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Incredible vanishing scientist

The disappearance of Vladimir Valentinovich Alexandrov, about which I wrote many months ago, remains a mystery. His role in the Soviet "nuclear winter" hoax, to which he contributed the mathematical "calculations," should have prompted considerable and continuing media interest, but hardly a word has been written about him since I reported the results of my research into the case.

When he disappeared in Madrid on March 31, 1985, European intelligence sources were convinced he had defected to the CIA, but after publication of my column the agency categorically denied this.

It was assumed by some at that time that Mr. Alexandrov was in the custody of Britain's MI-6. However, an American academician who called me insisted that Mr. Alexandrov was kidnapped by the KGB, by two men who forced him into a car on the night of his disappearance. I was told there were at least two witnesses who could verify this — and I was promised their names and statements. That evidence was never forthcoming.

The case fascinated me, and since then I have been putting together all the known facts on the Alexandrov disappearance.

1. On March 29, Mr. Alexandrov arrived in Madrid, where he was met at the Barajas airport by Soviet diplomatic officials. After a brief visit to the Soviet Embassy, he was driven by a representative of Cordoba to that city, where he was scheduled to attend an anti-nuclear conference. His lecture on nuclear winter was well-received. He was quartered at the Colegios Mayores, where the conference was being held.

2. On the morning of March 31, Alfonso Caballos, personal secretary to Cordoba's Communist mayor, Julio Anguita, telephoned the Soviet Embassy and made arrangements for Mr. Alexandrov's return to Madrid.

3. Two municipal council chauffeurs drove him to Madrid in a Seat 132 and at 9 p.m. delivered him to the first secretary of the Soviet Embassy. He then was taken by Soviet officials in a Mercedes van to a hotel on the Paseo de la Habana where the embassy kept an apartment for the use of visiting dignitaries.

4. Mr. Alexandrov checked into the Hotel Habana and was not seen again except, if they exist, by the two witnesses to his "kidnapping" by the KGB.

5. On April 1, the Soviet Embassy made unofficial inquiries to Madrid authorities as to Mr. Alexandrov's whereabouts. On April 17, it made a formal request to the Spanish government for a "missing persons" search.

6. At about the same time, Vitaly Yurchenko — the high-ranking KGB official who later defected to the United States, redefected, and reportedly has been executed in Moscow — was dispatched to Rome to intercept Mr. Alexandrov, who was scheduled to speak at another anti-nuclear conference in Italy.

7. At the time of Mr. Alexandrov's disappearance, Soviet Embassy officials and the Communist mayor's office in Cordoba told the Spanish press that he was drunk throughout his stay in Spain — a standard tactic to discredit defectors — though no one had noticed this when he delivered his nuclear-winter lecture.

8. Sources close to the CIA have merely smiled knowingly when asked about the Alexandrov case.

Question: If the Soviet Embassy had Mr. Alexandrov safely tucked away in its suite at the Hotel Habana, why would it kidnap him on the street in the presence of witnesses?

Question: Why would the Soviet Embassy make inquiries about Mr. Alexandrov's whereabouts when no one knew, or cared, that he had disappeared?

Question: Why would the KGB have tried to intercept Mr. Alexandrov in Rome if he were already in its hands?

Question: Why would the Soviets have kidnapped a good and obedient servant when all they had to do was summon him back to Moscow?

The international scientific community has, uncharacteristically, shown no interest in the Alexandrov case. He has not surfaced in Moscow for the *pro forma* press conference. The CIA says nothing. Are we therefore to presume that Vladimir Alexandrov simply vanished into thin air like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat? Or does the CIA know something it is not telling us?

Perhaps William F. Buckley will incorporate Vladimir Alexandrov into his next Blackford Oakes thriller. That may give us answers to the host of unanswered questions.

Ralph de Toledano is a nationally syndicated columnist.