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Soviets still employed at embassy in Moscow

By Bill Gertz
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The U.S. Embassy in Moscow continues to employ a small number of Soviet nationals even though two Marines are charged with spying after allegedly being seduced by female Soviet agents working there, according to the State Department's security chief.

Robert E. Lamb, chief of diplomatic security, said in an interview that as a security precaution none of the Soviet employees is permitted inside the Moscow chancery building.

The spy case involving two Marine security guards, Sgt. Clayton J. Lonetree and Cpl. Arnold Bracy, has rekindled a debate between the State Department and national security officials concerned about the role played by Soviet employees in intelligence operations against American personnel.

One administration official, who declined to be named, said the recent Moscow security breach provided security officials with "smoking gun" evidence of well-organized Soviet counterintelligence operations.

The official said both Marines allowed Soviet agents inside secret areas of the embassy in what has been called one of the most serious security breakdowns in U.S. history. A third embassy Marine is being held on suspicion of violating rules prohibiting socializing with Soviet women.

One Senate Republican familiar with the case said the Soviets sprang a "classic honey trap" using female embassy workers to seduce the Marine guards, noting that "they've been doing these kinds of things for decades."

According to intelligence officials, Sgt. Lonetree carried on a personal relationship with Violetta Seina, an embassy translator employed by the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Administration for Services to the Diplomatic Corps. Officials identified Ms. Seina as an "access agent" who was co-opted by the KGB for espionage.

Mr. Lamb said U.S. security officials assume that all Soviet employees at the U.S. Embassy compound are either KGB agents or are subject to KGB direction.

"It would be naive for us not to think that way," he said.

Last fall, in retaliation for the expulsion from the United States of 80 suspected Soviet spies, the Soviet government forced 260 Soviet nationals working at the U.S. Embassy to quit their jobs.

However, Mr. Lamb said earlier this week, "We still have some 'third-country' nationals and we continue to have some Soviet employ-

ees in the embassy compound, but they do not work in the embassy building." He did not elaborate on the number of Soviet employees or what jobs they perform.

Soviet employees have been moved outside embassy buildings in order to "reduce the possibility of some of them serving as access agents or 'swallows,'" Mr. Lamb said.

"Swallows" are KGB agents specially trained to seduce foreigners for intelligence operations.

State Department officials said nine unidentified third-country nationals work in the embassy as maids, cooks, a clerk and a cashier.

While it is generally assumed all Soviet employees left the embassy when the Kremlin ordered the withdrawal of 260 Soviet nationals in October, an administration official said the few remaining Soviet employees were "contract workers" involved in menial jobs such as garbage removal.

Rep. Jim Courter, New Jersey Republican, said he plans to propose legislation that would tighten State Department rules prohibiting the use of Soviet nationals not only in Moscow but at other U.S. diplomatic facilities in Warsaw Pact countries.

"I am basically drawing the line so that no Soviet personnel have access to our grounds or our building," Mr. Courter said in an interview. "I intend to make sure that, in fact, Soviet nationals are eliminated."

Intelligence sources said the Soviet workers and third-country nationals employed by the embassy pose a security risk because of pervasive KGB control over their actions. One source said a Chilean employee at the U.S. Embassy, named "Pablo," was married to a Soviet woman and may be an informant for the Soviet government.

Meanwhile, Navy Secretary John Lehman yesterday defended the Marine Corps, which is part of the Navy, citing its 40-year record of service guarding U.S. embassies abroad.

In remarks before the National Press Club, Mr. Lehman said that the Moscow embassy case "is the first instance where there has been a clear compromise of their integrity."

Marine Corps and State Department security officials are expected to answer questions about the Moscow Marine guards today before the House Armed Services subcommittee on military personnel and compensation, whose chairman is Rep. Les Aspin, Wisconsin Democrat.



Violetta Seina