

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE Q-A

USA TODAY
19 February 1986

INQUIRY

Topic: SOVIET DEFECTORS

Arkady Shevchenko, 55, the highest ranking Soviet official to defect to the West, becomes a U.S. citizen Feb. 28. In April 1978, he walked away from power and prestige as senior Soviet at the United Nations. He had worked for Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and former Soviet leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev. Shevchenko was interviewed for USA TODAY by Lee Michael Katz.



Arkady Shevchenko

incidents were planned to embarrass the U.S. government on the eve of the Geneva summit talks. Do you believe that?

SHEVCHENKO: No, for the simple reason I don't think (Soviet leader Mikhail) Gorbachev or the government wanted to embarrass the president on the eve of the summit. They were serious about the summit.

USA TODAY: Is it necessary for the USA and the U.S.S.R. to have talks?

SHEVCHENKO: It's absolutely essential and inevitable. We live on the same earth. With absolutely no dialogue, a miscalculation could escalate into a major confrontation, leading to a catastrophe, to nuclear war. Both we and Soviet-style socialism would be buried in the same grave.

USA TODAY: Would you favor a return to the detente of the Nixon and Carter years?

SHEVCHENKO: No. I was with the Soviet government, and I knew what the Soviet Union under Brezhnev's leadership actually had in mind at that time. The Soviets gained a lot during the period. There was an enormous military buildup, and they increased their sphere of interest.

USA TODAY: Do the Soviets really want normalization of relations between the USA and the U.S.S.R.?

SHEVCHENKO: On one hand, the Soviet leadership doesn't want any major confrontation with the West and the USA in the near future because of their preoccupation with domestic dilemmas. They want to improve the economy and to eliminate the growing gap in high technology between the West and the Soviet Union. But in the long range, you have to understand that the final objectives and goals of the Soviet leadership never change. It is the same thing — that they will win in the historical competition with capitalism, if not in this century, then in the next.

USA TODAY: Then the Soviet Union plans to take over the USA and the world eventually?

SHEVCHENKO: It's a fantasy to think that the Soviet leadership really has a specific timetable and kind of a master plan of how to dominate the world. It's rather a philosophical concept in which they believe that capitalism contains elements of self-destruction.

USA TODAY: Should what Nikita Khrushchev said at the United Nations — "We will bury you" — concern us?

SHEVCHENKO: I was present when Nikita Khrushchev said that. He was sorry he said it. We were trained: "Don't tell about this revolution. Don't frighten them about bloody revolution and everything."

USA TODAY: You briefed President Reagan before the

Geneva summit. What did you tell him?

SHEVCHENKO: Several things. One thing, which I've been saying for a long time, was that I have a strong belief now that the Soviet Union feels comfortable with its present military balance. It is really interested in arms control — there is more flexibility, which might even lead to more arms control agreements.

USA TODAY: What else did you tell President Reagan?

SHEVCHENKO: He wanted to know from someone who lived in the Soviet Union whether it's really true that the Soviet leaders believe in Marxism and Leninism or if that's just a cover for retaining power. I assured him there are some who've lost belief. But the core — Gromyko, Gorbachev — are true believers.

USA TODAY: Do you think Gorbachev's call for bilateral disarmament by the year 2000 is serious?

SHEVCHENKO: No. The Soviet Union has never been serious about that. That is a utopian idea. They will never trust us like we will never trust them. They will never trust an American president — Democrat or Republican.

USA TODAY: How do the Russians view Reagan?

SHEVCHENKO: Hatred mixed with respect — hatred

It's more important to be free than go back

USA TODAY: You're about to become a U.S. citizen. Do you ever have second thoughts about leaving the life and prestige you had?

SHEVCHENKO: I miss my country. There's no question about that. But for now, I have a new country, and I don't think that anything will happen in the Soviet Union which can change my mind. I've never had any regrets.

USA TODAY: What about your family? Your wife Lina died mysteriously a few weeks after you defected. And your son Gennady and daughter Anna — how could you leave them?

SHEVCHENKO: I didn't actually leave them. I gave my wife a full chance and opportunity to make up her own mind and decision. I strongly believe that the Soviets eliminated her. Of course, I have regrets about what happened with my wife, but I don't feel responsible for her death. I still haven't lost entirely the hope I can be reunited with my daughter. My son? It will be a pain for me always, but he preferred to stay in the Soviet Union. He told me in a letter I shouldn't bother him.

USA TODAY: You were a dedicated communist. Did you feel like you had betrayed your country by defecting?

SHEVCHENKO: Yes, I did betray a regime, an elite. I lost

all my beliefs in the system. But I have no feeling that I've betrayed my country and the people.

USA TODAY: Did the U.S. government botch two recent defection cases — Miroslav Medvid, the Ukrainian sailor who jumped ship, and Soviet master spy Vitaly Yurchenko, who defected then recanted?

SHEVCHENKO: Partly. I cannot say that in my case. But I will be frank, I didn't like the idea that the FBI said I had to be in a safe house, never appear in public, never write, never speak, never be a free man. The sailor's case is a clear-cut indication there is something wrong in the chain of command; it was really mishandled. The Yurchenko case will remain a mystery.

USA TODAY: There is a theory that Yurchenko was KGB all along, and that these

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because they cannot forgive the president two things: one, the strong effort at the beginning of the administration to modernize the strategic force, and secondly, Reagan was open and frank as far as the nature of the Soviet system.

USA TODAY: Did Reagan seem to have a grasp of the intricacies of Soviet government?

SHEVCHENKO: I think he did. I cannot say that he knew or even should know absolutely all the details of everything, but I think he has a very clear understanding of what he is talking about. He is equal if not superior to some of the Soviet leaders. He has an understanding of Soviet objectives and thinking.

USA TODAY: Is Gorbachev different as a Soviet leader?

SHEVCHENKO: He is a hard-core communist, a product of the Soviet system, a believer in the Soviet system. He has an acute sense that unless the Soviet economy is modern-

ized, the tremendous technology gap with the West eliminated, survival of the Soviet system will be at stake. It's not so much because he is concerned about the well-being of the Soviet people. He is concerned about the future of the system. We can expect a major effort to reallocate the resources in the Soviet Union from the military to the civilian sectors.

USA TODAY: Last summer, Edward J. Epstein, in the *New Republic*, called your book, *Breaking With Moscow*, "a fraud," and said that you "made up sources and even fabricated direct conversations."

SHEVCHENKO: There is only one year which I confused. And when you put the right year in, everything would be in its place.

USA TODAY: Did you spy for the CIA?

SHEVCHENKO: No. I didn't feel that I was a spy. It was a secret cooperation with the CIA or the American government, that's true.

USA TODAY: Did you get paid by the CIA?

SHEVCHENKO: I have never been on the payroll of the CIA.

USA TODAY: No, but they gave you \$50,000 a year to live on.

SHEVCHENKO: Do you know they gave it to me two years after my defection? I had hoped that my book soon would go through, and I could myself invest money and live without any kind of CIA help. The book was delayed for years, and I was at the bottom. I had to sell my car and everything and be on the street.

USA TODAY: Wasn't your credibility undermined by reports that you spent several thousand dollars a month supporting a call girl who later wrote a book called *Defector's Mistress*?

SHEVCHENKO: To a certain degree, yes. But I think it was a usual exaggeration by the American press. They made it a sensational story. I'm sorry it happened. But I'll be frank with you. I wanted a companion, a woman. I was in very bad shape.

USA TODAY: Now you get \$20,000 a speech, and you made \$500,000 from the sale of film rights from your books. Have you adjusted well to the capitalist system?

SHEVCHENKO: Of course, some of the things are a little bit exaggerated, I feel a success in the United States, and I like the system. My dream is to be absolutely financially secure in the nearest future, and then to join some solid, serious academic institution.

USA TODAY: You live openly. Aren't you worried that the KGB will track you down and kill you?

SHEVCHENKO: The KGB has a long memory and a long hand. My public profile is my defense. Anyway, I'm ready to take all these risks because it's more important for me to be free than to go back to the Soviet Union.

TIMELINE: Arkady Shevchenko

Arkady Shevchenko lives near Washington, D.C., with his second wife, Elaine.

Oct. 11, 1930: Born in the Ukraine, son of a physician.

1954: Graduated from Moscow State Institute of International Relations; later received a doctorate in international law.

1956: Joined Soviet Foreign Ministry.

1958: Began participation in United Nations General Assembly and disarmament negotiations in Geneva.

1963-1970: Served in the Soviet Mission to the United Nations in New York.

1970-1973: Personal adviser to Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko; named Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, highest Soviet diplomatic rank.

1973-1978: As undersecretary, he headed U.N. Political and Security Council Affairs.

Summer 1975: Sought asylum in USA but was told he would have to prove loyalty by spying for the CIA.

April 1978: He defected; his wife returned to Russia and died under mysterious circumstances.

February 1985: In memoirs, *Breaking With Moscow*, Shevchenko said he spied for the CIA more than 2 1/2 years before receiving asylum.

Feb. 28, 1986: Scheduled to become a U.S. citizen.

Source: USA TODAY research