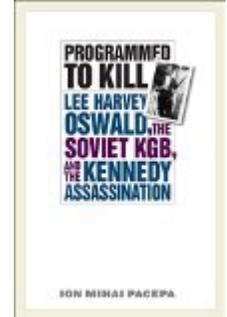


Ion Mikai Pacepa. *Programmed to Kill: Lee Harvey Oswald, the Soviet KGB, and the Kennedy Assassination.* Lanham: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 2007. 416 pp. \$28.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-56663-761-9.



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Given the thousands of books, research reports, and articles that have been written about the tragic events of November 22, 1963, today's reader has every right to ask this question: do we really need another book about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy? Two expensive federal investigations produced two summary reports and a combined thirty-eight volumes of evidence; at least four books have already promised "definitive" answers to the assassination's mysteries; one book "closed" the case; and others, by the massive weight of their bound volumes, suggested that final solutions had been found to the unanswered questions surrounding Kennedy's death. [1]

For a book to stand out in this sea of scholarship, the author must bring specialized skills or backgrounds to the table, which enables the writer to provide strikingly new insights into the Kennedy case, or to reinterpret old evidence in provocative fresh ways. Ion Mikai Pacepa's book delivers these essentials in a way that exceeds expectation. *Programmed to Kill*, simply put, is a

new paradigmatic work on the assassination of President Kennedy. It has the potential to become a revolution in terms of how we perceive the assassination, the questions we ask, and the kinds of solutions we seek as academic work on one of history's darkest days moves forward.

Lieutenant General Pacepa is the highest-ranking intelligence official ever to defect from the Soviet Bloc. He spent fifteen years of his previous life at the top of a Communist intelligence effort designed to cast the blame for Kennedy's death on forces within the United States. He is the only investigator of the assassination who had direct knowledge of the KGB's ties to Lee Harvey Oswald.

Pacepa contends that the Soviet PGU (the first chief directorate of the KGB) recruited Oswald in 1957 while he was serving as a marine in Japan. Brought back to Moscow in 1959 to be debriefed and readied for a new intelligence assignment in Europe, Oswald provided information that enabled the Soviets to shoot down an American U-2

spy plane on May 1, 1960. With prodding from the Soviets, Oswald was persuaded to leave Japan to return to the United States on a temporary mission to assassinate President Kennedy, whom Nikita Khrushchev had come to despise. Oswald was taken over by the PGU component for assassination abroad (the Thirteenth Department), given a Russian wife, and sent back to the United States in June 1962. The Thirteenth Department also dispatched Oswald's case officer, Valery Kostikov, as a diplomat to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City, to be available for secret meetings with Oswald. At the time, Mexico was the most desirable place for contact with the Soviet Bloc's important agents in the United States. Pacepa documents that Oswald and case officer Kostikov met there at least once, and probably twice.

In the fall of 1962, after a public trial in West Germany accused Khrushchev of personally ordering two political killings there, all foreign assassinations throughout the Soviet Bloc were called off. Oswald proved obstinate and determined to kill Kennedy despite the PGU's frantic efforts to deprogram him, including at least two direct and clear orders to stand-down and abort his mission. Oswald then stubbornly proceeded on his own--as a lone gunman--believing that afterward he could return to a hero's welcome in Moscow. To demonstrate his readiness for such a heroic ask, he took a shot at the right-wing American Army General Edwin Walker, narrowly missing him.

With Oswald's noncompliance, contingency plans were engaged for silencing him should he commit the unthinkable. Two days after he did just that, without PGU help or blessing, Oswald himself was killed by Jack Ruby, as arranged by the PGU with Cuban intelligence help. When Ruby was about to be released from jail in 1967, the PGU apparently had him killed by cancer--causing irradiation.

The search for a new paradigm in any field begins with anomalies that prior research could

not satisfactorily explain. There are scores of such anomalies that are newly explained in this book; let me cite but one as an example. Oswald's trip to Mexico City in September and October 1963 has been shrouded in controversy for years. The Warren Commission's narrative stated that Oswald was seeking a transit visa to Cuba, but was refused when the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City would not immediately approve a visa to the Soviet Union, a prerequisite for the prized Cuban visa. Pacepa notes that a first draft of Oswald's letter to the Soviet Embassy in Washington DC dated November 9, 1963, indicated that he had met with his case officer "Comrade Kostikov" in Mexico City. Thus, his true purpose in going there was to meet with his Thirteenth Department case officer. Significantly, records later showed that Oswald's letter, after arriving at the embassy, was signed off by Vitaly Gerasimov, a PGU officer assigned under diplomatic cover in the United States, whose signature appears on most of Oswald's correspondence with the Soviet Embassy in Washington.

New paradigms are by nature not yet perfect; they need further investigation to actualize their potential as models to guide research for a period of time. I can foresee at least one area where such elaborative research is needed. Pacepa gives fairly short consideration to Oswald's "Historic Diary," basically writing it off as a trail of disinformation whose purpose was to cover Oswald's tracks in Russia with a timeline that snugly fits Russia's cover story about Oswald's time spent there. But Pacepa does not read far enough: in the diary, there is also a statement of Oswald's political philosophy, one that combines the best aspects of capitalism and communism, and is revolutionary and unprecedented. In it, Oswald foresaw a great confrontation between the superpowers, and after that, a chance to rebuild the world based on the new utopia he had constructed. Seeing the arc of Kennedy's (and Khrushchev's) rhetoric leading toward détente in the fall of 1963, might Oswald have killed Kennedy to spark the

great nuclear confrontation that the Cuban Missile Crisis did not produce?[2] This personal and political motive to assassinate Kennedy might have prevailed over the KGB's orders for Oswald to draw back and abort.

Interestingly and in spite of the book's title, Pacepa presents no evidence that Oswald was a behaviorally programmed "Manchurian Candidate" sent to kill Kennedy. Oswald received only the routine and usual ideological indoctrination needed for any of the agents in the Thirteenth Department. Despite this, the fictitious idea of a scientifically programmed Oswald would have fit well with the real narrative Pacepa writes; the programming of the disgruntled American GI might have been so good that the assassin could not be stopped.

When successful, a new paradigm essentially connects the dots of the evidence in an extraordinary way to paint a new picture. Pacepa exceeds all prior expectations in this regard. His appendix entitled "Connecting the Dots" provides a timeline of Oswald's life along with Pacepa's parenthetical commentary showing how his book has illuminated the facts of the Kennedy case. This allows the reader to compare what the author has contributed alongside what is already known; in the process, the reader can compare Pacepa's thesis with their own pet theory.

Programmed to Kill is a superb new paradigmatic work on the death of President Kennedy. Over time, Pacepa's portrait of what happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963, may evolve into a revolutionary new lens for perceiving the event and its aftermath. From the most casual reader to the serious student preparing his or her own magnum opus, this book is a "must read" for everyone interested in the assassination of President Kennedy.

Notes

[1]. President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, *The Warren Report: Report of the President's Commission on the*

Assassination of President John F. Kennedy (New York: Associated Press, 1964); and U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee on Assassination, *Final Report of the Select Committee on Assassination*, 95th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979).

[2]. See Leland M. Griffin, "When Dreams Collide: Rhetorical Trajectories in the Assassination of President Kennedy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 20, no. 2 (1984): 111-131.

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