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A fearful symmetry

Nothing is yet proved beyond the shadow of a doubt, and there may be demons of disinformation lurking in the shadows, yet evidence filtering into the public domain suggests that the Bulgarian secret service, acting at the behest of the Russian KGB, may indeed have planned the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II.

The very notion that the Polish Pope was shot for political reasons is so intrinsically disturbing that it is rejected out of hand by many people. Those who wince at the baroque, and often paranoid, conspiracy theories spun around the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King Jr. are understandably reluctant to consider a whole new bibliography of conspiracy literature. Skeptical spirits pick up the scent of the irrational in all conspiracy scenarios, whether the filaments of guilt lead back to the New Orleans Mafia and the CIA, or to Turkish drug smugglers, the Bulgarian secret service and the Russian KGB.

Nevertheless, in the matter of power and the struggles to get it and hold it, there is ample historical evidence indicating that reality favors the irrational, and that paranoid modes of understanding may be the most accurate.

Americans who were able to accept the revelations of CIA schemes to murder Fidel Castro or to overthrow the democratically elected government of Chile's President Salvador Allende ought to consider with an open mind the possibility that Russian intelligence operatives are as capable of criminal behavior as Yankee

operatives who took their degrees at Princeton or Yale. The political will to avoid losing Chile is just as irresistible as the political will not to lose Poland.

What emerges from the mounting evidence that Mehmet Ali Agca was a hired assassin controlled by Bulgarian agents is a sad and fearful symmetry. A Bulgarian diplomat who defected in France has told French intelligence that he heard about the plan to kill the Pope from a close friend who is a high-ranking official in the counterintelligence division of Bulgaria's state security service. The plot was motivated by the Soviet belief that the Polish-born Pope, acting as an instrument of Washington, had instigated the thwarted Polish revolt carried out by the 10 million members of the Solidarity union movement.

Agca himself has told Italian authorities about a corollary plan to assassinate Lech Walesa while the union leader was visiting the Pope in Rome.

Thus far, the Reagan Administration has been observing a wise silence about the apparent Soviet role in the shooting of the Pope, allowing dispassionate observers to draw their own conclusions. One of those conclusions may be that there is a symmetrical pattern linking the CIA's use of Mafia hit men and the KGB's hiring of Turkish gangsters. Stripped of diplomatic euphemisms and high-tech firepower, the superpower conflict, seen in this way, begins to look like a gang war between the two most powerful families in organized crime.