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**WILLIAM S. COHEN**

Guest columnist

**It's hard for fiction to top reality**

WASHINGTON — In the world of spy and counterspy, reality is outrunning fiction.

When Sen. Gary Hart and I were writing our novel, the publisher questioned the plausibility of a plot sequence involving a U.S. senator being kidnapped, drugged, and transported to Moscow.

We insisted it could happen. We had what we thought was a plausible story line in a circumstance of an individual trying to protect other sources.

Now Vitaly Yurchenko, a senior official in the KGB, alleges something very similar happened to him. I wonder. Was our book among the reading material he had access to while living in Virginia as the guest of the CIA?

I used to think a lot of spy fiction was so extreme that it lacked plausibility. But the

longer I'm involved with oversight for intelligence matters, the more I am aware that in this field just about anything is possible — and usually occurs. In fact, I'm now convinced that fiction underestimates reality.

Whenever you step into the world of international intelligence, you descend into an infinitely long hall of mirrors. The multiplication of reflections makes it virtually impossible to distinguish image from reality. You walk down that hall, trying to touch something that looks like the way out, but it never is.

There are layers upon layers of deceit built into the system. It is virtually impossible for anyone outside to discern what is true. Even on the inside, there are so many compartments, so many layers, one doesn't have access to.

Was Yurchenko real? Was

*Sen. William S. Cohen, R-Maine, a member of the Intelligence Committee and co-author of The Double Man, gave his views in an interview.*

he false? What real information, if any, did he give us? How credible is it? And if it is credible, where does it lead? It all brings yet more ambiguity and opaqueness into a world that is already quite murky.

There's a scene in *Three Days of the Condor* in which an older spy and a relative neophyte are talking. The young man asks, "Tell me, do you miss the good old days?" and the old man replies, "Not really, but I do miss the clarity."

Masters like John Le Carre and Graham Greene have little to fear, but amateurs like us may be put out of business. I'm going back to writing poetry.