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UPDATE

EXPPELLING SPIES: THE U.S. COMES OUT AHEAD

(Updating Backgrounder Update No. 8, "Soviet Espionage at the United Nations: Further U.S. Curbs Needed," April 30, 1986.)

In the U.S.-Soviet war of espionage, Moscow long has enjoyed a critical advantage over Washington. While there have been 261 Americans with diplomatic immunity in the USSR, there have been more than 300 Soviets with immunity at the USSR's Washington Embassy and consulate in San Francisco, plus another 275 with diplomatic immunity at the Soviet mission to the United Nations. Given the differences between the open American society and the closed Soviet society, these numbers translate into a huge advantage for Soviet intelligence gathering capability in this country. Ronald Reagan's recent expulsion of 80 Soviet intelligence agents, working under diplomatic cover, has been the long overdue first step toward better protecting American national security from the Soviet KGB.

The Soviets retaliated by expelling ten American diplomats and banning Soviet citizens from working for the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and consulate in Leningrad. This forces the State Department to use some of the 251 diplomatic slots allocated by the Soviets to the U.S. Embassy to support personnel. To be sure, the abrupt nature of the boycott by Soviet drivers, receptionists, kitchen crew, and other support staff is creating inconvenience and short-term hardships for American diplomats in the USSR. But the Soviet loss is infinitely greater: Moscow's intelligence operations in the U.S., which dwarf whatever intelligence gathering can be conducted from the U.S. embassy in the Soviet police state, have been impaired severely.

General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev banned Soviet employees from the American embassy for two reasons: 1) He hopes that the U.S. Foreign Service, devoted to the comfort of its diplomats, will pressure the State Department and the White House to allow the Soviets to increase the number of their diplomats in the U.S. in exchange for

the return of Soviet maids and chauffeurs to the U.S. embassy. 2) The KGB has much less need for Soviet employees to spy on the American embassy in Moscow, thanks to the impending move of the U.S. mission in Moscow into a new building.

This building and the move, arranged by the Nixon Administration, is a windfall to the KGB. For one thing, the new building is located in one of the lowest spots in Moscow near the banks of the River Moskva. This not only makes Soviet eavesdropping easier, but makes U.S. collection of electronic intelligence from there extremely difficult. For another thing, and much more important, the Soviets have constructed the new U.S. embassy carefully embedded with countless listening devices. Just last month, the Wall Street Journal reported that the new U.S. embassy's "metal beams and bars are structured and welded in such a way as to become a giant antenna."¹

The new U.S. embassy in Moscow is the result of a detente era deal. As part of this deal, the Soviets were allowed to build a new embassy in Washington. This is going to create a major security problem for the U.S., when the Soviets move into their new building, located on Mount Alto, the second highest point in Washington. From there, the Soviets will be able to eavesdrop on telephone conversations and electronic data transmissions throughout Washington, and even on conversations taking place in various office buildings in this city. Some U.S. government officials can protect their telephone conversations with other officials by scramblers. But the private telephone conversations of government employees, congressmen and senators, their staff, journalists, and others may fall into the hands of the KGB and later be used for blackmail. It is ironic that U.S. citizens, who enjoy protection of their privacy under the Constitution, are subject to KGB eavesdropping.

The U.S.-Soviet agreement on the new embassy buildings stipulates that the Soviets cannot move into their new offices on Mount Alto until the Americans move into their new embassy in Moscow. Now, with the diplomatic staff of the American embassy effectively reduced and the numbers frozen at that level by the Soviets, the United States has little need to move into its new Moscow quarters. As such, the U.S. should scrap the embassy deal. The new Soviet embassy compound, with an estimated value of about \$100 million, is located in a prime Washington residential neighborhood and could be sold to private interests without much difficulty. It would be better to have fewer U.S. diplomats in somewhat cramped quarters in Moscow than to give the KGB Washington's prime spying spot.

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1. "Bye Bye for Spies," The Wall Street Journal, October 22, 1986.