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End CIA cover-up of pope slay plot

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato is outraged over what he perceives as a deliberate CIA-State Department cover-up of Soviet complicity in the plot to assassinate Pope John Paul II. D'Amato returned Wednesday from Italy on his own fact-finding trip to probe allegations that the Bulgarian secret police — and by extension the Soviet KGB — was behind the murder plot. He found to his astonishment that the American CIA was either "inept or deliberately obstructing" in its handling of the probe.

D'Amato said he believes top-ranking CIA officials all the way up to CIA Director William Casey are behind the effort to downplay the shooting. The CIA's obstructionist actions include disparaging Italian efforts to get to the bottom of the plot, dragging its feet on D'Amato's request for information, and admitting to him that the investigation had low CIA priority without even a single CIA worker assigned to the case.

"I am deeply disturbed by the conduct and attitude of the CIA," he said. So are we and so should every American. D'Amato believes the agency's inaction is based on the State Department's concern about not offending the Soviets before the expected summit meeting with Soviet leader Yuri Andropov who, as former head of the KGB, probably had a direct role in carrying out the plot to murder the pope.

Being "nice" to the Soviets and trying not to embarrass them by bringing up their heinous crimes against humanity has been tried again and again by American politicians and diplomats. Stalin's purges, the Katyn Forest massacre in Poland, use

of chemical and biological warfare, support of world terrorism, even possible KGB complicity in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy were all swept under the rug. The result: The Soviet Union continues its atrocities without letup and the United States loses more and more of its stature as a moral leader in the world.

We hope D'Amato's revelations will help end this spineless policy. By not exposing KGB crimes, the United States becomes a silent partner in perpetrating them.

Besides, what does the United States gain by remaining silent? The Soviets certainly have not reciprocated our restraint, since communist propaganda organs throughout the world exploit every opportunity to trumpet fabricated stories about CIA misdoings to the extent that people in the Third World are ready to swallow any lie the Soviets make about the CIA. To give just one example, mob rampages against U.S. embassies in Pakistan and other Muslim nations some years ago were fomented by KGB lies that the CIA led the armed occupation of the Great Mosque in Mecca.

President Reagan has been more vocal than any previous president in exposing Soviet crimes, having spoken out against Soviet support of terrorism and its use of chemical-biological weapons. There is no reason, therefore, that Reagan should not take the lead in getting to the truth about the plot to assassinate the pope. It is better to lose a summit meeting with Andropov than lose our national dignity by keeping silent in the face of Soviet outrages.