

VLAD

Act One

Soon after 9/11, George Tenet, head of the CIA, established an internal think tank to forecast any potential target or conceivable strategy for future terrorist attack. No scenario however extreme was to be left out. For its membership, the Agency scoured its ranks for suitable candidates for this special task force, codenamed "Red Cell." The ominous title was unrelated to the Cold War-era labeling of all things Communist as "Red." Rather it signified the newly operational anti-terrorist conditions for universal alert – Red, Orange, Yellow, etc.

By now, al Qa'ida had been specifically linked to the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks. Some years before 9/11 however, the Agency had begun keeping files on al Qa'ida, a Persian Gulf Islamic terrorist group. The file held details of the 1993 parking garage bombing of the World Trade Center, the 1998 US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the 2000 USS Cole sabotage in Yemen, and active training camps in Somalia, Yemen, and Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden, a known mujaheddin philanthropist and fighter in the Soviet-Afghan War and the seventeenth son of a prominent Saudi Arabian family, was al Qa'ida's charismatic leader. He soon appeared on video haranguing the twin evils - the US and Israel - as the source of the world's troubles, and promised future retribution.

Though the Agency had been alerted by field agents prior to 9/11 of al Qa'ida cell phone traffic and rumors boasting of imminent "large and bold attacks," its collective imagination fell far short of the overwhelming magnitude of the enemy's dramatic coordinated strategy, and audacious imagination and potent symbolism in the successful attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon with three high-jacked airliners.

For its Red Cell roster, the Agency tapped some of its more creatively imaginative members including, by default, some of its more eccentric and unpredictable types. One such agent from the U.S. embassy in Lahore, Pakistan, codenamed WOOLY, was delayed joining the main contingent of tapped agents in Langley. By his arrival, all recruits had been divided into smaller teams and WOOLY found himself in a group of one, which he didn't particularly mind - he preferred to work alone.

WOOLY was a contradiction – meticulous and highly focused in some regards, casual and careless in others. His codename, assigned by a supervisor, reflected either his penchant for Ivy League tweeds or his fuzzy distraction. A daydreamer, WOOLY was predictably imaginative; conventional in appearance, he was an unpredictable analyst - or just contrary, as his supervisor contended. In staff meetings, WOOLY had the annoying habit of reflexively taking the opposite view. Being the Devil's advocate was his self-appointed role. When contacted about the Red Cell project, WOOLY'S supervisor nominated him as much to get rid of his annoyance as to volunteer his eccentric talents. After all, his "talent" was what the Agency was asking for, no matter the consequence.

The Red Cell teams met in various conference rooms. These small groups worked on white boards under florescent lights, listing and organizing their ideas as Tenet directed. WOOLY, left alone, wandered into the library, or a lounge or alcove, or down to the cafeteria. In the library he could request classified files. With a small pad he doodled and made laundry lists of random thoughts.

Meanwhile the individual groups of “unconventional” analysts were busy asking themselves the conventional questions: “What could be the next targets? What’s unexpected and audacious? What has the same or greater potential impact and symbolic potency? Etc., etc.”

From this process the teams compiled the expected lists of targets and potential weapons of mass destruction. For major symbolic landmarks – the Statue of Liberty, the Verrazano Narrows Bridge and Golden Gate; for infrastructure – Fort Knox, power grids, nuclear plants, and water systems. Besides hijacked airliners, suitcase nukes and dirty bombs tied with biologicals for the predictable weapon of choice, with truckloads of ammonia nitrate and fuel oil a distant third. Within days, to assure a terrified public the Agency was working in earnest, the most general of these obvious ideas were leaked to the New York Times.

Meanwhile WOOLY, alone, was thinking neither “What?” or “Where?” but “What *if*?”

“What if *what*?” Director Tenet questioned privately, annoyed.

“*What if* it’s not just al Qa’ida?” WOOLY responded, “Not *just* bin Laden? What if it’s someone or something *bigger*?”

Tenet, astounded, queried, “What or who could possibly be *bigger* than has already happened?”

“What if it’s someone who wants us to get sucked into a fight – into a war – with al Qa’ida and the Taliban? Something like Mogadishu only much bigger...and longer? Someone who wants us to get mired in Afghanistan, like the Soviets in ’79 - for 10 years - with al Qa’ida as the bait? Someone who wants us to get suckered into another black hole a la Vietnam – in someplace just as horrendous and difficult?”

“Even if there is someone else who planned it, it won’t happen that way,” Tenet countered. “We’re much too strong for al Qa’ida. Or the Taliban. Or anyone like that. Our weaponry is too high-tech, too destructive. We’re going to kick their asses. Just like the President ordered.”

“I know that’s standard thinking,” answered WOOLY, “but that’s exactly why it’s an effective strategy. To me, the bigger the bait, the bigger the trap. And there isn’t anything bigger than the Twin Towers and the Pentagon and the White House or the Capitol for that fourth plane.”

“It’s just these terrorists – they escalated. They thought big, and now we have to think big. They got lucky – like Pearl Harbor.” Tenet conceded.

WOOLY pressed on, “What are the Pentagon’s war plans for Afghanistan?”

“Nothing significant, but you can check. The Pentagon has large-scale plans for Iraq, Iran, and Syria but there’s nothing large-scale for Afghanistan. Ever since the Soviets pulled out, we’ve really backed off – both State and us. Even the UN and other humanitarian agencies have closed up. Hell, you know that! You’re stationed right nextdoor. The country’s a wreck, if you can call it a country anymore.”

“Well...yes. And we struggle with that,” WOOLY reflected sadly, remembering his visits in the early seventies to the exotic country of rugged mountains, irrigated valleys, blue-tiled mosques and the romance of the ancient Silk Road.

“Well, we haven’t successfully penetrated the Taliban, and there’s certainly no friendly leader to pull a central government together, the infrastructure’s bombed to hell, the irrigation’s shot, no economy except heroin, and no manufacturing greater than artificial limbs and wheelchairs. We’re certainly not going to piss away our small budget on a country where the local warlords sell off the phone poles and copper wire. It’s not as if there’s a big established oil or gas field, or even a pipeline. You couldn’t even build one or they’d blow it up. There’s been no strategic interest from State for a long time. It’s a backwater. For whatever garden spot it once was, it’s been stripped bare and blown up – it’s a hellhole now.”

“And therefore we wrote it off – for almost a decade,” WOOLY concluded.

“Well let’s just say ‘unofficially’ we did.”

“Too bad,” WOOLY muttered to himself.

“Look, the consensus of all the NGO aid agencies was that it was virtually hopeless – especially with the Taliban taking over. And it certainly had no vital interest for us.”

“Until now,” WOOLY interjected.

“Yes, until now. Yeah - NOW! We gotta go in there and kick some ass. The President wants Osama’s head on a pole. Pronto. Quote, ‘Pron-to!’”

DUFFY stared at the souvenirs on Tenet’s desk, at plaques and photos on the wall.

Tenet interrupted WOOLY’S reverie, “What’re you thinking?”

“It’s only a theory, but I’m thinking the possibility of a proxy war.”

“Proxy wars are nothing new there, as you well know. We’ve got the Pakistanis supporting the Taliban to keep their western flank stable...”

“...Yeah, and the Kandahar road open to keep the heroin flowing,” added WOOLY.

“Right. Stability...at whatever cost to the Afghans. The Taliban’s strict fundamentalism isn’t any skin off the Pakis’ nose. The Pakis could care less if all the Afghan women are locked up, schools and hospitals closed, the fields planted with mines or poppies, the whole country blown back to the Stone Age - or at least the Seventh Century. Keeps it all simple and basic.” Tenet paused for a moment, and then added, “But I keep thinking they can’t be thrilled with all the refugee camps on their doorstep.”

“Well, Mr. Tenet, the camps are all Pashtun anyway – one big ethnic family, both sides of the border. All those young boys – mostly orphans - filling the Taliban’s *madrassas*, becoming Muslim fanatics and AK-47 toting little terrorists. It’s working for them – the Pakis. Even if the Taliban are hell-bent on creating a single unified Islamic Emirate. Mullah Omar, that leader with one eye, he had himself robed in Mohammed’s cloak atop his own mosque. They’re all pledged to obey this fanatic,” lectured WOOLY.

Tenet had run out of time and patience. He had other pressing matters. “So who’s behind your ‘proxy’ then? If not the Pakis, who – the Iranians, the Saudis?”

"I think it's Putin," responded WOOLY.

"The Russians? You're crazy!"

"I didn't say the Russians. I said Putin."

"I knew you had a questionable reputation, but your boss didn't say you were nuts."

"You want to know why?"

"I don't have time for this. You want to dream up some cockamamie theory, that's your choice. But if this leaks out, even a single sound byte, you'll find your ass collecting Social Security. Anyone in State or the White House gets wind of this, or this gets back to the Russians, or the media, you'll put relations back 20 years. And it'll not only be your head, but mine. I shouldn't even be talking to you about this."

"Sir, you've just confirmed why I should. A year ago you wouldn't have let me near your office with a conspiracy theory to simultaneously fly 737s into the World Trade, the Pentagon, and the White House. The bar's been raised, sir, and it's not coming back down."

"Get the hell out of here. And any report you write, you mark it for my eyes only. And burn your notes!"

"Thank you, sir. Have a nice day, sir."

"Get the hell out of here!"

Act Two

WOOLY sat at a table in the Langley café and thought back to the first germ of his theory. It had occurred three months before, without any significant event to give it meaning, just his curious reaction. He'd seen it on TV - George W. Bush's first summit meeting with Vladimir Putin in Slovenia, June 2001. "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very trustworthy and straightforward...I was able to get a sense of his soul," Bush had said, a true "heart-to-heart" about faith. That's when born-again Bush knew he could "trust" Putin. A photo had shown the two of them together smiling, clasping hands - WOOLY had thought Putin's smile had more the frozen, practiced quality of a mortician.

And then WOOLY recalled photos of Roosevelt and Churchill with Stalin at Tehran in '43, and again at Yalta in '45; Roosevelt and Stalin, in particular, smiling. Roosevelt had privately called Stalin "Uncle Joe," pleased with how well they'd gotten on. And WOOLY knew from later intelligence that the Soviets by then had penetrated Roosevelt's administration, from the Manhattan Project, to the OSS, to Roosevelt's own cabinet at the highest levels. There was much "Uncle Joe" knew about Roosevelt's strategies - the Bomb, war production, weaponry, counter-espionage, and post-war Europe. It was the smile of confidence on "Uncle Joe's" face, not warm camaraderie that Roosevelt misinterpreted.

And today WOOLY knew that Putin, the newly-elected Russian President was, more significantly, the recent head of the FSB - the Federal Security Service, a successor agency to the KGB - and he was former KGB for 15 years. He knew Putin's expertise was in psychology and international relations, with extensive experience in counter-espionage, foreign intelligence, and international trade with Westerners. WOOLY also firmly believed "once a spy - always a spy," whether one rose politically

to the presidency or not. The visceral psychology of espionage was in the blood. To WOOLY, there was more going on with Putin than politics.

WOOLY also believed that many American politicians were naïve and innocent, geographically insulated from most world political and cultural events, subject to their own consuming regional interests and the perpetual grind of politicking.

WOOLY also knew Bush first hand. As young men, they were both Yale College '68, and both history majors. Bush was a fun guy, not too serious. He was president of the "drunken Dekes" his senior year, and Skull and Bones, a secret society that traditionally tapped the president of the Dekes. Bush was a drinker and a regular party guy, though without the "good old boy" Texas accent of his later political career. They'd not been close. Bush hung out with a different group and WOOLY spent his free time with the Yale Dramat, working tech, doing small parts, and trying to write plays.

Though the Bushes had a distinguished Greenwich, Connecticut and political legacy, young George intentionally shrugged off his Eastern patrician mantle. After all, he'd spent ages 2 to 12 in isolated Midland, Texas in an unlikely middle class upbringing. Crammed into a small plain suburban house filled with younger siblings, he enthusiastically played in the backyard, messed around the neighborhood and back alleys with pals, and walked six blocks to elementary school. His greatest passion was baseball and he lived in his baseball suit.

His father, Big George or "Poppy," was determined to make his own way without family money. He required several years to rise from "regular" middle class to "regular" upper-middle class, with the attendant nicer home, nicer neighborhood and country club. But it was still Midland, Texas – a small wannabe Houston sprung-up on flat desolate scrubland, littered with sagebrush and dusty supply yards, stacked with oil pipes and greasy pumps. But still, there were streets with green lawns, shade trees, and Cape Cods a few blocks from downtown, and the idyllic American Dream could be lived there. And young George lived it.

Putin, six years younger than George W. Bush, grew up the son of poor working-class parents in Leningrad. Putin's father, like Bush's father, served in the navy (in the '30s though), and in submarines rather than as a carrier pilot. During the Great Patriotic War (WW II to us), Putin's father, a NKVD saboteur, would have been challenged physically, emotionally, and psychologically like Bush's father, a heroic decorated young torpedo bomber pilot. Putin's father operated clandestinely behind enemy lines in an occupied country; Bush's in the air over enemy waters.

Before his birth in '52, Putin, raised an only child, had a brother who'd died of diphtheria during the terrible 2½ year Nazi siege of Leningrad. Two decades earlier, Putin's paternal grandfather had served as Lenin's cook till Lenin's death in '26, and Stalin's till his death in '53, continuing for the Party thereafter. Grandfather would have absorbed "house politics." Putin's own father, who had survived the war in NKVD service, was a strong believer in Communism, and hated democracy.

WOOLY pictured the family conversations transpiring around young George and Vladimir in these two vastly different households and social settings. He imagined the various sophisticated and unsophisticated interpretations of war and

survival, of politics and ideology, of financial struggles and social issues in the two contrasting households.

While young George's imagination was filled with baseball and the playful activities of being a "regular guy," young Vladimir was obsessed with being "a spy" and "a hero." Putin was enthralled with spy movies. Though Bush was of normal stature growing up (WOOLY recalled about 5'11" at Yale), Putin never grew taller than 5'7." Bush played baseball, became a cheerleader in prep school, and competed summers in fierce family athletics at the family compound in Kennebunkport, Maine. Putin, starting in sixth grade, trained and competed fiercely in judo in a decrepit Leningrad sports club hard by a grimy turbine factory. He never fought at more than 135 pounds, and in training often took on teammates twice his size. He was known as a fearless competitor with an extremely calm demeanor - emotionless and soundless no matter the intense pain or struggle. He was serious, terse, hard-to-read.

Though a team sport, judo is essentially individual competition and Putin's will to win was exceptionally strong. He became a city champion and toured the Soviet Union with his team. Studying chemistry and later international law at Leningrad State University, he ignored pressure to join the collegiate team, remaining loyal to his shabby club and down-to-earth coach for 15 years. All along Putin was secretly emulating the physical, psychological, and patriotic attributes of his favorite fictional spies.

On graduation in 1975 he enthusiastically joined the KGB while earlier, at university, became a Communist. He remained a Party member until his disillusioned resignation in August '91 during the failed KGB coup against Gorbachev. By then Gorbachev had been systematically dismantling the Communist systems and encouraging nationalistic self-determination throughout the East European satellites, and now the Soviet Union. This period was a devastating and disillusioning crisis for Putin, personally and professionally. It can be said, then, that Putin came of age between the rise of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union.

WOOLY found Putin's judo background interesting, as he too had wrestled in high school and understood the dynamics. He knew too that Bush's Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, was a collegiate wrestler, though in an upper weight class. Therefore, he credited both men with a high degree of personal nerve, aggressiveness, independence, and tenacity, but gave the edge to Putin for his class struggle and deprivation plus, significantly, the "short man complex" - the compulsion to oppose and overwhelm a much bigger and stronger opponent. Furthermore, Putin was KGB.

So after the shock of 9/11, and when word came of his special assignment to Langley, WOOLY became obsessed with Putin and the evolving theory of a secret Russian proxy war. He also thought it ironic that no country was more obsessed with secret conspiracies than Russia itself, either instigating them or being their target, especially by the United States, its former "Great Adversary."

And now, here he was, trying to decipher a subversive clandestine psychology that targeted the US for its most devastating domestic attack ever. And

wondering if it could have been secretly instigated by the former Soviet Union – in particular, its inscrutable new President, the former KGB career officer, Vladimir Putin. WOOLY certainly thought so. And he thought Putin’s motives would be several: an overwhelming need to revenge the US-assisted losses in Afghanistan; the loss of the Cold War itself, with the corresponding loss of Super Power status, and the humiliation on the world stage; and finally the demise of the entire Communist system and the Soviet Union itself. Taken in its entirety, this period was an enormous national catastrophe, brought on essentially by US policy and Gorbachev himself. Proudful, Putin would have taken this catastrophe as a personal affront. And stoically, he would feel it, but he wouldn’t show it.

Analyzing Putin’s professional, political, and personal capabilities, and the motivating factors, WOOLY thought it totally within Putin’s powers to conceive, engineer, and even revel in such a terrorist conspiracy. Putin’s trick, however, would be to keep it absolutely hidden from the world. And at that, WOOLY thought, “How natural for a KGB agent.”

Act Three

Conventional Agency protocol required WOOLY to limit his report to two pages, plus a cover sheet of bullet points, which might be all Tenet would read. All of WOOLY’S thoughts and theories to date were too subjective and unconnected to specific 9/11 strategies for inclusion. No, they would never do; he had to organize and distill specific circumstantial evidence for his report.

In the meantime he considered titles for his secret file. He hoped the right title would put him in the correct “Agency” frame of mind. He began writing acronyms:

PUTIN > PUNIT > NITUP > INPUT > PITNU > TUPIN > TUPIN!-Two Pence > “Tuppence” =

TUPPENCE: Secret Report from the Red Cell

He hated the Dickens-like sound - too benign as well. Starting again, he began with Putin’s nickname:

VYLODYA> VL0D > VLAD > VLAD THE IMPALER! (i.e., DRACULA!) =

VLAD: Secret Report from the Red Cell

Though “Vlad” was obviously short for “Vladimir,” he liked the strong sound of it, and the sinister subtext. He then added:

For Director’s Eyes Only

He now had his cover sheet.

WOOLY had a talent for imagining and empathizing with a subject – to get inside the head of an ally or adversary, whether a national or a nation. This harkened back to his college passion for drama and theatrics – actors were mimics, chameleons; plays were hypothetical reconstructions.

WOOLY imagined Putin's KGB training, and from files began to catalogue the highpoints of Soviet espionage victories and defeats – history Putin would have studied at KGB school: agents, double agents, saboteurs, Legals and Illegals, disinformation, and proxy wars, from the Czars to Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev. And as a Cold War KGB officer, WOOLY had to imagine the influence of Brezhnev, Gorbachev, and Yeltsin.

WOOLY considered other ominous events occurring in the Middle East during the Cold War. US-backed Israel defeated Soviet-backed Egypt and Syria in the Yom Kippur War of '67, increasing Arab anger. The rage of the Arab Muslims against US support of Israel manifested itself in the oil embargo of '73.

The embargo was not alleviated until the early 80s, when President Reagan persuaded the Saudis and other non-OPEC nations to increase oil production, glutting the market, in turn hurting the Soviets, dependent on oil, their main export. The Soviets, heavily burdened by the arms race with the US, and their Afghan war, now faced deep economic crisis.

In the early 80s Reagan had pledged to defeat the “evil empire” of the Soviet Union, significantly increasing US arms build-up, thereby “burying” the Soviet Union by outspending them. A long-range missile limitation treaty was scrapped by the Soviets on Reagan's announcement to create an anti-missile defense system, “Star Wars.” Financially, the Soviets could not feasibly develop a counter-weapon.

Previously, in '79, the Soviets had begun sending in the first of 100,000 troops to assist the threatened Communist government in Afghanistan, thereby becoming involved in an escalating 10-year war of attrition. American cash, equipment, and CIA know-how aided the rebels, particularly with Stinger missiles to counter Soviet aircraft.

The rebel side had attracted outside Muslim mujaheddin fighters from Arab and Central Asia countries, including the wealthy radical from Saudi Arabia, Osama bin Laden. In Afghanistan bin Laden gained knowledge of the country geographically, politically, and culturally. With the CIA-backed mujaheddin rebels, he gained fighting skills. But all the while bin Laden harbored a hatred of the Americans for their corrupting influence in Saudi Arabia and their anti-Arab alliance with Israel.

In 1990-'91, with the Soviets out of Afghanistan, America suddenly shifted to Kuwait, with US bombing and land attacks opposing Iraq's invasion to assert its “historic right” to Kuwait. This new Gulf War further incited bin Laden and many other Arab radicals to act against the Americans.

The '90s was a period in which bin Laden organized and trained al Qa'ida in remote camps, and launched periodic attacks against American interests. It was only after strong pressure on Khartoum – Osama's base - by the US and US-allied Arab states, that bin Laden was forced to leave his downtown air-conditioned headquarters and relocate al Qa'ida elsewhere.

The mujaheddin of Afghanistan, with whom bin Laden had fought against the Soviets, and the growing fundamentalist movement of the Taliban, offered him the safest sanctuary and support, with perhaps further covert support from Pakistan. The ethnic Pashtuns that created the Taliban were a native population contiguous to both eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan. 20% of the Pakistani military was Pashtun.

Cleverly, bin Laden began to distance himself from the old Afghan mujaheddin fighters, as the mujaheddin were seen by the Taliban as fighting to grab political power for their respective war lords. The Taliban fundamentalists, on the other hand, were a movement to cleanse and purify society by restoring peace, disarming the population, enforcing Sharia law, and defending the integrity and Islamic character of Afghanistan. They wanted to emulate the ideal Islamic society created by the Prophet Mohammed 1400 years ago.

A “talib” is a student, part or full time, in a madrassa. A talib seeks knowledge; a mullah gives knowledge. All the talibs who gathered around their cleric, Mullah Omar, were children of the jihad – “jihad” being a religious war. They were deeply disillusioned by the factionalism and criminal activities of the once-idealized mujaheddin. But in the refugee camps of Pakistan, however, they learned to fight from the mujaheddin. And when the Taliban gave Mullah Omar power to lead its movement, he in turn gave power and authority to the Taliban to deal with the people’s problems.

The mountainous Afghan terrain with its tactical advantage to rebels was familiar to bin Laden, and the native population friendly, due to his deep financial resources. The nearby sanctuary of rugged western Pakistan just over the border was a further advantage, being off-limits to Americans, at least officially. And though they survived in caves, mountains, and mud compounds on either side of the border, bin Laden and his hardened Arab radicals maintained a chartered Ariana Afghan Airliner.

During this period, bin Laden vocally sanctioned large-scale violence against Americans and Israelis, and in 1996 issued an open call for war. Most significantly, bin Laden’s lethal mission was furthered by his personal ambition, charisma, and great media-savvy, in addition to his large personal wealth.

Unfortunately, all of this bin Laden and al Qa’ida intelligence gathered during the 90s did not attract serious attention at Langley. Though perhaps it did pique Soviet KGB interest because of their longstanding anti-US “Great Adversary” policy. Or so WOOLY suspected.

Act Four

In 1985, following 10 years of service monitoring foreign business, conducting counter-intelligence, and combating political dissent in the Soviet Union, Putin was assigned to monitor students and recruit agents in Dresden, East Germany. That year Mikhail Gorbachev rose to power, and began a six-year period that would result in the greatest changes in the Soviet system since the Communist

Revolution, changes that would shock both Putin and the Soviet Union - *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and *demokratsia* – reorganization, openness, government through elections and parliaments.

President Gorbachev was the first leader not to have grown up under Stalin. He had new Western-leaning ideas. Effectively replacing Communist hardliners by '87, he implemented new policies of These were the most progressive changes since Brezhnev's policy of "peaceful coexistence" and *détente* (co-operation with outsiders) prompted by Nixon's visit in the 70s.

Gorbachev believed in a new era of economic and political unity with Western Europe, rather than continued confrontation and "spheres of influence." He believed the revitalization from a Western-style restructuring would bring it in closer harmony, particularly without the continuing destructive economic burden of the Arms Race.

In a 1989 speech in Strasburg, he stunned the Communist world announcing a policy for self-determination for the Warsaw Pact states, and a non-intervention policy by the Soviet Union. This repudiation of the Soviet interventionist doctrine led to the systematic democratizing of the East European client states, and the subsequent fall of Communism. Gorbachev announced that German reunification, anathema to Communist hard-liners, would be an internal German matter. Gorbachev believed that whatever authority the Soviets appeared to lose in Eastern Europe would be balanced by an equal increase of influence in Western Europe.

Internally, however, there were unexpected repercussions. Gorbachev's economic policies backfired, bringing the country close to disaster through shortages and deficits. The democratizing of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were also destructive to the power of the Communist Party and to Gorbachev himself, unleashing latent feelings of nationalism and anti-Soviet hatred throughout the satellite states and ethnic Soviet republics. The expanding counter-revolution and a Soviet internal coup-attempt unfolded that would remove Gorbachev from power by Christmas Day 1991.

What Gorbachev had done, however, was music to Western ears. And no music was sweeter than the announcement by Presidents George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev to end the Cold War. The sudden dissolution of the Soviet Union into Russian and adjoining independent republics followed. This aggregate, especially the economic disasters, cost Gorbachev the Presidency.

Previously, in June 1990, with the recent collapse of the East German government, the barriers removed between East and West, the Soviets withdrawn from Afghanistan, and Communism rapidly failing, Putin was recalled to Moscow. Bitter and disillusioned, he resigned his KGB commission during the Gorbachev coup attempt in August 1991. Though Gorbachev survived the coup, within four months he would be convinced to resign by Yeltsin, who rising to the leadership vacuum, had boldly faced down the coup's tanks.

A civilian now, Putin reconnected with his former law professor from Leningrad State University, who was mayor of Leningrad, and Putin became his highly effective vice mayor. Putin quickly rose in local power and influence, thereby gaining the attention of President Yeltsin, who tapped him for Moscow. After highly effective Moscow service, and proving requisite political facility, Putin was

identified by Yeltsin's party as a Presidential-successor. They believed he demonstrated strength, determination, and the action to stabilize Russia and restore its prominence. He was presented as a modern hero, due in large part to his dedicated Party and KGB service

As President, Putin quickly took old-guard style control in both the economic and political arenas, and proved particularly effective in smashing rebellions in ethnic republics battling for independence or inter-ethnic revenge. He "controlled" corruption in the government, and the emerging Russian Mafia. Putin re-organized and divided the existing 89 Russian provinces and their governors into a more manageable 7 federal zones. Of the 7 zone administrators, 5 were former generals or KGB.

WOOLY certainly recognized a tough hard-liner when he saw one. He imagined Putin's ability to work both openly and secretly - to work with former Communist Party members, new "democrats," former KGB and military, the growing underworld, and the newly "rich and powerful" oligarchs. He could work diplomatically with foreign powers and business and, as an effective former spy, could do whatever it took without revealing secret agendas.

And suddenly here, in 1999, was a very tough determined "spy" in the most powerful office in this huge and troubled country - a spy with axes to grind, especially with the United States. For who other than the United States was more responsible for the current low status and failures of the former Soviet Union?

Finale

WOOLY knew he must finally connect the dots. In WOOLY'S theory, Putin must reconcile the hatred and animosity of the Muslims for the Russians, particularly in those Central Asia republics that it had fought and suppressed, and of course in Afghanistan.

WOOLY thought the answer and strategy would be stunningly obvious to Putin - "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Israel was the enemy of virtually all Muslims - radical and conservative - and the US was Israel's greatest ally. An ally that was, historically, the "Great Adversary" of the Soviets - the "Russians" now. Most of Putin's secretive and subversive career, and unique psyche were in dedicated opposition to this "Great Adversary." And Russia's demise and humiliation was at the major expense of this "Great Adversary." So perhaps nothing would suit Putin better than to see its former "Great Adversary" in a prolonged war that would sap its spirit, reputation, and treasure, and create political divisiveness. Particularly a religious war that could draw dedicated Muslims from around the world to a unified jihad - a modern Crusade. The involvement of the US in such a war would certainly benefit or even restore Russia, politically and economically.

This was not a difficult political, ideological, or strategic agenda to sell a radical Muslim anti-US terrorist group. The trick would be to keep it an absolute secret and to avoid any disastrous repercussions. And who more suited to manage this secret than Putin.

Whether it be technical, logistical, financial, or moral support, Putin thought his available resources and expertise could be put at the disposal of such a clever leader as bin Laden, such a determined organization as al Qa'ida, and such a jihad as the Muslims' against the "Great Infidels" – the US and Israel.

In WOOLY'S mind, it was not beyond reason that most or all of bin Laden's, al Qa'ida's, the Taliban's, and the Pakistani's activities could have been accessible to Russian intelligence during the 90s. After all, Muslims lived for centuries on former Soviet soil, many former Soviets were Muslims, and culturally, theologically, and language-wise, infiltration into these Muslim activities would have been possible. All it would take is professionalism, determination, and secrecy - all routine for Putin.

WOOLY recognized one final irony. 9/11 occurred practically on the 10th anniversary of the close of the Cold War, the fall of Communism, and the demise of the Soviet Union. It was hard for WOOLY to imagine a more symbolic coincidence than the events of 9/11.

Epilogue

"Fucking amazing...and absurd," commented Tenet. "I'll probably show this to the President anyway. I might as well. What do we have to lose?"

Two days later Tenet called WOOLY into his office. "The President said 'Thank you very much.' Unfortunately, it looks like we're both out of luck though. They're not going for Afghanistan. They're going for Iraq."

"You're kidding?!" responded WOOLY.

"I am not kidding. Their pretence is Hussein's got 'weapons of mass destruction,' and he'll go after us now that al Qai'da's opened the door. I told him our best intelligence couldn't confirm such weapons, and that we were highly doubtful. He said they didn't care; they were going in anyway. This was in front of the whole National Security staff. I couldn't believe it. They had their war-plan out on the table. He told me we'd have to do Afghanistan alone, with some Special Forces help. But there'd be plenty of cash for the local warlords. He wanted bin Laden one way or another, and we had one month to get him. He said, quote, 'The Army, Marines, and Air Force are going after Saddam and free the Iraqi people.'"

"My God!" said WOOLY, astounded. "It's the oil isn't it?"

"Third largest reserves in the world," answered Tenet.

"Jesus Christ! This'll be a major Mogadishu," said WOOLY. "And the disruption'll send the Russian oil prices even higher."

"The President, Cheney, and Rumsfeld all think it'll be a fast surgical war," added Tenet, "and Iraq'll join the ranks of democracy. And their oil will pay for it."

WOOLY paused, silent for a long moment. Finally he blurted, "Ain't that an f-ing bitch. I can see Putin now - Amazed." WOOLY paused, then added forlornly, "We're walking into this thing blind – blinded by revenge."

Curtain

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