

# Does Vitalii Yurchenko himself know what it was about?

by Criton Zoakos

For those who like to quote Russian folk proverbs for every occasion, here is one: "All's well that ends well." On the *Affaire Yurchenko*, most parties involved appear to think that indeed, it ended well, and therefore, "all is well."

The principal, Vitalii Yurchenko, director of the KGB's worldwide counterintelligence department, gives every appearance of being not merely happy, but truly ecstatic, at his "breakout to freedom," as he prosaically described his escape back to the embrace of Mother Russia. Before a pre-selected, invited group of journalists at the new Soviet embassy compound in Washington on Monday, Nov. 4, Mr. Yurchenko spun his yarn of high adventure, from his reportedly "forcible abduction" last Aug. 1, in Rome, through the "three months of drugging, torture, and violence," at the hands of "American agents" in a Fredericksburg, Virginia safehouse, to his gallant escape from a Georgetown restaurant on Saturday, Nov. 2, a few hours after Secretary of State George Shultz's Boeing 707 had taken off for Moscow.

"I am very proud that I managed to escape," Mr. Yurchenko said to the gathered journalists. He probably did not know that, at approximately the same time, some all-American intelligence community "old boys," were breaking champagne bottles by the caseload, somewhere on the other side of the Potomac, among them those who had been entrusted with Yurchenko's custody. "I am very proud that he managed to escape, too," many an intelligence community old boy must have repeated in unison, in an atmosphere of mirth.

Meanwhile, in the Kremlin, a metaphorical stone's throw away, Secretary George P. Shultz, seated before a grim-looking General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov, would not share in the mirth back home. He was being subjected to a ferocious tongue lashing by the Soviet leader who was demanding explanations about the "forcible abduction" and subsequent torture of Mr. Yurchenko by "American agents." TASS had already saturated the Soviet capital with tear-jerker stories about Yurchenko's mistreatment, accusing the United States of "state-sponsored terrorism," even before Shultz had gone up to the fourth floor of the Kremlin. Secretary Shultz told Gorbachov that Yurchenko's story to the press in Washington was "totally false." Gorbachov, in anger, retorted,

"You are lying, Mr. Shultz."

Aghast, George P. Shultz, wanted to know: "Are you calling the Secretary of State of the United States a liar?"

Reportedly, Mikhail Gorbachov did not bother to answer the obvious, but both he and his interlocutor watched the Nov. 19-20 Geneva summit quickly disappear down the tubes before their eyes. If not the summit itself, then, definitely, the packaged New Yalta deal Shultz was preparing to offer was finished—which is why champagne corks were popping on the side of the Potomac opposite the new Soviet embassy compound.

The following day, Secretary Shultz informed the American press that his talks with Gorbachov, with whom he had a "very vigorous discussion," were "frank and argumentative," and that "the view from [the Kremlin] of the United States is very different from what we think reality is." Immediately, the international press picked up on the relationship between Vitalii Yurchenko's "breakout to freedom," and the imminent collapse of the summit. Many drew a parallel between Vitalii Yurchenko and Gary Francis Powers, the American U-2 reconnaissance-plane pilot who was shot down over Soviet territory on May 17, 1960 by Soviet anti-aircraft missile batteries, which thus destroyed the scheduled June 1, 1960 Paris summit between President Eisenhower, Nikita Khrushchev, Harold MacMillan, and Charles DeGaulle.

In sum, it appears that Mr. Yurchenko's "breakout to freedom" has almost certainly destroyed Shultz's, and the American Eastern Liberal Establishment's, strategy of appeasement. In this sense, "All's well that ends well."

## Questions and implications

Regardless of the eventual outcome of the Geneva summit, Mr. Yurchenko's name is likely to stay with us a while longer. The entire *Affaire Yurchenko* has left certain important questions. The answers will be worked out in the broader context of the international intelligence warfare which has been raging since about March of this year. For one thing, the Senate Intelligence Committee is asking certain serious questions and demanding that CIA Director William Casey provide the answers.

The most obvious question is asked by the vice-chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.): Was Yurchenko a defector or a double agent? Asks Leahy: "You either have got a defector who was allowed to just walk away under circumstances that I still can't accept and cause a significant embarrassment to the United States, or you have a double agent who was planted on the United States and then you have far more than a significant embarrassment, you have an out-and-out calamity. . . . No matter what, something is wrong."

To right the wrong, the Senate has instructed the Central Intelligence Agency to appoint one of its own to investigate the entire Yurchenko matter from beginning to end. The two most obvious questions begging for an answer are: How did Yurchenko initially come under the custody of the United States and, second, under exactly what circumstances did he "break out to freedom"? On the answers to these questions will depend a further necessary set of conclusions, including, prominently, conclusions on the subject of "who benefits." Since the matter is likely to linger on for a while, it would be useful, for the record, to itemize the following known facts relevant to this matter:

Yurchenko disappeared in Rome, Italy, on Thursday, Aug. 1, 1985. He had been there since July 26, to conduct an on-the-spot evaluation of certain KGB capabilities and to inquire about the earlier mysterious disappearance of Soviet scientist Vladimir Alexandrov.

A Soviet embassy "note" to the State Department, of Nov. 4, 1985, in part reads: "On August 1, 1985 in Rome, Italy, Soviet diplomatic officer V. S. Yurchenko, who was there on a short-term business trip, vanished without a trace. In mid-October, that is, two and a half months after that, the State Department official confirmed that V. S. Yurchenko was on the territory of the United States."

A State Department press release of Nov. 5, 1985, in part reads: "On August 1, 1985, Mr. Yurchenko, a senior officer of the Soviet KGB, defected of his own volition to the American Embassy in Rome, Italy. He requested asylum in the United States and signed a statement to that effect and asylum was granted. Since his arrival in the United States on Aug. 2, Mr. Yurchenko has willingly cooperated with both the Central Intelligence Agency and the FBI in providing information about Soviet intelligence activities throughout the world and the organization of the KGB."

Yurchenko himself says: "In Rome, I was forcibly abducted by some unknown person. . . . Unconscious, I was brought from Italy to the United States . . . and denied the possibility to get in touch with Russian officials."

As early as Saturday, Aug. 3, 1985, Italian news agencies were carrying reports that Yurchenko had disappeared. In the United States, the first public source to reveal Yurchenko's presence in the United States was syndicated columnist Ralph de Toledano in the *Washington Times*, who wrote that Yurchenko, on Aug. 1, went to the Vatican to ask for asylum and was then transferred from the Vatican to the U.S. embassy.

The Vatican reference is interesting, because many weeks after de Toledano's article, on Nov. 5, 1985, a highly unusual incident of acrimony took place between the Vatican and the Turin daily newspaper *La Stampa*. In its edition of that day, *La Stampa* published a dispatch from its U.S. correspondent who reported that Yurchenko had said that "*agents seized me and drugged me in the Vatican, where I had taken refuge, and then took me forcefully to the United States.*"

A Vatican spokesman, Joachin Navarro Valls, met with reporters the same day and said, "The statement attributed to Mr. Yurchenko in *La Stampa* appears to be completely incredible and imaginary." Of course, none of the other journalists present at Yurchenko's press conference mentioned any reference to the Vatican. However, the Soviet embassy refused to admit to that press conference representatives of the *Washington Times*, the paper which first reported on Yurchenko's visit to the Vatican.

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All these details are of value to the Senate and the CIA in-house investigation into exactly how Yurchenko came to the United States. As both Sen. David Durenberger (R-Minn.),

Leahy, its vice-chairman, have already cast aspersions on Director Casey's demeanor in this whole affair, his Vatican affinities may prove of interest.

A third version, of course, is that Yurchenko initially pretended to defect to the U.S.A. in pursuit of purposes known to his government, that his ploy was discovered by his hosts, and that subsequent to that discovery, he was "given the treatment." This third version might make the inquiry into Yurchenko's "break out to freedom" rather intriguing.

Obviously he was given, by his hosts, the opportunity to escape on time to ruin Shultz's trip to Moscow and the summit. Are his superiors in Moscow pleased or displeased with the diplomatic results of his escape from that convenient Georgetown restaurant? Does Yurchenko know?