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Behind the Enigmatic Smile of Yuri Andropov

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Vice President George Bush, visiting Moscow for Leonid Brezhnev's funeral, was received by a chubby-cheeked fellow called Yuri Andropov. Bush was proper, Ivy League, genial: he quipped about how odd it was that the two intelligence chiefs had risen to top ranks. Andropov knew; he said nothing. He merely smiled.

It was the most enigmatic smile since the Mona Lisa. The New York cognoscenti could not help speculating; the consensus—rallied by Harrison Salisbury—was that Andy was a roly-poly "closet liberal" who drank Johnny Walker instead of vodka, chuckled and backslapped, and found it intriguing to occasionally dine with dissidents.

But for Sandor Kopacsi, former Budapest police chief, the smile meant something different. After all, Andropov, who was Soviet ambassador to Hungary from 1954 to 1957, earnestly assured Hungarian Premier Imre Nagy of personal safety and the inviolability of Hungarian borders even as Russian troops poured in for the 1956 invasion. Andropov smiled a lot in those days, Kopacsi recalled.

Now Yuri Andropov is general secretary of the Communist party of Soviet-occupied Russia.

Yet we have little substantial information about him. We know he wears glasses, although there is argument about whether they are heavily tinted or not. We know Andropov speaks in a refined tone, but we cannot be sure he speaks English. Harrison Salisbury insists he does, having talked to anonymous *babushkas* who say they heard Andropov. But Malcolm Toon, former U.S. ambassador to Moscow, says there is no evidence of Andropov's abilities with English.

And upon Andropov's accession, the French and German newspapers also reported that the versatile fellow speaks, you guessed it, "fluent French" and "a little German." All this is curious given that, before becom-

ing Russia's premier, Andropov had never visited a non-Communist country.

Andropov's lingo, and the angle of refraction of his spectacles, are interesting to the extent that they reveal larger facets of the man. But too much has been made of them, I suspect out of an urge to make sartorial trivia fit pet theories about Brezhnev's little-known successor.

Edward Jay Epstein devoted a lead article in the *New Republic* to refuting Andropov's image as a cultured Anglophile, cynical yet fun-loving, unfortunately placed in a brawling political milieu where he had to break a few necks. Epstein concluded that everybody else was wrong about Andropov, but as for what the reality was, hey, who was Epstein to know?

Someone should introduce Ed to Martin Ebon, who thinks he does, and who has convinced me he is right. Ebon is author of the encyclopedic *World Communism Today* and a distinguished Sovietologist. His new book, *The Andropov File* (McGraw Hill, \$16.95, 277 pgs.) is, to my knowledge, the only biography of Andropov published in the West. No doubt other frenzied students of Russia are sweating out manuscripts, but Ebon has beaten them to it. He hasn't relied on transparent media reports, and he hasn't projected his own whims onto his subject.

Ebon's biography, then, beams some welcome light on Andropov, so we may as well take a good look at the man who may be nuking us, if the peaceniks have their way.

Yuri Andropov was born on June 15, 1914, in the railway town of Nagutskaya in southeastern Russia. He issued from a lowly peasant family, so that his climb to success is what Ebon calls a "Marxist version of a Horatio Alger story."

He studied at the Rybinsk Water Transport Technicum, where he was secretary of the Communist Youth League, and the University Petrozavodsk. Then he signed up with the Volga Shipping Lines, all the while struggling to become a Communist party member, a distinction he achieved in 1939. Fate aided Andropov's formal embrace of Communist tenets; Stalin's energetic purges in the '30s created a vacuum in most top-level jobs and in Party membership, so that young enthusiasts like Yuri could be absorbed easily.

N. A. Mikhailov, Andropov's party chief, transferred Andropov to the Karelian Soviet Republic, which was territory usurped from Finland. The Finns were not amused, and put up a fight. On Nov. 30, 1939, the Soviets invaded, set up a "People's Government in Finland" and appointed Otto Vilhelm Kuusinen premier. Kuusinen was to become a mentor for Andropov; his later deposition had an underdog appeal for the young Communist Yuri.

In general the Karelian skirmishes with Finns and Germans made vivid impressions on Andropov, who refers to them periodically in speeches. That guerrilla experience may now embolden Andropov to engage his troops in Afghan suppression, although the Mujahiddins are much more ferocious than were the Finns; war is their national sport.

In 1951 Kuusinen had Andropov moved from Karelia to Moscow Party headquarters, where he was appointed CPSU inspector. It was his first bureaucratic post in Moscow, and he was to have an ample array of them. In 1953 he was sent to the Foreign Affairs Ministry; there Andropov attended to diplomatic wranglings with Poland and Czechoslovakia, before he was made Soviet ambassador to Hungary in 1954.

That was a crucial period in Andropov's life, not least because he came under the influence of Mikhail Suslov, upon whose mutterings careers were made and ended.

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Suslov instructed Andropov in the art of cheery brutality. We have no tape recordings, but can assume Suslov taught Andropov all the Soviet definitions: Diplomacy is the art of saying "nice doggie" until you can find a stone. Treaties are guidelines to be dutifully observed—until they cease to be in the Russian interest. The slogans of peace should be employed incessantly and with fanfare; they are the necessary precursor to war. And so on. When the Finnish people became uppity in 1956, it was Suslov who argued vehemently for a Soviet invasion.

Andropov's role in the Soviet invasion of Hungary is not fully clear. Hungarian exiles say that Andropov until the last moment convinced Communist locals that the Soviets had no intention of invading, and that troops entering the country were merely replacing native soldiers on leave.

But the question is whether Andropov knew all the while that an invasion was imminent and yet sweet-talked the ruling party. It is likely. After Imre Nagy was ousted, Andropov elevated and worked closely with Janos Kadar, exiled under his predecessor.

In the '60s Andropov worked as a liaison officer with various East European governments. It is rumored that he studied English under a tutor at this time; Ebon states this as fact. In 1967 Andropov—somewhat surprisingly—was made chairman of the KGB; his role was to rescue the fractured reputation of the secret police, and to update its antiquated intelligence techniques.

The KGB had become disreputable after 1953, the year of Stalin's death, for "excesses." It wasn't that the KGB shot counter-revolutionaries, or clubbed dissidents—that was standard procedure—but under Stalin the secret police had turned on several loyal Party members.

It became a house of vendetta for Stalin and KGB officials, the most savage of which was KGB Director Lavrenti Beria, who served since 1938. Beria was shot after Stalin's death, joining a tradition of slain KGB heads, a goodly number of them decapitated under Beria's benefactor, Stalin. Andropov wanted to put a stop to the KGB as a personal vehicle for disapproval,

and restore it to its erstwhile tradition of impersonal service to the state.

It is little known that the KGB is not a Communist invention; Czar Nicholas II created it for assassination insurance. He called it Okhrana. Then Lenin took it over and named it Cheka, or Vecheke. After a series of name changes, each to attach the prestige of novelty to the disreputable organization, it came to be called the KGB and was assigned to a separate department. Its headquarters today are in Dzershinsky Square, named after the first KGB chief after the Bolshevik revolution, Felix Dzershinsky.

This affable thug, known for comments like "My thinking compels me to be merciless," is Andropov's hero in the intelligence business; Andropov lavishly praised Dzershinsky in his speech accepting the KGB leadership, and often compares Lavrenti Beria's personal missions unfavorably with Dzershinsky's public interest slaughters. In the same year Andropov was named to the KGB leadership he became a candidate member of the Politburo; full membership was his in 1973.

The KGB under Andropov achieved two objectives, both essential to its survival. First, Andropov introduced modern surveillance equipment to the organization, some of it reportedly acquired through Kim Philby, the British spy for the Soviets. Before Andropov, KGB techniques were effective but without nuance: now high-tech monitoring devices have replaced ears at the keyhole, and tongue-loosening drugs have supplanted torture confessionals.

Second, Andropov successfully sanitized the KGB's image as a Stalinist leftover, arbitrarily monitoring and eliminating people. He did this not by softening the KGB approach, but by making it less conspicuous.

Ebon observes: "What can happen to someone who has incurred the displeasure of the local KGB in Moscow? All kinds of odd things. Threatening phone calls; suddenly the neighbors shun you; you come home and there seem to have been burglars, but they have actually taken away your books and files; hoodlums waylay you; you are a teacher, and pseudo-students, young KGB men in jeans, jeer at you; you are requested to come to the local militia for a few questions—and this

begins to happen once a week, question after question, wearing you down. No one beats you. Your ribs stay in place, there is no bleeding from the nostrils, you're not slugged unconscious—this is the New, Improved KGB."

Andropov concedes that there were "a few shortcomings" of the KGB under Stalin, but he remains defensive about the secret police's tradition of what he calls "Socialist legality."

Through the organs of the KGB, Andropov navigated to his present position. He released little nuggets of information to *Pravda* and *Izvestia* to discredit Brezhnev, and, by association, Brezhnev's protege, Konstantin Chernenko, considered Andropov's main rival for premier after Brezhnev. He recruited the support of Dmitri Ustinov, Soviet minister of defense since 1976, and Ustinov in turn mobilized the Russian generals. He spread the word that Mikhail Gorbachev, the only other serious contender for premier, was, at 51, a youngster inexperienced for top rank.

When Andropov was named, just hours after Brezhnev's death, to the post of General Secretary of the Party, it was widely treated in the U.S. media as a choice of a "liberal"—Andropov—over a "conservative"—Chernenko. In fact, as Zbigniew Brzezinski said, that was not the case at all.

"The choice in the Soviet Union is not between doves or hawks or conservatives or liberals...but between different types of tough guys. There is the rigid, ignorant parochial tough guy—I think Chernenko fits that mold—and there is the more sophisticated, skilled, experienced tough guy—Andropov fits that mold."

There is no doubt that Andropov is less oafish than Chernenko. Konstantin has the reputation of being a soulless lout; Andropov is a more crafty animal. He is not "sophisticated," but he is a shrewd player of Soviet truncheon politics. He is particularly adept at manipulation of public opinion; he has successfully convinced Soviet hardliners that he is to the right of Hannibal, and moderates that he is not an "ideologue."

Andropov told the CPSU, "We know full well that the imperialists will never meet one's plea for peace. It can be upheld only by relying on the invincible might of the Soviet armed forces." Yet before suspicious Moscow groups he has sounded a more dovish

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tone, and in speeches covered by European reporters he indulged in the buzzwords of the peace movement, which he is trying to lubricate.

Andropov said recently that nuclear war is most definitely "unwinnable," noting that the Soviet Union is "unilaterally committed" to nuclear reductions. He denounced the "atmosphere of mutual suspicion" that chilled arms negotiations. This, by the way, is the same Andropov who said in 1982, "Our entire post-revolutionary experience shows that one cannot go to the imperialists, hat in hand, and hope to win peace. . . . [So] our Party and our people created our magnificent Soviet Armed Forces and built up truly indestructible forces." This man knows the meaning of deterrence.

Andropov's militaristic agenda, coupled with his pacifying, if not pacifist, rhetoric, makes him a doubly dangerous opponent.

"It's a sick joke if the West thinks Yuri Andropov is a liberal," said Alexander Ginzburg, one of five dissidents exchanged with the U.S. for two Soviet spies in 1979. Ginzburg told *Newsweek* that the U.S. should not acquiesce to Andropov but "keep up the pressure, relentlessly. Don't give the Soviet leadership another inch."

Andropov, a master at fomenting public unrest and spreading rumor, wants to make it appear that he is a

fresh new boy on the block, agonizing about arms negotiations and the possibility of nuclear war, puzzled and disappointed at the West's intractability, willing to go ever so far, but of course reluctant to jeopardize Soviet territories.

Some Sovietologists here wonder whether Andropov's less-than-rosy health will cause him to slide from office, or impair his ability to achieve set goals. Just how ill Andropov is nobody knows. Ebon says he suffered a heart attack in 1964. Mathis Chazanov, Moscow correspondent for UPI, claims he suffers from "Armenian disease," an ailment which ranges in symptom from brief fevers to debilitating body weakness. But it is unlikely that the Kremlin would have elevated Andropov to his present post if his ailments were consequential.

There has been speculation about Andropov's measures toward dissidents, which from all indications should be draconian. Genuine Soviet peaceniks are being dispatched to psychiatric wards for treatment; the psychos actually have the nerve to impugn the Soviet peace machine.

But the real question, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn said in 1975, "is not how the Soviet Union will find a way out of totalitarianism but how the West will be able to avoid the same fate."

Andropov's greatest threat is not to the people of the Soviet Union, whose fate can hardly be worsened. It is to the people of the free world, whose liberties Andropov detests because he has never known or understood them, and so finds them perverse. ■

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