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The Many Routes to Assassination: Musings on Turkmenistan

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Title: The Many Routes to Assassination: Musings on Turkmenistan

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Abstract. This article describes some of the more common psychological routes leading to political assassination.

Examples of political assassination can be found in different societies, cultures, and historical eras. Yet, there seems to be a common set of psychological routes to assassination regardless of the differences in venue.

One route is via the psychodynamic process of projection. The assassin unconsciously removes elements within the self that are self-perceived to be noxious. These elements then are unconsciously placed by the assassin within a political figure. The political figure is now consciously perceived by the assassin to possess the noxious element and, thus, must be murdered. One might surmise that homicide replaces suicide in the service of the ego.

A second route is via another psychodynamic process: that of acting out. Here the assassin is in the throes of some internal unconscious conflict. Any will do. To manage the internal unconscious conflict, the assassin unconsciously chooses to immerse in some external conflict that is isomorphically parallel to the essential features of the internal, unconscious conflict. The perception of the external conflict--once the unconscious choice is made by the assassin--is quite conscious. Murder is consciously chosen by the assassin to consciously resolve the external conscious conflict as an unconscious choice to unconsciously resolve the unconscious conflict. (The unwieldy nature of the last sentence suggests why much of acting out is unconscious--not conscious--if any acts are to occur.)

A third route is via conscious covetousness. The political figure has what the assassin wants or is what the assassin would like to be. Assassination is the instrumental vehicle to rectify the situation--regardless of the worthiness of the assassin. This route often is termed amoral, antisocial, or morally insane. This may be the most common route to assassination and is often characterized by bloody coups.

A fourth route is via envy and jealousy. The assassin sincerely perceives that the political figure is unworthy to have or be what the political figure has or is--while the assassin is more than worthy. There is an inherent unfairness in Nature as perceived by the assassin and assassination rights the assassin-perceived wrong.

A fifth route is via an emptiness that must be filled or a nothingness that must become "somethingness." The assassin (through conscious and unconscious intrapsychic phenomena) murders so that a lack of identity, inadequate identity, or some degree of affective-cognitive depletion becomes overflowing--more than full with the notoriety of murder and the murdered.

A sixth route is via the assassin's perception that the political figure has committed an egregious act or has omitted to act in some outstanding manner that must be committed. The political figure deserves to be murdered for the cause of some greater Good.

A seventh route is via a social behavioral context that--in the 20th century--has frequently been associated with authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. The context is perceptively alluded to by Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar*: "We make holiday to see Caesar and to rejoice in his triumph" (I, i, 31-32); "The people choose Caesar for their king" (I, ii, 87-88); "I do believe that these applauses are for some new honors that are heaped on Caesar" (I, ii, 142-143); "The rabblement hooted, and clapped their chapped hands...because Caesar refused the crown" (I, ii, 252-255). The context is the seeming total unanimity for a political figure obtaining supreme power. As is immediately apparent, however, the unanimity is not total and the seeming unanimity breeds assassination.

A similar context was recently described by *The New York Times* concerning Turkmenistan's president, Saparmurat Niyazov. Newspapers carry flattering photographs of him daily. State-owned television regularly shows schoolchildren handing him flowers and bowing before him. Electronic media have featured letters from officials, students, and ordinary citizens, asking Mr. Niyazov to prolong his rule for life. And the Parliament has voted to allow Mr. Niyazov to become president for life.

The cult that reifies life also threatens it--often by fueling the other routes to assassination described above. Whether this occurs to Mr. Niyazov may have more to do with available opportunity than available motive. (See Heyman, M.N. (1984). A study of presidential assassins. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 2, 131-149; Political assassinations: Primary prevention in representative democracies. (September 19, 1997). *IBPP*, 3(8); Pontius, A.A. (1974). Threats to assassinate the king-president while propitiating mother: Some aspects of dangerousness. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 19, 38-53; Robinson, G.W. (1965). A study of political assassinations. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 121, 1060-1064; Rothstein, D.A. (1975). Presidential assassination syndrome. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 11, 245-255; Turkmenistan's leader is given lifetime in office by Parliament. (December 29, 1999). *The New York Times*, p A12; Westermeyer, J. (1973). Assassination in Laos: Its psychosocial dimensions. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 28, 740-743.) (Keywords: Assassination, Shakespeare, Turkmenistan.)