

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 7, PAGE II

LOS ANGELES TIMES  
26 July 1985

# Soviet Spies Are a Threat— and an Obvious Weakness

By DIMITRI K. SIMES

It is an open season on spies in Washington. Currently, more people are awaiting trial on espionage charges than at any time since 1945. The Administration and Congress alike are announcing steps to deal with the newly discovered threat.

The threat is real. So is political exploitation. Ideologues of the right are only too eager to exploit the situation to expose "the evil empire." And quite a few liberals are using espionage as a safe way to demonstrate their hard-line credentials.

Ironically, the omnipresence of KGB operatives reflects the systemic weaknesses of Soviet society. The Kremlin does not trust its own subjects, including diplomats. In fact, the Soviet Union doubts the loyalty of its diplomats so much that in both New York and Washington it houses them in special carefully guarded complexes without private phones. With the exception of the ambassador, his deputies and several senior counselors, most Soviet diplomats in Washington are confined to their embassy.

It is not surprising that the KGB performs some functions that in the United States would be among routine responsibilities of Foreign Service officers. Normal and perfectly legal political intelligence-gathering through discussions with knowledgeable officials, journalists and academics is among the KGB's duties.

The KGB's insatiable appetite for American technology is a reflection of another profound Soviet failure. Long gone are the heady days of Sputnik and the first manned space flight, when Nikita S. Khrushchev boasted that the Soviet Union would surpass the United States in the field of high technology. Despite Moscow's tremendous investment in science, the Soviet Union has fallen even further behind during the last two decades.

Is there a chance to put an end to the KGB's spying in America? "Nothing can be done to reduce the level of espionage considerably," says Harry Rositzke, former CIA chief of Soviet operations. Indeed, as long as the Soviet Union remains weak on self-confidence and technology, but strong on security services, the Politburo will keep trying. And, like it or not, the greed factor alone guarantees that the KGB will find some eager recruits among Americans.

The United States must wage a protracted war against Soviet espionage. This war requires a cool head, professionalism and patience rather than harried and hysterical responses. Unfortunately, there are plenty of voices trying to outdo each other in demanding extremist solutions. This would only make the KGB smile. The House voted in favor of the death penalty for spies tried by military courts in peacetime. Not extreme enough, some claim: Let's extend

executions to civilian traitors as well. And the executions should be made public via television and radio. This profound advice comes from Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska). All this in addition to the House's vote to expand the use of polygraph tests on more than 4 million people with security clearances at the Department of Defense and defense contractors.

Forget about decency and civil rights for a moment. Disregard the risk of adopting and, in the case of the indiscriminate use of lie detectors and televised executions, going beyond the practices of the Soviet police state. How long would it take before the pendulum of public opinion would swing back and there would be an outcry over counterintelligence abuses? An effective struggle against espionage is a struggle that could be sustained by the U.S. political process. KGB spymasters, like terrorists, rarely fear indiscriminate countermeasures. One of their purposes is to erode the internal fabric of Western societies, to trigger hysteria and wholesale suspicion.

There are some practical and ethical ways to address the espionage problem:

First, reduce the number of Soviet diplomatic personnel in the United States. There are legitimate reasons for why there are many more Soviet officials in America than U.S. officials in the Soviet Union, such as the presence of the United Nations in New York and the Soviet Union's practice of bringing in its own support staff rather than hiring locals. Still, the current gap—about 1,075 officials versus 300, in Moscow's favor—is disturbing. The Administration should also think carefully before entering agreements with Moscow to open additional consulates. The one that the Soviets have in San Francisco, with 41 officials, is a nest of spies.

Second, the number of FBI counterintelligence agents should be increased—but not in haste. Quality is as important as quantity. The last thing that we need are

more Mr. Millers on the FBI payroll. Too few FBI agents speak Russian or have any systematic training in Soviet studies.

Third, common sense dictates the need to reduce both the numbers of classified documents and persons with clearances.

Yet, no foolproof defense against espionage is conceivable. In the Soviet case a huge security apparatus is as much a problem as a solution. The oppressive regime alienates the Soviet Union's best and brightest, pushing a few of them into the hands of the CIA. Obsession with security makes one less secure.

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