

TWENTY UNAVOIDABLE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NOSENKO CASE by Tennent “Pete” H. Bagley

There are reasons to believe that the KGB officer Yuri Nosenko genuinely defected in 1964. Here are some that are cited by those who believe it:

- a) As every intelligence professional is aware, neither the KGB nor any other intelligence service would, all other things being equal, send one of its own genuine staff officers as a false defector into enemy hands. The risk would be too great that he might be influenced or pressured there to tell the important secrets he knows and to expose the very things his deception operation was intended to hide.
- b) The Soviet regime sentenced Nosenko to death in absentia and several KGB sources have said that the KGB was looking for him with the intent to assassinate him.
- c) Real KGB staffers suffered real punishment as a result of his defection or as a result of misbehavior uncovered by the KGB’s investigation of the defection.
- d) After he was cleared of CIA’s suspicions, Nosenko remained the rest of his life in the United States, became an American citizen, and long helped Western operations against the KGB -- things hardly compatible with a motive to deceive.
- e) Later defectors from the KGB have testified to the genuineness of his defection and its damage to the Soviet regime.
- f) Repeated CIA reviews and analyses of the case over thirty years have again and again cleared Nosenko of all suspicion.
- g) CIA insiders have stated under oath that Nosenko has told only the truth – with only occasional, normal human errors or exaggerations-- and that he has neither said nor done anything contrary to KGB practices as reported by other genuine defectors.
- h) Nosenko named a lot of KGB SCD officers, and exposed many “cases.”

These are only generalities, of course, and even if they were all fully pertinent to this particular case (which they are not), no generality could ever dispel the specific questions that arise in a counterintelligence investigation. (It is in errors of detail that deception operations betray themselves.) One might suppose that CIA — given its faith in Nosenko -- has considered and found satisfactory and mutually compatible answers to each and every one of these questions (although no evidence of this has ever appeared in public print). If CIA has not, its faith in Nosenko rests on shaky ground. No objective observer with a grain of skepticism could endorse that faith without clarifying these points of doubt.

Among the questions that must be answered are the following twenty, with reference to the pages where they are discussed in the 2007 book Spy Wars. (Should these find satisfactory and consistent answers, another twenty will follow.)

1. Nosenko claimed that through the entire years 1960-61 he was deputy chief of the American-Embassy section of the American department of the Second Chief Directorate (SCD) of the KGB – the job which gave him access to all the most important information he gave CIA, especially because he there personally supervised all work against the Embassy’s code clerks and security officer (John Abidian). Then:
 - a) Why, during that period, was Nosenko performing low-level tasks for the Tourist department, as he himself described and as was independently confirmed in at least one case (“F”)? While supposedly supervising the SCD’s top-priority work against the American Embassy, Nosenko was handling street-level homosexual provocateurs, recruiting homosexual tourists (one as far away as Sofia), helping the Tourist Department chief in a meeting with an American travel agent, and going abroad as watchdog for Soviet delegations. (Spy Wars, pp. 94-95, 160-62, 235, 250, 280)
 - b) Why did KGB insiders, including one former member of that section and Oleg Kalugin, later deny that he ever held that position? (pp. 160, 210, 235-36)
2. How and why did Nosenko preserve and bring to Geneva in 1964 his KGB authorization for travel, in December 1963, to search for the fleeing KGB officer Cherepanov? (pp. 87, 167-68, 250) Sub-questions:
 - a) If he was not deputy chief of the SCD’s American-Embassy section (Question No. 1, above), why was he sent to search for Cherepanov? (pp. 87, 167-68, 250)
 - b) Why was the authorization (signed by the SCD chief Griбанov) made out to “Lt. Col. Nosenko”, a rank which he had claimed to CIA, whereas under detailed questioning he admitted he was only being a captain? Is it only coincidence that he had already falsely asserted in 1962 that he was then a major? (pp. 250-51)
3. Why was Nosenko ignorant of the operational mission to Helsinki of his direct subordinate Kosolapov, as part of an operation to recruit an American Embassy cipher clerk? (pp. 157-60, 242)
4. Why did Nosenko fail to tell CIA in 1962 about his surveillants’ recent spotting of American Embassy Security Officer Abidian visiting Penkovsky’s dead drop? (pp. 16, 147, 203)
5. Why, in 1964, did Nosenko err by a full year – in a manner directly contradicting his career story — about the date of Abidian’s visit to that dead drop? (p. 88-89, 147-50, 186, 203-4)

6. If Nosenko had the specific task of watching over Abidian, how does one explain his ignorance of Abidian's trip from Moscow to his ancestral homeland Armenia? (When Nosenko himself could not answer this question, he felt it threatened his whole life history.) (pp. 186-87)
7. Why did Nosenko in 1962 give false information about (and not know the circumstances of) his boss Kovshuk's trip to the United States five years earlier, a trip which was actually connected with a penetration of CIA? (pp. 67-71, 185) Is it mere coincidence that while telling CIA of this trip, Nosenko's two closest associates in Geneva, Guk and Kislov, were precisely the two KGB operatives who had worked with Kovshuk on that trip? And that Nosenko, having read Kislov's KGB file, certified that Kislov had no connection with the KGB? (pp. 65-67)
8. How does one explain Nosenko's telling CIA in 1962 that he knew details of and even participated in the KGB attempt to recruit CIA officer Edward Ellis Smith, and his denial in 1964 of any knowledge of the name or the case? (p. 188) Or, similarly, his knowing in 1962 and forgetting eighteen months later about KGB relations with the Finnish president? (p. 186)
9. How does one explain Nosenko's mention in 1962 of the name "Zepp" – which at that moment was of intense interest to KGB counterintelligence – and then forgetting it by early 1964? (pp. 15-16, 150-55, 162, 203)
10. Was Nosenko really in Geneva in 1962 and 1964 as the security watchdog of a Soviet conference delegation, as he claimed, contrary to expert testimony and contrary to later statements by his KGB bosses? (pp. 5, 237, 253)
11. How does one explain Nosenko's many changes of stories about his KGB career, even his date of entry, and the later evidence that the stories were false? (pp. 93, 160-62, 235, 248-50)
12. How does one explain Nosenko's inability (or unwillingness?) to describe even the most routine KGB procedures? (pp. 83-86, 191-92, 251-55)
13. Is it true, as Nosenko authoritatively reported, that the KGB first uncovered Oleg Penkovsky, CIA's great spy, in late 1961 or early 1962 by chance Moscow surveillance of a British diplomat? (pp. 21-22, 86-87, 235, 243)
14. Is it true, as Nosenko highlighted to CIA in 1962, that the KGB first uncovered Pyotr Popov, CIA's great spy in the GRU (Soviet Military Intelligence), by chance surveillance of an American diplomat mailing a letter in Moscow in late January 1959? (pp. 11-12, 24, 68-75, 242-43) How does one equate this with the KGB's later admissions:
 - 1) that the GRU chief was fired from his post as a result of Popov's treason, almost two months before the letter mailing,

- 2) that KGB surveillants spotted Popov meeting CIA twice, at least two weeks before the letter mailing, and
 - 3) that it had earlier recruited Edward Ellis Smith, the CIA officer who had supported the Popov case in Moscow? (p. 16-17, 70-71, 189, 241-43)
15. Did Nosenko really have his claimed inside knowledge about Lee Harvey Oswald in the Soviet Union – despite later contradiction by a KGB chairman and other KGB veterans including Oleg Kalugin? (pp. 83-86, 95-96, 191, 210, 249) If not, where did he get his information? And why does he continue to make that claim to this day?
 16. Did the KGB recruit in Moscow any American Embassy code clerk prior to Nosenko's defection? (pp. 156-59, 241-42) If so, how does one explain Nosenko's authoritative claim to the contrary?
 17. How does one explain that this ten-year KGB CI operations officer was unable to disclose to the U.S. a single KGB spy who at the time of uncovering, a) was still active and b) had current access to US or NATO-country official secrets and c) had previously been unsuspected by Western counterintelligence?
 18. Why was Nosenko unaware, or not telling, that his close KGB associates at various times were members of the SCD's department for operational deception? (And why did Nosenko not report on the existence of this department?) For example,
 - a) His friend Yuri Guk meeting Nosenko before and after each CIA meeting in Geneva in 1962 (pp. 6, 9, 66, 236);
 - b) Aleksandr Kislov rooming with Nosenko in Geneva in 1962 (p. 7, 66, 70-71, 235, 236);
 - c) Vladimir Chelnokov taking him on an operational mission to Odessa in 1960 (p. 235).
 19. Is it mere coincidence that Nosenko replayed to CIA in 1962 each of these specific cases that had just been compromised to the Americans six months earlier by Anatoly Golitsyn?
 - a) Preisfreund (pp. 25, 28, 158-59)
 - b) Vassall (pp. 14, 24, 97, 179, 187, 189, 206, 261)
 - a) Belitsky (pp. 17, 25, 179)
 - b) Kovshuk's "trip" to Washington (pp. 24, 65-66, 69, 75-78)
 - c) Nine others including a Canadian and a French ambassador and a French businessman (pp. 4, 14, 25, 165, 206).

20. Why did it take the KGB five years, after his partial exposure in the U. S. press, to uncover as an FBI spy the KGB New York officer Aleksandr Kulak (“Fedora”), who had confirmed some of Nosenko’s (false) stories? And then only after Kulak had died of cancer? How does this equate with CIA’s claim that its own analysts previously unaware of the case had managed to identify Kulak in less than one hour using the same published information and obviously having less file information than the KGB about Soviet personnel in New York? (p. 163-65, 170)

While an objective observer seeks facts or rationalizations to answer each of these twenty questions (in a manner consistent with his answers to the other questions), a twenty-first question will have occurred to him, early on. How and why could so many questions – even any two or three of them -- have arisen about any genuine defector? The questions alone suggest that Nosenko was hiding important KGB operations, including its breaking of American secret ciphers (via recruited American code clerks) and KGB penetration of the staff of CIA.

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