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# WHERE VITALY'S FINGER POINTS

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**A** LONDON accounts of the defection of the KGB's No. 5 man, Vitaly Yurchenko (otherwise transliterated as Dzhyrchenko), first broken by me and given international attention by *The Washington Times*, have been splashed over England's front pages for several days. But though some London newspapers have added details of Mr. Yurchenko's background and activities, there has been almost no delving into highly important aspects and consequences of the case.

What was Mr. Yurchenko, head of the KGB's Division 1 and director of all agents and moles outside the Soviet Union, doing in Rome?

Mr. Yurchenko was sent to Italy to "handle" Professor Vladimir Alexandrov, Soviet delegate to a nuclear conference in Sicily, whose defection was largely ignored by the Western press.

The mission of Mr. Yurchenko and the KGB agents accompanying him was to kidnap or "liquidate" Mr. Alexandrov.

Once in Rome, however, Mr. Yurchenko slipped away from his associates and surrendered to Vatican City authorities. He chose the Vatican because he was fearful that the Italians would return him to Moscow. The Vatican notified Italian Foreign Minister Andreotti, who was kept fully informed of developments, and arranged for turning Mr. Yurchenko over to CIA officials in Rome.

Why did Vitaly defect at this time?

To answer this question, it is necessary to go back to the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev as Soviet dictator after the death of Konstantin Chernenko. Mr. Gorbachev was a

creature of Mr. Chernenko's predecessor and former head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov. Mr. Gorbachev has had close political, if not organizational, ties with the KGB, which was instrumental in making him the new Soviet *vozhd*.

**U**nder Mr. Gorbachev, the KGB again has assumed the vast and murderous powers it had under Lavrenti Beria during the Stalin era. Today it is the dominant force in the Soviet Union — "top dog," as one expert on the Soviet Union puts it. As such, it has launched a series of Stalin-type purges of the Soviet bureaucracy, the military, and its own ranks. Mr.

Yurchenko had reason to believe he was on the purge list and slated for liquidation in a Lubyanka cellar.

**F**or a high-ranking Soviet official to defect is a sensitive and dangerous process, one in which he can be betrayed at any step. Mr. Yurchenko chose Rome because he knew he would be able to find sanctuary at the Vatican, where it would be relatively safe to make an approach to the CIA.

What are the consequences of Mr. Yurchenko's defection?

Mr. Yurchenko carries with him not only an encyclopedic knowledge of the identities of KGB agents and

moles in NATO intelligence and counterintelligence services but also up-to-date experience in its operational methods.

[In the U.S., the FBI is continuing its search for former CIA agent Edward L. Howard, who is being sought as a result of information reportedly supplied by Mr. Yurchenko. Howard has been charged with selling secrets to the Soviets. A second ex-intelligence officer also is believed to be under investigation in the wake of Mr. Yurchenko's defection.]

Mr. Yurchenko is far more important than Igor Gouzenko, the Soviet lieutenant in the code room of the Soviet Embassy in Toronto whose

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documented disclosures broke open an atomic espionage ring in the United States, Canada, and England — or Vladimir Petrov, a Soviet diplomat who defected in Australia.

The only comparable defection is that of Gen. Walter G. Krivitsky, head of Soviet intelligence in all of Western Europe just prior to World War II. Mr. Yurchenko can disrupt KGB operations and disclose the full extent of Soviet penetration of U.S., British, French, Italian, and Latin American intelligence services.

In England, these are hard times for MI-5 and MI-6, already suspect because of past KGB infiltration into their ranks. Both these agencies

have battened down their hatches in expectation of the storm that Mr. Yurchenko's disclosures will unleash within the British government. Tremors are also being felt at the British foreign office, whose lax security is common knowledge.

There are very quiet hints of a royal commission, on the style of those that followed the defections of Mr. Gouzenko in 1945 and Mr. Petrov in 1954. But the likelihood of such an investigation seems small, since it would embarrass both Conservatives now in office and the British Labor Party.

It is certain, however, that there are rough days ahead for MI-5 and MI-6 as the nature and extent of KGB infiltration become known to No. 10 Downing Street. Both Britain's intelligence and counterintelligence have tended to take a casual view of the moles in their midst — perhaps because these moles have for the most part worn old school ties. Only after the Philbys, Burgessses, McLeans, et al. have taken refuge behind the Iron Curtain has MI-5 and MI-6 indicated any consternation.

Will Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher act with more vigor than her predecessors? Though she still seems to remain in the thrall of Mr. Gorbachev's smile, she must surely know that energetic action will strengthen her hand against an opposition in Parliament that continues to argue that we must not be beastly to the Russians — whatever their misdeeds.