

ERIC  
MARGOLIS

# Bulgars' secret

Evidence that Bulgaria was deeply involved in the attempted assassination of the Pope continues to accumulate. Italian investigators have produced sufficient evidence to link Mehmet Ali Agca directly to Bulgarian operatives who apparently planned, financed and provided support for the murder attempt.

Bulgaria is Russia's closest ally; on the surface, little occurs in Bulgaria without Moscow's knowledge or approval. It was, therefore, no surprise when Italian and Western officials claimed that Bulgaria was merely acting as a cat's paw for Moscow in the assassination plot.

The much-feared Bulgarian intelligence service, KDS, runs as a subsidiary of Russia's KGB. Senior Soviet KGB officers serve in the KDS and closely co-ordinate its activities with Moscow. Other covert Russian agents within the KDS ensure that KGB headquarters is kept fully informed on what goes on in the Bulgarian secret service.

Since World War II, the special operations directorate of the KDS has performed "wet affairs" on behalf of the KGB. These include assassinations of dissidents and defectors. During the 1950s, a number of leading Ukrainian nationalists were murdered in Germany by Bulgarian agents, using cigarette lighters that discharged a spray of cyanide gas into the victim's face.

A large number of Soviet defectors, particularly those from the KGB, have been killed in Europe by Bulgarian hit squads. Bulgaria also does its own work. According to some reports, its interior minister, Dimitar Stoyanov, said to a group of KDS agents: "Nowhere are our enemies safe from our grasp."

This threat, one echoed by other senior Bulgar leaders, was turned into reality in London, in September 1978, when a KDS agent used an umbrella with a poisoned tip to kill outspoken Bulgarian exile Georgi Markov, who had the temerity to openly discuss corruption within the Communist party and Bulgaria's involvement with international terrorist groups.

## Objective is money

In fact, Bulgaria has become a sort of Holiday Inn for terrorists. The Bulgars will supply terrorist training, facilities, rest camps, arms, munitions and just about anything in exchange for hard cash. A poor country whose prime export is rose petals and attar, Bulgaria has long resorted to shady practices in order to earn hard currency.

According to U.S. and West European officials, Bulgaria has lately become a major entrepot for illicit drug traffic. The Turkish mafia, with whom Mehmet Ali Agca was involved, operates out of Bulgaria's capital, Sofia, dealing in heroin, hashish and opium. Nothing like this could go on without the approval of the KDS.

The enterprising Bulgars have also gotten deeply involved in the seamier side of the arms business. Two months ago, for example, the Bulgars were caught in the embarrassing position of being exposed as suppliers of arms to South Africa. Doing business with the officially hated white racists is nothing new: Russia traded for years with white Rhodesia and still does with South Africa.

But in this case, Bulgarian weapons were being supplied, via Pretoria, to anti-communist rebels in Mozambique who were fighting the Russian-backed regime in Maputo. The Russians, I have heard, were most annoyed at their "little Slavic cousins." This incident also may point to an interesting observation: Not everything Bulgaria does is controlled by the KGB.

Back to the Pope and an intriguing theory: It is just possible that the KGB, and its then boss, Yuri Andropov, were not involved in the papal assassination plot.

Bulgaria has a military intelligence service called Romno. This organization is quite similar to Russia's own military intelligence service, the GRU. Both collect military and strategic intelligence abroad; both also operate domestically on behalf of Russia's and Bulgaria's military hierarchy.

## Fascinating theory

The GRU and KGB are rivals and bitter enemies. Both spy on the other. The GRU reports directly to the Soviet chief of staff and defence minister; the KGB reports to the civilian party chairman and Politburo. Romno, through its attached Soviet GRU advisers, reports to GRU headquarters in Moscow.

Sergei Antonov, the Bulgarian charged by Italy with being Agca's accomplice, worked for Bulgarian Airlines. Almost everyone has assumed Antonov was a KDS agent. Perhaps not. The state airline is controlled by Romno, not KDS. If Antonov was a Romno agent, as it appears, then we have a fascinating clue and theory.

Let us assume Antonov and his accomplices, worked for Romno; Romno is controlled by GRU, and now our trail leads back to Soviet military headquarters in Moscow. It is conceivable that the attempted murder of the Pope was organized by Russia's powerful defence minister, chief of staff or some high-level faction within the military power elite.

Such an attempt, operating through GRU channels, may well have occurred completely without the knowledge of Russia's civilian leaders or the KGB. We should recall that at the time, Poland appeared ready for revolt, the army was urging invasion, and the civilian leadership refused to take direct action.

Despairing that Brezhnev and the civilian Politburo would move forcefully against Poland, and fearing that all Eastern Europe might arise in insurrection, Russia's military leaders could conceivably have plotted to kill the Pope, whom they regarded as the motive force behind Poland's unrest. Perhaps one day a Romno or GRU defector will bring us the truth about this great mystery.