

The Mysterious Soviet Defection At the U.N.

*Did Moscow Suspect
He Had Ties to Former
FBI 'Deep Plant'?*

Post
4/16/78



Arkady N. Shevchenko

By Tad Szulc

AS HE SCURRIES under federal protection from hideaway to hideaway along the eastern seaboard of the United States, a 47-year-old Soviet diplomat of exalted rank named Arkady N. Shevchenko is writing one of the most unusual chapters in the annals of postwar political defections.

The most improbable of defectors, the scholarly and self-effacing Shevchenko served as under secretary general of the United Nations for political and Security Council affairs, the No. 2 political job in the world organization under Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, when he made up his mind sometime on Thursday, April 6, to defy a sudden order from Moscow to return home at once.

No Soviet official of Shevchenko's stature had ever defected to the West.

The initial Soviet charge that Shevchenko had been "coerced" by American intelligence into defecting and is being kept in the United States against his will is patent nonsense. Heavy hints dropped by Communist sources in New York that he had a "drinking problem" seem to fit under the heading of character assassination. The defection obviously was an acute political and propaganda embarrassment for the Kremlin.

And this embarrassment may deepen and turn into con-

siderable discomfort for the Soviets if Shevchenko agrees, as may well happen, to share his knowledge of Moscow's diplomatic and disarmament policy secrets with the U.S. government. It would be particularly important at a time when Moscow and Washington are entering the final phase of negotiations for a SALT II agreement.

Nothing would be more valuable to the United States at this difficult juncture in the talks than to acquire through Shevchenko an inside understanding of how the Russians plan and formulate their negotiating positions. In this sense, Shevchenko is potentially the richest prize in diplomatic intelligence ever handed the United States.

Contrary to Soviet charges, however, Shevchenko's willingness to submit to what are euphemistically called here "debriefings" — if this is the case — would not necessarily suggest that he was recruited by the CIA or the FBI.

This is not the way intelligence operates. CIA specialists who have handled Soviet-bloc defectors since the late 1940s say that recruitment of defectors is exceedingly rare. The vast majority — such as KGB officers Yuri I. Nosenko and Anatoli M. Golitsin — defect on their own, for whatever reasons, and intelligence co-option comes later, often as part of a *quid pro quo* for protection and asylum in the United States and the chance to build a new life here. In situations of this type, the first concern — a concern that has never been fully resolved after 14 years in Nosenko's controversial case — is whether the defector is a KGB "deep plant" or a possible double agent.

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None of these considerations would apply to Shevchenko. Traditionally, the CIA prefers to recruit "agents in place" — Col. Oleg Penkovsky and Col. Peter Popov, U.S. covert agents who were executed by the Russians, were classical examples — who may serve indefinitely as deep-penetration intelligence sources unless they are caught.

Defections are encouraged only rarely and when there are reasons to suspect that the situation is ripe for it in a given case. And when it came to Shevchenko, the political and diplomatic risks in approaching him to defect would have been unacceptable to the United States. One simply doesn't urge senior ambassadors to defect.

Now that Shevchenko has taken the plunge, however, he becomes an object of intense interest to the Inter-Agency Defector Committee, which is composed of representatives of the CIA, the FBI, military intelligence services and the State Department. And this probably explains why FBI agents have been discreetly protecting Shevchenko since he decided not to return to the Soviet Union and spent the last week hopping between motels in Pennsylvania's Pocono mountains (surprisingly registering under his own name at a White Haven, Pa., motel last Monday morning) and friends' homes in New York City.

American officials, of course, have refused comment on any aspect of the Shevchenko affair, obviously an exceedingly sensitive one, except to say that he is free to stay in the United States, go home, or choose some other place of exile in the world.

A Rising Star

TEN DAYS after his dramatic decision, Shevchenko's motivations remain wholly mysterious. All he said through his American lawyer before vanishing from his luxurious apartment on New York's East 65th Street late last Sunday — the defection was kept secret for nearly three days — was that he had political "differences" with the Soviet government.

Whatever this meant, the gesture was as stunning as it was unprecedented. Previous defectors had included some fairly senior officers of the KGB, the Soviet secret service; a destroyer commander with a wide and useful knowledge of the inner workings of the Soviet navy; quite a few Mig pilots, and a smattering of lesser diplomats — and that was all western governments ever expected.

But Shevchenko was part of the elite of the Soviet establishment. A career diplomat and protege of Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko — he was his personal adviser on disarmament in the early 1970s when the first Soviet-American agreement on limiting strategic arms (SALT) was negotiated and signed — Shevchenko received an ambassadorial title in 1971 when he was 40 years old, the youngest Soviet foreign service officer to achieve it.

Two years later, an even greater accolade was accorded him: His government recommended him for the United Nations undersecretaryship. This was tantamount to being appointed by Waldheim, since under standing practice the top professional job in New York is reserved for a Russian. Westerners never doubted that Shevchenko was Moscow's eyes and ears at the United Nations, with access to much signifi-



Yuri I. Nosenko

cant international diplomatic information — no matter what is said about the ostensible independence of international civil servants.

Shevchenko, in other words, was clearly as trusted by the Kremlin as any of its top envoys and, just as clearly, he was a comer. He had spent five years as undersecretary general (he had also lived in New York from 1963 to 1971 as the disarmament expert of the Soviet mission to the United Nations) and his \$76,000 annual contract had been renewed for two more years only last Feb. 3.

Given Shevchenko's well-rounded international experience — everything from disarmament to the Middle East and United Nations peacekeeping forces streamed through his office — he was a likely candidate for a Soviet deputy foreign ministership the next time around. Perhaps someday he could even aspire to succeed Gromyko, his aging patron, as foreign minister.

An Exercise in Discretion

THE GENERAL VIEW is that Moscow will not use Shevchenko as an excuse to let Soviet-American relations deteriorate even further, although Soviet Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin raised the subject with Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance last week. The defection, unpleasant as it is

at the U. N.

to the Russians, is essentially extraneous to the basic relationship between Moscow and Washington, and there seems to be no reason to add new problems to the differences over SALT and Africa that Vance will be discussing in the Soviet capital later this week.

Nevertheless the administration is handling Shevchenko with extreme care to avoid needless frictions. The hope that the Russian diplomat will allow himself to be debriefed in secret by American officials is a factor in this exercise in utmost discretion.

Another consideration is the approaching trial of the Soviet computer expert Anatoly Shcharansky on charges of spying for the United States. Shcharansky's former roommate, Dr. Sanya L. Lipavsky, had covertly worked for the CIA at one point, and the administration here worries that the trial may be used as an attack on American intelligence operations in the Soviet Union. It thus doesn't want to have the Russians throw the Shevchenko case into the hopper of intelligence accusations.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to sort out the question of Shevchenko's legal status in the United States. He has not yet requested political asylum here and, according to his New York attorney, Ernest A. Gross, a one-time American delegate to the United Nations, he has no intention of doing so.

This is one of the many mysterious facets of the Shevchenko story. Gross insists that, strictly speaking, Shevchenko is not a defector because he hasn't asked for asylum. But State Department legal experts say this is a fine point and, possibly, a bargaining chip for the Soviet diplomat. In order to remain in the United States after his United Nations employment is formally ended, Shevchenko must adjust his immigration status, and obtaining refugee status may be the only solution.

The growing impression in Washington is that Shevchenko wants to resolve his employment problems with Waldheim before making an open move in terms of his legal status in the United States.

Approaching his situation with remarkable pragmatism and business acumen, Shevchenko is trying to negotiate his way out of the United Nations job although he has already been placed on leave by Waldheim.

At first, he indicated that he has no plans to resign his post, evidently a bargaining ploy. Yet Waldheim has no choice but to fire him because of the basic arrangement with Moscow governing the undersecretary post. The Russians have demanded his dismissal, and Waldheim has said that henceforth Shevchenko is a question strictly between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Last Thursday, however, a U. N. spokesman said that Shevchenko has asked for "a mixed bag of money and personal security" in order to resign and spare Waldheim a legal test as to whether an international civil servant can be



Ernest A. Gross

fired at the request of his home government. It is understood that Shevchenko wants the equivalent of severance pay covering the two years of his new contract and the return of his contributions to the retirement fund. This could add up to \$150,000. He also appears to have a contract for a book he has been writing for a New York publisher.

To protect himself further, Shevchenko claims he wishes to retain his Soviet citizenship. This, however, may be a moot point because Moscow is likely to deprive him of it, as it has done with the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, now conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra here, and former Soviet Gen. Pyotr G. Grigorenko, a leading dissenter, currently in New York.

Given the way Shevchenko has been acting, the question arises whether he had been preparing his defection all along or acted on the spur of the moment after receiving a recall order and then engaged Gross to help him to make the most of the defection. And it is entirely possible that if the Soviet diplomat had planned to defect for some time, his decision was triggered by instructions to fly home at once.

A Link With "Fedora"?

ON THE SURFACE, there is no plausible explanation for Shevchenko's move. He had one of the best careers in the Soviet diplomatic service and only last February his government had supported the extension of his U.N. contract. He always appeared to be ideologically in tune with Moscow and he was regarded as a straight, no-nonsense, party-line diplomat.

The question then arises why he had been recalled so abruptly. It isn't even clear if he was asked to go home for good or just for consultations, although the former seems more likely inasmuch as his wife and daughter departed precipitously last Saturday.

One possibility is that Moscow discovered in some fashion that Shevchenko's loyalty might be flagging. There have been unconfirmed rumors that he had an extramarital love affair in New York, and, as CIA experts note, defections are often the result of emotional involvements.

An intriguing but entirely undocumented possibility is that the Soviets might have tied Shevchenko to "Fedora," the FBI's cover name for a Soviet intelligence officer working under diplomatic cover at the United Nations in New York who was regarded by the Bureau as its most important "deep plant" agent.

The story of "Fedora" was first disclosed publicly in a book on Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of President Kennedy, written by Edward Jay Epstein and published shortly after Shevchenko's United Nations contract was extended in February. Oswald, according to the book, had KGB links, but "Fedora" — along with Nosenko — had convinced the FBI that it was not so. "Fedora," who had worked for the Bureau from 1962, is believed to have returned to the Soviet Union two or three years ago. While it is impossible to establish a connection between "Fedora" and Shevchenko, speculation has developed in intelligence circles whether the diplomat's sudden recall might have been related to the "deep plant."



Oleg Penkovsky

There certainly is no other immediate explanation for the Shevchenko mystery and there may never be one. Shevchenko has yet to explain what his "differences" with the Soviet government were.

Moving Fast

IN ANY EVENT, Shevchenko moved fast after he received written orders to return. Late on April 6, after writing a letter to the Soviet U.N. Mission declaring that as an international official he could not be peremptorily summoned to Moscow — an unusual act for a Soviet diplomat — he sealed his office to make sure that no "incriminating" material was planted there.

That same evening he telephoned Gross, who lives seven blocks away. He told Gross that he planned to be "temporarily absent" from New York for reasons of health, but that he anticipated legal problems in which he would need assistance. Gross asked him for a letter outlining his situation, and Shevchenko had it delivered the next day, April 7. Quickly, Gross asked the State Department for federal protection for his Soviet client.

Then Shevchenko informed his office by telephone that he was going on leave. He said it in such a tone that both the

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Soviet and United States delegations were immediately informed of it.

The Russians smelled a defection, for they demanded a confrontation with Shevchenko. This was granted, and last Sunday he met with two Soviet diplomats at Gross's Wall Street office, informing them that he had no intention of returning to the Soviet Union. The Russians expressed shock and dismay. Shevchenko spent Sunday night near New York under FBI protection and, on Monday, was driven to the motel in White Haven.

Last Thursday, Shevchenko was back in New York, having cocktails with Gross and a few of the lawyer's American friends. But as of the end of the week, Shevchenko's whereabouts were again unknown. He wants to meet with Waldheim, who was in Europe at the time of the defection, to discuss the conditions for his resignation, but it is not certain that Waldheim will agree.

As matters now stand, the mystery of this highest-level Soviet defection in history persists. One may have to wait for Shevchenko's book for a full explanation — if he is prepared to provide one.