

Capriccio Siciliano

Part two of the Soviets' explosive investigation of the JFK assassination

In this section

This week continues *Executive Intelligence Review's* exclusive translation of "Capriccio Siciliano" ("Sicilian Caprice"), a four-part series of articles on the links between political assassinations and the drug trade by Julian Semyonov which appeared recently in the Soviet youth organization's weekly magazine *Ogonyok*. The series is important not only for the new light it sheds on such matters as the Kennedy assassination, the Mafia, and the activities of the Maoist Chinese intelligence apparatus, but also because it sets forth a new sophisticated Soviet perception of the inner workings of British and Knights of Malta linked intelligence networks.

Part one of our serialization last week dealt with the links between Lee Harvey Oswald, the purported assassin of President John F. Kennedy, and Jack Ruby, the man who killed Oswald; the links between Ruby and the Mafia and drug-running; and presented evidence linking Chinese intelligence to both. Semyonov showed that Oswald's brief "asylum" in the Soviet Union was due to no love on Oswald's part for the USSR, but rather conformed to an intelligence "laundering" profile that cohered closely with Maoist foreign policy interests of the early 1960s period. As late as 1969, he revealed, the Chinese had an extensive dossier on Oswald. He noted that President Kennedy's moves to strengthen detente in the period just before his death had drawn fire from the Chinese, and set forth a compelling pattern of circumstantial evidence that Oswald and Ruby were involved in a conspiracy prior to the Kennedy murder and that Ruby was actively deployed from the moment of the assassination in an effort to cover up that conspiracy. Finally, Semyonov showed that Ruby was an important figure in Mafia drug-running in Dallas.

The words of my American acquaintances about "a foreign hand with a well-known signature" are easily deciphered: "the well-known hand" is the Mafia, "the foreign signature" is Peking's foreign services.

In order to understand the Mafia-CIA-Peking triangle, which rests on an invisible base called "narcotics," it was necessary to visit Sicily. (...)

... Syracuse knocked me out with its quiet provinciality, its cart drivers, the African heat, and the prickly sandy dry wind: past greatness is somehow always accompanied by heat and the dry wind from the desert. So it was in Babylon, and in Lebanon, and in Peru there was the same kind of dryness although not the sandy dry wind — the cold mountains loomed on all sides and the sun was dry, blinding, lifeless.

... In the basement car rental office, it was dark and cool. It was 12:00, leaving half an hour or at the most an hour before siesta, the obligatory after-lunch rest.

The dispatcher listened to my request, went into the garage, and brought out a luxurious Jaguar.

"How much is it?"

"Peanuts," answered the dispatcher and showed me a price list. 25,000 lire a day and 200 lire per kilometer. How many kilometers are you going?"

"400."

"90,000. Plus gas. It's full. That's another 50,000. That's," he touched the keys of his calculator, "160,000 or so ..."

"But don't you have a cheap little Fiat?"

"They're broken down. You don't drive a broken-down car, do you?"

"No ... I flew here from a long ways off, and I would like to see your island ..."

"All Americans want to see our island."

"I'm a Russian."

"A Ru... What?! Russian?!" The dispatcher opened his eyes wide and cried, "Paolo, come here, there's a Russian! A real Russian?"

I showed him my passport. Paolo and the dispatcher inspected it like a wild thing, then got me out a little Fiat, figured out the price, and in parting said:

"We'll tell Messina you may be three hours late or so, and they won't charge you. You're pretty hard up

for lire. Buon giorno, camerata, arrividerci!”

I drove through the streets of new Syracuse, faceless, with the architecture of boxes. Then I came into the old city and saw the huge port, the glassy surface of the Mediterranean, and I understood why the Carthaginians tried so hard to take this city.

The Mafia and fascism: Italy

Peking's sidling up to the Mafia, however, did not begin here. To explain how that happened, we have to look into the past ...

“The Mafia and fascism!” asked my companion, letting me into his office. “A highly interesting theme. Let's go out on the balcony, where it's not so stuffy. What will you drink: whisky, wine, gin!”

“I'm behind the wheel.”

“Then you can drink anything,” he laughed. “Under the new laws a driver can drink one aperitif — a glass of whisky with water, a bottle of wine, and cognac with a cup of coffee.”

We sat on the balcony in the shade of a striped umbrella. The large, noisy east coast city of Catania was below us. The similarity with Naples, united with Sicily for many years, was apparent: the many colors of laundry on sticks overhanging the street, the unbelievable noise, and the monotonous color of the houses — gray. People in the sunny countries tend to somber colors, although it would be pretty and cheerful if the walls were white, yellow, green ...

“And where would the money come from,” asked my companion when I mentioned this. “The landlord has no wish to spend lire on the outside of the house. It's enough that the apartment brings in the money. The apartment, not its facade. And the city? It's poor.”

My companion was a professor of history. He was already old, retired on pension. He had moved back from Rome to his homeland, under the Sicilian sun.

“Fascism and the Mafia,” he repeated and reached for a cigarette. “That is highly interesting, you know. Even more interesting than the problem of the real translation of the word ‘mafia.’ Some say that mafia is ‘death to the French,’ ‘morte ai francesi,’ and place its establishment in the 13th century, the time of the Sicilian Vespers, when the people defeated Charles of Anjou's occupiers. Others think that mafia was born in the middle of the last century and applied to the followers of Mazzini who used the slogan: ‘Mazzini Authorizza Furto, Incendi, Avelenamenti.’ The first letters spell ‘MAFIA’. What does it mean? ‘Mazzini authorizes kidnappings, arson, and poisoning.’ An engaging interpretation of Mazzini, no?”

“Let us put aside the question of where the Mafia came from. It's more convenient for its American sister ‘Cosa Nostre’ to support the 13th century version. ‘Patriotic struggle for the people’ and such-like chimerae — the North Americans love historical

associations. What can you do, it's a prestige-minded nation.

“Now, as for fascism and the Mafia ... There exists the opinion that Benito Mussolini acted against the Mafia, because it was a serious — and, more importantly, organized — force, a true state within a state. There exists the opinion that Mussolini did not want to tolerate anyone in Italy who was bound by some unity other than ‘the unity of fascism.’ In a word, it is asserted that the illegal law of Mussolini acted against ‘righteous’ illegality (I have in mind thieves’ jargon, ‘the righteous thief’), against the Mafia. I, however, do not altogether agree with that sort of opinion.”

“What is the evidence?”

“I will give you my version. You have the right not to agree with it. Here it's not very much agreed with. But first some history. Two years after seizing power, Il Duce went to Sicily. He was a fine orator — perhaps the best in the 20th century. He came from the workers and had had relations with the socialists at the beginning of his political career. He picked up a smattering of knowledge, learned to use the phraseology, and knew what to talk about and what to offer the people.

“Cesare Mori organized the dictator's security during the visit to Sicily. After Il Duce's triumph in Palermo, he was named prefect of the Sicilian capital. During the ceremonial banquet, Mussolini turned to Mori: ‘I would like to hear some Albanian tunes.’ Not far from Palermo was the Piana dei Greci commune. There lived Albanians who had fled from the Turks. Their songs and dances were striking and strange, and we Sicilians are a strange breed. We mingled with the Greeks and the Arabs, and we love everything strange. Since Il Duce's wish was expressed suddenly, Mori of course could not organize security on the spot, and it was necessary without delay. Mussolini was as impatient as a woman. Mori went to Piana and called the mayor, Don Cuccio. ‘You answer for order and security.’ Don Cuccio was the head of the Mafia in Piana. This was known to the initiated, and of course to the police ace Cesare Mori. ‘I wish to greet the commune residents, true sons of the new Italy,’ said Il Duce. Mori pushed Don Cuccio up to Mussolini's car: ‘Sit next to him.’ Don Cuccio blinked at the photographers, laid his hand on the dictator's shoulder, and said, ‘Duce, as long as I am beside you, not a single hair will fall from your head — “leader of the people” and my friend. Italy is yours, Piana is mine.’

“A few weeks later, Don Cuccio arrived in Rome. He wanted a reward from Il Duce for the tour of Piana. The dictator's office, however, refused him a meeting with Mussolini. Don Cuccio pulled his hat down over his eyes and went to the harbor. He was not used to being insulted. He was going to return to Palermo and decide what to do next.

“Cesare Mori was waiting for him at the gangplank.

'My dear friend, Il Duce was misled,' said the policeman. 'He did not realize that it was you. You identified yourself too lightly, giving only your name and not your title. They aren't used to that at the office. Let's go, Il Duce is waiting for you.'

"The prefect's monstrous Lincoln took Don Cuccio, beaming with pleasure, not to Il Duce's palace, but to jail."

"What does this mean?"

"Let us take everything in order. What is the Mafia? Not only narcotics, after all, not only kidnappings, casinos, corruption, shootings, blackmail, and getting into big politics through the back way. It is also the taxes which Sicilian latifundists wanted to get from the peasants for the land they rented. Supplementary taxes, outside of government control. We have a lot of land and a lot of peasants. And all the land belonged to the latifundists. The people were starving; incidentally, that is why they fled abroad, not to join Cosa Nostre. And so the Mafia collected these illegal taxes from the peasants in Sicily on behalf of the latifundists living in Rome, and pocketed a portion of the money for their services and risks. Mussolini was not happy with this. He wanted all the money in his government safes. Is this what all the fascists wanted?"

"Cesare Mori began to make arrests among 'peasant Mafiosi.' He began from the bottom, notice, and that explains a lot. In all the little towns of Sicily hundreds of Mafiosi were arrested. They were chained together and sent to a concentration camp on the island of Lipari. Prefect Mori traveled around Sicily and personally directed the arrests. He disappeared from Palermo for five days and returned from Rome with a law introducing the death penalty. He made arrangements to employ medieval tortures during interrogations of rank-and-file Mafiosi: electric shock, tearing out fingernails, burning the soles of their feet. Mori got what he wanted: the Mafia's holiest of holies, the 'law of silence,' cracked. The rank-and-file Mafiosi, unable to withstand the tortures, began to tell everything they knew.

"Mussolini gave a speech in parliament: 'Thanks to the merciless scalpel of Cesare Mori, I have done away with the Mafia!' Soon Cesare Mori became practically the national hero of Italy.

"And then he went too far. He arrested the chiefs of the Mafia, Don Vitone and Don Calo. And then he went after several veteran fascists, to whom connections from the Mafia led. He jailed a member of parliament, an old friend of the fascist 'movement,' Cuccio, several mafia lawyers and doctors, who operated on anonymous patients pierced with nine-caliber bullets. And on the day that Cesare Mori, during a speech at a literary club in Rome (for he was beginning to write — that policeman's passion), exultantly announced that he had ferreted out the secret staff of the 'high' Mafia, an aide whispered to the prefect that he was urgently wanted on the telephone. Mori heard the request of the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, and returned to

the hall only to say, 'Friends, I have urgent business with the Minister. Till tomorrow.' But 'tomorrow' never came: Cesare Mori got the axe. He lost all his power and belatedly understood the truth — he had overplayed his hand. A month after his ouster, the entire police and court apparatus in Sicily was purged. Rome explained it as follows: 'The Mafia has been rooted out. We have entered a period of calm. Emergency measures are no longer necessary.'

"In fact, everything was at once simpler and more complicated: the Mafia had won, won in its usual, long-drawn-out method. A chain of connections had gone to work, i.e., the foundation of total corruption. The history of Mafia penetration into the blackshirt 'movement' went back to before the victory of Mussolini, when the young fascist, having buried the leftist intelligentsia member, turned for help to 'the godfathers.' Only they could reliably harbor you and provide alibis; on orders from the old man, any shady mafioso is prepared to take on someone else's guilt. For all its secretive monolithism, the Mafia still has names: the fascist had been harbored by Don Calo, the very same Don Calo whom the naive Cesare Mori called to account on the very eve of his scandalous and inglorious release from his duties.

"Don Calo was released, naturally, a few days after the dismissal of Mori.

"Moreover, Don Calo's rival, the recognized 'boss' Don Vitone, was thrown into a damp cell. They made the old man die, crowning Don Calo, friend of fascism, the new 'boss' of Sicily."

The Mafia and fascism: the U.S.

... I drove along a broad highway through a valley. Hills loomed in the distance — dark blue, jagged, mysterious. The highway was empty. Not a soul was there, just my little Fiat ...

"All Sicily slips right by," I thought, remembering how three years before I had cut across Italy from West to East, to Yugoslavia, on an identical, or even better, highway. Going 130 kilometers per hour, there's not a moment to look around, only in front. Tunnels, flooded with sharp yellow light, dozens of tunnels — and no Italy. The highway distances the countryside and is only good for speed as an end in itself. Stop! (...)

... I pulled into the right lane and went off onto a "municipal" road, small, narrow, bumpy. It brought me into the hills, into the quiet, toward the "godfathers," into the center of unpeopled, hot, and secretive Sicily.

... I had already had for a long time some materials in my journals about one of the leaders of the American Mafia, Vito Genovese. The Italian Mafiosi are unostentatious, good-natured, quiet — real provincials in button-up shoes and shirts with no collars. They are transformed at night when, glancing

at the second hand, they wait for a shot — their people are out dealing with a rebel who got the idea of living by laws other than the unwritten charter of the secret Sicilian order.

When Vito Genovese went to the New World, he was a low-level Mafioso. The lowest of the low, for he was born not in Sicily but in Naples — the “city of petty thieves,” as one gentleman put it to me in Palermo. He sat at a table in an expensive cafe, in his dusty boots with bare legs, drank a Napoleon (fabulously expensive here) and with pleasure chatted with me in good English.

Genovese was tried five times: for murder of his rivals, selling weapons, and running secret houses of prostitution. Five times he was acquitted for “insufficient evidence” — the law of silence in Cosa Nostre is identical to the Mafia law in Sicily, with the difference that for violation of the law in Brooklyn they shoot you with a machine gun, and in Sicily, by a single shot from an old carbine.

This cascade of acquittals in cases that seemed clear-cut to everyone (prison for life or the electric chair) helped Genovese become one of the leaders of Cosa Nostre. He ran prostitution, organized large-scale blackmail in which the payments from the targeted people amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars, sold opium. It was he who first established the latter business on a broad basis. But he tied that business together with the international politics of Charles Luciano, the king of narcotics.

In 1936, Charles Luciano was sentenced to thirty years.

Vito Genovese, however, disappeared. He turned up in Sicily, in a rather striking fashion: in Mussolini’s headquarters. He opened his shabby briefcase, dumped out \$300,000 and said to the clerk receiving him:

“I would like the great Duce to know that his humble compatriot wants to build a new building for the party. I think that this will show my devotion to fascist Italy more than the words of various blabbermouths.”

Il Duce heard about that. He carefully studied the “godfather’s” dossier, for he knew “who was who” in the Mafia world on which he had so ceremoniously declared war and to whose destruction he was passionately calling the nation. He was destroying the small fry; he didn’t touch the strong men; indeed, he protected them. Il Duce was thinking about the future.

“Genovese,” he said, when he summoned the Mafioso several years later, “in America, in that land of corrupt plutocrats and financial bigwigs, a certain Carlo Tresca — a Marxist and a scoundrel — slandered me and the entire fascist movement, that is the movement of a nation, which acts for freedom and peace, against international bolshevism and greedy imperialism. I want you to have your say in this regard, Genovese.”

Don Vito had his say: Carlo Tresca was cut down by

three rounds from a tommy-gun. His rotting corpse was found in the slums of old Manhattan.

When this was reported in the newspapers, Mussolini invited Genovese over late at night and offered the Mafioso a goblet of champagne.

“You are a true patriot of the new Italy,” said Il Duce, “fascism will not forget your devotion.”

And what about Luciano, the “king of narcotics”?

In 1942, this prisoner was brought to a safehouse of American intelligence, the OSS (predecessor to the CIA — ed.). Seven days of talks took place. Then Luciano, with 24 years left on his term, was settled in a quiet seaside cottage not far from New York. From there he was transferred to Africa. He made his own way to Sicily, and there began his work as the OSS station chief. Besides intelligence, he had a thought for business: it was he who sold his Sicilian Mafiosi friends huge quantities of American weapons — for “the struggle against fascism,” of course, to the tune of millions of dollars. These weapons of course came nowhere near the hands of a single leftist partisan. And when the Allies landed in Sicily, the first visitors to the American governor of the island, Colonel Poletti, were two friends: Genovese and Luciano — one the American intelligence *resident*, the other the friend of Il Duce.

Whom were they working for? Themselves. If fascism won, Genovese had access to Il Duce. If the allies won, Luciano would remain crowned OSS station chief.

How the Mafia operates

The structure of the Mafia, born in Sicily, reliably guarantees the security of the criminals, the foredoom of the victims, and the continuity of the “work.”

The main organization is the “family.” This kind of family unites one, or sometimes two Sicilian villages. Who are the members of this family? Fathers, sons, brothers, (and sisters, of course!), cousins, brothers-in-law — try to break this kind of “family support,” when a careless word endangers not just anybody, but a son or a brother! It would not be forgiven, and the “law of silence” is inversely proportionate to the “law of revenge.” Cosa Nostre was set up according to the same family principle, when the first Sicilian emigrants came to the New World 100 years ago — illiterate peasants who didn’t know the language and had no work, but knew how to shoot on target, keep quiet, and be grateful to the grave to those who gave their children bread.

Several families are united in a “*coscia*,” which means a “leg.” The family principle holds here as well. The “legs” make up “associations,” which have control over a branch of industry or business; they collect “taxes” from trade unions. The “associations” comprise “*Onorata Societa*,” i.e. the Mafia.

The heads of the family are the “*capo*” (in Europe)

or "boss" (in the U.S.). In case of his demise, there is a "second boss." But the "intellect," an educated man, usually a lawyer, answers only to the "boss." He is the "adviser." The "lieutenants" are reserved for the "second boss." They don't know either the "boss" or the "adviser." "Lieutenants" command "soldiers." It is these "soldiers" who carry out the leadership's orders, which they get from the "lieutenants." It is all just like in intelligence: the footsoldier knows nothing about what the "boss" is thinking. The orders always come through the "second boss," so that the continuous chain is practically impossible to break. (There are also "mercenaries." These include "non-Italians." They are hired as couriers, who take narcotics across borders; and in cases where there is a very complicated operation of a political nature, people like (James Earl) Ray or (Jack) Ruby are hired.)

The main tasks of the Mafia are the corruption of the police and state apparatus; the establishment of influence on "key" people in business, banking, the airlines, and ports. In the name of this goal all means are permitted: blackmail, kidnapping, violence, murder, and control over zones of influence. The Mafia's activity is sharply divided into legal and illegal: the first includes Mafia-owned restaurants, docks, airports, pornography, and the trade unions; the second covers casinos, prostitution, and narcotics trade.

The Italian language is not sufficient for proper conspiring. Even Sicilian dialect won't do.

Most members of the "family" now speak in slang. Two men are sitting in a restaurant. One nods to a man in the doorway and says "the artichoke." His nickname? No. This means "chief of a group of gangsters." Someone who has been done away with is "wiped out." A woman who has been liquidated is "the Mother superior"; narcotics are "ashes"; gold dust is "garbage"; an unarmed man is "empty"; a policeman on leave is "a Cairo rooster"; a policeman on patrol is "a rooster with a feather." See if you can understand: "the Cairo rooster has been wiped out", or "the Mother Superior had a lot of ashes"...

One example of how the Mafia can conceal the names of criminals who have strewn their path with corpses is "the Palermo war." It began in 1950, when a new land reform was decreed in Italy limiting the size of latifundia. This reform was carried out only because the left forces in Italy were able to pressure the government so much that to refuse to satisfy the demands of the peasantry might cause the collapse of the government. The Mafia began to develop a strategy — new conditions dictate new methods. An exchange of views between Doctor Navarro, the Mafia chief in northwest Sicily who had control over all the Palermo ports, and his younger colleagues ended in a fight. Principles were forgotten, and a power struggle began. The younger wing of the Mafia struck a blow: Carmelo Napoli, the old Mafioso who had maintained

ties between the criminals and the municipal authorities, received a package. When his bodyguard opened the plywood box, there lay the head of one of Don Carmelo's favorite German shepherds. This is how the death sentence is announced to an enemy in the Mafia.

Carmelo Napoli immediately took steps. He knew what to do, remembering the lessons of his old teacher, "the first monarch of the Mafia," Don Vito Casio Ferro. It is worth telling about this person in more detail.

When Vito Casio was put on trial for contraband, he laughed and said to the prosecutors:

"Respected signori, you will never be able to prove that I participated in the crimes committed by my people and myself. There were plenty of them, I assure you. But you will never find evidence or witnesses. I promise you that. And why are you charging me with smuggling, anyway? After all, I didn't do any smuggling. That's too petty for me."

He of course didn't mention that he didn't need petty smuggling. Not he, the "monarch of the Mafia." He had built his own fleet, with 50 boats of various tonnages. This was an industry, not smuggling.

Already at the beginning of the century, his people had settled in New York. The men of Cosa Nostre did not take a single serious step without consulting "the godfather" in Sicily — the devout and quiet Don Vito, dressed like an average peasant.

At the start of the First World War, he set up special groups of Mafiosi, armed and ready for conducting special operations. Mafiosi units formally fought with the Allies, they were such patriots! And of course they robbed the supply houses, captured trains, and dealt with the recalcitrant by terror. The war ended, but the power of the Mafia would remain a long time.

It was just at this time that Don Vito Casio decided to get the Mafia into the state power organs. Hundreds of Mafiosi — with the sanction of their "lieutenants," and they on orders from the "assistants to the capo" — offered themselves to the police as paid informers. In fact, they were assigned to guide the police, if necessary, on a false road.

The next stage was to get Mafiosi recruited into the Carabinieri, the preserver of order by day and violator of it by night.

The third stage was to run candidates for parliament. This started in Palermo and ended up in Rome.

Germination was the most consistent and reliable method. Mussolini was defeated, but Don Vito Casio's people remained. Those who had to depart due to compromising ties to the fascist regime gave way to "oppositionists," prepared years beforehand by the Mafia. The "advisers" thought of how to lay in reserves. Not for nothing did they obtain fabulous sums of money, since the Mafia doesn't pay for trifles. The dummy with a pistol who puts holes in the enemy gets a thousand. The guy who thinks up whom and how

to kill gets a million. That's why they say: shoot, don't think.

Carmelo Napoli informed his plants about the package. The police put his house under constant surveillance. Two bodyguards tripled the protection. At every whisper they reached for their weapons. At night, the house was guarded by five men. Three days, then four, passed without any alarming signs.

Napoli was sure that his invisible enemies understood that there was no sense in taking a risk, since he didn't trust anybody. Connections determine everything.

A week later, however, Napoli was killed. They shot him up from a car stopped at an intersection. The signature of Cosa Nostre. Naturally no one was found. Apparently the younger Mafiosi managed to pay more to those who had previously eaten from Don Carmelo's hand, so that the police worked not for the old man, but against him. A change of masters, simple as that.

The next shot was Giuseppe Greco.

Then Galatolo was killed.

In a mere 10 days, seven men were killed in the struggle for power. (Seven people in 10 days! And not a trace. And here you have 30 witnesses in the Kennedy killing! Pure nonsense, compared with the available experience.)

Three young Mafia leaders came to the fore in the "Palermo War": Nicolo d'Alessandro, Nico Cottone, and Genco Russo.

The first killed was Cottone, then Alessandro. The only remaining "young Mafioso" was Genco Russo,

who taught "the king of narcotics," Luciano, but was Don Calo's guardian. He walked with his two friends in the same harness, on the way to money and power. He won one round. Everybody was convinced that his friends had been "wiped out" by the older men in revenge for the death of the "artichokes." The answer to the question of who planned the murder is still unknown. It seems to be that Cottone and Alessandro fell on Russo's orders. The struggle for power is a cruel thing, in which "former friendship" is a dry abstraction, meaningless sentiment. In the Mafia you are capable of killing anyone who threatens your interests. It isn't important who: a "90-pound weight" (big-wig) or an "ant" (young Mafioso). The punishment is the same — death. (It is worth noting that in "black work," the role of the hat is very important for the Mafiosi: if it's tipped to the right — someone's following me"; to the left — "I see you and I'm watching you"; tipped back — "I need help" — so it's safe to shoot, sell heroin, or stab safely.

... When I talked face to face in a little bar on the seacoast with an "old man" connected to the Mafia (so my New York friends said), a young man lolled in the doorway. His black hat was tipped to the left and he had a book in his hands. As I went out, I glanced at the title and the youth was holding the book upside down. Apparently he was a foot-soldier, illiterate, although he saw me all the time and was all the time watching me ...

Next issue: Luciano and the assassination of Italian oil-man Enrico Mattei.