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SUBJECT Significance of Recent U.S. Espionage Cases

BRYANT GUMBEL: On After Eight this morning, embassy security. In Moscow it's been compromised. You know that. The question is, just how much?

As we've been reporting, President Reagan now says the new American Embassy in Moscow is apparently so riddled with listening devices that we won't move in until its fixed.

The problem, of course, recently came to light when several Marine guards were relieved of duty after allowing Soviets to move freely in some of the most sensitive parts of the building. Two of the guards, Sergeant Clayton Lonetree and Corporal Arnold Bracy, are accused of having allowed the Soviets near-total access to the embassy, sometimes for hours at a time. In all, half of the 28 Marines assigned to the Moscow Embassy are undergoing polygraph tests and will be reassigned.

In our Washington newsroom this morning is Dr. Jeffrey Richelson. He is a member of the faculty of American University and the author of several books on intelligence.

Is it true that you think this problem's been blown out of proportion?

DR. JEFFREY RICHELSON: Well, I think, in general, the espionage cases that have occurred, the damage has not been as great as projected in the media and by prosecutors.

GUMBEL: And by that, I assume you mean the Pollard spy case, the Walker spy ring, that these things have each been called what, the greatest spy...

DR. RICHELSON: Each one, in succession, has been termed the greatest damage to the country in many years.

GUMBEL: But how bad was this one?

DR. RICHELSON: Well, if we're talking about the embassy, certainly it's highly disruptive of the functioning of the embassy. It may have compromised some intelligence operations, which is certainly damaging, to a certain extent. But the thing that has to be kept in mind is how much is any of this going to really change significantly U.S. relations with the Soviet Union or history. And often it turns out to be the case that these events, in the long run, in the long run of history, sort of wash out.

GUMBEL: Let me get a different perspective here in New York, where joining us is George Carver, who was with the CIA for 26 years. He's now a Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown.

How do you assess the damage?

GEORGE CARVER: Well, I assess it somewhat more seriously than Dr. Richelson. I agree that you can't say that every one is the worst. But I think the damage has been very major indeed. I think our entire Moscow Embassy operation has been compromised. I think the Soviets know whom we're seeing in the Soviet Union, what we're thinking. I think they knew what President Reagan's fall-back positions at Reykjavik were supposed to be. And if you're trying to enter into a negotiation, Bryant, where the other fellow knows all the cards that you have and how you plan to play them, your chances of coming out ahead of the game are very slim indeed.

GUMBEL: How much, gentlemen, do we fault the Soviets in all of this? I mean I'm not saying what they did was ethical. But I'm wondering, in the land of intelligence and counterintelligence, just how unethical was this? Is this something that everybody does?

DR. RICHELSON: Yes.

CARVER: Well, the Soviets are behaving like Soviets. They do it more extensively and more thoroughly than almost anyone else. And, sure, we try to keep track of who goes in the Soviet Embassy in Washington, and other things like that. But if we ever were to engage in the kind of wholesale espionage against the foreign diplomatic establishment in Washington, you in NBC, your colleagues in the media, Congress and the press would be all over the U.S. Government, and clawing and screaming and calling for heads

And so we do not do it anything like as extensively as they do because we play by different rules.

GUMBEL: Dr. Richelson?

DR. RICHELSON: I'd have to disagree. The history says that the United States has all over the world targeted Soviet embassies, for a variety of reasons: the collection of intelligence, monitoring what the Soviets are doing in a particular country. And former CIA employees have written extensively about tapping phone lines, trying to plant bugs in foreign embassies, Soviet embassies, monitoring the personnel, trying to set up personnel with women, and so forth.

So, it's hardly something that is only done on one side.

GUMBEL: What about the President's now-concern for occupying the new building? Do you think it well-founded?

CARVER: I think it's extremely well-founded, because allowing the Soviets to construct the building outside of our observation, allowing a Soviet architect to help plan it, and then disappear in the Soviet Union, means that it's likely to be so riddled with listening devices actually build into the fabric of the building, that I think we'll probably never be able to clean them out.

I was glad to see the President say what he did, Bryant. But I hope he hasn't climbed out on yet another limb off of which he's going to back. He said we'd never swap anyone for Daniloff, and we did. He said we'd never negotiate with terrorists, and we did. And now he's saying that we're not going to move into the new embassy until he can be assured it's secure, and that may be a very long time.

GUMBEL: We have about a minute and a half left.

Dr. Richelson, look ahead for me a little bit, if you might. How do we avoid this kind of thing in the future?

DR. RICHELSON: Well, I think we have to be more realistic in terms of building embassies, particularly in the Soviet Union; and also in terms of manning those embassies. It simply has to be done with people that we can be sure are not going to be on the KGB payroll.

GUMBEL: What's that mean? I mean how can we be sure? Supposedly, Corporal Bracy was a Marine's Marine.

DR. RICHELSON: Well, we can't be absolutely sure, but we can certainly minimize it by trying to have as many Americans

there working at the embassy as we can. If we have 200 or so Russians working at the embassy, it's certainly going to be the case that a fair proportion of them will either be KGB employees or co-opted by the KGB.

GUMBEL: But if you have Americans working in some of the jobs that are considered the more menial jobs, aren't they very vulnerable, then, to money as a motivation?

CARVER: Well, they're less vulnerable than Russians who are already under the KGB control. And I think Dr. Richelson is absolutely right. It's very nice to have friendly English-speaking Soviets get your Bolshoi tickets, clear your household effects, do customs, do all these other good things. But if they're running around working for the KGB, cleaning out your IN box in the process, that way lies madness.

And unfortunately, Bryant, our bureaucracy, our State Department, and even my good friends in the Foreign Service have always fought against taking effective security measures. They're inconvenient, they're intrusive, but they're necessary if you're dealing with a closed society like the Soviet Union.

GUMBEL: Would you say our attitude towards security at our embassies has been, what, nonchalant in the past?

CARVER: It's been almost nonexistent. This bothered me when I was a CIA officer. It bothered me when I was on Reagan's transition team in 1980. And basically, I've had friends in the Foreign Service tell me that worrying about security is McCarthyite paranoia. And so long as you have that set of mind, you're going to have problems such as we have today.

GUMBEL: George Carver, Dr. Jeffrey Richelson, thank you both, gentlemen, very much.