

The Washington merry-go-round

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WITH LES WHITTEN

WASHINGTON — While CIA officials squirm under the klieg lights on Capitol Hill, Soviet KGB agents are operating in the shadows of the same congressional corridors.

In the past few years, the KGB has stepped up its activities on the Hill. KGB operatives in a dozen guises have been slipping around to see key Congressmen and their aides.

Many congressional aides, as political

appointees, are granted access to secret documents after no more than a cursory background check. Their leaks, although unwitting, could be serious.

Secret government files identify diplomat Boris Solomatin as the KGB "residentura," or operating chief, who first recognized how much valuable intelligence is available on Capitol Hill.

Until his recent departure, he was the deputy Soviet envoy at the United Nations. His replacement, although expected soon, hasn't arrived.

Under Solomatin, the KGB "residentura" in Washington has been Dmitri Yakushkin, the brilliant Soviet embassy counselor. His KGB rank, according to the secret files, makes him second in power only to amiable Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin.

The files allege that Yakushkin directs a Washington spy ring, which employs diplomats, newsmen and sympathizers from countries friendly to the United States. Visiting delegations from Russia also are loaded with KGB experts, who know how to spot useful intelligence.

Officials indicate that Yakushkin concentrates on Capitol Hill where information is abundant and security is lax.

One of his most effective spies on Capitol Hill was pretty Galina Utekhina, a modish cultural attache, who moved in congressional circles and even began dating prominent figures on the Hill. The files identified her as a KGB Mata Hari, a fact which we revealed in a 1970 column. She quickly returned to Moscow.

The KGB appears to be most interested, according to officials, in intelligence about U.S.-China relations, SALT disarmament talks, MIRV missiles and U.S. computer technology.

The KGB reportedly also helps

orchestrate the Soviet lobbying effort on Capitol Hill. Soviet diplomats, academics, economists and others have sought particularly to persuade Congress to grant the Soviet Union "most favored nation" trading status.

A favorite KGB approach is through contacts from other countries. In the secret files, they are referred to as "third party nationals." Those who quietly lobby for Soviet views are called "agents of influence."

The KGB ringers in visiting delegations may be technological experts, who can quickly size up a piece of U.S. equipment. Or they may be personnel experts, who sound out sympathetic Americans for recruitment as informants. This is called "talent spotting."

Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., has quoted "very, very good sources," meanwhile, as alleging that foreign agents have actually infiltrated congressional offices. Our sources said the secret files contain no evidence that any member of Congress, nor their employes, are spies.

Footnote: Yakushkin never returned our calls. A Soviet spokesman, however, said "I don't think it's true" that Yakushkin is a KGB spy chief. The spokesman added: "You are interfering in a very sensitive field."

ONASSIS CRASH: Sources close to the late Aristotle Onassis have told us that he privately blamed himself for his son's death in a 1973 plane crash.

The son, Alexander, had wanted to install some new parts and check out the plane. Because this had been neglected, say our sources, Aristotle Onassis felt personally responsible for the crash.

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To relieve his conscience, he tried desperately to come up with evidence that the plane has been sabotaged and, therefore, that someone else had caused the accident. He offered a \$500,000 reward for proof that the plane had been sabotaged. But there were no takers.

We contacted the pilot of the fatal flight, Don McCusker of Westerville, Ohio, who survived the crash without any permanent injuries. He said an investigation had established that the ailerons used to steer the plane had been misconnected. A check-out flight, he said, would have detected this.

Although the accident was caused by a defect in the plane, he still faces manslaughter charges in Greece. His trial has been scheduled for November 18.

He has been unable to contact heiress Christina Onassis, however, for help in meeting his expenses and settling the case.

LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION: The State Department's prestigious Foreign Service Institute, which trains American diplomats in foreign languages, is struggling with a discrimination scandal.

On the theory that democracy begins at home, Spanish-speaking instructors have complained they must wait twice as long for promotions as teachers of such exotic tongues as Hindi, Hungarian and Swahili.

Instructors in German, French and other common tongues also are discriminated against, our investigation shows.

The institute's dean, James Frith, concedes there is unhappiness, but adds: "It's a matter of supply and demand."