

# JACK KING



*Who really holds the power?*

# THE FIFTH INTERNATIONALE



# ***The Fifth Internationale***

by Jack King

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## ***Prologue***

*Warsaw, August 1991.*

Tall and lush trees covered the westerly façade of the Soviet Embassy, effectively obstructing the view for anyone interested in the historic building. Here and there a patch of gray stucco wall could be seen if anyone wanted to peruse closer, but anyone persistent enough to loiter about the nine-foot cast iron fence surrounding the property would be ushered away either by the frequent sentry rounds of the uniformed and armed guards on the inside of the fence or the gray-uniformed police patrols on the outside. The man standing in one of the five windows of the second floor knew that not even the station of the Polish counterintelligence office located directly across the street in a six-story building would be able to discover his presence. Still, the unit assigned to monitor the embassy was dispatched from their post for this one day. No one was to find out the identity of the man. No one was to know about his presence. His name was Col. Alexy Borisovich Rybkin, a commanding officer of *Shturm*, an ultra secret unit of Spetsnaz. His presence in Poland, away from the events that drew tanks to Moscow's White House and kept the world at watch, was caused by an even more important circumstance.

Summoned to the nondescript office on the second floor were three men who arrived simultaneously in black Volga limousines driven by *Shturm* soldiers. The youngest of the three men was an economics professor at the University of Warsaw, a brilliant mind whose only obstacle on the path to high government office in these days of uncertainty and freedom euphoria was his communist past. Prior to 1989, the year that will forever mark the end of an era in history books throughout the world, he was an

advisor to the minister of finance, a man he despised for his lack of independence and narrow-minded leadership dictated by obsolete party directions. The second man had traveled a much farther distance to attend the meeting. Officially serving the post of Polish military attaché to Bulgaria, he devoted much of his time away from Sofia to a reclusive mountains estate built for a reason known only to a handful of people in the Eastern Block. The last one to enter the Embassy compound was the Bulgarian Ambassador to Poland, for whom today's meeting would have a decisive meaning, as his post was likely to end shortly due to recent political developments in his home country.

The three men were escorted to the second floor.

Without waiting for the doors to close behind them, the military attaché rushed toward the lonely figure standing in the window.

"You were supposed to pay your dues, *not* finance your own political agenda!" he shouted, his fervent gesticulation adding a comical appearance to his stocky, balding and unmilitary posture, so contrary to his rank of general of the special forces unit he commanded.

"I admit, Colonel, the general has a point. The Moscow coup d'état puts the mission in jeopardy. While no one suggests you participated in the events for your personal gain" -- the professor shot a long look to the general -- "some of our members have expressed their deepest concern over your agency's intentions. Need I remind you, Colonel, that these people control significant assets, the lack of which can ruin years of preparation and cost hundreds of lives, not excluding their own?"

"Gentlemen." The silhouetted figure of Colonel Rybkin moved away from the window. "I assure you our forces in mother Russia had no part in the coup other than--"

"Oh, please!" the general cut in, his face red in exasperation. "The KGB doesn't call the shots anymore, and especially not here! You can no longer suppress the flow of information. For Christsakes, have you watched television lately? Moscow is crawling with *Shturm* troops! Now the question everyone wants an answer to is, what is the foreign operations unit doing alongside the Alpha forces?"

"The *Spetsgruppa Shturm* is assigned to the First Chief Directorate," the colonel declared reticently. "As you undoubtedly know, Comrade General, we are subordinate to Maj. Gen. Victor Chernyakov, who is a man of political goals. To question his orders--"

"There were commanders who refused to follow Chernyakov's orders!" the general broke in.

"My, my, General, you do keep abreast! I don't believe that news has made it to CNN yet!" The Russian always suspected the general, who once headed the Second Department of Polish Ministry of the Interior, responsible for the counterintelligence, of having active contacts in Moscow. But he also knew the man lacked political finesse. The general had high aspirations not backed by talent. He was a good soldier, no doubt about it – his devotion to the cause was the best testimony, but his days with the organization were numbered. "As I was saying, to question Chernyakov at this stage of our development would be foolish. It would bring attention and scrutiny very much undesired, and could, as the professor pointed out, cost years of hard work, not to mention the lives of our comrades."

"If you had only paid your debt in time we wouldn't have to worry about it now, would we? Professor, I warned the board about collaborating with the Russians! History has taught us only one thing about them: it's either under their heel or at their throats."

"Now, that's enough!" The Russian slammed his hand on the table, rage in his eyes. "You have been nothing but a whining, melodramatic fool! Yes, the coup may have foiled our plans; yes, it may have cost our lives even, but there is no time like the time of turmoil, when one can attain the biggest gains. Surely a man in your position and with your background should know that." The Russian fixed his gaze on the general's face. "Now, if you'll sit down, I'll explain."

There was a time when a military general of a "friendly" nation would have stood at attention in front of a KGB colonel and spoken only when spoken to, but those times were gone forever. Or so it would seem. There was already talk of Poland joining NATO, and a Polish general had nothing to fear anymore. Yet fear was a major factor in making the general as defiant as he was. A man who is afraid panics and loses the ability to think rationally. The general was afraid. For years now his main duty was not to serve his country but to serve the organization. The organization meant Rybkin. Fear of the Russian intensified the general's anger.

"What's to explain? I'll bet you, Professor." The general was losing ground and needed support. "I'll bet you he's here to ladle out from the treasury!" He turned abruptly toward the Russian. "But you don't control the strings to the purse, Colonel..."

"Sit down General", the Russian cut in, his voice a hiss, his eyes cold and intense, a trait which earned him a pseudonym Snake among his men.

For a moment the general wrestled with the gaze, but then he slowly retreated to his seat, a beaten soldier stripped of everything, including honor.

"As I said before, I've called this emergency meeting to *discuss* with you a change of plans and..." It took only a glance to halt the general's last attempt to rise, "And, to

remit our share. Moscow events were just as surprising to me as they were to the rest of you, I assure you. True, they may've wrecked years of preparation, but instead they provided our cause with an opportunity undreamt of before." The Russian reached down for a dark leather briefcase, turned the combination lock, and took out a manila filing strapped with an elastic band. He pulled out several sheets of paper, laid them on the table, and continued, "Now, General, as the treasurer, would you care to run by us the state of the assets gathered by our comrades, up-to-date and guarded by you so closely?"

The general glanced at the professor and the Bulgarian. Both men were too lenient. Typical civilians. Where would the organization be today if it weren't for people like him and others of military background? To follow the lay out and be ready to stand up and fight! When Rybkin announced the meeting, the general knew what it was going to be about. Two years prior, when he was appointed military attaché, but more importantly assigned to guard the treasury, and had to relinquish his command of the Second Department of the Ministry of the Interior, he made sure not to leave his office without planting loyal contacts, both from within and outside of the organization. A decade such as the eighties in Poland produced strong ties within the department he headed, and his years in the Soviet military academy left him with some good friends who went to high places in the Kremlin and Lubyanka. His contacts in the Eastern Block's intelligence agencies kept him up-to-date with the changes in the community. Yes, he knew what was happening in Moscow. But, he also knew better than to push Rybkin too far, and especially here, on his turf, inside the Soviet embassy.

He swallowed his pride and read from a document he had prepared for the meeting. "In alphabetical order: Bulgaria..."

"The total for the Block will suffice."

"Not including the Soviet Union" -- the general could not refrain the satisfaction of pointing it out; it was his little victory -- "hard currency, banks, businesses, corporations, and assets formed and owned by the Block's agencies in the West, gold reserves, and objects of art held in Bulgaria and private estates in the West, at today's market values would cash in at approximately... one hundred to one hundred and five billion dollars."

"Good God!" The professor and the Bulgarian gasped simultaneously. They were well aware that the treasure had to be substantial -- the collection had been going on for years -- but neither expected it to reach such a level.

The Russian pushed his papers across the desk toward the general.

"While the politicians were squabbling over seats in the White House, troops loyal to our cause were able to visit the Kremlin vaults, as well as some of the Party members' dachas, and access their Swiss accounts." He paused for effect and to wait out the murmur of his interlocutors. "The figures you see are only rough estimates I prepared on the way from Moscow. As you can imagine, there was little time to prepare a full assessment. Later on you'll receive a detailed breakdown of our contribution. Read it aloud, will you?"

As the general glanced through the handwritten pages his hands began to tremble, anxiety growing in his voice.

"Gold bars... hard currencies... truckloads of objects of art, private and Hermitage... bank accounts, businesses set up and controlled by the Central

Committee... that's... that's..." He looked up from one man to another. "Roughly speaking, that's forty... maybe forty-five billion!"

The air in the room stood still. The men were processing the information. The professor was leaning over the general's shoulder, scanning the notes. One hundred and fifty billion dollars! That kind of an amount, when compared to, say, Poland's international debt of some forty-odd billion, was a fortune of unthinkable proportions.

"Where is it all? How do you plan to transport it?" The ambassador spoke with worry in his voice. It was his task to assure safe passage to and from Bulgaria. The changing political scene in his country could hinder his influence anytime. "I mean, Good God, five hundred tonnes of gold..."

"Do not be concerned about it." Rybkin glanced at his wristwatch. "The convoy should reach the Polish border in a matter of hours."

"Polish border? Have you gone mad?" A perplexed voice shouted.

The Russian disregarded the concern.

"Which brings me to another reason for our little get-together." He paused for effect. "It is time to move the treasury out of Bulgaria."

"Out of Bulgaria?" The ambassador gasped, a trace of relief in his voice. He saw the writing on the wall, and knew that if he wanted to enjoy the spoils they had to be made available in places where he will not be hunted down by the new regime.

"It is the safest place; we established it years ago!" The general sensed the transfer would also mean changes, perhaps even termination of his position as the treasurer. Being in charge of billions of dollars worth of goods, being able to see, to touch all those riches, the gold, the jewels, even those paintings, the masterpieces some collectors would

be willing to shell out millions for, was a position he loved. It made him feel important and in control: It was his prerogative to assess the danger of possible seizure of the treasury and destroy it if necessary. At his decision billions could go down in flames. To destroy a fortune takes a man superior to one who merely amasses it.

"It may have been the safest place to store the assets, but the times are changing, something our leaders failed to notice. As you all know the situation in Bulgaria, you can understand that putting such sums into work, conducting grandiose financial operations out of a country that's having trouble feeding its own people would bring undesired attention in the West."

The men weighed the announcement in silence. The uncertainty, years of covert activities, illegal transfers, cover-ups, and the use of undue authority were finally going to reap rich rewards. There will be plenty enough of the one hundred and fifty billion *green ones* to provide the peace of mind and protection for all those comrades who fought for the ideals, repeatedly jeopardizing their lives and health in the name of the ideology that failed them. Countless armies of nameless officers of the state security and intelligence services stranded in enemy territory, even in their own countries, afraid to admit to what they did, not knowing what the next day would bring; the party members who were now being persecuted for their political beliefs, the very fundamental right the new democratic system was supposed to provide and guarantee. Instead it was freedom and democracy for the chosen.

"Of course," Rybkin continued, "to achieve our goals, certain changes are necessary." He paused to make a stronger impression. "Our intelligence indicates, and

any avid observer will concur, that the current Polish administration will fold within weeks."

The Poles were taken aback. Rybkin's statement could not have been merely drawn out of observation. True, the political scene in Poland resembled a street marketplace, with politicians trading lucrative appointments and bickering over bills and responsibilities, and the people growing angry over closures, lay offs, and hyperinflation. But to say the government was about to fold required more than the ability to make ample observation. It meant that Rybkin was better informed than both Poles would like to see. Partnership in conspiracy aside, it was a matter of national honor and pride. Unless, of course, Rybkin's sources consisted of the members of the organization they had all fathered, which would bear great testimony to its efficiency.

The Russian was a keen observer of human emotions and was quick to dispel any doubts.

"Years of careful planning are reaping their rewards. Our organization's reach is deep-rooted in all governments of the crumbling Eastern Block's countries," he continued when the agitation subsided. "The situation opens new perspectives for you personally as well as for the organization as a whole. Poles are disillusioned with the new system, which was meant to bring them prosperity, but seemingly brought only rising prices and unemployment. It is safe to predict the new government will steer to the left, but it will be even more essential that the adopted policies of free market economy and democratization continue. We will need your expertise and dedication to the cause in the new administration..."

Excitement followed his words. The men savored the new possibilities, the sweet taste of vindication, feelings that lingered in the last years of uncertainty and growing fear of retribution and expected trials of the former communist regime's officials.

"General." The Russian stood up; the officer followed. "I am pleased to inform you that you will receive a task worthy of a military officer. As defense minister you will be personally responsible for safe passage of the treasury onto Polish soil and its subsequent safety within your country." Rybkin noticed the general stroking his chest, as if looking for future medals, his eyes adrift. That self-possessed buffoon was a mistake from the start, the Russian thought. "And you, Minister." He turned toward the professor. "You will make sure our funds are securely invested and managed."

"Minister..." The professor was flustered. His dreams were coming to life. "But you cannot seriously expect Poland to launder a hundred and fifty billion dollars!" his practical side came to life.

"Arrangements have been made for your nomination as minister of finance in the new government, and similar positions will be filled with our people from other countries associated with our organization." He nodded toward the Bulgarian ambassador. "Of course, you won't be drifting alone in the open seas. Our people will seize other strategic positions within the government; their sole purpose will be to provide you with enough freedom in your decisions.

"Poland is already experiencing the boom of the new reality. The amount of Western capital pouring into the country is the highest in the region. Your country's eagerness to continue and sustain the open market economy is exactly what we need to safely invest and multiply our assets. Poland's wide-open doors to the West will help us

achieve what our ideologists and military could not. One day you will join the European Community, perhaps even NATO. We have to be prepared. We shall activate the corporations and sleepers our agencies have placed all over the Western hemisphere. There isn't a government department, a major financial institution, or a corporation in which we won't have an asset or a hook on someone. We will, at last, succeed.

"In the years to come the West will be ecstatic with the transitions in the former Bloc. The World is watching, the World wants a democratic Russia and the coup could not come at a better time to prove the Evil Empire is crumbling. The Soviet people want democracy, prosperity, and freedom. Our squabbling politicians, the breaking off of the satellite countries, and the loosened grip on certain Soviet republics are providing the World with exactly what it wants to see. The illusion of the tyranny ending and of the West's victory is uncanny. The West wants to believe it and it shall have it.

"Gentlemen," the Russian finished triumphantly, "the West, and indeed the World, will be won with the only weapon and argument it understands and fears: money, the one ideology our fathers and predecessors dismissed."

\* \* \*

*Moscow, September 1991.*

The Government resigns. The President concedes and appoints a new Prime Minister." This and similar headlines dominated the front pages of Poland's biggest daily newspapers. The reader was shuffling through a stack of freshly arrived papers until he found the one he was most interested in. He scanned the feature article and the paragraph that brought a smile to his face: "Gazeta learned from its sources that the new Premier has already chosen his cabinet... Jerzy Konieczny, a professor of economy at the

University of Warsaw, will head the Ministry of Finance..." Farther down the page a brief note read: "On a sad note, Poland's military attaché to Bulgaria died from cardiac arrest upon receiving his appointment to the post of the Minister of Defense."

The reader put down the paper and looked out the window. Yes, to survive and thrive, the organization has to be restructured. Fewer soldiers is the first step in the reform. More hotheads will have to fall to make room for professionals: economists, lawyers, financial planners and bankers – strategists who will build an empire based on a corporate model, not on guns.

He chuckled at the comparison and leaned on the windowsill.

The sky was unusually blue over Moscow.

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