

WHO KILLED WHOM AND WHY?

By M. S. Aronson

All speculation about the forces behind the shocking murder of the late President John F. Kennedy and about its political repercussions suffers from a severe limitation; for while any analysis must aim to embrace the whole epos, the assassination itself is probably a mere prelude to an historical tragedy the scope of which is not yet discernible. Another problem for the analyst is the border line between the believable and the unbelievable in the mind of the public. This border line is set by national biases to a far greater extent than by actual objective judgment of facts, events and likelihoods. What Americans reject as inconceivable developments culminating in the assassination is largely based on mental preconditioning. The popular view of the American body politic as a free and democratic set-up responsive to the spontaneous wishes of the majority lulls many people into rejecting without examination any theory predicated on sinister schemes within the power structure. The distance and strangeness of foreign peoples enable Americans to recognize and even to exaggerate the degree of cynicism involved in the internal power struggles of other countries, especially if they happen to be hostile towards those countries. No tale of intrigue ever sounds too wicked to American ears if the setting is the Kremlin, or some Latin American palace. But when it comes to America, well, we know we are "basically" the most decent and democratic of nations, and that shadowy deeds probable elsewhere are impossible here; and that even if they do occur, they are exceptions, dark spots on an otherwise innocent national record.

This prejudice is a virtual guarantee against penetrating popular inquiry into the facts behind the assassination of President Kennedy; yet it is probable that the truth here is in direct proportion to its unaccept-

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ability by the popular American mind, and that its sinister nature is far more marked than Americans can imagine of the American Establishment. It is no coincidence that the foreign press, including the friendly foreign press, was immeasurably more ready than newspapers here to treat the assassination as an outcome of a possible political plot within high echelons of effective American power. (WRITTEN DEC 1-1963)

Hundreds of circumstances and details pertaining to the killing, the suspected assassin, the assassination of the assassin, the behavior of the Dallas police, etc., etc., will give rise to a whole new field of literature. Scores of books will be written over decades, pointing out the incompatibility of accounts which are now being taken at face value. This literature will be justified by the truism that the closer we are to historic events in place and time the more difficult it is to perceive the truth about them.

In spite of all these disadvantages, the political observer cannot subdue his urge to theorize and speculate. Man's intellect includes a blind stubbornness about admitting ignorance; and we often pretend to know best that about which we know least, as witness religion.

Thus, on the assumption—not necessarily correct—that we can already discern some major implications of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, we can choose between the theory that the President fell victim to a lone maniac, and the theory that his murder was carried through by an organized conspiracy.

The theory of the lone killer seems less feasible when one considers the perfectly smooth machinery of the assassination, plus the obvious glibness with which the authorities in Dallas came up with a quick and popularly acceptable solution of the case. Indeed the local head of the police seemed eager to close the case in spite of the distinct possibility that it has not yet been opened. Serious questions arise. Why were the Dallas police so eager falsely to link Lee Harvey Oswald with leftist groups and causes? Why was it made possible for Jack

Ruby to kill him? Did anyone help Oswald to establish a biography which would seem to link him both to the shooting and to an expedient political motive for it? Did anyone help him to get to Mexico when he went there in late September, and to apply there for both Cuban and Soviet visas? Under what circumstances was Oswald hired, so short a time before the Presidential visit, to work at the warehouse from which the fatal shots were allegedly fired? Was the trajectory of the fatal bullets consistent with the geographic relation between the target and the window from which the shots were allegedly fired? Did the public announcement of the route of the Presidential party give Oswald enough time to plan, prepare and place himself within the range of the target? If not, from whom did Oswald learn the route before it was publicly announced? Who knew the route before a public announcement was made of it? Why was Lee Oswald allowed to leave a building surrounded by police, and from which the U.S. President had been shot, merely upon establishing that he was employed in it? As it is now clear that Oswald was *not* connected with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, what motivated him to make statements prior to the assassination which would enable the police to link him with that organization after the shooting? Was Lee Harvey Oswald a walking corpse, a fall guy, doomed even before the assassination to die? And if so, did he die after fulfilling an assassin's role or only as a decoy? Was the assassin condemned to death by the very people who assigned him to shoot? If so, when did the execution take place—with the shooting of Lee Oswald, or with the shooting of Dallas Patrolman J. D. Tippit? The first reports of the murder of Patrolman Tippit also related that a Secret Service man had been wounded; since then, nothing has been heard about that Secret Service man. What was his relation to Patrolman Tippit; and is it possible that the two were shot in a duel between them?

These and many other questions remain unanswered; but this does not necessarily mean that the answers are not known in

Washington's upper echelons of power. On the contrary; if those in high circles had no answers at all, vigorous investigations would have been undertaken immediately, and many secrets exposed. The clues provided by the contradictions in the initial accounts are so voluminous that any swift and sincere investigation would undoubtedly penetrate the veil. If the assassin had acted all alone, or if he represented an insignificant group of fanatics, the formidable investigative machinery of the authorities could soon pick up the threads, without leaving us in the dark for even this long.

Instead of such prompt and effective investigation, however, the public has been promised an abundance of prolonged Executive and Congressional inquiries. Our assumption is that a sincere investigation could produce explanations so quickly that the "investigations" promised and in progress are primarily intended as a whitewash, to convince the people that everyone has done his job and that no significant parts are missing from the jig-saw puzzle. This does not necessarily amount to doubting the integrity of some of the inquiries, such as that to be conducted by the special Presidential commission. These panels, however, will primarily review evidence gathered by other investigative bodies. Any fabrication involved in such evidence may have been so thorough as to render it indiscernible. It is beyond doubt therefore that much skepticism and legitimate doubt will survive any findings of the official investigations.

The possibility can by no means be dismissed that important men in Washington do know the identity of the conspirators, or at least of some of them, and that these conspirators are so powerful that prudence dictates that they not be identified in public.

Let us make the "fantastic" assumption that President Lyndon Johnson and Attorney-General Robert F. Kennedy know or believe that the murder was planned by a group of high-ranking officers who would stop at nothing to end American-Soviet negotiations. However strong their desire

to avenge John F. Kennedy, what course would then be open to them? To move against such formidable conspirators might start a disastrous chain of events. It could lead to American troops shooting at other American troops. It could lead to a direct take-over by a military clique. To avert such catastrophes, it might well be considered prudent to pretend utter ignorance, in the hope that the conspirators might be removed from power discreetly, at a later date, one by one.

Of course, this theory sounds absolutely fantastic. But if we are to think about the issues without "patriotic" prejudice, it is necessary to test its plausibility by imagining it to be an explanation of the assassination of the head of another country. Few people in America would have difficulty accepting such a theory about the assassination of a Soviet, Latin American or Southeast Asian leader; and chances are that its incredibility in our own case is merely a measure of our ill-conceived national exceptionalism.

If indeed a few people in Washington know or believe such to be the background of the assassination, their knowledge or belief may suffice to render the political ends of the conspirators fulfilled. In such a case American global policies would henceforth be charted by people aware that further softening of the Cold War would be challenged by a well organized and powerful group. Thus the conspirators may cast their shadow over Washington and the world without openly appearing as a political force.

The Johnson Administration need not necessarily resent having to reckon with such a force, since "Mr. Johnson has never believed that the fundamental issues which divide Russia and the democratic nations can be settled by negotiation." (Max Freedman in the *New York Post* of December 1.) In fact, "the new president is close to the generals and the admirals. They have frequently bucked the peace policies of JFK and Secretary Rusk." (Drew Pearson in his syndicated column of November 26.) How significant this closeness to the generals and their political backers may prove is indicated by the fact that "one of the first reports he

[President Johnson] received was from Walt Rostow, the State Dept. adviser who wanted to take us into war after the Kennedy-Khrushchev talks in Vietnam. This week Mr. Rostow recommended that this is the time for a new hard line against Moscow. JFK used to smile at Mr. Rostow's belligerent advice. Will [LBJ] know how to evaluate it?" (Ib.) Thus it seems that at Arlington Cemetery were buried John F. Kennedy and whatever cautious Cold War stance he imposed upon American foreign policy.

In this respect, there may be special significance in President Johnson's November 27th speech before Congress, both as to statement and omission. The pains he took to emphasize that John Kennedy's policy on civil rights would be continued make sharply conspicuous the absence of any specific declaration that the policy on American-Soviet negotiations would be continued as well. Certainly, the new President must have devoted immediate thought to this paramount question, and it is cause for wonder that he said nothing about it. If he intends to continue Mr. Kennedy's foreign policy but preferred not to acknowledge this fact, what was the reason for his preference? Is he withholding public commitment on this issue until he has a chance to neutralize the forces which killed President Kennedy? If on the other hand he plans significant changes in the policy concerning the Soviet Union and the Cold War, are these changes in effect imposed by the conspirators and the fear of them, or are they imposed by a consensus of the views of the new President and the conspirators?

The policies of John F. Kennedy were what they were; his tragic death does not retroactively alter them. It is only human that his critics were as grieved by his untimely death as were his most ardent supporters. This does not mean, however, that what he stood for can be seen in any sudden new light. The possibility that he was assassinated by uncompromising Cold War or hot war enthusiasts does not vindicate his policies as having been in the best interest of peace. Our national frame of mind is so

conditioned in favor of ultra-rightist escalation that a man decried as an "appeaser" is not necessarily a man of peace, any more than a man decried as a "communist" is necessarily even skeptical about the status quo. If John Kennedy was assassinated by rabid Cold Warriors, this would not prove him to have been an opponent of the Cold War. It would merely prove that he had not met their degree of bellicosity.

In fact, during the last weeks of the Kennedy Administration, Washington's reluctance regarding an international detente was becoming ever more obvious. The late President, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and other key men warned with increasing frequency against the delusion of a thaw. They took pains to put the world on notice that the international detente could be called off at any given moment, and replaced by a confrontation of brute force. These warnings were accompanied by deliberate U.S. efforts to renew tensions involving access to Berlin. Plans for the creation of a multinational nuclear surface fleet were pushed with vigor by a Washington not dissuaded by the reluctance of all its partners, with the solitary exception of West Germany. Any American plan thus involving the West Germans in a nuclear force is of course incompatible with a sincere approach to an American-Soviet detente. It conclusively proves that the detente was embraced as a temporary expedient, while the basic policy remained one of military challenge or blackmail of the Soviet Union.

Nor did these steps reveal any change in the thinking of the Kennedy Administration since the signing of the partial nuclear test ban treaty. This treaty was concluded not merely because it imposed few meaningful limitations upon the signatories; and not merely because the Soviets accepted, in essence, American proposals (the U.S. having a long record of retracting its proposals the moment the Soviets agreed to them); but primarily because the U.S. would have irrevocably lost her diplomatic leadership of her allies unless she went along with them on a minimal agreement with the Soviets. The treaty was a small concession to these

allies, to prevent them from reaching far more substantial agreements with the Soviet Union, without American participation or leadership.

Washington thus looked upon the treaty as a mere device for retaining diplomatic stature among the Atlantic allies. It was therefore perfectly consistent for the United States to accept the treaty while simultaneously bending every effort against further diminution of tensions. The aim was not a detente, but to render a true detente impossible. The push for the multilateral nuclear surface fleet, the incidents on the Berlin Autobahn, the newly imposed travel restrictions on Soviet bloc diplomats in the United States, and even the Barghoorn affair, were all part of this policy of sabotage. And the biggest step toward a new consolidation of the Atlantic alliance was yet to come. Reliable reports indicate that the Kennedy Administration's election campaign gift to the American people was to have been, if all went according to plan, Cuba. (See "Cuba—Sold Out?" in the November, 1963 TMO.) This gift was to climax Kennedy's electioneering, and also to galvanize U.S. allies into that unity, now lacking, which can be created only in an international emergency.

If there is any question as to whether President Kennedy needed to present the American electorate with a Cuban fiesta, or as to whether he needed a new international crisis to cement the disintegrating alliance, there can hardly be a doubt that Lyndon Johnson cannot do without such a victory. What other swash-buckling act can elevate Lyndon Johnson from the grey pettiness of behind-the-scenes Congressional intrigue to Presidential stature? How else, but with Cuba at his feet, can he lay claim before the American people to distinction and grandeur?

Cuba is therefore in mortal danger. Before she is collected into the United States basket, the "Maine" may well be sunk a second time. This time, unlike previous occasions, at least as much preparation must go into making it appear that the U.S. is defending her legitimate vital interests as has