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Moscow's Prying Eyes

The report was stamped SOVERSHENNO SEKRETNNO—the Soviet Union's equivalent of "Top Secret"—and each copy was numbered to limit distribution. The copy obtained by French counterespionage agents was copy No. 1, which meant it came from the office of the chief of Directorate T, the KGB division that specializes in scientific and technical espionage. As described by U.S. analysts, the documents detailed Soviet successes in stealing advanced technology from the United States and its allies—a systematic and widespread spying campaign that, according to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, now poses "a far more serious [national security] problem than we had previously realized."

Last week, amid continuing reports of a widening spy scandal in West Germany and a rip-roaring controversy over diplomatic espionage between Moscow and Great Britain, Weinberger went public with a new warning against the dangers of Soviet espionage against the United States. The Pentagon released a 34-page report by a special interagency task force that offered a chilling assessment of the Soviet drive to filch Western defense secrets. The Soviet documents were an uncited source of the U.S. report: overall, they outlined a carefully coordinated campaign to copy, buy or steal specific technological innovations at the request of Soviet defense agencies. The task force concluded the Kremlin spends up to \$1.4 billion annually on such espionage and it reported that the Soviets themselves estimated the technological haul at up to 10,000 pieces of equipment and 100,000 documents every year.

Spy Budget: Obtained by the French from an unnamed Soviet double agent in 1983, the documents included the annual reports of an obscure unit of the Soviet government, the Institute for Inter-Agency Information (VIMI). VIMI, according to U.S. experts, coordinates between intelligence agencies and the Soviet defense industry. When Soviet researchers want a key piece of equipment from the West, VIMI assigns the job to a spy agency like the KGB and establishes a budget for the task. During the late 1970s, for example, the Ministry of Aviation ordered the theft of electronic components used in American cruise missiles; the KGB got the job and was allocated 170,000 rubles to do it. In another case, the Ministry of the Electronics Industry wanted

Western equipment to test semiconductor memories—an espionage assignment budgeted at 4.5 million rubles.

The U.S. report did not reveal whether either of those espionage operations succeeded, but Pentagon officials said there was evidence of blatant Soviet copying of American research in other areas. The irony is that most of the technical reports obtained by Soviet agents in the West are readily available as unclassified documents—and the Pentagon's goal, said Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle, is "to sensitize the scientific and technical community to the fact that there is a very large and well-organized Soviet apparatus that has targeted scientists and engineers . . . for military purposes."

Unequal Numbers: Weinberger had another goal as well—to argue for curtailing the number of Soviet diplomatic personnel allowed in the United States. The State Department reports that 980 accredited Soviet personnel now live in this country, with the largest contingent at the United Nations. By comparison, the

United States has only 214 diplomats in the Soviet Union. Typically, 25 to 30 percent of a Soviet diplomatic mission's staff is KGB, says former CIA man George Carver, though others may help in espionage as well. The State Department opposes any such limit, but Weinberger has allies on Capitol Hill: Congress has approved an amendment by Sens. William Cohen and Patrick Leahy requiring State to come up with a plan to equalize the number of Russian diplomats in this country



Weinberger presents his evidence: KGB agents on high-tech missions

with the number of American diplomats in the Soviet Union.

Perle denied that the Pentagon's publicity offensive had been timed to cast a pall over Ronald Reagan's November summit meeting with Soviet party leader Mikhail Gorbachev—and indeed, it was hardly the only sign of strain between East and West. In Bonn, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's government was mortified when a secretary in Kohl's own office fled to East Germany with her husband, the latest event in a mushrooming spy scandal that began in early August. And in London, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government expelled 6 more Soviet citizens on suspicion of espionage, bringing to 31 the number of Soviet expellees since the defection of the KGB's London spymaster in July. Moscow, which had already expelled 25 Britons, expelled 6 more in reply—and Thatcher announced that the game of tit for tat had gone far enough.

TOM MORGANTHAU with JOHN BARRY, KIM WILLENSON and JOHN WALCOTT in Washington