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U.S. INVESTIGATING ENVOY SOCIALIZING

✓ By **ELAINE SCIOLINO**
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WASHINGTON, May 4 — The State Department is investigating several cases in which American diplomats may have violated rules against unauthorized socializing with foreigners in sensitive posts overseas, a high-ranking State Department official said today. He said the diplomats might be reassigned or recalled.

The official, Robert E. Lamb, Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security, also said the State Department and other Federal agencies investigated more than 10 American embassy staff members every year because of unauthorized socializing with foreign employees and residents. Many of these employees are either reassigned or recalled.

"By and large, career diplomats recognize overtures for what they are and report them," said Mr. Lamb, discussing techniques of Soviet bloc intelligence agents in an interview. "When an employee doesn't recognize them for what they are, he or she will be investigated and transferred."

Cases Kept Secret

Such cases are kept secret to prevent violations of privacy laws. But Mr. Lamb said secrecy was also important to avoid creating a climate in which American governmental employees would be afraid to admit unauthorized socializing.

The problem of unauthorized socializing is more widespread than is generally acknowledged and extends far beyond the most recent incident in which two Marine guards formerly posted in Moscow have been charged with allowing Soviet agents into the most sensitive areas of the United States Embassy. The marines were reportedly involved with two Soviet women who worked at the embassy.

"It's not just the marines," said Mr. Lamb. "The Soviets will target anyone they can."

He said Soviet bloc and Communist-dominated nations used socializing both inside and outside their own countries as a classic espionage technique.

The degree of social contact allowed between American embassy employees and local residents varies with the sensitivity of the post and the perceived extent of a threat. Most rules governing social contact are confidential, and some are secret, according to Administration officials.

Business Contacts Allowed

Legitimate business contacts are allowed, but social contacts in Soviet bloc countries and some Communist-dominated countries are severely limited. "One-on-one social contacts are generally precluded in these places," a State Department official said. "There are also rules on how to report each social and business contact. But Administration officials say the nature and extent of the social contact depends to a large degree on the attitude of the individual ambassador."

In the 1970's, an American ambassador in Eastern Europe who was a political appointee was recalled because he became involved with a woman who American officials believed was a member of the K.G.B., the Soviet intelligence service, according to Administration officials.

American officials working at the United States Interests Section in Havana and the United States Embassy in Managua have been sent home in recent years after dating local women.

A Case Is Closed

The State Department spokesman, Charles E. Redman, said today that the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation thoroughly investigated and then closed a case involving the wife of Harry G. Barnes Jr., the Ambassador to Chile, who had an affair with an embassy chauffeur when her husband was Ambassador to Rumania a decade ago.

Referring to a report about the incident, Redman said, "This does refer to incidents that occurred nearly 10 years ago, or over 10 years ago."

He said that the investigation of Mr. Barnes's wife, Elizabeth, concluded "that there was no effort to take advantage of the situation, and no compromise or breach of security took place."

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