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KEVIN P. RIEHLE 

Soviet and Russian Diplomatic Expulsions: How Many and Why?

Abstract: Between 1946 and 1991, over 1,500 Soviet officials—mostly intelligence officers operating under diplomatic cover—were expelled from diplomatic and other government representations around the world. Expulsions often involved single or small groups of officials, but occasionally occurred en masse. Countries chose to expel Soviet officials for four reasons: in reaction to anti-Soviet regime changes and political reversals, in retaliation for Soviet covert activities and political manipulation, in reaction to Soviet intelligence officer defectors and intelligence obtained from penetrations of Soviet intelligence services, and, most frequently, in retaliation for espionage. Recent expulsions are modern adaptations of a method that was common during the Cold War with commonalities of purpose, but some variations, especially in scale and level of international cooperation.

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Since February 2022, 34 countries, mostly in Europe, have expelled over 700 officials from Russian diplomatic establishments. That follows a wave of expulsions in the aftermath of Russia's attempt to assassinate Sergey Skripal in 2018, and the closure of Russian diplomatic establishments in the United States after Russia's manipulation of 2016 elections. These are modern adaptations of a method that was common during the Cold War but had become more sporadic in the post-Cold War era.

Relying on a combination of press information, declassified intelligence reporting, and bulletins published by the U.S. Department of State, this article analyzes the countries that applied that method, what Soviet activities prompted expulsions, what effects they had on the operational environment, and how they were similar to or different from their modern equivalent.

Based on international standards, diplomats enjoy immunity, which means that a person who holds diplomat status cannot be put in jail or prosecuted in court, no matter what they do. The only recourse for a host government that wants to protest the actions of a foreign diplomat is to declare the person *persona non grata* and expel them from the country for "activities incompatible with diplomatic status." There have been exceptions made to diplomatic immunity in rare cases when a diplomat is involved in an extreme crime, like a vehicular homicide. But even in such cases, exceptions are never automatic, and only the sending country can agree to waive immunity. For a charge of espionage, which is a political crime not a physical crime, an exception is never made.

The practice of diplomatic expulsions was institutionalized in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961, which gives countries the right to expel diplomats who violate host country laws or who interfere in the host country's internal affairs.¹ Both the United States and the Soviet Union frequently expelled each other's officials during the Cold War, and the United States also experienced similar treatment from left-wing governments in Latin America, as Andrew Jordan describes in his 2018 dissertation, "You're Out! Explaining Non-Criminal Diplomatic Expulsion." Nevertheless, Jordan notes, "[T]he practice of diplomatic expulsions, as well as expulsions of other foreign personnel by an executive, has received little attention in the field of international relations or in political science more broadly,"² although research has been done into some specific cases.³

The lack of focused research is true for expulsions of Soviet officials during the Cold War, which usually fell into two broad categories that aligned with the two reasons allowed under the Vienna Convention: retaliation for Soviet covert activities and political manipulation, leading to the closing or reduction in the size of a Soviet diplomatic establishment; and retaliation for espionage, which violates a country's laws. An expelling country weighed those purposes against the costs: as most Soviet officials expelled from

embassies were intelligence officers, the inevitable reciprocal Soviet expulsion of an equal number of the expelling country's officials meant the loss of intelligence assets inside the Soviet Union. Many times during the Cold War and since, countries counted the benefit worth the cost.

Between 1946 and 1991, at least 79 countries expelled over 1,500 Soviet officials, not counting several mass expulsions involving unspecified numbers. The practice of expelling Soviet officials included those who were resident in a foreign country as well as countries barring the reentry of officials who had traveled to Moscow. Expelled officials represented the full spectrum of Soviet establishments abroad. They were often embassy-based diplomatic personnel, but also included nondiplomatic employees, such as interpreters, maintenance workers, security guards, and technicians. They were assigned to consulates, commercial and trade offices, and many from military attaché offices. Soviet officials were also expelled from the United Nations (UN) secretariat and UN specialized agencies like the International Civil Aviation Organization, International Wheat Council, and International Cocoa Organization. Others represented Soviet commercial companies, like Amtorg, Aeroflot, Inturist, Sovexportfilm, and joint ventures with local companies, as well as Soviet newspaper, television, and radio news outlets.

The expelling countries included 22 in Africa, 21 in Asia (including the Middle East), eighteen in Western Europe, eight in South America, seven in North America (including the Caribbean), and three in Eastern Europe ([Figure 1](#)). The numbers of expulsions were small up to 1970, with most years under twenty worldwide. A mass expulsion from Great Britain in 1971 made that year stand out, followed the next year by another mass expulsion from Bolivia. The year 1983 was the most damaging of the entire Cold War for the Soviet Union, with over 200 officers expelled from 26 different countries, including four countries—Bangladesh, France, Grenada, and Iran—expelling nineteen or more, each for different reasons.

About one-third of publicly expelled officials were announced publicly by quantity but without names. The remaining were named. In most cases, the expelled officials were officers from the Committee for State Security (KGB) or the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU). Consequently, it is likely the names by which many were known outside the Soviet Union were fictitious. Nevertheless, in several cases, officers were dispatched to multiple countries using the same fictitious name, facilitating the identification of Soviet intelligence officers when they appeared elsewhere. Of the expelled officials, only eleven were women, most of them wives of expelled Soviet officers, reflecting the male-dominated Soviet intelligence and diplomatic system.

A country that expelled a Soviet official could do so either quietly or publicly. In some cases, a government demanded that an official depart the

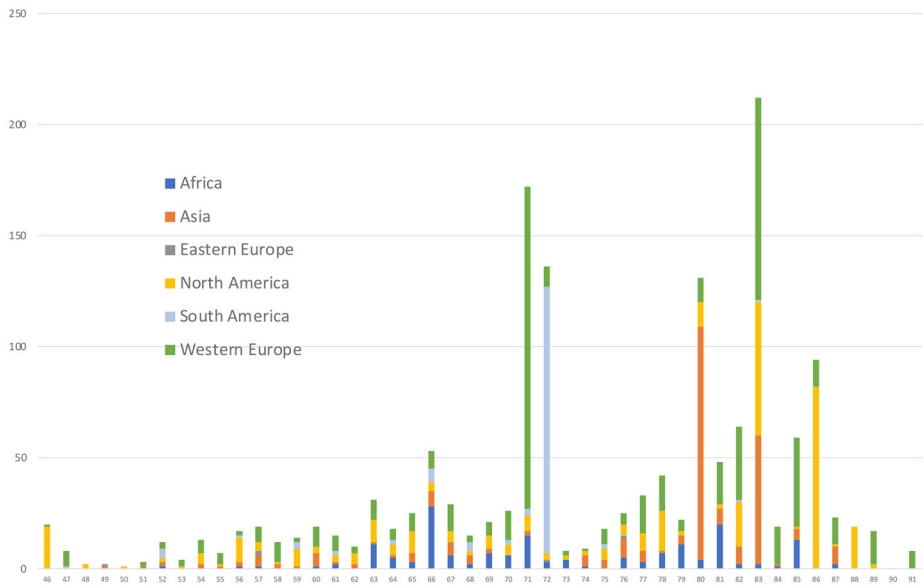


Figure 1. Trend of Soviet expulsions in the Cold War. Source. Database of expulsions compiled by the author based on press information, declassified intelligence reporting, and bulletins published by the U.S. Department of State. Not included are the countries that completely severed diplomatic relations, the 1963 and 1971 expulsions of Soviet diplomatic staff from Congo, and the 1981 expulsion from Equatorial Guinea, specific numbers for which were not announced.

country, but made no public statement, often in response to espionage cases. The expelling country’s decision against making a public announcement was due to a combination of the sensitivity of a counterintelligence operation and to avoid inevitable political repercussions from the Soviet Union. The total number of quiet expulsions is unknown, although declassified records shed some light on them. For example, a 1984 Department of State analysis of diplomatic reciprocity with the Soviet Union and Soviet Bloc countries included a list of 94 Soviet officials expelled from the United States from 1946 to 1983, 24 of whom had not been announced publicly. The list was declassified in 2011.⁴

REASONS FOR EXPULSIONS

In many cases, however, the expelling country did publicize the action, at times sweeping out large numbers of Soviet officials and naming them. These actions were based on two sometimes simultaneous reasons: to send a political message of dissatisfaction with the Soviet government’s interference in internal affairs, and to punish the Soviet government for aggressive intelligence activities.

When an expulsion received publicity, the expelling country often announced only that a Soviet official was engaged in “activities incompatible with diplomatic status.” The Vienna Convention does not require the host country to articulate a reason. The lack of specificity afforded the Soviet Union the opportunity to claim that the charges were unfounded and unjustified, fueling Soviet propaganda about capitalist aggressiveness and lack of diplomatic propriety, which the Soviet Union could then contrast with its own supposed peaceful motives. Other times, a little more detail was made public, such as claims that the individual committed espionage, was caught in possession of classified information, or was recruiting spies. Nevertheless, in many instances, the expelling government cited specific details of the activity that precipitated the expulsion.

Anti-Soviet Regime Changes and Political Reversals

A large portion of public expulsions of Soviet officials during the Cold War came in connection with coups that overturned Soviet client regimes. Expulsions were a tool that a small state could use against a superpower with minimal risk. The Soviet Union lost more influence within the expelling state than the converse after a regime change that precipitated expulsions. Jordan argues that expulsions “increase in value to states on the weaker end of a power disparity.”⁵ While that may not always have held true, especially in U.S.–Soviet tit-for-tat expulsions, it aligns with many instances of small states expelling Soviet officials during the Cold War. This was a uniquely Cold War type of expulsion founded in bipolar superpower competition with no analogs in the post–Cold War world.

The Soviet government’s reputation and relationships repeatedly suffered during the Cold War from reversals of countries’ cooperation with the Soviet Union or coups that removed Soviet-friendly governments and replaced them with pro-Western ones, often with U.S. sponsorship. A country could respond to an anti-Soviet coup in a spectrum of ways: reduce the size of the Soviet diplomatic presence to a level that aligned with the new, less cooperative relationship; close a Soviet consulate or military mission; or at the most serious level, sever diplomatic relations altogether.

These events were often the result of Cold War proxy battles. For example, in November 1963, during the Congo crisis, the Congolese government expelled the entire Soviet embassy staff, claiming the right to approve any Soviet diplomats who were sent to replace them. In March 1966, Ghana expelled 22 Soviet embassy officials along with over 200 nondiplomatic Soviet technicians and advisors. The action followed a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)–sponsored coup that removed the president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, who had become close to the Soviet Union.⁶ Bolivia acted similarly in March 1972, after a right-wing junta took over the government

from a Soviet-friendly one. The Bolivian government demanded that the Soviet Union remove 119 officials from the embassy in La Paz, leaving fewer than ten.⁷

In August 1979, a pro-Western coup removed Francisco Macías Nguema as president of Equatorial Guinea. Nguema had come to power in 1968 and expanded his country's ties with Cuba, China, and the Soviet Union. In 1981, the pro-Western regime that removed him ordered the Soviet embassy to reduce its size from 195 personnel to an unknown but much smaller number. Some of the expelled advisors were undoubtedly intelligence personnel, as the new regime also closed a signals intelligence (SIGINT) collection base on the Gulf of Biafra from which the Soviet Union had supported interventions in other African countries.⁸ As of 2022, Russia still did not have a resident embassy in Equatorial Guinea, covering the country from neighboring Cameroon.

In August 1980, the Iranian revolutionary regime instructed the Soviet Union to close one consular office in Iran and reduce its diplomatic staff in Tehran. The move came after the Iranian foreign minister publicly accused the Soviets of interfering in Iranian internal affairs and refusing to agree to a natural gas export deal. The Soviet consulate in Isfahan was subsequently closed, and the staff in Tehran cut back. This came just a year following the Iranian revolution, which Soviet leaders initially greeted with hopefulness because it removed a U.S. ally from the Soviet border. It also followed the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, which Iran viewed with suspicion. The Soviet Union's inability to take advantage of regime change in Iran led to the revolutionary Iranian regime expelling Soviet diplomats.⁹

Egypt was a particularly thorny partner during the Cold War for both the West and the Soviet Union. In 1972, Anwar Sadat's government expelled thousands of Soviet nondiplomatic advisors. Then, in September 1981, the Egyptian government expelled the Soviet ambassador and eight other named officials, all of which were identified as KGB officers and accused of exploiting religious strife and coordinating leftist elements in the country. The Egyptian government shut down the Soviet military mission in Cairo and closed its own military office in Moscow. The 1981 expulsion also extended to over 1,000 nondiplomatic Soviet technicians working on infrastructure and industrial projects in Egypt.¹⁰

Similar political reversals led to Soviet expulsions in Pakistan in 1980, Costa Rica in 1982, Grenada in 1983, and Liberia in 1983 and 1985. In other cases, anti-Soviet regimes severed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union altogether, such as in Brazil (1947), Colombia (1948), Venezuela (1952), Israel (1967), and Côte d'Ivoire (1969), leading to the complete closure of Soviet embassies. These anti-Soviet coups and reversals sent political messages to the Soviet Union, often inspired by a U.S. covert action, such as in Ghana in 1966, or overt military invasion, such as in Grenada in 1983.

Retaliation for Covert Activities and Political Manipulation Operations

During the Cold War, countries around the world regularly accused the Soviet Union of political manipulation, organizing coups, and interfering in internal affairs. These allegations were reminiscent of Soviet covert operations in the 1920s designed to remove capitalist governments and install Bolshevik regimes in places like Bulgaria, China, Estonia, Finland, Germany, and Hungary. Russian political interference also forms a foundation for similar allegations against the Russian government in the twenty-first century in places like Libya, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

Beginning early in the Cold War, at least 25 countries expelled Soviet officers in retaliation for political interference. Japan became the first when it expelled a Soviet embassy official in 1951, accusing him of controlling communist party activities in the country. Both Argentina and Mexico accused the Soviet Union in 1959 of employing covert operations to foment communist agitation. The U.S. Department of State's 1987 annual summary of expulsions listed a range of allegations levied against Soviet officials from 1971 to 1986:

- Plotting to foment religious and sectarian strife (Egypt: September 1981).
- Maintaining contact with and financing leftist rebel movements, communist parties, and other local opposition groups (Bolivia: April 1972; Liberia: April 1979; New Zealand: January 1980; Bangladesh, November 1983).
- Complicity in antigovernment coup plotting (Sudan: August 1971; Liberia: November 1983).
- Disseminating hostile propaganda (Pakistan: August–September 1980).
- Manipulating local media and financing local peace and antinuclear movements (Denmark: October 1981; Switzerland: April 1983; West Germany: May 1983).
- Maintaining contact with suspected terrorist and other “extraparamilitary” organizations (Spain: February 1980 and March 1981).
- Infiltrating and influencing local exile communities and ethnic emigré groups (Sweden: April 1982).
- Manipulating local agrarian reform movements, fomenting local labor strikes, and helping to organize demonstrations against food price increases (Ecuador: July 1971; Liberia: April 1979; Costa Rica: August 1979; Portugal: August 1980).¹¹

Additionally, in April 1983, the Swiss government ordered the closure of the Soviet Union's Bern-based *Novosti* press bureau, charging that it was a center for “political and ideological indoctrination” of young members of Swiss peace and antinuclear movements and for planning street demonstrations. Swiss authorities said that the *Novosti* bureau had “served as a center for disinformation, subversion, and agitation” rather than as a news agency. The director of the bureau, Aleksey Dumov, was expelled.¹²

Expulsions following covert manipulation activities were founded on anger and disillusionment toward the Soviet Union, even among some countries that would normally be inclined to ally with Moscow. One anomalous event occurred in 1957, when the Polish government expelled Soviet press attaché Nikolay Maslennikov. Maslennikov had expressed support for a tightly controlled press system and clashed with outspoken and independence-minded Polish journalists. He reportedly attributed the conflicts to Jews holding positions of authority in the Polish government.¹³ Romania, another Warsaw Pact country, also expelled a Soviet military attaché, Aleksandr Musatov, in 1972, probably to confront Moscow's "Brezhnev Doctrine" and in relation to Romania's refusal to follow Moscow's lead in the Sino-Soviet split.¹⁴

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, analogous cases arose in several countries. The Greek government expelled two Russian diplomatically covered individuals in 2018, accusing them of trying to persuade the population along the northern border of Greece to oppose a solution to the long-simmering naming issue for what was then referred to as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Russian officials allegedly tried to bribe local Greek leaders to disrupt the agreement by which the territory would become formally named the Republic of North Macedonia.¹⁵ The naming issue had been an obstacle to North Macedonia acceding to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Russia's attempted, albeit failed, disruption would have delayed accession.

The most prominent post-Cold War expulsion for political manipulation occurred in the United States in two consecutive presidential elections. In January 2016, President Barack Obama expelled 35 Russian officials in retaliation for election interference, and then in April 2021, President Joe Biden announced the expulsion of ten officials in reaction to allegations of Russian intelligence services attempting to interfere in the 2020 U.S. elections.¹⁶ Although there have been numerous additional reports of Russia manipulating elections, for example in France, Montenegro, Spain, and the United Kingdom, the reactions to those events did not elicit public diplomatic expulsions.

Reaction to Defectors and Penetrations

Another catalyst for expelling Soviet officials came when Soviet intelligence personnel defected or cooperated with Western intelligence and revealed their colleagues' names and activities, sometimes resulting in large-scale expulsion actions. Defectors' revelations provided firsthand knowledge of the identities of intelligence officers within a Soviet embassy, giving the receiving country grounds to reduce that intelligence presence. Knowledge gained from defectors at times precipitated immediate expulsions, while other times it

sparked investigations that led to expulsions over the following year. Although defections of Russian intelligence officers did not end with the Cold War, the use of defectors' information to prompt expulsions has not been a post-Cold War phenomenon.

The first such incident occurred in May 1946, when the Canadian government ordered the departure of seventeen Soviet officials named by Igor Gouzenko. The expulsions came eight months after Gouzenko's defection and three months after the Canadian government initiated a royal commission to investigate Gouzenko's revelations.¹⁷ The next occurred in 1954, when the Soviet Union severed diplomatic relations with Australia. Although the severance of relations was the Soviet Union's initiative, not Australia's, it led to the closure of the Soviet embassy in Canberra for the next five years. It came after publicity surrounding the defection of Vladimir Petrov, and a few weeks later, his wife Yevdokiya Petrova, in April 1954. The Petrovs' detailed information about Soviet intelligence operations directed against Australia and launched from Australian territory sent political ripples around the world.¹⁸

The United Kingdom issued the largest ever defector-related expulsion order in September 1971, called Operation "Foot," when it expelled 90 Soviet officials and barred the reentry of fifteen others. That order was executed three weeks after the defection of Oleg Lyalin, a KGB officer responsible for collecting intelligence about potential sabotage targets that the Soviet Union would attack in case of war. Lyalin's revelations went beyond his personal operations and included information about numerous KGB officers and activities in general, and the UK government took the opportunity of Lyalin's defection to send a retaliatory message to the Soviet Union. The British government did not immediately name the expelled officials publicly. However, their names appeared three years later when U.S. author John Barron published a list of nearly 1,600 Soviet intelligence officers in his book *KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Agents*.¹⁹ The level of detail in his book suggests unacknowledged government support. According to Mitrokhin, the KGB was caught completely off guard by the mass expulsion but was more worried about Lyalin's revelations regarding Soviet preparations for sabotage operations in case of war.²⁰ Kalugin similarly claimed that the Lyalin defection inflicted a crippling blow on KGB activities, both because of the expulsions and because of Lyalin's revelations.²¹

Two other defectors resulted in expulsions in 1971, although not on the scale of Lyalin's. In March 1971, Mexico expelled five KGB officers accused of supporting guerilla groups that opposed the Mexican government. These expulsions came a year after the defection of Raisa Kiselnikova, an administrative employee at the Soviet embassy in Mexico City, whose revelations provided details of KGB covert operations in Mexico. She

claimed, with CIA prompting, that Soviet influence had stimulated unrest in 1968 that resulted in over 100 deaths in Mexico.²² Kiselnikova's revelations spurred a yearlong investigation that identified embassy-based officers.

Another expulsion order occurred in October 1971, a few weeks after Lyalin's. The Belgian government ordered the departure of nine Soviet officials based on the revelations of Anatoliy Chebotarev, a GRU officer assigned to the Soviet embassy in Brussels who defected in early October. The Belgian government initially planned to keep the order quiet, but it was soon leaked that Chebotarev had identified 37 intelligence officers at the embassy. Nevertheless, the Belgian government did not publicize the names of the expelled Soviet officials and did not expel all 37.²³ Several of the names, although not all of them, appeared in Barron's 1974 published list. Ironically, Chebotarev himself requested to redefect to the Soviet Union only two months after defecting. No public information is available about how he was received after his return to Moscow, but the damage he did to Soviet operations in Belgium likely weighed into his reception.

The year 1983 saw a particularly large number of expulsions due to defectors and penetrations. Iran expelled and publicly named eighteen Soviet personnel in May 1983 based on investigations of the Tudeh Party following the defection of KGB officer Vladimir Kuzichkin the previous year. As in Mexico a decade earlier, the expulsions came over a year after the defection and were based on similar allegations of Soviet meddling in Iranian internal affairs.²⁴ A month before the Iranian expulsions, France expelled 47 Soviet officers, naming all of them publicly. The names came from over 4,000 pages of documents that detailed KGB science and technology intelligence collection operations and personnel around the world. KGB officer Vladimir Vetrov, codenamed FAREWELL, provided the documents to the French counterintelligence service in 1982, leading the French government to the mass expulsion on the grounds that the Soviets were "engaged in a systematic search on French territory for technological and scientific information, particularly in the military area."²⁵ France also shared the identities of Soviet officers internationally, and over the next several weeks, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Italy, Japan, Norway, Switzerland, the United States, and West Germany expelled nearly 150 intelligence officers accused of collecting science and technology intelligence.²⁶ Initial public statements from various governments implied that the expulsions were related to Kuzichkin's defection to draw attention away from Vetrov, leading newspapers to compare the case with Great Britain's mass expulsion in 1971. Despite the attempted misdirection, Vetrov was arrested in Moscow in 1982 on unrelated charges and executed in 1985.²⁷

In July 1985, the British responded quickly to Oleg Gordievskiy's defection by declaring 25 Soviet officials *persona non grata*. Gordievskiy had been an MI6 penetration of the KGB for over ten years before his defection, so the

British government had ample time to process his information and prepare an expulsion order, even before the defection. After the Soviet Union reciprocated with an equal number of expulsions of British officials, the British government expelled six more Soviets. Unlike the 1971 mass expulsion, the British government published the names of all 31 Soviet officials expelled in 1985.

Just a few weeks after Gordievskiy's defection, Vitaliy Yurchenko defected to the U.S. government in Italy and revealed the existence of two Soviet penetrations of U.S. intelligence services: Ronald Pelton at the National Security Agency and former CIA employee Edward Lee Howard. Although Yurchenko redefected only three months later, those espionage cases, along with others that broke in 1985, such as the Jonathan Walker spy ring, compounded by the Soviet expulsion of U.S. journalist Nicholas Daniloff, prompted the U.S. government to expel 25 Soviet intelligence officers in September 1986 in Operation "Famish." When the Soviet Union responded with reciprocal expulsions, the U.S. government expelled 50 more in October, and then five more after that, totaling 80. Mikhail Gorbachev reportedly stated at a Politburo meeting, "We cannot let this hostile action go unanswered. ... This is important not only from the point of view of Soviet-American relations, but international relations as well. If they are talking with the Soviet Union in such a manner, one can imagine how they will act with other countries."²⁸ The Politburo meeting did not mention Yurchenko's defection or Soviet espionage activities.

Two additional defections in the late Soviet period led to expulsions. GRU officer Yuriy Smurov defected in Canada in May 1988 while working as a Soviet employee at the International Civil Aviation Organization in Montreal. From Smurov's revelations, the Canadian government identified the Soviet case officers handling agents inside a defense contractor firm, prompting the expulsion of eight Soviet officials, likely all GRU officers, in June 1988. Canada also barred nine others who had previously served in Canada from reentering the country. When the Soviet government reciprocated, the Canadian government expelled two more Soviet officers. The final defector-related Soviet expulsions during the Cold War occurred in October 1991. The Norwegian government declared eight Soviet officials *persona non grata* following the defection in May 1991 of KGB officer Mikhail Butkov. Norwegian government spokespersons provided few details of the reasons for the action; however, press reports indicated that one of the expelled officers, Boris Kirillov, had been a case officer responsible for contact with Norwegian prime minister Jens Stoltenberg.²⁹

Defectors and penetration agents thus accounted for over 200 Soviet expulsions during the Cold War, not counting the complete closure of the Soviet embassy in Canberra in 1954. In some cases, the expelling country

used public defections as a pretext to sweep out Soviet officers about which they already knew. The speed with which the British government identified and expelled large numbers of Soviet officials both in 1971 and 1985 suggests foreknowledge of their existence. The CIA assessed the week following the 1971 expulsion that the British had planned the move months before it actually took place, but that Lyalin's defection "strengthened the government's resolve."³⁰ Similarly, a Belgian expulsion order came just a few weeks following Chebotarev's defection in 1971, and a Canadian order that came just a short time after Smurov's defection in 1988 included officers who had departed Canada years earlier. In other cases, the expelling country used defector revelations as the starting point for counterintelligence or counterinsurgency investigations, sometimes waiting over a year to issue the order, such as in Mexico and Iran.

Retaliation for Espionage Cases

Espionage cases are the most frequent reason for expulsions, both during the Cold War and since. Unlike defectors, which sometimes led to mass expulsions, espionage cases usually led to smaller numbers per incident, often one or two. The expelling government frequently does not reveal the nature of the espionage, stating publicly only that the officer was caught with classified information or clandestine communication devices. The evidence in many cases is based on sensitive counterintelligence operations, and thus the expelling government is sometimes loath to make those operations public.

In other cases, the expelling country has announced details, even revealing sensitive offensive counterintelligence operations. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) occasionally announced publicly that a Soviet officer was caught in a double agent operation. For example, GRU officer Yuriy Leonov was expelled from the United States in August 1983 after a two-year double agent operation involving Armand Weiss, a technical editor and government consultant. Weiss publicized his own role in the case after the expulsion.³¹ KGB officer Gennadiy Zakharov was expelled from the United States in August 1986 after receiving "three classified documents from an undercover informant."³² Those cases often involved targeting military-related or science and technological information. Others were not as clear but stated more vaguely that the official was expelled after "trying to obtain" defense or classified information.

When a recruited agent was arrested or when the Soviet officer was caught publicly, the expelling country often publicized the specifics of the espionage. Arrests in these cases were timed to catch the handler in the act of meeting the source to support a prosecution and to gain the most public visibility possible. The first such cases appeared in the 1950s, when espionage-related public expulsions of nearly 100 Soviet officials occurred in 25 different

countries during the decade. The United States led the pack by far with 27 expulsions. Justifications for expulsions were mixed, but military-related espionage was the most common. Several prominent espionage cases in the 1950s prompted expulsions, including the arrests of Judith Coplin in 1950, Kurt Verber and Otto Ponger in 1953, and Jack Soble in 1957 in the United States. Three separate espionage cases in Sweden led to expulsions in the 1950s: Ernst Hilding Andersson in 1951, radar expert Anatole Ericson in 1956, and Bedros Zartaryan in 1957, each related to military information. Iran expelled GRU officer Anatoliy Kuznetsov in March 1956 for recruiting an Iranian air force warrant officer who was tasked with providing intelligence on Iranian military logistics and fuel supplies. The 1950s also saw the first expulsions of Soviet officials from the United Nations in New York, usually for military-related espionage.

Military personnel were often the targets of Soviet operations targeting sensitive military plans, equipment, or technology. The Italian government expelled two Soviet officials in 1970 a week after arresting an Italian noncommissioned officer for espionage. Indian police expelled a Soviet military attaché in February 1984 after catching him meeting with a junior Defence Ministry officer. In 1986, the French government expelled four GRU officers after the arrest of a French Air Force officer who was tasked with tracking French naval and nuclear submarine movements at strategic ports near Brest. Other major espionage cases that resulted in expulsions were the Ivan Rogalsky case in 1977 in the United States involving National Aeronautics and Space Administration information; multiple cases in 1983 and 1984 in Belgium, in which Soviet officers tried to acquire NATO and Belgian government information; and the 1985 arrest in India of nineteen Indian officials in multiple government ministries who provided military and economic information to Soviet handlers. The Norwegian government expelled nine Soviet officials after a multiyear investigation that culminated in the January 1984 arrest of Arne Treholt, who had provided the KGB with Norwegian defense information.

Espionage-related expulsions were most common in NATO and technologically advanced countries, reflecting the information available to steal, the military threat those countries posed to the Soviet Union, and the more hostile counterintelligence environment for Soviet officers. The United States led the way in espionage-related expulsions. In the 44 years from 1946 to 1989, there were only eight years in which the United States did not expel at least one Soviet official. Most years the United States expelled five or fewer; Operation "Famish" in 1986 was the lone exception of a U.S. mass expulsion. Beginning in 1976, France also began to take more public action against Soviet espionage. The Farewell Dossier expulsions in 1983 were the most extreme example, but every year from 1976 to 1987 saw at least one

Soviet expulsion from France. Western European countries, such as Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, and West Germany employed expulsions frequently to remove Soviet intelligence officers caught conducting espionage.

In addition to military-related espionage, some Soviet officials also were expelled for counterintelligence-related operations, such as attempting to penetrate a counterintelligence service or pursuing Soviet defectors abroad. For the KGB, persuading a Soviet defector to return home was a counterintelligence mission, and several officers were expelled for approaching defectors, especially in the 1950s. For example, the U.S. government expelled two KGB officers in 1956 for trying to coerce members of the crew of the Soviet merchant ship *Tuapse*, who had defected in Taiwan in 1954, to return to the Soviet Union. The next year, the U.S. government expelled KGB officer Gennadiy Mashkantsev for trying to coerce defector Soviet Air Force pilot Petr Pirogov to return. In 1956, Petr Kashtanov, a former Soviet officer who emigrated to the United States after World War II (WWII), reported having been approached by officials based at the Soviet mission to the United Nations. Kashtanov testified in a congressional hearing that the officials knew who he was even though he was using a pseudonym. They told him that the United States would lose the battle against communism in the end, so the sooner Soviet emigres returned home, the better off they would be. The Soviet UN officials were expelled soon after their approach to Kashtanov.³³ One other expulsion in 1956 even allegedly involved a Soviet officer forcing the repatriation of a Soviet citizen whose child had been born in the United States.³⁴

Soviet officers were caught trying to penetrate foreign counterintelligence services as well. The first post-WWII Soviet officer expelled from the United States, Valentin Gubichev, was arrested receiving documents from Judith Coplin, a Department of Justice employee who provided information about U.S. counterintelligence investigations of Soviet individuals. In 1971, the Ghanaian government expelled Gennadiy Potemkin after he was caught with police special branch documents in his possession. Most prominently, in February 1978, the Canadian government expelled or barred the reentry of thirteen officers who had tried to penetrate the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Although not as common as military targets, counterintelligence targeting was not unusual among Soviet expulsions.

Russian espionage slipped from countries' priorities after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which, along with efforts to encourage democratization and reform in Russia, led to fewer espionage cases in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, it did not disappear altogether, with Russia running prominent cases like Aldrich Ames and Harold Nicholson after 1991. The first post-Soviet mass expulsion occurred in 2001, when the United States

expelled 50 Russian officials after the arrest of Robert Hanssen.³⁵ However, that was an exception for most of the post–Cold War era. Isolated expulsions occurred in the first decade of the 2000s. After Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, the practice returned in greater force, with Russia’s own actions making states less hesitant to accuse Russian officials of espionage, sabotage, and assassination operations. Between 2014 and 2018, multiple countries, mostly in Europe and North America, expelled Russian officials, climaxing in 2018, when 30 countries expelled nearly 150 Russians in retaliation for the attempted assassination of Sergey Skripal in the United Kingdom.

The 2018 Skripal case was an unusual event in the history of diplomatic expulsions. The Russian activity that precipitated the expulsions occurred on the soil of one country, but nearly 30 other countries expelled Russian officials in sympathy. A sympathetic expulsion had occurred only once during the Cold War after the Farewell case in France (see above) and has occurred only a few times since. It occurred again in 2021, after the Czech government reduced the size of the Russian embassy in Prague to parity with its embassy in Moscow in retaliation for the 2014 sabotage of weapons warehouses in Czechia. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania soon announced expulsions in solidarity with Prague.³⁶ The largest sympathetic expulsion in history occurred within six weeks after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, when nearly 500 Russian officials were expelled from 29 countries, mostly in Europe; over 200 additional expulsions occurred over the following year. Never during the Cold War did such an intense reaction come from an event involving a single country, which, like the Skripal assassination attempt, demonstrated a level of diplomatic unity not seen previously.

EFFECTS OF EXPULSIONS

Expulsions of Soviet officers could accomplish two simultaneous operational goals: reduce the Soviet espionage threat and provide propaganda opportunities. Those benefits came with costs, especially related to Soviet reciprocal actions that reduced the expelling country’s intelligence access to the Soviet Union, and the replacement of known Soviet intelligence officers with unknown ones.

Reduce the Soviet Threat

The expulsion of intelligence officers temporarily lowered the Soviet intelligence threat by reducing the opportunity factor of the threat equation—threat = intent × capability × opportunity.³⁷ When a Soviet officer was expelled, the Soviet service’s access to the target eroded, restricting Soviet intelligence reach. The other two factors of the threat equation did not

change as much: expulsions did not affect Soviet intent to conduct intelligence or covert operations; that was driven by Soviet ideological rivalry. Overall, Soviet intelligence capabilities did not necessarily change, unless an inexperienced officer replaced a more seasoned one. Expulsions did, however, limit opportunities for Soviet services to contact recruited sources or to operate embassy-based SIGINT platforms. Expulsions shrank the number of Soviet officers, temporarily reducing the opportunity factor.

That threat reduction was mitigated by the fact that when a known officer left, a Soviet service replaced him with another officer. Expulsions may have delayed Soviet intelligence services' activities, but they did not stop dispatching officers abroad. Over the months and years following an expulsion, Soviet services found new officers or new cover positions in which to place them. It then took time and counterintelligence resources to identify the new officers. Expulsions, especially en masse, set the expelling country's counterintelligence back to the starting point in identifying who among the Soviet embassy staff was an intelligence officer.

Over time, the threat returned. For example, the 1983 Farewell Dossier expulsions resulted in severe damage to the KGB's science and technology collection in industrialized countries, causing "the collapse of Line X (science and technology collection) operations in Europe."³⁸ In relation to collection of intelligence on high-performance computers, the expulsions caused "the collapse of a crucial program just at the time the Soviet military needed it," according to Weiss.³⁹ However, in 1991, two other KGB science and technology collection officers defected in European countries—Sergey Illarionov in Italy and Vladimir Konoplev in Belgium—revealing that the KGB had replaced expelled officers and reconstituted the collection effort. Konoplev's defection led to the first post-Soviet expulsions for espionage in April 1992, including officers who had handled an asset who had been recruited as early as 1967.⁴⁰ Although the Farewell Dossier expulsions had a significant effect, the effect was temporary, because the Soviet Union's need to collect science and technology intelligence and to handle assets did not end. Kalugin further claimed that KGB officers expelled from Western countries received assignments in East Berlin, which gave them opportunities to travel to West Germany, partially mitigating the lost access.⁴¹

Additionally, the Soviet government almost invariably reciprocated by ordering an equal number of expulsions from Moscow, so the expelling country paid for the action by losing access in the Soviet Union. The Department of State stated in its 1984 assessment of reciprocity with Soviet diplomatic representations, that since the 1950s,

most U.S. PNG [*persona non grata*] actions have been based on evidence of espionage—in contrast to Soviet PNG actions against our diplomatic personnel, which have often been retaliatory in nature. The

Soviets have proven less likely to retaliate when the U.S. PNG action has been based on hard evidence and when the case is not publicized.⁴²

Countries that posted intelligence officers to the Soviet Union were forced to weigh the prospect of reciprocity when deciding to expel officers, and then whether to do so publicly or quietly, which was undoubtedly a major reason why the Soviet government persisted with that policy. Expulsions thus required extensive coordination between intelligence, counterintelligence, diplomatic, and political equities, because one or more of those equities was likely to lose access in Moscow. After initial Operation “Famish” expulsions in September 1986, the Department of State and CIA reportedly had misgivings about the risk that the United States could lose more than it gained in continuing tit-for-tat expulsions.⁴³ One U.S. intelligence commentator even stated that the expulsions produced “no net long-term gain to U.S. security.”⁴⁴ U.S. President Ronald Reagan decided to proceed anyway, mostly for political reasons.

In other cases, governments chose the opposite course of action specifically to avoid losing their visibility on the existing Soviet intelligence presence or their access in Moscow. When Great Britain expelled 25 officers after Gordievskiy’s defection in 1985, the Danish government faced a similar choice. Gordievskiy had operated under diplomatic cover in Copenhagen in the 1960s and 1970s, and his cooperation with MI6 and Danish intelligence began during his second posting in Denmark.⁴⁵ When Gordievskiy defected, the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) recommended that Denmark expel eleven KGB officers from Copenhagen. The Danish government had expelled Soviet officers several times before, including as recently as 1984, although never en masse. However, this time the government decided to allow them to stay. According to Danish Minister of Justice Erik Ninn-Hansen, it was wiser to maintain the known presence but to employ counterintelligence operations to monitor and obstruct their operations.⁴⁶

The same dynamic continued past the end of the Cold War, especially after mass expulsions following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. In July 2022, MI6 chief Richard Moore assessed publicly that expulsions of over 400 diplomatically covered Russian intelligence officers had “reduced [Russia’s] ability to do their business to spy for Russia in Europe by half.”⁴⁷ However, some states have weighed the value of expelling or not, and if so, to publicize or not. In February 2023, Australia announced that it had detected and disrupted a major spy network and expelled an unspecified number of Russian diplomatic personnel over the previous six months, providing few details.⁴⁸ The United Kingdom, which has held a strong line against Russia’s invasion, has not publicly expelled any Russian officials, possibly both to monitor known officers in the United Kingdom and to protect British

intelligence operations inside Russia. Russia's practice of reciprocating for diplomatic expulsions has continued unchanged since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, forcing countries to make the same choices that they faced during the Cold War.

Propaganda Benefit

Part of the decision to proceed with expulsions was likely due to the recognition that, parallel with reducing the intelligence threat, expulsions also provided propaganda benefit for the expelling country and for the anticommunist West in general. Western countries, especially the United States, faced relentless Soviet propaganda that accused them of spying on the Soviet Union. One method that Western countries could use to counter those allegations was to expose Soviet intelligence officers caught conducting espionage operations and publicize the reasons for their expulsions. The more specificity in the announcement, the more ammunition Western states had to drive the propaganda message.

Up to the early 1980s, the Department of State and FBI frequently issued press releases naming Soviet officers expelled around the world and identifying their espionage and covert activities. Those statements made the threat of Soviet intelligence frontpage news, but brief press coverage quickly faded from view. In May 1960, less than three weeks after a U.S. U-2 surveillance aircraft was shot down over the Soviet Union, the U.S. House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee tasked the Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress to compile an inventory of Soviet espionage cases worldwide. The list included 65 cases, beginning with the Gouzenko case in Canada, and included 21 expulsions of Soviet officials up to 1960. U.S. Senator Karl Mundt had the list read into the Congressional Record on 18 May 1960. The shootdown of a U.S. U-2 surveillance aircraft in Soviet airspace had elicited sharp accusations from Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev against the United States for conducting illegal intelligence activities. To counteract those allegations, Mundt stated, referring to an international meeting in Paris, which U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower and Khrushchev were scheduled to attend, but which collapsed after the U-2 incident, "This week in Paris, Mr. Khrushchev engaged in a global blasphemy by raising his right hand and swearing before the God in whom he does not believe that his hands were clean from the standpoint of international espionage."⁴⁹

The U.S. Intelligence Community created the Active Measures Working Group in 1981 to counter Soviet propaganda and disinformation operations. Less than a year later, in February 1982, the Working Group published the first Department of State "foreign affairs note" that detailed Soviet expulsions and identified Soviet officers' names. These notes, which were

produced annually until 1988, became regular public reminders that the Soviet Union was under diplomatic pressure globally for its intelligence and covert operations.⁵⁰

Part of the motivation behind these annual notes was likely the works of disaffected former CIA officer Philip Agee, who exposed over 2,000 CIA officers in his two volumes, *Dirty Work: The CIA in Western Europe* and *Dirty Work: The CIA in Africa* in 1978 and 1980.⁵¹ The KGB fed many of the names to Agee, who unabashedly exposed CIA officers and accused them of assassinations, bribery, and coup plotting, some real and some fabricated. The difference between Agee's publications and the U.S. response was that the United States published "foreign affairs notes" overtly as government documents, taking advantage of the Department of State's authoritative voice. Soviet support to Agee, on the other hand, was covert and even Agee was sometimes unaware of the KGB hand behind the data he published.⁵² However, the KGB covert supply of information to Agee may have been retaliation for previous U.S. covert leaks, especially after John Barron's publication of a list of nearly 1,600 Soviet officers, along with their career histories, in 1974.⁵³

The first edition of the Department of State's foreign affairs notes, titled "Expulsion of Soviet Representatives from Foreign Countries, 1970–81," covered the previous decade (Figure 2). Successive annual reports were published in January each year until 1988 and covered the previous year, while maintaining a running alphabetical annex of all the names published to date. The note published in 1987 provided both a list of expulsions for the previous year and a review of expulsions since 1970. By 1988, the alphabetic annex included 367 names (including several misspelled duplicates), over 100 of which had never appeared in any of the previous annual notes, suggesting that the annex included declassified material that had not appeared elsewhere in public.

The foreign affairs notes were far from comprehensive. Another list, published by journalist John Barron in his 1983 book *KGB Today: The Hidden Hand*, contained the names of 197 Soviet officers who had been expelled or withdrawn between 1974 and 1983, 44 of which had never appeared in a Department of State note. Barron's 1983 list, which was read into the Congressional Record on 18 June 1987, also included full patronymics for most officers, which seldom appeared in the foreign affairs notes.⁵⁴ The Department of State notes also contained many mis-transliterations of Soviet officers' names, which Barron corrected in most cases. Barron apparently had other sources besides foreign affairs notes.

Department of State notes and other public revelations served both to counter Soviet propaganda and to inform other countries of the names of Soviet intelligence officers. Some countries shared the identities of Soviet officers through intelligence liaison relationships even if an expulsion action was taken

Foreign Affairs Note



United States Department of State
Washington, D.C.

**Expulsion of Soviet Representatives
from Foreign Countries, 1970-81**

February 1982

Expulsion of Soviet representatives from foreign countries has occurred regularly since the days of Lenin, explicable in large part by Moscovls way of dealing with other states. According to available information, 27 Soviet officials were expelled worldwide in 1981, including one charged by Danish authorities with passing money to local peace and antinuclear groups and others from Malaysia, Egypt, and the United Kingdom. In 1980, by comparison, some 116 Soviet officials were expelled from Spain, Canada, New Zealand, and at least six other countries, 100 of them from Pakistan when the government there undertook to reduce the Soviet presence.

While the majority of Soviets expelled from foreign countries are usually charged with espionage (the surreptitious or clandestine acquisition of secret information), an increasing number have been sent away in recent years because of involvement in "active measures" (covert and sometimes overt influence operations intended to affect third nations' policies). Espionage may be of a political, military, or industrial

nature; it may also include the attempted penetration of foreign intelligence and security services. "Active measures" operations, on the other hand, have been found to include the funding of labor and student unrest; agitation against an established government; clandestine contact with and support of indigenous dissidents and/or separatist groups; propaganda, deception, and disinformation activities; and political influence operations.

This report provides a listing of those expelled in 1980-81 as well as a sampling of the major expulsion cases from the 1970-79 period. The most notable of that decade included the 105 Soviet intelligence operatives from the United Kingdom and 9 from Belgium in 1971, 60 from Bolivia in 1972, 5 from China in 1974, and 11 from Canada in 1978. However, since many countries prefer to avoid publicity in such cases, the total number of *persona non grata* actions, forced terminations of assignments, and deportations of Soviet officials is believed to be substantially higher than the lists indicate.

Figure 2. First "foreign affairs note" listing expulsions worldwide, U.S. Department of State.

without publicity. The CIA declassified in 1999 a document dated mid-1959 that listed Soviet officials exposed publicly over the preceding decades, including some who had been declared *persona non grata*. The list was translated into French, presumably for sharing with Francophone liaison partners.⁵⁵

The foreign affairs notes gave public notice of the expulsions, not just for a U.S. audience, but also as an overt intelligence sharing method, which served simultaneously as threat reduction and propaganda. However, sharing was not universal. At least seventeen Soviet officers reappeared in a new country after having been expelled elsewhere, either because the latter country had not received information about the previous expulsion or had chosen to disregard it. For example, Gennadiy Potemkin was expelled from Congo in 1963 and then again from Ghana in 1971. Yevgeniy Fedorovich Ivanov was expelled

from France in 1976, and then from Portugal in 1978. Yuriy Churyanov, one of the 47 Soviet officials expelled from France in 1983, was expelled from Zaire in 1987. Dmitriy Dyakonov was expelled three times: from Argentina in 1959, Brazil in 1963, and Mexico in 1971. A British newspaper report in 1979 listed an individual named Nikolay Vasilyev who had also reportedly been expelled three times, from France in 1939, Sweden in 1946, and Ghana in 1966.⁵⁶

At least one post–Cold War instance of an expelled officer reappearing in another country was reported in 2017, when an individual using the name Eduard Shirokov was named in Montenegro in connection with an attempted coup. Polish officials recognized Shirokov as a former Russian military attaché who used the name Eduard Shishmakov, who was among four Russians expelled from Poland in 2014 for conspiring to recruit Polish government officials.⁵⁷ In this case, Shishmakov/Shirokov's latter mission was not under diplomatic cover, and he disappeared from Montenegro without being arrested. Russian officers from among the over 700 expelled from European countries in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine could also appear elsewhere in the world, most likely in non-European countries. If this has occurred, it has not become public. However, an increase in nonpublic international counterintelligence information sharing since the Russian invasion may make it more difficult.

CONCLUSION

The over 1,500 public expulsions of Soviet officials between 1946 and 1991 were a Cold War tool to weaken the Soviet intelligence threat and publicize its hypocrisy about espionage. Soviet intelligence services operated aggressively throughout the Cold War but were not invulnerable. Hundreds of Soviet officers were caught meeting with agents—bona fide and double—clearing dead drops, or communicating in other ways. They also suffered from defections from among their own. That allowed the expelling country to impair Soviet operations by publicly expelling officers and countering Soviet propaganda. Expulsions tapered off toward the end of the 1980s, with only Great Britain, Norway, and the United States taking public action after 1988, and no public expulsions reported in 1990 at all, the only year since 1946 in which there were no announced expulsions.

Expulsions of Russian officials have continued since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, although more sporadically, with the first mass expulsion occurring in 2001 after the arrest and conviction of Robert Hanssen in the United States.⁵⁸ The return of that method in force since 2014 shows both commonalities and differences from the Cold War era. Countries' retaliation for Russian espionage and covert operations have continued to yield expulsions to reduce Russian intelligence reach, while simultaneously propagandizing Russia's aggressive operations. However, the Cold War phenomenon of anti-

Soviet coups has disappeared. Additionally, although defections of Russian officers still occur—over 40 Russian intelligence and state security officers have defected publicly since 1992, with others likely not publicized—defections have not resulted in mass expulsions since the Cold War.

Another difference lies in execution. During the Cold War, the majority of expulsions were done by a single country based on a specific Soviet action within that country. Collective and collaborative expulsions were rare, with the 1983 expulsions following Vladimir Vetrov's Farewell Dossier being an exception. Since 2018, there have been three collective expulsion actions, two of which were en masse—following the 2018 Russian assassination attempt on Sergey Skripal in the United Kingdom and since early 2022 to protest Russia's actions in Ukraine. The number does not count the complete closure of all Russian government establishments in Ukraine, which had been reduced to small staffs over the preceding years anyway. Although at least 79 countries publicly expelled Soviet officials over the whole course of the Cold War, the extent of sympathetic diplomatic actions and the numbers of officials expelled in 2022 far exceeded any one-year period during the Cold War.

Both during and after the Cold War, expulsions have been a reaction to Soviet/Russian aggressive actions, most often espionage and covert activity, through which Russia has brought diplomatic expulsions on itself. But Russia has never given up, using reciprocal expulsions to punish other states and gradually replacing expelled officers back to previous levels. Although expulsions have resulted in a short-term reduction of the threat from Russian intelligence services, the propaganda effect has caused even greater pressure on the Soviet Union and Russia because of its ability to expose Soviet/Russian aggressiveness and hypocrisy in the international environment.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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- ⁵⁷ Alistair Bunkall, “Russia ‘Linked’ to Election-Day Coup Plot in Montenegro,” *SkyNews*, 21 February 2017, <https://news.sky.com/story/russia-linked-to-election-day-coup-plot-in-montenegro-10775786>; Dusica Tomovic and Natalia Zaba, “Montenegro Coup Suspect ‘Was Russian Spy in Poland,’” *Balkan Insight*, 21 February 2017, <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/02/21/montenegro-coup-suspect-was-russian-spy-in-poland-02-21-2017/>
- ⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Expulsion of Russian Intelligence Officers,” Press Statement, 22 March 2001, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2001/1570.htm>; “Expulsions Delayed by Hanssen Probe,” *UPI*, 22 March 2001, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/2001/03/22/Expulsions-delayed-by-Hanssen-probe/9858985237200/>

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