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KGB Official Defects In Geneva's Spy War

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An apparent American victory in the shadowy East-West espionage war was disclosed yesterday when the State Department announced that a staff officer of the Soviet Union's top security agency has defected to the U. S.

Yuri I. Nossenko, 36, self-identified as a staff member of the Soviet Espionage and Counter-Espionage Committee for State Security (KGB) and regarded here as "a very important person," has asked for political asylum, a State Department spokesman said. His request will presumably be granted.

Mr. Nossenko arrived in Geneva Jan. 20—ostensibly as a legal expert with the Soviet delegation to the 17-nation disarmament talks. He disappeared from the Rex Hotel on Geneva's Avenue Wendt last Tuesday, the day before he was to have returned to Moscow.

There are broad hints that U. S. Central Intelligence operatives persuaded him to defect.

Neither State Department nor CIA officials would disclose Mr. Nossenko's reason for defecting or his present whereabouts. There were varying and unconfirmed reports that he is in Paris or West Germany. He is undoubtedly being interrogated by American intelligence officers.

One London source said Mr. Nossenko was linked with the 1962-'63 Penkovsky espionage case in Moscow, but that report could not be confirmed here immediately.

Col. Oleg V. Penkovsky of the Soviet Army was arrested by Russian agents in October, 1962, and tried in Moscow last year on charges of having spied over a period of 17 months for the U. S. and Britain. He was found guilty, sentenced to death and later reported executed.

The U. S. and British denied complicity in the Penkovsky case, but informed sources have hinted that it was a major coup for American and British intelligence. At the time of his arrest, Penkovsky was serving as deputy head of the Foreign Department of the State Committee for the Co-ordination of Scientific Research.

If Mr. Nossenko is a KGB staff officer, as he claims, he might know some or all of the ramifications of the Penkovsky affair, to say nothing of the details of the KGB's espionage and counter-espionage operations. Such information could be extremely valuable for the U. S. and its allies.

In announcing Mr. Nossenko's defection, State Department press officer Richard I. Phillips said the Russians had told American authorities "he is a staff member of the KGB (and that) he was assigned to Geneva on temporary duty from KGB headquarters in Moscow."

KGB headquarters is a gray stone former insurance company office building in Moscow's downtown Dzhirzhinsky Square.

Mr. Nossenko, said to be married and the father of two children, reportedly enjoyed European life and some of its accoutrements, such as Western-style clothing.

According to reports received here, Mr. Nossenko was billeted in Geneva with nine other Soviet delegation members in the Rex Hotel. When he disappeared, the other nine Russians were hastily moved to Soviet delegation headquarters.

There were unconfirmed reports from Geneva that Mr. Nossenko had slipped over the Swiss border into France. French police, however, denied any knowledge of him.

Soviet delegation leaders in Geneva did not report his disappearance until Sunday, when they asked the Swiss police to try to locate him.

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