

U.S. Tapped Top Russians' Car Phones

By Laurence Stern

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The U.S. government systematically monitored the limousine radios of top Soviet officials in Moscow for several years ending in 1971, according to former intelligence sources familiar with the operation.

The project, code-named Gamma Gupy, was terminated in late 1971 after some details of its operation were disclosed by columnist Jack Anderson.

A former intelligence official who had access to the transcripts of the monitored conversations in Moscow described the system as one of

the most valuable intelligence pipelines the United States had in the Soviet Union.

Among the Soviet officials who were tapped by the Gamma Gupy system were Soviet Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, President Nikolai Podgorny and Premier Alexei Kosygin.

The top-secret operation was conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency in collaboration with the National Security Agency—the government's chief gatherer of intelligence by electronic means.

Anderson's column, which appeared on Sept. 16, 1971, did not specify the means by which the conversations of top

Kremlin officials was transmitted to Washington.

Intelligence sources here said the Soviet limousine telephone traffic was susceptible to interception because the phones were not sufficiently "scrambled"—a technique for making spoken words snoop-proof.

(The name of the telephone tap operation is reportedly an NSA code classification indicating the priority and secrecy of the mission.)

Anderson said yesterday that after his column appeared he was invited to lunch with then CIA Director Richard M. Helms and asked by Helms not to divulge the

means by which the interception was made. Helms also requested, Anderson said, that the project not be referred to again.

The columnist said his original source on the Soviet tap told him the Russians had already realized their phone traffic was being monitored. Otherwise, he insisted, he would not have written the column. Anderson said he agreed not to mention details of the system and specifically promised Helms not to allude to the operation in his book, *The Anderson Papers*.

A CIA spokesman said yesterday. See GAMMA, A16, Col. 1

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terday the CIA had no comment on any aspect of the matter.

There was only one other published reference to the Moscow taps—a passing allusion in *The Wall Street Journal* of May 8, 1973 to the fact that "the CIA was busily monitoring the radiotelephones in Mr. Brezhnev's limousine as he sped around Moscow and out to the country for weekends."

A former intelligence official who had access to the Gamma Gupy traffic characterized the original 1971 leak as "completely gratuitous—it served no purpose and blew our best intelligence source in the Soviet Union."

There has been widespread conjecture that the White House Special Investigations Unit, known as the Plumbers, was investigating a news leak in the fall of 1971 that compromised an important intelligence source in the Soviet Un-

ion.

White House special counsel J. Fred Buzhardt had been seeking to discourage the indictment of John D. Ehrlichman, Charles W. Colson and Egil (Bud) Krogh, all former presidential aides, on grounds that the prosecution of their cases would jeopardize national security.

Ehrlichman, testifying last June in his California trial, said the responsibilities assigned the Plumbers included the Pentagon Papers, the SALT talk leak "and . . . the third one which had to do with the disclosure of a CIA source in a foreign country—and then the fourth one, which I am not at liberty to discuss."

The nature of the third and fourth news leaks has never been officially identified.