist network would be fully exposed, and at least those individuals caught *in flagrante*, brought to justice. Instead, something quite different happened. Each of the three valorous Italian judges brought his findings to the public. Arrests were made. But no one went a step further.

On the contrary. Think back to the end of 1982. As Imposimato was making public his findings which pointed the finger at the KGB, Yuri Andropov, the KGB head who had ordered the hit against the Pope in the first place, was ascending the throne of the Soviet Union. It was the apotheosis of the KGB. At that point, anyone from the Western world—Germany, France, Britain, or the United States—could have demanded full disclosure of the events in Italy around the attempted Papal assassination. No word. No investigation. No interrogation. Only silence—what the Italian mafia calls *omerta*, the law of silence.

Had any one of the Western powers pursued the rich leads emerging from the three interconnected Italian investigations, it would have been absolutely clear that:

- the U.S.S.R. had ordered the hit against the Pope;
- the U.S.S.R. therefore was hell-bent for leather on a course to destroy the West.

Instead, what did the West do?

Just months after the explosive revelations from Agca and the three investigations hit the international press, Ronald Reagan announced his new strategic doctrine to be the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a concept earlier developed by Lyndon LaRouche. Reagan turned the tables on the Soviets, such that they were caught off balance. Had he pursued, simultaneously, the Bulgarian track to the Pope's assassins, he could have forced the Soviets into a position of defensiveness, from which they would have had to listen to reason on the issue of SDI.

Instead, shortly after Reagan's extraordinary strategic shift, with the SDI speech, Soviet leader Andropov—the same man who had overseen the reorganization of Soviet and Warsaw Pact satellite state secret service capabilities into drug and arms and terrorist networks—came out with an offer which no one could resist. This was his summer 1983 offer of a new Yalta, to redivide the world into spheres of influence, whereby both the Eastern and Western oligarchical groups would profit.

Had the truth come out, that the Soviets—indeed Yuri Andropov in person—had ordered a hit against the Pope, such an "offer" could never have been taken seriously. At least, it could not have been sold to the public. The West would have had the upper hand and could have rejected out of hand the obnoxious Soviet offer.

More pertinent to the situation at hand: Since the destruction of the hated Berlin Wall and the opening of the borders which have kept East and West Europe artificially separated

for over 40 years, a great new spirit of freedom has swept the continent. Unfortunately, however, the forces of evil on the other side have not died off. Rather, as recent reports in the West German and Israeli press have documented, the old vicious networks of subversion identified with the East German Stasi and the Soviet KGB—those same networks described by defectors Sverdlev and Sejna—are not only still alive, but are actively recruiting and organizing to extend their zones of influence into the West. As the wave of republican revolution sweeps over Europe, casting aside the shards of old authoritarian forms, there remain networks behind the scenes, which are still dedicated to the task of undermining and ultimately destroying the West. Concretely, what this means is that the networks of the KGB and its affiliates in Czechoslovakia, the G.D.R., Bulgaria, etc. are still in existence, even though the leading lights may have been disgraced. This is, after all, the significance of the fact that Markus Wolf, “ex”-head of the Stasi in the G.D.R., is still alive and well in Moscow. This is the significance of the fact that Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, who was Honecker’s righthand man for drug trade and Irangate related arms sales, is still “in retirement” in Bavaria.

The big questions which are still open for the freedom fighters of Eastern Europe and their colleagues in the West

are the following:

1) If these networks were set up by the Soviets in the 1950s and 1960s to run drugs, arms, and assassinations, and if their control capability has been destabilized by the intervening developments, where have they ended up? In other words, has the drug department of the G.D.R., run under Schalck-Golodkowski and others, been dismantled, or merely taken over by other, perhaps Western interests? Can it be that the frenetic diplomacy of Western drug-running circles like those associated with the Edgar Bronfman gang and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), is geared toward reorganizing those drug networks once run by the communist regimes, along the lines of the new Yalta agreement?

2) If Eastern Europe is to free itself of the dictatorship of the Moscow oligarchy, then it must free itself of the apparatus of intelligence, drug running, weapons trade, and such that has been an integral part of the state apparatus of every East bloc nation for the last 20-30 years.

To identify who is who, and what is what, who runs what and where are the various threads of the networks, including emphatically, the threads leading into the American, British, and other Western intelligence networks, the most efficient thing to do would be the most obvious: Reopen the Bulgarian file.

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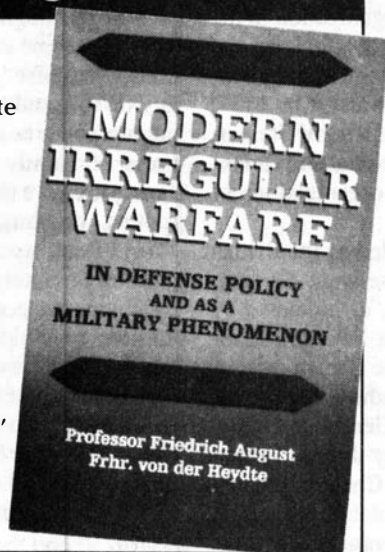
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