

MONOGRAPH #3

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Monograph # 3

The release of VENONA translations involved careful consideration of the privacy interests of individuals mentioned, referenced, or identified in the translations. Some names have not been released when to do so would constitute an invasion of privacy.

INTRODUCTION

On 1 February 1943, the U.S. Army's Signal Intelligence organization, usually called "Arlington Hall" after the location of its headquarters in Virginia, began a program to examine encrypted Soviet diplomatic telegrams sent between Moscow and Soviet missions abroad. Not until 1946, however, after very difficult analytic work, did Arlington Hall begin to recognize that these so-called diplomatic communications contained thousands of messages of the KGB and GRU, the Soviet secret intelligence services.

This monograph accompanies the third set of VENONA translations being released to the public. The first release, in July 1995, was of a number of Soviet espionage messages concerning Soviet intelligence operations against the U.S. atomic bomb program (the Manhattan Project). The second release was of KGB messages between the New York KGB Residency and Moscow Center during 1942-43.

This third release comprises many more documents than either the first or second release - more than 500 translations - and includes all the decrypted and translated messages between the New York and Washington KGB Residencies and Moscow Center (minus the atomic bomb-related messages previously released in July 1995).

KGB AGENTS AND OFFICERS

During the VENONA period the KGB used the coverterm PROBATIONERS to refer to their agents. A KGB *officer*, whether under official diplomatic cover or operating as an "illegal," was a Soviet citizen and a sworn officer of the KGB (usually holding police rank). In VENONA messages, KGB officers are often referred to as

"workers" or "cadre." *Illegals* were Soviet citizens, KGB or GRU officers, operating under cover in foreign countries with no visible connections to legal Soviet establishments. These persons had entered the country other than in an official capacity such as a staff member of an embassy or consulate. An *agent* was a private citizen recruited by the KGB to carry out espionage or other clandestine activities on behalf of the KGB. In VENONA we also see some persons who appear to fall somewhere in between agent and officer. American Communists Jacob Golos, Elizabeth Bentley, and Greg Silvermaster, veteran controllers of agent networks, could be placed in this category. In fact, Silvermaster was at one time the only American citizen in the KGB Hall of Fame in Moscow.

THE WASHINGTON KGB RESIDENCY

Except for its agents working against high-tech targets such as the atomic bomb project, the most important KGB sources were in Washington, D.C. Nonetheless, VENONA shows that these Washington-based espionage nets were apparently run by the New York Residency; that is, the New York Residency wrote and sent VENONA messages to Moscow even when these messages clearly concerned activities in Washington. KGB Washington sent no messages until very late in 1943. In 1944 Washington's message volume was still only half that of New York.

Finally, in 1945, Washington KGB took charge, it seems, sending twice as many messages as New York. Vassili Zubilin, a KGB general officer who had been the Resident (chief) in New York in 1942-43, moved to Washington during 1943 as Resident there. The Washington KGB thereafter began sending messages in ever-



VADIM

(Anatolij Gromov/Gorsky)

increasing volume. When Zubilin was recalled to Moscow in 1944, Anatolij Gromov, covername VADIM, replaced him in Washington. Gromov (actual last name Gorsky) was also a senior officer, in his late thirties, who had served for the preceding four years as the KGB Resident in London. American spymaster and courier for the KGB, Elizabeth Bentley, knew him only as "Al."

NEW YORK ESPIONAGE OPERATIONS - THE NEW KGB

In 1944, covername MAJ, believed to have been Stepan Apresyan, became the KGB Resident in New York. According to a complaint to Moscow Center by his co-Resident or subordinate, covername SERGEJ, MAJ was a young, inexperienced officer who had not previously been posted abroad. Apresyan was about twenty-eight years old; he operated in New York under the cover of vice-consul (see NY messages of 9-11 Oct 1944). While we do not know why MAJ was elevated early to senior KGB ranks, there were other major changes in KGB espionage operations, as we can see in the VENONA messages. Moscow Center and the New York Residency intended to take more direct control of some existing espionage nets that had been run for the KGB by American Communists such as Jacob Golos (covername ZVUK) and Greg Silvermaster (covernames PEL and ROBERT). And, as MAJ reported to Moscow, the time might come when the KGB would need to have espionage agents not recruited from within the Communist Party. All of this relates to the dissolution of the COMINTERN as discussed in the previous VENONA release and its accompanying monograph. The transition was resisted by American spies, Greg Silvermaster and Elizabeth Bentley, as well as by some of their agents. They complained that Moscow did not trust them and that, as a practical matter, the KGB would be less successful in running espionage operations if they put their officers in direct contact with the agents, bypassing the old guard Communist Party controllers. Perhaps mindful of this, the KGB introduced the Illegal ALBERT into their espionage operations. Silvermaster, Elizabeth Bentley, some of their individual agents, and members of the "new network" were now to fall under ALBERT's control.

KGB TRADECRAFT

These translations frequently show KGB tradecraft – the techniques of secret espionage and counterespionage – in great detail. The KGB term *Konspiratoria* sometimes seen in VENONA refers to tradecraft and operational security. A few examples for quick reference (all New York to Moscow):

- Agent Recruiting: No. 27, 8 Jan 45 and No. 1506, 23 Oct 44
- Meeting and Password Scenarios: No. 1220, 26 Aug 44
- Secret Document Photography: No. 1469, 17 Oct 44
- Countersurveillance: No. 1755, 14 Dec 44
- Technical Surveillance Countermeasures: No. 1824, 27 Dec 44
- Document Forgery Operations (the KGB "A"-line technique):
No. 1203, 23 Aug 44
- Cover Business: No. 618, 4 May 44
- Payments/Rewards to Agents: Nos. 1052 and 1053, 5 July 45

Also, VENONA has excellent examples of the work of a KGB agent and Communist Party functionary, covernames ECHO and DICK (Bernard Schuster), in carrying out investigations on behalf of the KGB, as part of the vetting process of agent candidates (New York to Moscow, Nos. 1221, 1457, and 1512, all from 1944).

KGB SPECIAL OPERATIONS

In addition to espionage, the KGB carried out other secret activities in the U.S. In VENONA we can follow the KGB using its agents in the hunt for Viktor Kravchenko, covername KOMAR, who in 1944 defected in Washington from the Soviet Government Purchasing Commission. (See especially New York to Moscow messages of May to August 1944, nos. 594, 600, 613-14, 654, 694, 724, 726, 740, 799, and 907.) In the latter message, sent from MAJ to PETROV (who was either L.P. Beria, head of Soviet State Security, or V.N. Merkulov, his principal deputy who functioned as the day-to-day head of the KGB) New York announces that KOMAR/Kravchenko had been located by their veteran agent Mark Zbrowski, covername TULIP. Additional related messages of 1944 are nos. 1145, 1202, also

no. 87 of 19 Jan 1945, the last VENONA reference to the case, which reports that KOMAR is "in a great panic" about his safety and that KGB agents KANT (the new covername for Mark Zbrowski) and ZhANNA are carrying out "the work on KOMAR." The KOMAR messages contain references to anti-Communist emigre community involvement in the defection, including references to David Dallin, Isaac Don Levine, and even Aleksander Kerenskij, head of the post-revolutionary Menshevik government before it was overthrown in the Bolshevik coup. KGB New York also makes the mysterious remark (message no. 740, 26 May 1944) that "KOMAR is well informed about the KRIVITsKIJ case." KRIVITsKIJ was a famous KGB defector who supposedly committed suicide in Washington in 1941.

ELIZABETH BENTLEY



Elizabeth Bentley

In 1945, Elizabeth Bentley, a KGB agent who also ran a network of spies and served as a sometime courier, went to the FBI to describe Soviet espionage in the United States and her part in it. She gave a 100-page statement, in which she provided many names - persons in positions of trust who, she told the FBI, were secretly supplying information to the KGB. However, she brought no documentary proof. No espionage prosecutions resulted directly from her accusations. Over the years she testified before Congress and in court and also published a book about her espionage career. Elizabeth Bentley was a controversial figure, and there were many who discounted her information. Ms. Bentley appears in

these VENONA translations (as covernames UMNITsA [GOOD GIRL] and MYRNA) as do dozens of KGB agents and officers who she named to the FBI. VENONA confirms much of the information about Soviet espionage that Ms. Bentley provided the FBI.

BORIS MORROS

Boris Morros was, like Ms. Bentley, another controversial figure of the Cold War. In 1959 he wrote an often criticized book, *My Ten Years as a Counterspy*, in which he described his long association with the KGB and his decision to go to the FBI with the story of KGB operations in the U.S. In the book he wrote about various personalities who are referred to in VENONA, including Vassili Zubilin and Jack Soble. Morros appears in VENONA as covername FROST (the Russian word for frost is *moroz*). In his book Morros described how KGB agent Alfred Stern provided his own money to fund a musical record company, managed by Morros, as a KGB front and a cover for international intelligence operations. This operation is confirmed in VENONA - Stern (covername LUI) is quoted as saying his "130,000 dollar investment is exhausted" but also that "I want to reaffirm my desire to be helpful. My resources are sufficient for any solid constructive purpose. . . ." (See New York to Moscow, nos. 4-5, 11, and 18-19 of 3 and 4 January 1945.)

DONALD MACLEAN

Longtime KGB agent Donald Maclean, covername HOMER, a senior British diplomat posted to Washington during the 1940s, is found in several VENONA messages, from New York and Washington (nos. 915, 1105-1110, 1146, 1263, 1271-74, possibly 1352, all sent during 1944). He was neutralized because of information from VENONA. Since only 1.5 percent (thirty-six) of all Washington-to-Moscow KGB messages of 1945 were able to be decrypted, it is notable that six of these were HOMER messages (nos. 1788, 1791, 1793, 1808-1809, 1815, and 1826 - no. 1809 is a continuation of 1808). Note that the small body of Washington messages that could be broken were from small windows of

cryptanalytic opportunity found by the Arlington Hall analysts in messages of March and June 1945 only. Therefore, we have but a glimpse of Maclean's treachery, but ample opportunity to see the type of important information he was providing to the Soviets.



HOMER (Donald Maclean)

HOMER is the English rendition of the Russian covername spelling, GOMER. (The Cyrillic alphabet used in Russian has no letter representing the sound "h" of the Roman alphabet, and foreign words beginning with the "h" sound are regularly spelled with the Cyrillic equivalent of "g.") Meredith Gardner, Arlington Hall's principal VENONA analyst in the early days, began to break HOMER messages as early as 1947/48, but the story did not come together immediately as the covername was variously represented in the messages as GOMMER (a KGB misspelling), GOMER, G. and "Material

G." Initially, it was not apparent that these were all references to the same person, particularly as both New York and Washington traffic was involved, and Gardner worked the NYC traffic first (thus the early successes against the atomic bomb spies shown in the first VENONA release).

COVERNAME ALBERT: PRINCIPAL KGB ILLEGAL IN THE U.S.

Covername ALBERT (earlier covername MER) is found in VENONA more than fifty times, sometimes as signatory to messages sent by the New York Residency. ALBERT was Iskhak Abdulovich Akhmerov, a veteran KGB officer who had two tours of duty in the U.S. as an Illegal, that is, an officer using a false identity and background (a *Legenda* in KGB parlance) and without diplomatic cover or immunity. ALBERT's career, ascertained from VENONA and

other sources, gives an excellent example of the bewildering plethora of names by which a KGB personality might be known:

Communications Covername (the covername in VENONA): MER in 1943-44; ALBERT 1944-45.

Aliases (1937-45): William Greinke, Michael Green, Michael Adamec, and more.

Street names: Michael, Bill. For example, Elizabeth Bentley knew him only as Bill - no last name, not even the alias, much less his true name. She knew his wife, also an Illegal, as "Catherine." Catherine actually was VENONA covername ELZA, true name Helen Lowry, a niece of KGB agent and Communist Party leader Earl Browder (VENONA covername RULEVOJ).



ALBERT/MER
(Iskhak Abdulovich Akhmerov) and "voice.")

True name: Iskhak Abdulovich Akhmerov. (In some cases so-called true names of KGB officers, the names that appeared on their passports and the diplomatic lists, were false. For example, Vassili Zubilin, the sometime KGB Resident in New York and Washington, was actually named Zarubin. To add to the difficulty in understanding the names, other KGB officers used true names that were not names at all - Russian words, but not traditional Russian names. Some of these *nommes de guerre* included senior KGB officers Vladimir Pravdin, Jacob Golos, whose last names mean, respectively, "truth" and "voice.")

In one message ALBERT refers to his earlier work in the U.S. as an Illegal, and he mentions his old agents, covernames LEONA, JULIA, TONYa and REDHEAD. None of these have been identified, nor do we know if ALBERT reactivated them in 1944-45 (No. 975, 11 July 1944). See also the important message, Washington to Moscow, No. 1822,

30 March 1945, which reports of the well-placed veteran GRU agent ALES (probably Alger Hiss) being interviewed by covername "A." It appears that "A." was ALBERT.

In 1946, ALBERT reportedly moved to Baltimore. Actually he and ELZA secretly left the U.S., probably because the KGB had learned about Elizabeth Bentley's statements to the FBI. KGB veterans consider him to have been one of their service's most successful officers.

THE TRANSLATIONS

The majority of the translations in this release represent telegrams from the New York KGB Residency to Moscow Center in 1944. Most of these messages were between KGB officers - covername MAJ (Stephen Apresyan) and covername VIKTOR (General Pavel Fitin). Approximately 50 percent of all the 1944 New York KGB to Moscow Center messages were sufficiently decrypted to be translated. In contrast, only 1.5 percent of the Washington-Moscow KGB messages sent in 1945 were able to be broken and read. No other



VIKTOR (LtGen Pavel Fitin)

Washington-Moscow KGB messages from any other year were ever successfully deciphered. While relatively few messages from the Center to the Residencies were broken, those that were broken are very important to our understanding of KGB operations and doctrine.

The translations included in the current release are relatively easy to read and understand compared to those in the second release because of the cryptographic circumstances discussed in the monographs which accompanied those releases. The codebook and

cipher procedures used by the KGB during 1944 and 1945 made it possible, after great effort, for the analysts to produce fairly complete translations. Nevertheless, translations often contain significant gaps - code groups that could not be broken. The New York translations in this set were the earliest of all the VENONA materials decrypted. All of the New York to Moscow messages (but not Moscow to New York) that were successfully solved were at least partially solved during 1947-1952 and disseminated to the FBI (on a regular basis starting in 1948). Many of the Washington KGB messages were also first decrypted during this period but not quite so early as the New York material.

The 1944 and 1945 messages disclose mainly U.S. individuals involved in a massive Soviet espionage effort - over one-hundred Americans, most of them Communists, are mentioned in the translations of this release. Some of the organizations infiltrated by these individuals included the following:

<u>U.S. Agency</u>	<u>Some of the Relevant VENONA Messages</u>
Department of the Treasury	NY No. 1119-1121, 4-5 Aug 44; 1634, 20 Nov 44
Office of the Strategic Services (OSS)	NY No. 954, 20 Sep 44
War Department	NY No. 1721-28, 8 Dec 44
Department of State	Wash. No. 1822, 30 Mar 45
Department of Justice	NY No. 27, 8 Jan 45

The translations disclose agents with access to the White House, Congress, and political parties, as well as agents in the media and in high-tech defense industries. New York message nos. 1635, 21 Nov 1944 and 12-16, 4 January 1945 reveal assets and in-fighting relating to ROBERT's (Greg Silvermaster) large KGB net in government departments and agencies in Washington.

MORE ATOMIC BOMB MESSAGES



Lona Cohen

the first time from you about the electromagnetic method of separation of ENORMOZ." These messages were overlooked in compiling the materials for the first VENONA release in July 1995.

One translation, NY no. 1507, Oct 1944, footnoted covername BUMBLE-BEE (Russian ShMEL') as equating to David Greenglass; however, the translation shows a handwritten emendation of "David Greenglass" to "Walter Lippman" which is the correct equation.

The KGB successor organization has recently provided historians some information about Lona and Morris Cohen, their agents in the U.S. in the 1940s and later infamous Illegals operating in the U.K. as Helen and Peter Kroger. Reportedly, Lona Cohen had the covername LESLIE while she was involved in atomic bomb espionage courier duties for the KGB (see NY's no. 50, 11 Jan 1945, the only VENONA reference to this covername. This message suggests that LESLIE/LESLEY had not been active for the previous six months).

This third release also includes a few important messages concerning Klaus Fuchs, the atomic bomb spy, especially New York KGB messages 1606, 16 Nov 1944 and Moscow Center's messages to New York, nos. 183, 27 Feb 1945 and 349, 10 April 1945. The last message, only partially recovered, will be of great interest with respect to the controversy about the pace of Soviet atomic bomb development. In it Moscow tells NY that CHARLZ's (Fuchs's covername) information on the atomic bomb "is of great value," and his recent report "contains information received for

MORE TO COME IN 1996

The remaining releases of VENONA will include more than 1,000 message translations: the KGB in San Francisco and Mexico; the GRU in New York and Washington; and the Naval GRU in Washington. Finally, KGB and/or GRU messages from Montevideo, London, Stockholm, and elsewhere will be released.

By Robert Louis Benson