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Bubble, Bubble . . .: To protect the embassy staff from electronic snoopers, sensitive U.S. missions abroad are equipped with bugproof conversation "bubbles," pod-like chambers of aluminum or plastic placed inside bigger rooms.

The inner chamber is suspended a few inches off the floor so no wires can go in or out undetected. The outer room has noise generators or wind machines to smother any sounds that might escape the inner bubble.

A former diplomat told my reporter Allen Myerson that the U.S. Embassy in Tehran had a bubble that looked like a space shuttle. It was big enough to hold the ambassador's daily staff meeting, safe from the prying ears of the shah and his secret police.