

U.S. Holds Up Departure Of a Soviet Student Here

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An attempt by Soviet officials to fly a Soviet exchange student out of this country after he had slashed his wrists and throat was delayed last night when American officials

demanded the right to question the student.

The exchange student, 36-year-old Merab Kurashvili, a civil engineer, was flanked by a group of Soviet officials while the head of the Soviet group and a State Department official debated the American demand to certify the student was willing to go back to the Soviet Union.

As they did so, the Aeroflot flight that Mr. Kurashvili was to take to Moscow was delayed in its 8:30 P.M. departure.

The Americans wanted to question Mr. Kurashvili to make sure that his departure was voluntary and that he did not want political asylum.

Earlier in the day, American demand to question him reportedly caused a sharp exchange of words between the State Department and the Soviet embassy. The Russians reportedly took exception to the United States refusal to let the exchange student depart the United States without being questioned.

Mr. Kurashvili arrived at Kennedy Airport last night, accompanied by a half-dozen Soviet officials, shortly before 7 P.M. to board the Aeroflot flight departing at 8:30 P.M.

Already at the airport was a group of officials from the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

As the Soviet group entered

the Pan American World Airways terminal—from which Aeroflot passengers depart—they were confronted by the American officials, who included Richard Coombs, a Russian-speaking Foreign Service officer, and Edward Farley of the immigration agency.

Earlier, Mr. Coombs, when asked what might happen, said: "It's not all that smooth—there is no real understanding."

When the Soviet group entered with Mr. Kurashvili in the middle of it, the Americans moved toward them and Mr. Farley said that the United States officials wanted to interview Mr. Kurashvili in an Immigration and Naturalization Service office in the airport's International Arrivals Building.

One of the Soviet officials, said to be from the Soviet Embassy in Washington and identified only as Shcherbakov, responded, "If you want to have an official interview, you can have it here."

At that point, the Soviet and American groups were standing in the entry way to the main lounge in the terminal.

Mr. Coombs then suggested, "Let's find a place to sit down. The two groups moved toward the first-class lounge one level up.

Question Is Unanswered

As the groups moved away, a reporter called to Mr. Kurashvili, "Do you want asylum in America?" The exchange student, a tall, olive-skinner man wearing a brown fur hat with a brown scarf pulled up high to cover a bandage on his throat, made no reply as he walked straight ahead and puffed on a cigarette.

One of his Soviet escorts commented, "He doesn't want to say anything."

A white bandage was visible also on one of Mr. Kurashvili's wrists.

Once up in the first-class lounge, Mr. Coombs and the Soviet official identified as Shcherbakov conferred while standing in the entry to the lounge. About 30 feet away, Mr. Kurashvili sat with the other Soviet officials while members of the United States immigra-

tion agency looked on from other parts of the lounge.

No American was closer than 10 or 15 feet from Mr. Kurashvili at this point.

The conversation between Mr. Coombs and Mr. Shcherbakov appeared amiable. Twice each man interrupted the talk to make telephone calls, with Mr. Shcherbakov calling his Embassy in Washington.

Mr. Kurashvili's stay at Kennedy Airport was longer than his stay there on Sunday. That night, after arriving at the airport with his wrists and throat slashed, the 36-year-old civil engineer was escorted to Jamaica Hospital in Queens by Port of New York Authority policemen.

He told the policemen he had cut himself with a razor blade while being driven to the airport for the Moscow-bound flight.

Mr. Kurashvili had arrived at Kennedy Sunday after he and another exchange student, Grigori Smelyi, 36, had left the University of California at Berkeley on Friday.

They had left after they had been the subject of a citizen's arrest in a food store in Berkeley. The manager of the store accused them of shoplifting. Although the charges were

dropped, the two men, who had protested their innocence, said they were so humiliated that they could not stay in Berkeley.

According to the Port Authority police, when Mr. Kurashvili was asked Sunday if he wanted asylum in the United States, he replied that he did not.

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