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The New Breed of Anti-U.S. Spy in Europe

By William Shawcross

MAGNUS PYM, the double agent of John Le Carre's new novel, "A Perfect Spy," declares at one point: "We betray to be loyal. Betrayal is like imagining, when the reality isn't good enough."

Pym is the spy who came of age in the 1940s. Now, for many West European liberals, "reality" is an unwanted bond with the United States. They could argue, like Magnus Pym, that to be loyal to their own countries, and to a greater good, they need to undermine that bond, betray it if necessary. If so, such traitors may be men of some apparent distincton—like Arne Treholt, who is now serving the maximum 20 years in Norway in return for his work for the KGB.

The Treholt story is an alarming tale of vanity, self-delusion and greed—alarming because it seems likely that he could be the new sort of perfect spy.

Treholt was the golden young man of the Norwegian Labor Party, and an accomplished, ambitious official of the Norwegian Foreign Office. In 1983 he was made chief of the Foreign Office's press department, a charming man of 41, every journalist's friend and best contact. Blond, good-looking, energetic (a marathon man), in a glamorous second marriage to a television star, fun, relaxed—and narcissistic.

In January 1984 he was in charge of press arrangements for Secretary of State George Shultz's visit to Norway for the European Security Conference. His arrest a few days later aroused absolute incredulity among those who knew him. Arne Treholt a spy? Out of the question! Norway was thrown into utter consternation.

And not only Norway. Treholt had been a diligent campaigner against the junta of the Greek colonels and was thus closely connected with Andreas Papandreou and his socialist government in Greece.

"Say it's a lie, say anyone, but not Arne Treholt. We all loved that man, not only for what he did for Greece, but also as a personal friend," wailed Melina Mercouri.

Alas, it was not a lie. He had spied for 15 years.

This did not diminish his celebrity. In prison he became a millionaire by writing and smuggling out a book complaining of the "Gestapo methods" and the "Kafkaesque process" to which he was subjected. In fact, he was treated with the utmost kindness. He had a three-room suite: an office, a bedroom and an exercise room. His wife was allowed to visit him, until she dumped him. She has written her own account, which made her very rich, too. It is rather galling for the Norwegians.

Treholt was born in a farming community. His father was Labor Minister of Agriculture. Arne got on well with him, but not with his mother, and left their country home to live in student digs in Oslo when he was 15. After school he did Norway's compulsory military service, read political science at university and entered politics by becoming leader of the student section of the Norwegian Labor Party. He also worked as a journalist.

Then came the Vietnam war, which made anti-Americanism the political creed for thousands upon thousands of young Europeans. Treholt was involved in the antiwar movement in Norway, not as a dedicated backroom soul or a voice on the streets but as a personality who always seemed to be greeting and standing beside the principal speakers. But he never seemed to have any well-formed political views. One of his best friends said of him later that he had no ideology—beyond anti-Americanism.

His most passionate cause was against the military junta that seized Greece in 1967. He helped organize opposition in Norway and traveled around Europe seeing all the Greek exiles, from King Constantine to Andreas Papandreou to the Moscow Greek Communists. He had no doubts the real problem was that the colonels enjoyed the support of the Nixon administration.

In the late '60s, the Scandinavian governments took the junta before the European Court of Human Rights. Treholt was the assistant to the lawyer arguing the Norwegian case. He claimed to have been followed and threatened by Greek secret policemen who were acting with the blessing of Washington. It was at this stage of his life, in his late 20s, that the KGB beckoned to him.

"Like most of the other young politicians, I was attended to by Russian diplomats," Treholt wrote in a letter from prison. "We had glorious lunches where we discussed Norwegian and international politics."

The Soviet Embassy in Oslo courted young idealists, treating them to caviar, vodka and Georgian champagne—in a country with the highest liquor prices in Europe. Treholt later claimed his first Soviet contact, Yevgeny Belyayev, was "a little pest whom I kept at arm's length." But they met frequently for discussions on world affairs.

The KGB is a patient and subtle organisation. One of its techniques is to lure people into giving away information without having to admit it to themselves. Thus Treholt's vanity was constantly polished; he was told that he was really "building bridges" between East and West, and thus helping to further and protect Norway's position, rather than compromising it.

It was three years before money entered the relationship, when Belyayev gave Treholt far too much money to buy and mail some books. Treholt said he was so upset by the incident that he considered telling the police. But he did not even tell his wife. The court would find that Belyayev's actions fitted "the typical pattern for the recruitment of new intelligence agents" and that "one decisive feature of the development was to get him to accept money."

By the time the Russian left Oslo in summer, 1971, Treholt was almost hooked. They had a farewell lunch at the Coq d'Or restaurant, and Belyayev brought along a friend. This was an altogether more attractive character named Gennady Fedorovitch Titov. Later, Treholt said that Titov was "a

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very fascinating and exciting type" who was extremely well informed and intelligent; an amusing, challenging person to be with, full of jokes about the Soviet leaders, the very antithesis of the system he made fun of representing, a Gorbachev before his time—and a brilliant agent.

Treholt agreed to meet him again, and again. Titov told Treholt never to write his name in his diary or address book, and never to call him at the embassy.

Treholt was now a consultant at the Norwegian Foreign Policy Institute. This made his lunches with Titov all the more enjoyable; he had authority when they discussed Vietnam, Greece, journalism, NATO, peace and friendship. Titov told Treholt that he had very perceptive and original ideas.

By this time, Vietnam had radicalized the Nordic socialist parties. In the Norwegian Labor Party, the generation that had known Nazi occupation was fading and a growing segment on the left consisted of isolationists, even neutralists. This was where Treholt belonged. In 1972, he helped organize the successful campaign mounted by the left against membership in the European Economic Commmunity.

Treholt became an undersecretary in charge of law-of-the-sea negotiations. It is said that he gave away American techniques for tracking Soviet submarines and he was very helpful to the Russians during negotiations over the Barents Sea that began in 1977. When he returned from the talks in Moscow he showed Titov his notes on the negotiations, as well as classified Norwegian papers. He would later explain this by saying that "Titov explained to me that the embassy got its reports so late and that they were so incomplete that they did not give any good background into what was happening."

The final agreement for a temporary "grey area" in the Barents Sea, which both sides could fish, was thought by many Norwegians to unduly favor the Soviet Union.

Treholt's spying, which he later called "unorthodox diplomacy," might never have been discovered but for the arrest in January 1977 of a more tragic spy.

This was Galtung Haavik, an elderly secretary at the Foreign Ministry, who had fallen in love with a Russian prisoner of war whom she nursed when Norway was occupied by the Nazis. In 1946 she joined the Foreign Ministry, was posted to Moscow, and resumed the affair, although the man was now married—and suffered the predictable, banal, but terrifying, consequences. Over the next 25 years she had at least 259 clandestine meetings with eight different controllers, including Gennady Titov. She was finally arrested as she passed documents to a Soviet diplomat in a dark side-street of Oslo. She confessed, and died in prison six months later.

Titov was identified as a KGB general and expelled from Norway. Treholt's meetings with Titov came to light. For the first time, he was under suspicion.

By now the Greek junta had fallen. Treholt was a frequent visitor to his socialist friends, including Papandreou and Mercouri. At the end of 1978 Treholt was appointed to the Norwegian mission at the United Nations. Just before he left, another of the smooth men from the Soviet embassy arrived saying he brought greetings from "Henry," who would love to see him in Helsinki. Treholt went, and he and Titov met again, two years after the wretched Haavik had been arrested.

"Henry" wanted to reactivate Arne and he had a new friend for him—the man who was to be his contact in New York. He told Treholt that they should meet in restaurants far from the United Nations or leave notes in newspapers in the delegates' lounge. Treholt did not object. Later he said that he was only trying to improve Norwegian-Soviet relations. The court decided that this implied "such an exaggerated sense of his own position and influence as to be scarcely credible." But he may well have been conceited enough to believe it.

Norway was a member of the Security Council for part of the time that Treholt was in New York. He provided the Russians with Norwegian and NATO positions, often before important ministerial meetings. He was apparently very helpful on Afghanistan before talks between former Secretary of State Alexander Haig and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Titov told him Gromyko was very pleased with his work.

Treholt had three meetings with Titov in Vienna or Helsinki (where Soviets can travel without visas) while he was assigned to New York. KGB generals do not hold such meetings in third countries unless they consider the agent very important. The court decided the purpose of the meetings was for Titov to point Treholt toward his next targets.

By this time, Treholt was in his late 30s and very visible in Norway. He was talked of as a future foreign minister—maybe, some said, even prime minister. He was irritated by the greasy-spoon cafes his Soviet contact chose in New York. He insisted on more upscale places—which were also more visible. When he met Titov, either in Helsinki or Vienna, he took no precautions; nonchalantly he would take a taxi straight from the airport to the rendezvous. He must have driven his controllers insane. And with reason. He was being tailed by the FBI in New York.

By 1982, Treholt's wife wanted to resume her television career full-time and so he asked to be posted back to Oslo. He applied to study at the Defense College, where he would be handling information on nuclear planning classified by NATO as "cosmic top secret." When Treholt's application was received, Norway's security system and several cabinet ministers were thrown into panic.

It was clear to them by now that he was a Soviet agent. But he was a respected public figure; the security police were already under attack on the left as a threat to civil liberties, and the evidence had to be complete. If they denied him a security clearance, he might just lie dormant for years, and surface as Norway's foreign minister. They decided to let him into the college.

He took copious notes. It is a NATO truism that "the battle of the Atlantic must be fought in the Norwegian Sea," and that the Soviets would try to seize Norway and operate their submarines out of Norwegian fjords.

A few days after the course ended in April 1983, Treholt flew to Helsinki to see Titov again. The court would find that the material he gave Titov did immense harm to Norway's security.

He was still in close touch with his Greek friends. Papandreou was now prime minister and Greece was becoming the most intransigent member of both NATO and the EEC. In 1983, Treholt was frequently in Athens and engaged in spoiling actions, most notoriously refusing to allow the EEC as a body to condemn the shooting down of Korean Air Lines flight 007 by the Soviets.

By now, Norwegian security police were with him everywhere. In Vienna, they photographed him and Titov with a camera hidden in a baby carriage. In the picture, Titov, a broad, short man, is gesticulating widely; Treholt walks beside him, grinning boyishly, as if immensely proud to be in this great man's company.

At about this time, Oleg Gordievsky, the former KGB resident in London, who was now a British double agent, informed London that the KGB had a very important spy in the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. On Jan. 20, 1984, just after he had helped host the visit of George Shultz, Treholt checked in at Oslo airport for a flight to Vienna. As he walked towards the departure gate, Inspector Oernulf Tofte of the Security Police put a hand on his shoulder.

At first Treholt said he was going to meet a girl friend in Vienna. In his briefcase there were 66 foreign ministry documents. He claimed he was simply using the case as a travelling safe over the weekend. After more feints and denials, he was shown a picture of Titov. He said he had known him long ago, but had not seen him since 1976.

He was then shown the Vienna picture. He began to vomit.

After a visit to the lavatory, he had a proposal: "Let's team up and get those swine." The police said that might have been a good idea 10 years ago. Treholt began to weep.

He confessed. Later, he would say that his confession was false because he was a victim of the famous "Stockholm syndrome," the sympathy that hostages develop with their captors. He would say he had done nothing to endanger national security and was only building bridges. But when he admitted having received $50,000 from the Iraqis in return for documents, this defense looked even thinner than at first. Taking money from Saddam Hussein was something that even Treholt could not describe as "bridge-building." The court reckoned he had been paid reasonably by the Russians as well, netting some $120,000 altogether for his espionage. But Treholt and his lawyers insist that this is a great exaggeration.

When the case finally came to court, he would appear immaculately dressed, as the foreign minister he might have been, with his bridge-building theses all prepared, but he fell apart under specific questioning. The court dismissed his defense as fantastic, saying that the idea of the secret statesman "contains such an outlandishly exaggerated perception of one's own position and influence that the court must dismiss the motives the accused has given."

In "The Meaning of Treason," Rebecca West warned that such motives are so often straightforward lies, designed to make the spy seem idealistic to others—and probably to himself.

In the end there usually is no single motive. As with Magnus Pym, Treholt's treachery was bound up in fantastic egotism, money, and the politics of the time, particularly anti-Americanism. He was prepared to betray not because, like an older generation, he was disgusted with his own society, but because of distaste for his country's principal ally, the United States.

Such distaste is becoming more widespread in Europe today. One Norwegian official commented after Treholt's arrest, "If Treholt, who enjoyed the best of Norwegian life, could do it, how many more like him are there who grew up in his generation, not only in Norway but in all of Europe?"

Quite a few, I should guess.

Sam Perry did additional research for this article.

William Shawcross' latest book is "The Quality of Mercy." This article is adapted from The Spectator.