

Panel probes charges phony

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WASHINGTON — The Senate Intelligence Committee has begun an inquiry into hotly disputed assertions that the United States was duped by a phony Soviet defector who came to this country in 1964.

According to a new book, two branches of the Central Intelligence Agency concluded that the defector was probably a Soviet plant, but their conclusion was overridden and the defector is now actively employed as a consultant to the CIA.

An independent inquiry by the Washington Post has established that the book's account is essentially correct, and that doubts about this defector sharply divided the U.S. intelligence community. The doubts are dismissed as unfounded by the FBI and other CIA officials, including former Director William E. Colby.

The Post also has found that some former high-ranking CIA officials believe that acceptance of the defector as

legitimate has gravely compromised some U.S. intelligence and counterintelligence programs, perhaps even rendering them useless in the secret cold war with the Soviet Union.

The defector in question is Yuri Nosenko, who defected to the United States in February 1964, and claimed to have intimate personal knowledge of Lee Harvey Oswald's two-year stay in the Soviet Union before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The defector said Soviet officials regarded Oswald as suspicious and had no substantive dealings with him.

CIA suspicions about Nosenko led to his being held virtually a prisoner for about three years and subjected to intense questioning. The Rockefeller Commission that reported on CIA activities in 1976 described Nosenko's handling without naming him:

"For much of this time (three years) the defector was held in solitary confinement under extremely spartan living conditions. The defector was apparently not physically abused. The justifi-

cation given by the CIA for the lengthy confinement arose out of a substantial concern regarding the defector's bona fides."

According to author Edward Jay Epstein, whose new book "Legend" was published April 9, senior officials in the CIA concluded that Nosenko was sent to the U.S. with a reassuring message about Oswald by the Soviet Committee on State Security, the KGB. Epstein charges that after exhaustive investigation the CIA and other U.S. agencies decided that they could not decide whether Nosenko was legitimate or phony.

Later, Epstein contends, new executives in the CIA cleared Nosenko and declared him bonafide.

The staff of the intelligence committee is now investigating these events, according to a member of the committee.

The Post's inquiry into Epstein's allegations was hampered by the fact that although sources who sympathized with his viewpoint were willing to discuss the case, present or former officials in-

Red defector duped CIA

involved in the decision to clear Nosenko were not available for questioning.

One former CIA official who was a source for Epstein's book told *The Post* he had read the final CIA report on Nosenko that was the basis for clearing him. This former official claimed that the report did not respond to dozens of the questions raised about Nosenko's reliability, but merely concluded that he was a self-serving liar, not a planted KGB agent.

The CIA refused to discuss the case, except to say: "We are satisfied with Nosenko's bona fides."

The basic challenge to Nosenko's reliability came from the CIA's counterintelligence division, then led by James J. Angleton, and the Soviet Russia Division, then led by David Murphy and Tennent H. Bagley. Angleton — who is well known for his suspicious view of defectors in general and his great respect for KGB wiliness — was fired from the CIA by Colby. Murphy and Bagley apparently both resigned.

The *Post's* inquiry has established

that senior U.S. intelligence officials, including at least some of those who were fired or retired in various personnel upheavals at the agency, fear that the ultimate acceptance of Nosenko has effectively destroyed the ability of U.S. intelligence to conduct a secret war against Soviet intelligence organs, and has seriously compromised other U.S. intelligence organs.

Some of these officials harbor fears that the Soviet Union has effectively penetrated the CIA, the FBI or both.

Epstein and informed sources sympathetic to his viewpoint contend that the Nosenko case is particularly significant because it is a key to a number of other controversial defector or spy cases in which the United States has put great faith.

Nosenko gave the CIA information about other spy cases and defectors that may have seriously misled the United States, his doubters believe, allowing the Soviets to continue other, more damaging intelligence operations against this country.

One case cited by Nosenko's doubters

involves the earlier testimony of another Soviet defector whom the CIA officials doubted Nosenko tended to believe. That earlier defector said there was a KGB "mole" in a high post inside the CIA. Nosenko said there was a mole, but then gave evidence suggesting that it was a peripheral and unimportant figure. Nosenko's doubters wonder if he drew suspicion away from a much more important "mole."

Another important case involving Nosenko was that of "Fedora," a Soviet official at the United Nations who worked secretly for U.S. intelligence for many years. Fedora staked his credibility on a confirmation of key elements in Nosenko's original story to U.S. officials that Nosenko himself later admitted were untrue, according to Epstein and other sources.

Some intelligence officials believe this episode showed that Fedora — who was given that code name by the FBI — was actually another Soviet plant. Fedora is still highly regarded inside the intelligence community, sources say.