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# Deflecting Assassins From Their Goal

President Ford's decision to curtail his campaign travels is crucial to preserving basic stability in American life. If the President of the United States had chosen to stay on the hustings, then other candidates for his office could do no less. And recent events suggest that the result in what should be a peaceful Bicen- tennial could be carnage at or very close to the top of our political life. The cause lies partly in the infectiousness of violence. Violence is contagious because when one man or woman acts out his or her violent impulses, the inner barriers which others have built against acting on similar impulses of their own are threatened and sometimes crumble. The problem of ensuring our leaders' safety will not be solved simply by requiring that they cam- paign less among the people, although this is an essential first step. Effec-

Mr. McMillan is completing a book on Marina and Lee Harvey Oswald.

(five) gun control, not only for hand- guns but for rifles, is a must. Had there been such legislation I believe that several of our recent assassinations could have been taken place. The explanation lies in the emotional makeup of the assassin, who is frequently in profound inner conflict over the act he is about to commit because of this conflict the assassin may be ready and even eager to be deflected from his goal. The assassin I know most about is Lee Harvey Oswald, because I am writing a book about him and his wife Marina. Despite the emotional factors which were impelling him to kill John F. Kennedy—and there were such factors—Oswald was deeply in conflict. Part of him wanted to be dragged back from the precipice, was begging to be dragged back. In fact, thus, had any obstacle been placed in

Oswald's path, no matter how slight, he might very well not have gone through with it.

One obstacle that could have deterred Oswald was the smallest difficulty of all, even embarrassment: buying firearms. Had he been unable to order lethal weapons by mail as he was able to do, then it is quite possible that this particular individual would never have come into possession of the high-powered rifle with which he killed President Kennedy.

Under legislation which has been in effect since 1968, Oswald could not have bought either his revolver or his rifle by mail, but it still is a simple matter to buy firearms in the United States.

Oswald is by no means the only killer or near-killer who could all too easily have been deterred. Most leaders of the American Left, if they will probably come away with the impression that the barrier is blocked by legislation. He had a good reason for not wanting to buy a rifle and had at least two good chances to fire at him. One of these chances passed up merely because he seemed to him that he was not wearing the right suit, and he later went back to get his rifle.

And now we have Jack Jane Moore, who began to buy a .45 caliber rifle in 1968. He had a good reason for not wanting to buy a rifle and had at least two good chances to fire at him. One of these chances passed up merely because he seemed to him that he was not wearing the right suit, and he later went back to get his rifle.

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Since it is becoming apparent that many of our assassins and would-be assassins are not the determined, single-minded individuals we may have supposed them to be, since they are generally in doubt about their mission, and since they tend also to be paranoid personalities with more than average fear that their guilty scheme is going to be detected in advance, it may be easier to stop them than we suppose. Almost any impediment will do, but by far the best would be gun control laws with real teeth in them.

Another argument for gun control is against, say, wide use of preventive detention, in that the real danger is the man or woman who is truly capable of carrying a violent scheme into action, is rarely a threatener and may be very very hard to detect.

One reason for killing, at least, is inability to express anger in lesser ways such as writing letters or in face-to-face encounters. Thus Oswald, who longed to be a hit man, but was not, was furious at FBI agent James P. Hosty who on Nov. 10, 1963, was looking into Oswald's record to determine whether the former's husband constituted a security threat because of their ties to Russia and Oswald's interest in Cuba.

Hosty, more periphrastic and probably than anyone in the FBI who dealt with the case prior to the assassination, is the one person who said that Oswald was in a "looming" state of mind to kill the President. However, even on the basis of what he knew, there was no reason why it should have been that Oswald might be a threat to the President's life.



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Oswald wrote a letter to Hosty warning him against seeing Oswald again and threatening to go to the Dallas police station if he did not do so. He also wrote a letter to the Dallas police station and the letter to the Dallas police station. He also wrote a letter addressed to Hosty, the FBI agent at the Dallas office.

Oswald was not capable of the encounter to which he was subjected face to face. It is not, although not probable, that he might have been spotted as a threat to the President. On the other hand, he had been capable of the encounter and of expressing his anger face to face. It is also possible that he would not have been the kind of man who would kill the President.

As things stand today, it is the person with many channels to display his anger, the activist, the demonstrator, the joiner of causes, the writer of threatening letters, who is likely to catch the eye of local police or the Secret Service on the eve of a presidential visit.

That leaves the quiet one, the dangerous one, the one with no other way to express his anger, at large and free to go about his deadly task.