

Score one for the KGB

Hats off, reluctantly, to the KGB. Moscow's intelligence masters have pulled off a major coup and left the CIA with borscht all over its face. All this would be wildly funny if it were not such a disaster for the West.

Three months ago, according to the CIA, the number-five man in the KGB, Vitaly Yurchenko, defected to the U.S. bringing with him a cornucopia of secrets and the names of a score of Soviet spies. Up until last Monday, Yurchenko's defection was billed as a great triumph for the West, one that "left the KGB shattered."

On Monday, to general shock and horror, Yurchenko turned up at the Soviet Embassy in Washington. He claimed to have been kidnapped by the CIA, drugged and tortured for three months. Then, he somehow escaped from a CIA "safe house" and managed to get to the Soviet Embassy. The gleeful Russians loudly denounced "U.S. state terrorism."

One of three things happened. Yurchenko was a plant, sent to discredit and confuse the CIA. Or, he really did defect but somehow the Soviets got to him, while under CIA protection, and so threatened his family in Russia that he had a change of heart. Or, finally, that he really was kidnapped by the CIA and interrogated under drugs.

The first scenario strikes me as the most likely. The Soviets are masters of such double games and have used plants with great success in the past. For example, the entire anti-Bolshevik opposition in the 1920s and 1930s was destroyed by a brilliant "false flag" operation called The Trust. This organization, ostensibly anti-communist, was actually run by the Soviet secret police who had merely to round up and execute its members.

During the 1950s and 1960s, a number of KGB "defectors" were sent west with the purpose of spreading false information and flummoxing the CIA. To this day, the CIA remains uncertain about

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the true allegiance of at least three major Soviet defectors, even though they were also hailed as intelligence triumphs.

Recall also the case of the famous Berlin tunnel, dug by the CIA into East Berlin right under Soviet Army headquarters. It now turns out that the Soviets knew about this CIA "coup" for years, fed it false information, and then "discovered" it, so making the CIA look like villains.

A similar false operation may have been mounted when the CIA "learned" of the sinking of a Soviet nuclear sub in the Pacific. The CIA spent \$500 million to raise the sub which apparently contained little of value. Worse, the operation caused a hostile Senate to begin cutting CIA funding.

The Soviets are unrivalled in such skulduggery. Back in the 1930s, a Soviet agent in Paris received a message, rolled it up into a tiny paper ball and threw it down a sewer. On returning to Moscow he was executed. All agents were instructed to burn messages, not throw them away. He had been monitored by other agents and caught breaking the rules. That is professionalism.

Yurchenko's re-defection leaves the CIA looking monumentally stupid and incompetent. Whether he was a real defector, kidnapped or a plant, he should never have been allowed to get back to the Soviet Embassy and bring such humiliation down on the U.S. The information that he gave is now largely prejudiced. Just as bad, Yurchenko's flight eastward undermines the credibility of two other recent high-level Soviet defectors.

Heads in the wretched CIA will certainly roll. An angry Senate will cut its growing budgets, the liberal media will savage CIA tactics and competence. Any future Soviet defectors will think twice about putting their lives in the hands of such bunglers — and well they should.

In one brilliant stroke the Soviets have managed to deliver a staggering blow to the defender of the West, the CIA, much as they undermined and demoralized the British secret services in the 1950s and 1960s. Intelligence, like the church, is a vocation requiring high morale, ardent faith and trust of one's colleagues. When these links are destroyed, the entire organization begins to unravel.

The careful Soviets ran a test run of this operation a year ago in London, where Oleg Bitov "defected" and then returned home to Moscow under the glare of TV lights. The CIA should have been warned, but eagerness for a media triumph overcame caution.

Those crafty chess players at Moscow Centre would never have allowed such a fiasco to occur. It even seems that Yurchenko actually dined with CIA chief William Casey — who should be now eating humble pie while the KGB toasts with vodka and caviar.

Punch



"It's awful. The place seems so empty without him."