

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-13NEW YORK TIMES
6 April 1987J **ESSAY** | William Safire

Personal Defense Initiative

WASHINGTON

Every American visitor staying at a Moscow hotel comes back with the same story. You discover the bathroom has no soap. You say loudly angrily to nobody in particular, "What kind of backward country is this, no soap in the bathroom!" And a few moments later, as if by magic, the chambermaid taps at the door bearing a bar of soap.

The bugging of rooms, like the knowledge of English by drivers who profess to speak not a foreign word, is taken for granted by Americans in the Soviet Union.

At the 1972 summit, when the "clean room" in the U.S. Embassy was occupied by Henry Kissinger and his aides, a group of Nixon assistants were forced to hold a strategy session on public relations in a Moscow hotel room. Ron Ziegler turned the radio up loud. John Scali rattled his teacup in his saucer. Herb Klein, speaking in a whisper, kept banging his foot against the coffee table. I was supposed to be taking notes at that meeting but couldn't hear a thing.

Coming back from a Moscow trip, Treasury Secretary George Shultz took his seat in Air Force One, sighed deeply and remarked how good it was to be able to talk in a different kind of society, free of the fear of being overheard. (I recall thinking bitterly of that moment when the revelations came of the secret Nixon wiretapping and White House taping system.)

Now, 15 years later, Secretary of State Shultz will be going to Moscow more worried than ever about the security of communications. Our embassy was penetrated by Mata Hari's great-granddaughters, and tiny transmitters are suspected of infesting not only the usual chandeliers and

How to resist Soviet snooping.

saltshakers but the typewriters and computers.

U.S. diplomats there who used to scoff at demands by hard-liners that Soviet citizens be denied embassy access are now reduced to writing messages in longhand. Visitors are urged to bring a children's toy that enables you to write on a slate and make the message vanish by pulling up the plastic. Secretary Shultz will have to drive out to the airport to use his plane for secure communications home, unless he can bring a trailer along with an unpenetrated scrambler.

Even as this rape of our national privacy takes place, we are told that the new U.S. Embassy building is already compromised with eavesdropping devices. Senator Pat Leahy, who with Senator Pat Moynihan led the long fight to enhance embassy security, suggests we tear the whole thing down and start from scratch.

Why do we not complain, as we did when the Russians bombarded our embassy with radiation and dusted doorknobs with carcinogens?

The answer is simple: We try to eavesdrop on their communications everywhere. That takes some of the zing out of our moral indignation.

But the Russians are more careful than we are. Soviet construction men built their new embassy here; their nationals do all the menial

chores with no foreigners employed.

What can we do to make certain they are not stealing more from us than we are from them? Retaliation is an obvious answer: no opening of the new embassy here until we are sure of a secure embassy there.

The less obvious answer has to do with a new strategy of communications security. For a generation, our policy has been to stamp as top secret anything to do with eavesdropping countermeasures. The result has been a good offense and a lousy defense.

When I wrote here that the Russians were using Mount Alto to direct listening-lasers at the White House windows, and that the White House was attaching vibrators to the windows to counter this snooping, a caller suggested that I had breached security. That's nonsense; the Russians can hear our windows rattling, just as they could hear the Scali teacup and the Klein stamping foot.

It's about time our technical publications began speculating about reasons for weakness in the latest anti-bugging technology. Fear of our anti-espionage laws has not led to security but to suppression of the truth about our weakness.

Here we have a nonexistent defense because we have concentrated on offense. And here we have an Administration that in a related field has adopted a policy of a space shield, which has revolutionized the mad reliance on offense.

Where is the Personal Defense Initiative? Why have we neglected the field of resistance to snooping? Why can't we put an electronic shield around our embassies, and use that technology to let the Americans of the future protect themselves from unwanted intrusion from any quarter? □

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