U.S. winning spy wars

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It's hard to keep track of the score in the current diplomatic donnybrook between Washington and Moscow. By latest count, 80 Soviet diplomats have been booted out of the U.S. and 10 Americans out of the USSR.

So far, the Americans are winning hands down.

On Wednesday, the by now very cranky Soviets told 260 of their citizens who work at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the consulate at Leningrad to go home. This was a dastardly, underhanded blow. Instead of attending cocktail parties, U.S. diplomats will now have to drive cars, file papers and do light dusting. A hard sacrifice, but well worth the price.

From now on, the number of Soviet and American diplomats in one another's country will be roughly equal, about 250 each. This is excellent news for the FBI and its Soviet spy hunters, but bad news for the KGB's Moscow Centre and the GRU's "Aquarium."

All embassies house spies and conduct espionage. American missions, depending on their location, have small teams from the CIA, the National Security Agency, and, within the military attache sections, operatives of the Defence Intelligence Agency. Agents from Treasury, the Nuclear Regulatory Agency and the Drug Enforcement Agency are occasionally present. These people operate overtly under diplomatic immunity and are usually well known to their host nation.

The Soviets, by contrast, have a far more elaborate spying industry. Each Soviet embassy has two complete, independent intelligence operations. The KGB maintains a "resident" who runs his organization's spy efforts in the host country and reports directly back to KGB Moscow Centre. He and his deputy are "legals" who run networks of "illegal" Soviet agents. The "resident" has the power to execute his agents without prior approval from Moscow Centre.

Then there is the lesser-known GRU, or military intelligence. The GRU "resident" reports back to the Soviet High Command and concentrates on military intelligence. One of GRU's prime missions in the event of impending war is to co-ordinate assasination missions and sabotage attacks by *Spetsnaz* commando teams against the host nation's political leadership and important communications targets.

When not busy spying on their hosts, the KGB and GRU spend the rest of their time watching each other. This is no accident. One of the most important means of Communist party control is to have two or even three mutually hostile security organizations spying on their competitors. Life in Soviet embassies is not, as one may imagine, very chummy.

Soviet ambassadors, in most cases, are little more than figureheads charged with running mundane embassy operations. They have absolutely no influence over KGB or GRU agents and are not even allowed into the underground, steel-walled intelligence operations centres within the embassies.

Given these facts, one may readily understand why Soviet embassies have grown so populous — they have literally become hotels for spies. Their roofs bristle with electronic eavesdropping devices that listen into host nation data transmissions and phone calls. And they must also provide services to other Soviet spies operating under cover as journalists, trade officials, cultural mavens and scientific junkateers.

For years American counter-intelligence officials have been pleading that Soviet diplomatic missions — including the UN delegation — be cut back to manageable numbers. Until the recent expulsions, the FBI could not mount 24-hour surveillance on the huge number of Soviet "legals," not to mention agents under deep cover.

Virtually all the Soviet "diplomats" expelled were KGB or GRU agents and this will be a major setback to Soviet espionage activities. America will also suffer from the reduction of its "diplomats" in Moscow and Leningrad where it has very few "illegals" on the ground. Still, the U.S. came out way ahead.

As a result of recent expulsions, the U.S., Britain and France have hamstrung Soviet spying activities. Will Canada, a key Soviet operations centre, follow suit? Oh, no. Ottawa is too busy fretting about South Africa.