

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3-BWASHINGTON TIMES
29 October 1985

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Is that missing physicist crooning to the CIA?

The disappearance of Dr. Vladimir Alexandrov, top-drawer Soviet nuclear physicist and a KGB scientific disinformation specialist, escaped the attention of the U.S. media until it was linked by me to the defection of Vitaly Yurchenko, No. 5 man in the KGB, a report which received international attention when it was bannered by *The Washington Times*.

Most of the American press, both printed and electronic, in rewriting my report, though giving me no credit, entirely missed the point of what had happened to Mr. Alexandrov.

Mr. Alexandrov vanished in Madrid, en route to a nuclear conference in Sicily. The rest of the Soviet delegation to that conference — a group

of academicians including the son of Andrei Gromyko — was immediately ordered to remain in Moscow. Vitaly Yurchenko was sent to Rome to intercept Mr. Alexandrov, should he show up. The importance of Mr. Yurchenko's mission can be measured by the fact that he was met at the Fiumicino airport by the Soviet ambassador to Italy, who put the entire Rome embassy at his disposal. At the first opportunity, Mr. Yurchenko turned himself over to Vatican authorities, who made contact with the Central Intelligence Agency.

The uproar in the Kremlin over the Alexandrov disappearance is understandable. He was, at 40, one of the top-ranking physicists and mathematicians in the Soviet Union, deeply involved in both military nuclear research and in the development of the Kremlin's own strategic defense against nu-

clear attack. As such, he could inform the West as to the exact status of Soviet advances in Star Wars — information vital to President Reagan as he prepares for his summit meeting with Kremlin boss Mikhail Gorbachev.

But Vladimir Alexandrov's role in Soviet nuclear affairs may have been of considerably greater importance to the KGB. Working in 1984 with the KGB's multibillion-dollar disinformation section, Mr. Alexandrov had created the hoax of a "nuclear winter" — thoroughly debunked by such real scientists as Dr. Petr Beckmann — which, we were told, would result from a nuclear exchange between the Soviet Union and the United States. According to Mr. Alexandrov's "findings" any such exchange would release so much dust and debris into the atmosphere that the sun would be blocked out and a new Ice Age would destroy all vegetation and most of mankind with it.

This fright-wig "theory" was successfully transmitted by the KGB to the United States and caused a sensation when it was espoused and popularized by Dr. Carl Sagan, Cornell University pundit and TV personality. This lozenge of sci-fi hokum made headlines, giving much comfort to nuclear-freeze propagandists and, until the scientific community had analyzed it, giving the Pentagon and the Reagan administration some bad headaches. The "nuclear winter" fairy tale, let it be

noted, is still being pushed by Mr. Sagan as "scientific" fact.

Mr. Alexandrov was flown to Washington by the CIA and is now being debriefed both by intelligence experts and by American scientists. Asked about this report, the CIA declined comment.

What Vladimir Alexandrov has told the CIA about the state of Soviet military nuclear development and Star Wars capabilities will probably never be publicly divulged. But its effect can be seen in the visible stiffening of President Reagan's stance on his Strategic Defense Initiative and his decision not to bow to Soviet pressure against it.

Once Mr. Alexandrov has been thoroughly debriefed, however, he can contribute mightily to American awareness by exposing just how the KGB has been able to influence and distort our scientific thinking.

Ralph de Toledo is a nationally syndicated columnist.