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Moscow Builds Case Against Daniloff

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MOSCOW, Sept. 9 — Nicholas S. Daniloff, the indicted American correspondent, said today that he believed the Soviet authorities were trying to assemble an espionage case against him dating back five years.

Mr. Daniloff, who is a correspondent of the magazine U.S. News & World Report, told his wife that investigators had been questioning him about his work since he took up his assignment in the Soviet Union in 1981.

The Government newspaper Izvestia, in a detailed account of the case against Mr. Daniloff, indicated Monday that the authorities intended to link Mr. Daniloff to Paul M. Stombaugh, an American diplomat who was expelled last year on espionage charges.

Mr. Daniloff's wife, Ruth, said her husband told her during a 90-minute meeting at Lefortovo prison. "They are going back over all my journalistic activities and building up a case."

He said he was being interrogated four hours a day.

Daniloff on Summit Prospects

Mrs. Daniloff said her husband seemed resigned to spending time in prison before his case was resolved.

"I think he thinks it will be a long haul, but he thinks that things are escalating rather dangerously," she said. "You know he would not like to see it torpedo the summit or U.S.-Soviet relations."

Mrs. Daniloff said her husband felt that his case was political and that the investigation of espionage was a formality that would be used against him only if his case was not resolved and he was put on trial.

Mr. Daniloff, who was arrested on Aug. 30, was indicted on Sunday.

The Government press agency Tass said today that the United States was trying to turn the detention of Mr. Daniloff into an excuse not to engage in serious arms control negotiations.

Tass said warnings by the Americans that the Daniloff case could harm relations were a "pretext to evade, for the umpteenth time, a discussion of what really is the centerpiece issue not only of the Soviet-U.S. relationship, but of international life in general — the need to end the arms race."

"If Daniloff had not been caught spying, they would have found some other pretext," Tass said.

The commentary, by Boris Shabayev, a Tass analyst, said:

"Daniloff is not the first U.S. spy caught red-handed by the Soviet security service and so it would have been only natural for his bosses to hold their tongues in shame to spare themselves more embarrassment. But they have raised a deafening uproar instead and are threatening Moscow with every kind of punishment."

In a dispatch from Washington, the press agency also quoted Senator Dave Durenberger, a Minnesota Republican who is chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, as having said Sunday on the NBC News television program "Meet the Press" that American intelligence agencies were not prohibited by law from using journalists as informants.

[On the Sunday program, Senator Durenberger noted that the Central Intelligence Agency had a rule against using journalists, but that there was no statute prohibiting such use. David Holliday, a spokesman for the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Tuesday that the C.I.A. rule could be waived at the request of its director, but Mr. Holliday said he knew of no instance in which this had happened. "I never know it to be done," he said. "This is a very strict rule, and they adhere to it."]

Last week, President Reagan, in a personal letter to Mikhail S. Gorbachev, is said to have given assurances that Mr. Daniloff is no spy.

A spokesman of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Gennadi I. Gerasimov, said today that "Soviet-American relations should not be a hostage to the Daniloff case," which Mr. Gerasimov said was "not important."

"If both sides were to make an effort, it would be possible to find a solution," he said.

Allusion to a Proposal

He seemed to allude to a proposal he mentioned on Monday, to the effect that both Mr. Daniloff and Gennadi F. Zakharov, a Soviet spy suspect in New York, be released in the custody of their respective ambassadors pending trials.

Mrs. Daniloff, after having visited her husband today, said he was looking thin and felt isolated, spending most of his time in a small cell.

She said that investigators from the K.G.B., the Soviet intelligence and internal security agency, had told Mr. Daniloff that the death penalty was the ultimate punishment for conviction on espionage charges.

"It is very nasty when you are alone in your cell and people are talking to you about the death penalty," she said. "He is living in a vacuum here. He does not know what is going on in the outside world and it can be very frightening."

Mrs. Daniloff said that at her husband's request, prison authorities had improved his diet slightly and were allowing him two hours of exercise daily.

She said Mr. Daniloff was being given two glasses of milk a day to go along with the soup and buckwheat cereal he was receiving.