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COMMENTARY

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ARNOLD BEICHMAN

The CIA, Andropov and possible papicide

What is going on with the White House, the CIA, the Soviet KGB, Italy, Bulgaria, Turkey — and Yuri Andropov, as the suspect in the Case of the Pope's Assassin?

Something is going on and my "scenario" may explain the strange lassitude exhibited by the CIA and CIA Director William Casey towards what is potentially one of the greatest scandals in modern history — the greatest since the June 1914 events at Sarajevo. The reputed lack of interest by the CIA in the Italian judicial investigation of the attempt on the pope's life almost two years ago has become a subject of private discussion by former CIA executives who still maintain connections with the agency.

If it is true the CIA is maintaining a lofty attitude towards the Italian probe, such inaction would come only on direct orders from the White House. Such orders may well have been issued by President Reagan for all kinds of reasons. One of them: to get Soviet agreement on some acceptable form of arms control or on a pullout of Cuban troops from Angola or on some other contentious question.

There is a clue which might confirm this scenario:

On Dec. 20, 1982, *The Christian Science Monitor* published a tape-recorded interview with Vice President George Bush. In the question and answer session, Bush, former head of the CIA, made several statements about the Soviet secret police, the KGB — until recently headed by Yuri Andropov — which implied that the KGB was much maligned. The crucial paragraph in the interview quoted Bush as follows:

"My view of Andropov is that some people make this KGB thing sound horrendous. Maybe I speak defensively as a former head of the CIA. But leave out the operational side of KGB — the naughty things they allegedly do..."

The Washington Times of Dec. 27 published my critical commentary on this interview. Now one must assume that Bush, like any ambitious vice president, wouldn't have made such an outrageously idiotic statement about the KGB without some encouragement or even an order from the president himself or from a trusted Reagan aide. Bush and the president had several meetings following the vice president's meeting with Andropov, Brezhnev's successor as party chieftain.

If this theory is correct, then what Bush was doing was exonerating in advance Yuri Andropov of any involvement with the assassination plot against the pope. Bush's kind words about the KGB are, of course, belied by everything we know about the KGB and a lot of that knowledge is to be found in the recently published report, "Soviet Active Measures," issued by the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the House of Representatives.

The House report details some KGB activities against the enemy, the United States — activities which range from the disgusting to the unspeakable. Obviously, the CIA, which uncovered some of these "active measures," the White House and Bush himself know what the KGB is capable of. Yet, strangely, Bush deplors the exaggeration about the KGB's "naughty things."

Were the *attentat* successfully tied to Andropov and the KGB, which, judging by the *Readers Digest* and NBC exposes, seems to be probable, Andropov's position as the new Politburo boss and as the U.S.S.R.'s spokesman would be so seriously compromised as to make possible his ouster by his own and, perhaps, unhappy colleagues in the Politburo. There is precedent for such an ouster — Nikita S. Khrushchev was "voted" out of office in October 1964.

From a U.S. standpoint, Andropov is in a tough spot. The Italian judicial investigation proceeds with all deliberate speed, although the news from Rome has been meager recently. Even the Vatican seems to be avoiding comment on the investigation, a strange phenomenon, since after all a pope, the vicar of Christ, was shot and almost killed.

Further, a source who follows the Catholic press in America told me that leading Catholic journals have kept their reporting of the case to a bare minimum, if reporting at all. Is the pope also signaling that he is ready to forgive and forget if Andropov will soften the Soviet attitude toward Poland and elsewhere towards Catholics in the Soviet empire? Is there some kind of "blackmail" operation going on because, for a change, the West holds some trumps and has displayed those trumps by discouraging rather than encouraging speculation about Andropov and by leashing the CIA while awaiting some more by Andropov?

The New York Times seems to be the only daily newspaper working on the mystery of the pope's assassin. A.M. Rosenthal, its executive editor, has assigned at least five of his top correspondents to keep working on the case.

There is something going on and there is no doubt that Vice President Bush's tour of Western Europe has more to do with Yuri Andropov than with any of the cover stories put out for his *tour d'horizon*.

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1. The CIA has enormous resources which could be used to support the Italian investigation. These resources have not been deployed and they will not be in the future if Andropov behaves. Time is running out and the Italian judicial investigation can't go on forever. Or can it?

2. The White House, in effect, has offered to let Andropov cop a plea — behave and we'll lay off the attempted assassination plot; the assistant district attorney who has delivered the "bargain plea" is Bush, via his exculpatory statement about the KGB.

Knowledgeable people long have passed beyond the point of uncertainty about the Bulgarian-Soviet connection, but since one can't indict and try Andropov on a charge of attempted murder or conspiring to kill, the next best thing is to keep the case alive. And, as has already been noted, there may even be Soviet sources who would like to see Andropov out of power.

Arnold Beichmann, a political scientist, is a visiting scholar at the Hoover Institution.