

Daniel Schorr / Just what goes on?

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Here we go again! Is Arkody N. Shevchenko, the highest Soviet official in the United Nations Administration, for real when he says he just doesn't want to go home? Or, an American agent choosing this way to come in from the cold? And/or a Soviet agent faking a defection to make trouble for our side?

In the murky world of single, double and triple agents, things are seldom what they seem. In fiction, such ambiguity can make for a rattling good yarn; in real-life government it can make for a rattling headache.

Our intelligence people are itching for a crack at Shevchenko and his secrets. Our counter-intelligence people warn of something fishy about him.

We may be in for another internal scrap, like the 14-year fight over Yuri Nosenko, of which, indeed, this may be a continuation.

Nosenko was a Soviet KGB officer whose 1964 defection

seemed a shade too coincidental when he turned up, ten-weeks after President Kennedy's assassination, with word that he had handled the case of Lee Harvey Oswald in Russia and could give assurance that Oswald had no KGB connection.

Only after he had been worked over for three years in a CIA camp in Virginia did the agency — so ex-Director John McCone later told me — finally accept Nosenko as an authentic defector telling the truth. In so doing, McCone overrode James Angleton, chief of counter-intelligence, who continued to insist that Nosenko was a KGB "plant."

The Nosenko case turned into a climactic fight over the role and power of counter-intelligence — the section of a spy agency that guards against penetration and deception by the other side. That fight now has broken to the surface.

Edward Jay Epstein, with considerable help, has presented the counter-intelligence case in his book, "Legend," which piles up evidence to suggest that Nosenko's real mission was to divert American attention from supposed KGB links with Oswald.

The KGB, under this scenario, arranged to have the phony defection authenticated by another Soviet intelligence officer, a spy for the FBI code-named "Fedora," who was working under diplomatic cover at the United Nations.

The counter-intelligence veter

ans, in their bitter rearguard battle, apparently had no qualms about fingering a top FBI spy, and this may have helped to speed Shevchenko's steps toward the door. He himself was on the Soviet delegation at the UN in 1964 when "Fedora" was talking about Nosenko, and he also, it turns out, had American intelligence contacts for several years.

Now Shevchenko is offering to tell the government, for a price, whether "Fedora" was passing on the real dope or "disinformation." Next question: Why should Shevchenko be believed?

If all this leaves you a little dizzy, you have a lot of company. The one enjoying the mess is Angleton. Angleton is presented by Epstein as having been crucified in 1974 for his refusal to buy Nosenko, and forced out of the CIA by Director William Colby after having been mischievously exposed as involved in unrelated CIA improprieties, like mail-opening operation.

"Baloney!" says Colby, who insists he had been long planning to fire Angleton after concluding that his obsession with Soviet intelligence was actually harming American intelligence.

One cannot discount the function of counter-intelligence, considering the aggressiveness of Soviet penetration efforts. As the saying goes, even paranoids can have enemies. But, out of control, counter-intelligence can be literally that — against rational intelligence.