central government is not relevant—even local *mukhtars* have been displaced or co-opted by militias. An Arab newspaper editor told us ethnic cleansing is taking place in almost every Iraqi province, as political parties and their militias are engaged in tit-for-tat reprisals.

In April employees began reporting a change in the demeanor of guards at Green Zone checkpoints. They seemed to be more militia-like, in some cases taunting. One employee asked for press credentials because guards had held up her embassy badge and loudly proclaimed "embassy" to passers-by as she entered. Such information is a death sentence if overheard by the wrong people.

Of nine employees, only four had family members who knew they worked at the embassy. A Sunni Arab female employee told us that most of her family believes the United States, widely perceived as fully controlling the country and tolerating the malaise, is punishing populations as Saddam did. Some of our staff do not take their American cell phones home, as this makes them a target. Planning for their own possible abduction, they enter code names into their phones for friends, colleagues, and contacts. For six months, we have not been able to use any local staff members for translation at on-camera press events.

One employee says life outside the Green Zone has become "emotionally draining." He lives in a mostly Shiite area and claims to attend a funeral "every evening." Employees are apprehensive enough that we fear they may exaggerate developments or steer us toward news that comports with their own worldviews. Objectively, the civility and logic that make for a functional workplace may falter if social pressures outside the Green Zone don't abate.

[Interrogation]

SPOOK MEMORY

From "Assassin," an interview with Nikola Kavaja, a seventy-three-year-old Serbian living in Belgrade, conducted by Christopher S. Stewart, published in the Summer issue of The Paris Review.

CHRISTOPHER S. STEWART: You were a World War II prisoner, a Communist soldier, a CIA hit man, a hijacker, and now you're a fugitive on the run. Where to begin?

NIKOLA KAVAJA: Do you want some schnapps?

STEWART: No, thanks. I'm fine with water.

KAVAJA: Water's for pussies.

STEWART: Most of the time I'd agree. But ten-thirty in the morning is a little early for me to be drinking shots of schnapps.

KAVAJA: It's a hello. You drink some schnapps with me. We drink together.

STEWART: Okay.

KAVAJA: That's better. *Salud*. So—I was born in Montenegro in 1933. When Hitler attacked Yugoslavia, my father and mother and I were all transferred to separate prison camps in Albania. My brothers went to the war. In October 1944, when the Russians forced the Germans out of the Balkans, I went back to Peć to find my mother. But she wasn't there. No one was there. I had to fight for myself. The first time I killed someone was that year—a German soldier. He was wounded and leaning over a well, getting water. I walked up to him, took him by the legs, and tossed him in like garbage.

STEWART: You weren't afraid?

KAVAJA: My dick, was I ever afraid. I hated them. I couldn't find my family anywhere. I searched for months. Eventually, I found my mother in Vojvodina. I learned that two of my brothers were killed in the war. I joined the air force academy and graduated seventh in my class. They made me a war pilot. Around that time, another brother of mine was thrown in jail for being anti-Communist. He wasn't. But Tito was a suspicious man.

STEWART: You never liked Tito?

KAVAJA: I hated him. Around that time, I became a member of an underground anti-Communist group. That's where my life really started.

STEWART: What was the first job?

KAVAJA: My commander had me paint on the walls of the military barracks: LONG LIVE THE SOVIET UNION. DOWN WITH TITO. DOWN WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY. For me, it was funny—a what-the-fuck kind of thing, you know.

STEWART: You weren't afraid you'd get caught?

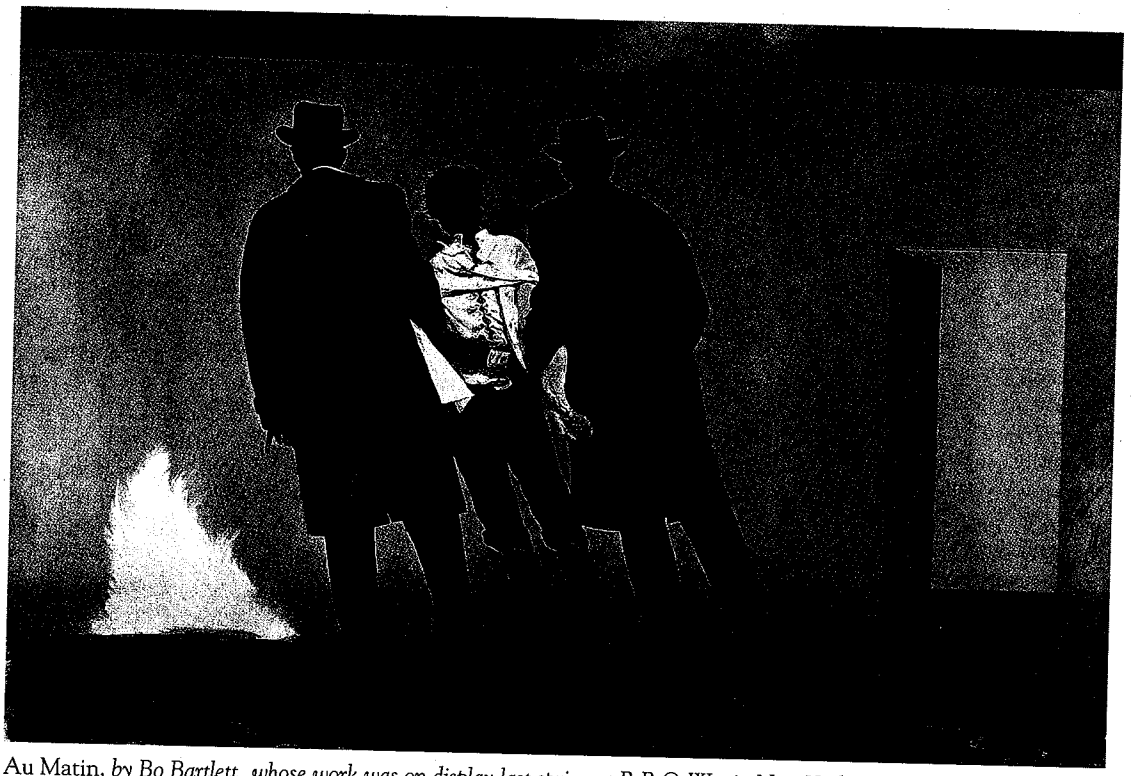
KAVAJA: Who would have known? I was into football and girls. It made me laugh. The big assignment came next, to burn the gas tanks at the airport in Sombor. My commander gave me some time bombs and I set them up near the tanks, which held a million gallons of gas. One night I placed the bombs around the tanks and walked away. When they went off, there was a massive explosion. I was far away but I could see huge yellow flames in the sky. I realized it wasn't a joke anymore. I was in big shit. Police swarmed the base and all the towns nearby. They arrested hundreds. I knew seven of them. One was a major hero. He got the death penalty. For nothing! The others died in prison.

STEWART: You didn't feel guilty about this?

KAVAJA: Guilt? My dick. You don't know about guilt. Schnapps?

STEWART: I'm still working on this one, thanks.

KAVAJA: After my commander was arrested, I was



COURTESY P.P.O.W., NEW YORK CITY

Au Matin, *by Bo Bartlett, whose work was on display last spring at P.P.O.W., in New York City.*

told that a lot of officers were arrested at the airport, and they had also asked about me and my friend Sveto. I took my machine gun, a pistol, three grenades, a compass, binoculars, and a bag of clothes, and I became a deserter. That's punishable by death. I knew they would chase us. Sveto and I decided to cross the border illegally into Austria. We had trouble at the border. Someone shouted, Stop. Then there were shots in our direction. We were in open space. Behind us were woods. We got down and fired back. The fight went on for ten minutes. I went through two clips and threw my three hand grenades. But we managed to get back into the woods and retreat to our border. I fired all but seven bullets.

We walked for an hour, then tried the border again. That time was worse. We got ambushed from three different directions. It was the Yugoslav People's Army, my own fucking army. They surrounded us, three of them with machine guns. The commander approached and asked where we were going. I reached into my leather jacket and said, We were just visiting Svetko Laković. The commander said, There's no one here with that name. Where are your arms? I said, We don't have any. I just have gloves. When I took out the gloves, I drew my pistol, put it to his forehead, and pulled the trigger.

STEWART: What about the other guys with guns?

KAVAJA: I had seven bullets left. I could have taken them all. But my gun jammed. From behind, I was hit with a machine gun and I lost consciousness. When I came to, there were twenty or so soldiers around.

STEWART: Pour me some schnapps.

KAVAJA: I don't want to talk about the trial, about being beaten up day and night. I was sentenced to eighteen and a half years. After four years, I escaped into Austria, where I was picked up and shipped to a U.S. Army base. They thought I was KGB, but after months of interviews three intelligence officers introduced themselves and offered me political asylum.

STEWART: Is that how you started working for the CIA? How did they ask you to join?

KAVAJA: They asked me, my dick. They didn't ask. They checked me out for seven months. I had to prove myself. I bombed some Communist buses in Vienna. It was their way of testing my loyalty. They liked me because of my history. I was young and fearless and hated Communism. So I started to work dirty jobs against Yugoslavia, against Russia—sabotage, spying, exposing double agents, assassinations. I did some very bad things, but I accepted my destiny. In 1959, I uncovered a gang of Yugoslavians smuggling arms to Algeria. They would come in dressed up like priests. I tracked them down and killed them. There were nev-

er any reports about the people who disappeared. They might as well have never lived.

STEWART: So you were like God, deciding who would and wouldn't die?

KAVAJA: No, my superiors made the final decisions. I killed. One person is on my conscience—a double agent from East Germany. I received an order from military intelligence to kill this woman. When I got her, she didn't know what I was going to do. She was probably twenty-three years old. I asked her for her family name and where she lived. There would be no official report—she would just disappear—and I wanted to send a message to her family and say where they could find her.

STEWART: Why her?

KAVAJA: There was something about her. I just wanted to do her a favor. Even when I was in prison in the United States, I dreamed about her. She was not the first one nor the last one. I just felt sorry for her. She was so young. But she was a proud girl. She spit on me.

STEWART: And you shot her?

KAVAJA: What do you think? I didn't rape her. I told her to walk ahead of me. And I shot her in the back.

STEWART: Did you think she deserved that?

KAVAJA: I never worried about killing an innocent person. I wasn't trained to kill innocent people. I killed people on my level—soldier to soldier, agent to agent. It is not my job to think about innocence or guilt. She didn't ask for mercy. She was probably guilty. But she stays with me. No one else does.

STEWART: How were you paid?

KAVAJA: By the job. For the bigger jobs, like assassinating Tito, I would have been paid $15,000. For most jobs, $10,000. They dropped the money off at my house.

STEWART: You didn't assassinate Tito—but you tried?

KAVAJA: Killing Tito was a big mission. For almost a decade, I hunted him. My last attempt to kill him was in 1971 at Camp David in Maryland. He was going there to visit Richard Nixon. No one can carry a gun around Camp David, but I went alone, dressed as a state trooper. I couldn't get on the actual property, but I got up into a tree where I could see the chopper with binoculars. I had my sniper rifle with me. My thought was that at some point Tito would take a walk into the woods. He liked to take walks. It was beautiful, I thought. Who wouldn't take a walk? I waited all day and night.

STEWART: In the tree? You didn't sleep?

KAVAJA: No. I couldn't kill him if I was asleep. You don't know anything about this kind of thing! Sleep? What a fucking joker.

STEWART: Did Tito ever go for a walk?

KAVAJA: Never. After two days, he left. And that was it. Nothing. So I didn't get him. But I did a lot of damage to his regime and to Communism.

STEWART: You had a Serbian terrorist organization, didn't you?

KAVAJA: It was a freedom group. I called it Freedom for the Serbian Fatherland—SOPO. We got money from the CIA. We bombed the Yugoslav embassies in Washington and Ottawa and the consulates in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Toronto. Bin Laden stole our strategies. I don't know how many people were killed. But after that the State Department got a lot of pressure from Tito to track us down and extradite us. It was a big mess.

STEWART: Did they catch up with you?

KAVAJA: Not until 1978. I was in New York on my way to a friend's house and more than twenty agents with guns ambushed me on Third Avenue. They arrested several of us. A judge in Chicago found us guilty but delayed the sentencing for a month. I got out on $250,000 bail. The judge released everyone except for Stojilko Kajević, who went by the name Priest. He helped me lead SOPO. The FBI thought he was the most dangerous. That was a mistake. After the trial, I told Priest I was ready to do a hijacking I'd been talking about. My plan was to land in Chicago, pick Priest up, then fly to Belgrade and crash into the Communist Central Committee building.

STEWART: So that's what you did when you got out on bail—hijacked a plane?

KAVAJA: First I returned home to see my family. One day I got a call from Priest. He said, Send me the memorandum. I said, For whom? President Carter, he said. That was the password to hijack the plane and come get him. That night I went into my basement, where I made bombs. I built two of them into two beer bottles. The telephone rang—it was an FBI agent from Chicago, Al King. He said, Hi Nik, how are you? I said, I'm making a bomb for tomorrow. He thought I was joking. I took some socks from my daughter's room and stuffed the bottles in my pant legs. I put on my pants and looked in the mirror and you couldn't see that anything was in there. The next morning, I woke up at five, just like any other day. My wife cooked me a steak for breakfast. That's all I eat—steaks. I said goodbye like any other morning. A cab took me to the airport. I ordered a brandy at the airport bar and relaxed. I checked in and waited by security for the right moment to pass through. I knew that if a police officer stopped me, I would have to kill him. I saw an albino couple with a lot of camping equipment passing through security. So I went with them. They set off the alarm. The police stopped them but not me. I got on the plane to Chicago. Next to me was a woman from Poland

who had never been to the United States. Imagine that. She has to get on my plane! We drank a brandy together. We talked. Fifteen minutes before landing, I said goodbye to her and went to the bathroom.

I got the bombs ready, then went to the cockpit. The stewardess asked me what I needed. I said, Give me the key to the cabin. She was paralyzed. I put my hand in her pocket, took the key, and opened the cabin. There were four pilots. I showed them the explosives and said, This is my plane now, I am responsible for your lives. If you make a mistake, we will all go to God. I told the captain, whose name was Mitchell, to get me in touch with the FBI. Al King got on the line. He was absolutely crazy! He said, Nik, you're late for court. I said, Listen, in five minutes I'm going to fly over the courthouse. I told you last night that I was making bombs. He said, Why do you make jokes? I said, You'll see me in five minutes.

I flew over the courthouse three or four times, and the stewardess brought me brandy. Eventually we landed, and I parked the plane at the far end of the airport. Hundreds of police surrounded the plane on the runway. The FBI asked me what I wanted. I said, I want Priest. Passengers kept asking for things. One woman said she was going to give birth and I said, What the fuck is going on? I'm not a doctor, I'm a terrorist.

The FBI sent my lawyer out to the plane to try to talk me out of it, but I said it was too late. Then he begged me to release the passengers. That was the riskiest moment. I worried the FBI would attack. But I had the bomb trigger in hand and I told them not to mess around because I could blow up the plane in a second. The briefcase of dynamite was at my chest. I gave the passengers five minutes to get off. You should have seen these fat Negroes! It was hilarious. Looking at them, you wouldn't expect them to be so fast. But they were off in seconds. At the end four people were left: Mitchell, a copilot, my lawyer, and a flight attendant.

STEWART: What about Priest?

KAVAJA: Priest finally called me. But it wasn't good. He said, Brother Nikola, I'm not coming with you. That was the most difficult moment. I'd sacrificed everything for this, my wife, my kids, my life. We had a deal. We were going to take the plane to Yugoslavia. It was his job to show me the building we were going to hit. I hadn't been back to Yugoslavia for decades. The Communist Central Committee building was built in the Sixties. I didn't know the land. I didn't know what to do at that point. But he got off the phone and it was over.

I told them to refuel the plane and then I told Mitchell we were leaving. There were forty or fifty cars following the plane down the runway. Mitchell asked me what the plan was, and I said, New York. On the way, I demanded a 707, a much bigger plane, and a new crew to meet me at JFK. No one knew what I was going to do. When we landed, the 707 was there. We pulled up. I took Mitchell and the copilot and tied them to me. I wanted to make sure I didn't get killed on the way across and that the new pilots were not imposters. There were hundreds of police snipers. But I had this living wall around me. After we left New York, I finally told my lawyer the plan. You should have seen his eyes. He was a baby. We flew for hours. But then I had second thoughts. I was ready to die. But I didn't know where the Central Communist building was in Belgrade. I didn't want to kill regular civilians. That was never my job. I wanted to kill Tito and the biggest symbol of the Communist Party—not go down as the guy who killed innocent people. My friend betrayed me and I lost the target.

STEWART: So you're up there in a stolen 707, with a bunch of hostages and nowhere to go.

KAVAJA: I didn't want to lose my life for nothing. That was the point. But you don't have time to think. My lawyer said that Ireland didn't have an extradition agreement with the United States. I'd get political asylum, I'd be safe. So we landed there. I gave up the explosives and let everyone go. Then the negotiations started between the authorities of Ireland, my lawyer, and the States. Of course, they all betrayed me. Ireland sent me back to the U.S. That was it. This time it was over for real. I was in jail from 1979 to 1997. Solitary confinement. Noriega was at the same prison. I never left my cell. I had three shirts, three pairs of pants, three towels, and two blankets. I had a mouse friend who visited me at night. I did push-ups—thousands a day—and thought about my wife and kids, and I thought about Tito.

STEWART: What does it feel like to assassinate someone?

KAVAJA: What the fuck?

STEWART: After such an extreme life, it must be hard to settle down and call it quits.

KAVAJA: It's not over. I still fuck good. I've got a couple of young girls. You see this one here? Her tits! Her hair! I also have other jobs to do, but we won't talk about that. I have money and girls, and that's a good life for me. I'm set up.

STEWART: I see pictures on your wall of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini. Are they idols?

KAVAJA: These are big men.

STEWART: And big murderers.

KAVAJA: American presidents killed, too.

STEWART: How do you think you'll be remembered?

KAVAJA: Evil.