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K.G.B. Defector Helped the C.I.A. Brief Reagan Before Summit Talks

The following article is based on reporting by Leslie H. Gelb and Philip Shenon and was written by Mr. Gelb.

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 8 — A Soviet intelligence agent who defected to the West last year provided President Reagan with important insights into Mikhail S. Gorbachev and Soviet policy only weeks before Mr. Reagan met the Soviet leader in Geneva in November, American officials say.

The officials said the defector, a former K.G.B. official named Oleg G. Gordiyevsky, had advised Washington that Soviet leaders, although relentless in trying to expand their nation's influence, were ready to bargain seriously.

Mr. Gordiyevsky, who was once the London station chief for the K.G.B., the Soviet intelligence and internal security agency, and who is its highest-ranking officer to remain in the West, also told American officials that although Washington had cause to worry about Moscow, Soviet leaders were perhaps even more concerned about the directions taken by the Reagan Administration.

Endorsed Defector's Views

This complicated picture of Soviet thinking came at a time when officials said Mr. Reagan was just beginning to emerge from his unclouded sense of the Soviet Union as the "evil empire." Mr. Gordiyevsky reinforced the views of other defectors like Arkady N. Shevchenko, the former high-level Soviet official at the United Nations who sought asylum in 1978.

To get this information and a personal impression of Mr. Gorbachev, William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, flew secretly to London last fall to meet with Mr. Gordiyevsky. Information provided by the defector was then used liberally in the Central Intelligence Agency's profile of the Soviet leader prepared for Mr. Reagan before the summit meeting in Geneva, sources said.

But the sources said there was an important piece of information that Mr. Gordiyevsky provided to his British intelligence "handlers" in 1981 that London apparently did not pass on to Washington for some time.

Believed U.S. Would Attack

Soviet leaders, he told them, believed that Mr. Reagan intended to order an attack against the Soviet Union or one of its close allies, perhaps Cuba.

Mr. Reagan was said to have been apprised of this Soviet belief by the time of Mr. Casey's visit.

For over 15 years, Mr. Gordiyevsky was a double agent, a spy for Britain

and, for a time, Denmark. He began spying for Britain while serving as a junior K.G.B. officer in Copenhagen in 1966, his first foreign assignment.

His last days as a double agent were marked by what sources said was one of the most creative and daring escapes from the Soviet Union. Contrary to information made public last fall when Mr. Gordiyevsky's defection was announced by the British Government, he did not defect in Britain.

In the jargon of espionage, his escape was a "clandestine exfiltration." The sources said this was not the first time that double agents had been smuggled out of the Soviet Union.

Information provided by Mr. Gordiyevsky since the early 1970's seriously disrupted K.G.B. activities in Britain and Scandinavia, sources said. His information was also instrumental, they said, in the arrest and conviction of Arne Treholt, a former Norwegian diplomat who was sentenced to 20 years in prison for spying for the Soviet Union.

Although it has been widely discussed in the British press, the story behind Mr. Gordiyevsky's long career as a double agent and his defection continue to fascinate and perplex Western intelligence specialists. The case, they say, raises important questions about the nature of modern-day espionage by the great powers.

No Doubts of Authenticity

None of the current and former intelligence specialists interviewed raised serious doubts about Mr. Gordiyevsky's authenticity as a double agent and defector. But they raised and tried to answer some of the mysteries about a career that has been closely guarded by British intelligence.

These are among the questions:

¶Why did he choose to spy for the British M.I.-6 counterintelligence branch rather than the C.I.A. or other Western intelligence organizations?

¶How did he fool Soviet intelligence for so long, or is it possible that he masqueraded as a British agent while continuing to serve the Soviet Union?

¶What kind of information has he provided over the years, and what was its value?

¶How did he escape from the Soviet Union, and why?

Despite early press reports, intelligence sources say, Mr. Gordiyevsky at first worked exclusively as a double agent for Britain. He was recruited by British intelligence, they say, during his diplomatic service for the Soviet Union in Copenhagen in the late 1960's.

Shortly after his defection, Danish officials indicated that Mr. Gordiyevsky had also worked directly for Denmark's intelligence service from the start, but American sources discount those accounts.

Britain, they said, knew that it could not oversee Mr. Gordiyevsky in Denmark without the logistical help of the Danish Government. That understanding later prompted British officials to reveal his identity to the Danes and permit them direct contact with the Soviet official.

Sometime during his years in Copenhagen, American officials said, Mr. Gordiyevsky faced the choice of working for M.I.-6 or the C.I.A.

A former key intelligence official said there was substantial competition between M.I.-6 and the C.I.A.'s deputy directorate for operations, which handles secret agents. He pointed out that the two agencies often compete for the same sources, particularly in the Middle East, where the agencies tried to steal each other's agents.

British Reputation Cited

C.I.A. officials say that over the years many K.G.B. agents have defected to the United States and worked with the agency. The agents chose the United States, the officials said, because of their feeling that British intelligence had been penetrated over the years by the K.G.B.

This perception notwithstanding, intelligence officials in Washington said M.I.-6 had an international reputation for high professionalism in handling spies.

The reputation of the British intelligence services for sophistication and discretion is believed to be the chief reason Mr. Gordiyevsky decided to spy for the British rather than other intelligence services, the sources said.

Mr. Gordiyevsky, they said, doubtless appreciated efforts to place him in the company of Russian-speaking British agents and to provide little information to journalists after announcement of his defection.

Yurchenko Treatment a Contrast

His treatment contrasted sharply with the American handling of Vitaly S. Yurchenko, a K.B.G. official of higher rank than Mr. Gordiyevsky who defected to the United States last year but later escaped from C.I.A. custody and returned to Moscow.

Mr. Yurchenko and other defectors who have been handled by the C.I.A. have complained bitterly about American treatment, saying that they were rarely allowed to converse in Russian and that details of their escapes were often leaked by official sources. Mr. Yurchenko, for example, was said to be furious that his defection was described in detail in American newspapers.

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The sources said British handling of Mr. Gordiyevsky was a good part of the explanation of how he managed to evade detection by the K.G.B. for so many years.

The danger to any double agent comes primarily, the sources said, from his handlers' taking advantage of his inside information too hastily. But the British showed tremendous restraint. For instance, they did not move against other K.G.B. agents whose identities were disclosed by Mr. Gordiyevsky. Doing so would have led the K.G.B. quickly back to him.

There is a belief in the international intelligence community that American officials will occasionally fall prey to political concerns and move too quickly against Soviet operatives identified by a double agent.

But the story of Mr. Gordiyevsky's decision to spy for Britain does not solve another puzzle for current and former intelligence officials. They noted that when a K.G.B. agent of Mr. Gordiyevsky's status defects, the welcoming Government usually takes action against its own citizens who are spying for Moscow.

But in the Gordiyevsky case, the only action taken by the British Government was to expel 31 Soviet diplomats, journalists and other aides, an action that prompted the Soviets to retaliate in equal measure.

Two sources said Mr. Gordiyevsky had identified several British citizens who spied for the Soviet Union. They further indicated that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her aides decided against prosecuting them for fear that their case would not be conclusive in the courts and that opposition politicians would criticize the Government for playing politics with the delicate subject of spying.

Another source said he believed that Mr. Gordiyevsky might have identified British citizens who were nevertheless not paid agents.

Still other sources offered an even more intriguing explanation. They reasoned that Mr. Gordiyevsky has been holding back some information to protect his family, all or most of whom are still said to be in the Soviet Union.

Triple Agents Called Rare

Nonetheless, the judgment of British and American intelligence officials is that Mr. Gordiyevsky was a genuine double agent and is a genuine defector.

In general, these experts say they believe that so-called triple agents — for example, a K.G.B. officer masquerading as a British agent who actually continues to serve Moscow — are a great rarity.

Triple agents, they said, must provide a great deal of important informa-

tion to establish their credibility. All of this is given, in the case of a triple agent, for the sake of propounding some important piece of misinformation later on.

A former intelligence agent, reflecting the views of most of his colleagues, said triple agents were almost always "not worth it" and "romantic movie fiction."

The consensus in London and Washington is that the information Mr. Gordiyevsky provided has been sound and useful. Government sources in Washington said he had provided intelligence agencies with details of K.G.B. operations in Scandinavia and Britain, which are known as major intelligence-gathering outlets for the Russians.

Called Familiar With Politburo

They said he also had a strong knowledge of the workings and policies of the Soviet Politburo, the policy-making body of the Communist Party. The Politburo, the sources noted, outlines the policies followed by the K.G.B. and its agents.

According to the Government sources, Mr. Gordiyevsky was of enormous help when Mr. Yurchenko defected to the United States last year. This defection set off an animated debate in the intelligence community over whether Mr. Yurchenko was actually a high-ranking K.G.B. officer.

Mr. Gordiyevsky, sources said, was one of the first to confirm that Mr. Yurchenko was who he said he was.

Described as sophisticated and perceptive by those who knew him in Copenhagen and London, Mr. Gordiyevsky is also thought to have provided Western intelligence officers with insight into the thinking of key Soviet leaders, including Mr. Gorbachev. As the K.G.B. station chief in London, he helped plan and run Mr. Gorbachev's visit to Britain in the spring of 1985 to meet with Mrs. Thatcher.

It could not be learned what information, if any, he provided about the ascendancy of the former head of the K.G.B., Yuri V. Andropov, to the leadership of the Communist Party in 1982. Mr. Andropov died in 1984.

Soviet Paranoia Seen

Much of what Mr. Gordiyevsky said over the years underlined Soviet paranoia about the United States, particularly Moscow's fear over the intentions of the Reagan Administration.

Officials are of two minds about his disclosure in 1981 of Moscow's concerns that Washington was planning military action against the Soviet Union or its allies. Although a few British officials were said to believe that the Russians did indeed fear an attack, other intelligence agents discounted this, noting that Soviet military forces did not take steps indicating they were preparing for war.

It is not clear how much of what Mr. Gordiyevsky told the British was passed on to Washington, although there are strong indications that his identity was not revealed. Adm. Stansfield Turner, a former Director of Central Intelligence, said, "It's accepted practice to be very circumspect in describing a source, but I'm not commenting on this case."

Another former key intelligence official said London and Washington "will share information but not details on the source itself."

Mr. Gordiyevsky's intimate knowledge of the Kremlin leadership was what led Mr. Casey to travel to London last fall.

Mr. Gordiyevsky was twice assigned to Denmark, from 1968 to 1970 as an attaché in the Soviet Consulate in Copenhagen, and from 1972 to 1978 in a variety of posts at the Soviet Embassy.

He was later transferred to London as head of the political section of the

K.G.B. in the Soviet Embassy. In the spring of 1985, he was elevated to K.G.B. station chief in London.

Shortly after his promotion, sources said, he was unexpectedly summoned back to Moscow.

There was said to be considerable discussion among his British handlers over whether to let him go. The sources said the handlers clearly remembered Oleg V. Penkovsky, a high-ranking Soviet military intelligence officer who provided important information to the British in the early 1960's.

He, too, was called home, and his British handlers allowed him to return. By that time, however, the K.G.B. had discovered that he was a double agent. He was imprisoned in Moscow and executed in 1963.

Mr. Gordiyevsky went back. According to sources, he quickly determined that he was in danger in Moscow and signaled his handlers that he was in trouble. The British then set in motion an elaborate plan to spirit him out of the country, sources said. Similar plans had been used before, and details about them have been guarded with the utmost secrecy.