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'Master spy' gives newsletter at U.N. a new slant on events

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UNITED NATIONS — "U.N. Clerk' Is Kremlin's Master Spy in New York," a headline in a major tabloid here told New Yorkers.

The story produced predictable reactions.

On the city streets, a series of random queries to New Yorkers brought knowing smiles, expressions of outrage and of helplessness over the "spies in our midst."

At the U.N., there were expressions of outrage of another sort. An employee of the world organization called the article "pure sensationalism, garbage."

At the U.S. Mission, mum was the word at first and only repeated prodding shed some light on what apparently happened.

At the FBI's New York office, the response was that any interviews concerning counterintelligence matters would have to be cleared with headquarters in Washington.

The story that the New York tabloid told involved Viktor Andreev, a Soviet national who arrived here last July as special deputy to the U.N. undersecretary-general who heads the secretariat's Department of Special Political and Security Council Affairs. The undersecretary-general himself is a Soviet national, and the post has traditionally been a Soviet plum.

The article charged that Mr. Andreev "runs a vast Soviet spy network operating openly at the U.N."

But on specifics, the article's charges were more modest. It said the Soviet "master spy" converted a newsletter produced by the secretariat for top-level officials into an "outrageous propaganda sheet" which is "edited to favor the Soviet Union and make the U.S. look bad."

While the specific accusation hardly justifies the charges of espionage, it points clearly to the length the Soviets will go to exert influence over the U.N. and its highest officials.

The story of the secretariat newsletter, pieced together from U.N. employees, and official and unofficial U.S. sources here and in Washington, begins in 1982 during the Falklands war. "The secretary-general [Javier Perez de Cuellar] expressed an interest in getting a wider range of views on issues, particularly in times of crisis, and asked that a newsletter be produced from

wire service sources to serve that need," a U.N. official said.

The issue came before the Security Council, where some member states expressed an interest in receiving the newsletter.

According to the U.N. source, U.S. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick expressed concern that the product be impartial and fair but was told that it was not designed for dissemination to member states and let the matter drop.

There it stayed until July. Enter Mr. Andreev. Things began to change.

U.N. sources said the decision was taken to expand the newsletter, adding more wire services, increasing its size and frequency of output and upgrading the quality. Its name was

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changed from Political Information News Service, or PINS, to Political and Security Council Affairs News Service.

"The thing began to look and sound like it was coming straight from the Soviet mission," a non-official source in Washington said. The impression was seconded by a source in New York who refused to be further identified.

The change brought Ambassador Kirkpatrick back into the picture with an expression of concern to the secretary-general on July 25.

What was she concerned about? U.S. sources were reluctant to say. The U.S. mission at first refused to say anything at all and also refused to allow any U.S. official to be interviewed on the subject.

President Reagan also is reported to have brought up the matter on Sept. 23 when he held a reception here for the secretary-general. It was the day before the president addressed the U.N. General Assembly.

An examination of the newsletter reveals the subtlety of approach to the subject matter.

For example, a copy of the 4:30 p.m. report dated March 5 contains six items, none reflecting remotely a point of view critical of the Soviet Union or its U.N. allies. There is a warning by Vietnam of a Chinese invasion, an item on Israel summoning envoys "to explain its tough anti-guerrilla campaign" in Lebanon, a denial by New Zealand that it was moving towards neutrality and a report on President Reagan telling members of Congress that "his MX nuclear missile program was vital to the success of U.S.-Soviet arms talks."

On that same date, South Korea ended its ban on 14 dissident politicians and Vice President George Bush visited a refugee camp in Sudan to dramatize the plight of famine-haunted Africa. Both events went unreported in the newsletter.

The whole secretariat newsletter affair threw into bold relief the problems that grow out of Moscow's New York operation.

Here the Soviets maintain a huge corps of officials — 110 diplomats at the Soviet Mission to the U.N. and 427 more who serve in the U.N. Secretariat, 90 percent of whom are "professionals" rather than "general service" clerical workers.

Soviets in the secretariat, although theoretically international civil servants, are at Moscow's own insistence treated as Soviet nationals first, serving for fixed five-year terms followed by rotation home. They live together in the same compound and, according to secretariat sources, stick pretty much to themselves.

Because the Soviet contingent in the secretariat does not operate in the United States under the travel restrictions that apply to Soviet diplomats, the potential for espionage under the direction of the Soviet intelligence agency, the KGB, is real and undoubtedly taken into account by the FBI.

The potential for exerting influence over the work of the U.N. is greater still and far less controllable. And the potential for mischief is enormous.

In this intrigue-laden environment, charges of KGB activity surface and resurface.

How much do they go on? Only the FBI and other U.S. intelligence agencies have the data to make a determination. And for a variety of reasons, dealing with the protection of sources and methods, these agencies are not in the habit of talking.