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The KGB's Resistance To Soviet Detente

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When news of the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald for the assassination of President Kennedy reached Soviet leaders and the boss of the dread KGB, the vast Soviet secret police apparatus, a bomber was immediately dispatched from Moscow to Minsk by the frightened Kremlin.

The purpose: To retrieve Oswald's secret dossier in the KGB's office in Minsk (where Oswald had lived before returning to the U.S. in June, 1962) and fly it to Moscow for inspection. Terrified Kremlin leaders feared that the dossier might conceivably disclose "some relationship" between the assassin and the KGB.

As it turned out to the Kremlin's vast relief, according to KGB defector Yuri Nosenko's version in a new, soon to be published book on Soviet secret intelligence, the file showed no link. Nevertheless, this association between KGB and Oswald was another near miss when the independent operations of the mighty Soviet secret police threatened disruption of world peace against the Kremlin's announced policy—a danger more prevalent in today's era of detente.

Writes author John Barron: "Nosenko states that two panels of psychiatrists independently examined Oswald at KGB behest and each concluded that, though not insane, he was abnormal. Accordingly, the KGB ordered that Oswald be watched but not recruited . . ."

Oswald returned to the U.S. in June, 1962, then sought re-entry to the Soviet Union via the Soviet embassy in Cuba in September, 1963. When the KGB blocked his return, he went to Dallas to prepare for his terrible deed.

That episode is brought to light in Barron's authoritative expose of the pervasive, international spy network. "KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents" (Readers Digest Press) is the first definitive study of this foreign espionage and internal state police apparatus written with assistance of Western governments, including the U.S., West Germany, the Netherlands and Great Britain.

The reason for this unaccustomed help is in itself significant. After years of shrouding the public from scrutiny of Soviet spying, Western governments have come to realize little if any national security of the Western powers is involved. Obviously, KGB has all the threads of its own operations and would learn nothing from disclosure.

There is, moreover, a second, more ominous reason for the new desire by Western security agencies to have more information made public on vast KGB operations. This is the fact that KGB, confronting internal resistance to the Communist system arising from the Kremlin's policy of detente and expanding contacts with the West, is growing larger, more oppressive and more dangerous.

Consider these facts: The London-based Institute for the Study of Conflicts reported in 1973 that Soviet agents in Western European countries increased from 1,485 ten years ago to 2,146 last year. Three out of every four accredited Soviet "diplomats" in NATO countries are engaged in some form of spying.

To protect the rapidly growing Soviet trade bureaucracy from ideological taint, the Kremlin has installed as head of the Soviet chamber of commerce a top KGB official named Yevgenni Petrovich Pitovranov.

"The contradiction between the public politics of detente and the secret machinations of the KGB," writes Barron, "can be seen in the realm of trade. While the Soviet Union solicits broader commercial ties with the West, the KGB prepares to prevent these ties for its own familiar purposes by installing Pitovranov and other officers as overseers of the chamber of commerce."

Every Kremlinologist knows of the KGB's deep peneration into Soviet life. But disturbing questions about its Kremlin influence are raised by Barron's study, which has been commended by Ray S. Cline, former U.S. Central tral Intelligence Agency official and State Department intelligence boss, as "the most authenitc account of the KGB I have ever seen."

Thus, on Sept. 6, 1964, Barron writes, KGB agents fired a poison-pistol at a West German technician, sent from Bonn to "cleanse" the Moscow embassy of KGB microphones. The technician almost died from the invisible injection of nitrogen mustard gas.

As a result of that attack, the Bonn government angrily cancelled an invitation to then Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev to visit West Germany, a visit expected to result in a Soviet bid for detente. Within five weeks, Khrushchev was fired and detente was delayed for nearly six years.

The connection between the event in Moscow and Khrushchev's downfall is conjectural, but KGB's power to thwart Khrushchev's step toward detente was indisputably clear. That is one of Barron's chilling conclusions: KGB, pushing the hardest of hard lines, has an impact all its own on Kremlin actions abroad.

Yet, argues Barron, it carries total immunity. "Dismantlement of the KGB would remove the very foundation of Soviet society," he writes, "foundations laid by Lenin more than half a century ago."