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Fiction From the Kremlin

When the hard-eyed schemers in the Kremlin are stung by truthful reports on their deadly mischief, they respond by cranking up their \$4 billion-a-year "dezinformatsia" machine to produce diversionary lies. One truth they have been most determined to conceal if possible, distort if necessary, and deny at all costs is their ruthless testing of chemical weapons on tribesmen in Afghanistan, Laos and Cambodia.

We've checked with chemical experts who had collected evidence on the scene. We've studied hundreds of pages of classified reports never made public. We went to Southeast Asia to interview survivors of the attacks.

The Soviets' disinformation campaign was as diverse as it was fantastic. The KGB planted stories that the CIA had caused an epidemic of dengue fever in Cuba; that a University of Maryland malaria research laboratory in Lahore, Pakistan, is a germ-warfare facility; that chemical and bacteriological weapons at a U.S. military base caused 80 infant deaths in Naples, Italy; and that the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, where an accidental release of poisonous gas killed so many people, was really an American chemical-weapons factory.

Some other examples:

- Marking the anniversary of the Soviet shoot-down of an unarmed Korean Air Lines plane, Radio Moscow revived the Kremlin's original line that the passenger plane was on a spy mission for the United States, and added a new twist: the plane was blown up not by a Soviet interceptor's rocket as the Russians had acknowledged, but by a U.S. bomb on board the airliner, supposedly detonated to prevent the Soviets from proving their charges of espionage. The Soviet broadcasts even charged that the United States had impeded efforts to recover the plane's wreckage and "black box."

The KGB's charges were based largely on reports by "the prominent Japanese military expert and journalist Akio Yamakawa." But Yamakawa had been unmasked as a KGB agent years earlier.

- Waving an apparent West German embassy cable as proof, a Ghanaian official charged at a press conference that the U.S. Embassy in Accra was trying to overthrow the government of Lt. Jerry Rawlings. West German officials supplied

proof that the cable was a fake within two days.

- Hoping to discredit Italian authorities' charge that the Bulgarian secret police (and probably the KGB) had engineered the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II, Soviet disinformation experts faked a pair of cablegrams purporting to be from the U.S. Embassy in Rome to the State Department. The first proposed a campaign to implicate the Bulgarians; the second indulged in some self-congratulatory crowing about the campaign's success.

Although the United States is a favorite target of the KGB's forgers, it's not the only one. Our sources listed at least 25 countries where Soviet disinformation documents have been identified. Nor does the Kremlin's fiction factory respect high rank. In October 1981 a phony letter bearing the signature "Ronald Reagan" was sent to King Juan Carlos explaining how urgent it was for Spain to join NATO—meddling that, if authentic, could have infuriated the sensitive Spaniards and killed the NATO membership initiative.

And in May 1983, the Russians moved from the printed forgery to the electronic field, splicing together snippets of public utterances by President Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher into a supposedly intercepted telephone conversation between the two leaders. On the resulting tape, assiduously leaked by the KGB to favored European outlets, Reagan appeared to be criticizing Thatcher's handling of the Falkland Islands war with Argentina, accusing her of needless escalation of hostilities. The Soviets were trying to stir up a little mischief—two weeks before the British elections.

We have been recipients of KGB disinformation documents. On Nov. 11, 1981, we received a mailgram that purported to be from the Swedish ambassador in Washington. It informed us that, as a matter of conscience, the ambassador was disassociating himself from his government's decision to allow a U.S. satellite-tracking station at the Karlskrona naval base.

If such a decision had, in fact, been made, it would have been a startling departure from Sweden's long-cherished neutrality. A call to the Swedish Embassy confirmed our suspicion that there had been no such decision.

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