

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1A

The walls have ears at new embassy

By Gregory Spears
Inquirer Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The new U.S. Embassy being built in Moscow is riddled with Soviet listening devices planted in its main structural components, according to several members of Congress who received secret briefings recently about its problems.

They said that an elaborate and far-reaching network of spying equipment was concealed inside precast concrete construction units, including beams, walls and floor slabs, and that the devices may be impossible to remove without wrecking the building.

Construction has been stopped at the nine-story building, already three years behind schedule and with more than \$20 million in cost overruns, while U.S. officials decide what to do. The building is not occupied.

"We'll either have to make a decision to go ahead (and attempt to remove the devices) or we'll have to blow the building up," said Rep. Dan Mica (D., Fla.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs international operations subcommittee, which oversees U.S. Embassies. "The building itself is a monumental disaster."

Sen. Lawton Chiles (D., Fla.) confirmed that espionage equipment had been found within the building, which was begun in 1979. He said the devices were imbedded in prefabricated building components manufactured outside the building site and without U.S. inspection.

An agreement signed in 1977 required the United States to employ Soviet laborers and materials in its new embassy. Only nine U.S. government inspectors were permitted inside the 10-acre job

site, according to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Richard N. Dertadian, director of the Office of Foreign Buildings.

Dertadian said he could not discuss the existence of any listening devices in the building. He did say a painstaking inspection was under way that would not be completed until the spring or summer.

He said he doubted that the building would be torn down. "If we were to tear that building down now and try to do it again, how to get our materials and people in and out would be a real bilateral problem," he said.

Soviet workers have been locked out of the construction site since August 1985, after it was discovered they had been doing concealed work not called for on building plans, Dertadian said.

The listening devices were found by U.S. officials using equipment Mica likened to a CAT-scan machine, capable of producing three-dimensional views of the interior of building components.

What was discovered "would make James Bond look old-fashioned," Mica said. "The entire building may be a [spying] device. That's part of the problem."

U.S. intelligence experts estimate it will cost \$30 million to \$40 million to attempt to rid the building of the bugs, Mica said. But they may never be assured of secure communications in the building — the heart of a \$192 million U.S. Embassy complex that was supposed originally to cost \$89.1 million — because it might be impossible to remove the devices without destroying the building.

The intelligence experts are weighing the possibility of crippling the spy system by destroying its transmission equipment but leaving some Soviet spy gear buried within the embassy walls. The risk is the Soviets may be able to reactivate the bugs, Mica said.

Searchers found "an entire beam that's an antenna," Mica said. "Maybe you disconnect the transmitter that hooks up to that beam, but maybe somebody else will hook up a new transmitter."

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Dante Fascell (D., Fla.) said he favored salvaging the build-

ing because "there is no secure place, and no way to get a secure place, in Moscow." Fascell toured the building in March.

He said U.S. officials would have to use their ingenuity to outwit Soviet eavesdropping equipment. "Everybody might have to learn sign language — maybe that's far-fetched, maybe it's not," he said.

Fascell also said he did not want the dispute over the embassy building to further disrupt already strained U.S.-Soviet relations. "You have to find some way not to force this fight into the other fight, the arms control effort," he said.

The two nations agreed in 1977 to build new embassies in each other's capital cities. Under the agreement, the Soviets are prevented from occupying their new Washington embassy, which is unfinished on the inside, until the United States moves into its new embassy in Moscow.

The current U.S. Embassy in Moscow is a 55-year-old converted apartment building. Dertadian described it as "the worst embassy building I have ever been in," and said it was vulnerable to spying because it abuts another building.

In 1978, embassy employees doing some repair work after a major fire discovered a tunnel filled with sensitive listening equipment alongside the embassy. In 1983, U.S. officials reportedly were concerned that the Soviets were beaming low-level microwave signals at the U.S. Embassy that could interfere or intercept embassy communications.