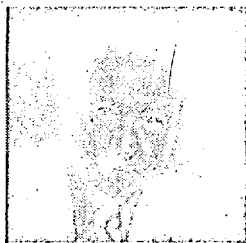


P-Alsop, Stewart  
Director

Khrushchev, Nikita  
Shelopin, Aleksandr  
P-Gart, Murray

WHO IS MR. X? see U.O. # 7 in Life

BY STEWART ALSOP



WASHINGTON--Who is Moscow's Mr. X? Who is the man in Moscow strong enough to defy party boss Leonid Brezhnev in the most public possible way, and--so far--get away with it?

This question has Washington's corps of resident Kremlinologists both fascinated and deeply puzzled. But they agree that there must be a Mr. X, and that therefore a fierce power struggle must be going on within the Politburo. They further believe that the struggle may burst into the open before the Communist Party Congress next March. In that event, Boss Brezhnev may suffer the fate of Nikita Khrushchev in 1964, or, only last week, of Poland's Wladyslaw Gomulka.

There are some Kremlinologists who think they can put a name to Mr. X. But consider, first, the evidence that a Mr. X must exist. The evidence centers around the publication in the West of Nikita Khrushchev's amazing reminiscences.

Parts of the story are still murky, but the basic facts about the Khrushchev memoirs are known. Initially, the key role was played by Khrushchev's daughter, Rada, and her journalist husband, Aleksei Adzhubei, editor of Izvestia until Khrushchev's downfall. Rada and Aleksei recorded the old man's rambling, often inaccurate, frequently farcical, and utterly fascinating memories of the past.

At some point, probably in 1969, the omniscient Soviet secret service, the KGB, learned what the Adzhubeis were up to, and thereafter a remarkable figure, Victor Louis, entered the picture. There is no doubt at all that Louis is an agent of the KGB, but he is not at all an ordinary agent.

KGB MISSIONS

He lives in style at a dacha with a private tennis court, and he drives a Porsche and an air-conditioned Mercedes (air conditioning, since it is totally unnecessary in Moscow even in August, is the ultimate Soviet status symbol). Louis has carried out several delicate missions for the KGB, including a trip to Formosa to make contact with the Chinese Nationalists. But he specializes in contacts with the West.

For example, he peddled a bastardized version of Svetlana Alliluyeva's memoirs in the West, to undercut the impact of the genuine memoirs. He also negotiated the Western publication of the confessions of

don Lonsdale. The book was a clumsy attempt to drive a wedge between the CIA and British MI-6, at the same time glorifying the KGB. In Moscow, he is the KGB's chief flack--he is often the unnamed "reliable Soviet source" in stories from Moscow.

Louis negotiated the agreement with Time-Life for the sale of the Khrushchev reminiscences, for a sum on the order of \$600,000. The deal was signed and sealed at a meeting between Louis and Life executive Murray Gart in a Copenhagen hotel room in August, and it included a provision for the deposit of a large sum of money in a Swiss bank in the name of the Khrushchev family.

SECRET OPERATION

There is no precedent at all for this kind of deal. But what is even more unprecedented--and deeply significant--is that Leonid Brezhnev, the Kremlin's No. 1 man as party chief, could not conceivably have known about and approved the KGB-Victor Louis operation.

On this point, the Kremlinologists are unanimous. The reason is implicit in the book itself. It is not only an attack on Stalin and Stalinism--it is a terribly damaging indictment of the Soviet system itself, which is made to look both brutal and farcically incompetent. What is more, it is a specific attack on policies with which Brezhnev is closely identified--the rehabilitation of Stalin, the suppression of freedom and dissent in Soviet literature and art, the tightening grip on the whole Soviet population.

The publication of the memoirs in the West was a major political act, which would ordinarily require the explicit approval of the whole Politburo. It is inconceivable that it was approved by Brezhnev and his supporters. Therefore--Q.E.D.--there must be a Mr. X strong enough to defy Brezhnev.

Mr. X must also be strong enough to protect Victor Louis and the Adzhubeis. In late November, Adzhubei gave an interview to Western reporters openly critical of the Brezhnev regime--another act without precedent. The interview was not for attribution, but the KGB of course knew about it--and may have ordered Adzhubei to grant it.

There is other evidence of a breakdown of Brezhnev's authority and a resulting power struggle. Readers of the usual Soviet tea leaves--position in pictures, publication of speeches in the party press, etc.--agree that Brezhnev

No. 1 last summer, and that he has since slipped badly.

Brezhnev is a hard-liner, both in terms of relations with the West and internal discipline, and his chief support comes from the military. Recent personnel shifts have weakened the position of the hard-liners. For example, Leningrad party chief Vasily Tolstikov, a hard-liner and Brezhnev man, who was in line for elevation to the Politburo, has been sent as ambassador to Peking, where he can no more influence events than if he had been sent to the Lubyanka Prison.

U.S. intelligence satellites have confirmed a virtual halt to Soviet missile deployment, hardly likely to please Marshal Grechko and Brezhnev's other military allies. Russian diplomats in Washington and elsewhere have taken to hinting that Western policy should be shaped to help the "angels" in Moscow, suggesting an angel-devil, or dove-hawk, struggle for power.

Mr. X, at least for tactical purposes, is presumably an "angel." Who is he? Aside from the power to defy Brezhnev and protect Louis and the Adzhubeis, he would logically have other characteristics. He would have close connections with the KGB or with a powerful faction of the KGB. He would be very shrewd and very ruthless. And he would be comparatively young.

FITTING THE ROLE

Brezhnev is in his 60s and has had two heart attacks, and several other members of the Politburo are approaching senescence. Premier Aleksei Kosygin had a flaming row with Brezhnev in July, on the old issue of military-civilian priorities, but he is also in his 60s and has bad kidney trouble. He could be an ally of the restive younger men, but he seems most unlikely to be their leader. There are several possibilities for the role of Mr. X, but only one of them seems to meet all the requirements.

Politburo member Aleksandr Shelopin is that one. He is 52, young by Kremlin standards, a former boss of the KGB who has carefully maintained his connections, and he was shrewd and ruthless enough to play the key role in the deposition of Khrushchev. No one really knows, of course, if the shrewd Mr. Shelopin is really Mr. X. But the experts do not think--they know--that there is a Mr. X, and that a mounting struggle for power is going on behind