



Just before April Fool's Day 1971 Ivan Aleksandrovich Kulikov the Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in London walked into the Kensington High Street branch of bookseller W.H. Smith and stole a £5 Mickey Mouse kaleidoscope. He was tackled as he made his shuffling escape and was lucky not to be charged. A seemingly idiotic act of larceny was followed by the expulsion of Soviet Embassy personnel in September.

A look through the kaleidoscope would have provided a guide to the future behavior of Russian diplomacy and espionage which could be described as erratic unless one were part of the state security apparatus soon to be shadow government. This extensive arrogance has its genesis in the post-Cold War successes of Soviet espionage that culminated in the overconfidence and excesses today by those at the control console.

The post-World War 2 Soviet atomic secrets super spy team, many honored by postage stamps, involved over fifty main frontline agents in several countries and ended in the arrest of Colonel Rudolf Ivanovich Abel in June 1957. The hubris of that achievement continued long after that benchmark event without equal success writ large the roll-up of ten exposed Russian illegals in 2010.

On 24 September 1971 the UK expelled 90 Soviet diplomatic and other representatives on espionage charges and barred the return of 15 others who were temporarily out of the country. The names of the 105 Soviet intelligence operatives had been provided one month earlier to British counterintelligence officers by KGB defector Oleg Adolfovich Lyalin who also supplied information on the planned infiltration into England of Soviet agents for the purpose of sabotage. Other documents provided by the defector detailed Soviet plans for infiltrating segments of the Royal Navy.

The Soviet expulsions did not stop there.

One hundred and nineteen Soviet diplomats working at the Soviet Embassy in La Paz, Bolivia were expelled on charges of financing leftist rebel movements, Communist and other local opposition groups on 30 March 1972.

Costa Rican authorities ordered 17 Soviet diplomats to leave the country on 11 November 1982. In addition, the visas of two Soviet couriers who routinely traveled between Costa Rica and Nicaragua were cancelled. The drastic cutback in the size of the Soviet mission left an ambassador and eight embassy functionaries in the country.

Forty-six Soviet personnel were expelled from France on 5 April 1983 for a systematic search on French territory for technological and scientific information particularly in the military area. A French Interior Ministry statement noted that the number of Soviet residents in France had increased by about 1,400 over a decade to 2,406 at the beginning of 1982. Of that group, about 700 were believed to hold official passports, an increase of about 500 over the 10 years. About one-third of the 700 were considered professional intelligence agents.

The French expulsion was believed to be related to the killing in February 1983 of French undercover counterintelligence agent Colonel Bernard Nut and the defection of KGB Major Vladimir Kuzichin.

The French action was part of the 1983 reaction of every NATO member with the exception of Portugal and Luxemburg in regard to Soviet spies who attempted to steal economic and technical information or attempted by various means to stop the deployment of nuclear missiles in Western Europe. Ninety Soviet officials were expelled in August 1983 compared to 47 in 1982 and 27 in 1981.

Eighteen Soviet diplomats were expelled for interference in the internal affairs of Iran on 7 May 1983. The Iranian government then closed the TASS bureau, nationalized Soviet banks and economic installations in Iran while Soviet diplomats were told to restrict their activities and not to leave their homes.

The United Kingdom expelled twenty-five Soviet personnel for espionage on 12 September

1985 after the defection the previous May of KGB London Resident double agent Oleg Antonovich Gordievsky.

In October 1986 twenty-five Soviet officials assigned to the United Nations departed the United States in line with a 7 March 1986 order that the U.S.S.R. reduce its level of representation at the United Nations.

In August 2017 the United States government ordered the closure of the Russian Federation Consulate in San Francisco as retaliation for a direction to reduce American diplomatic personnel in Russia by 755. The Russian action came after the imposition of sanctions for interference in the US presidential elections the previous year.

On 14 March 2018 the UK government expelled twenty-three Soviet officials as undeclared intelligence officers arising out of the military grade nerve gas called Novichok poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Boris Johnson had summoned the Russian Ambassador to give his government 36 hours to declare any missing stocks of Novichok.

Soviet era and later embassy personnel expulsions are not the only bellwether of diplomatic sleight of hand.

Even with the dispatch of so many lesser officers over the decades, the number of former and present Russian Ambassadors involved with espionage in the post-WW2 period has been staggering.

It began down under in Australia when Soviet Ambassador Nicolai Ivanovich Generalov was recalled on 4 April 1954 because of the Petrov spy scandal. There would not be another Ambassador for five years. This caused no dent in his career and he went on to be Ambassador to Libya in January 1956.

The next unplanned departure came from Soviet Ambassador Panteleimon Kondratyevich Ponomarenko who was expelled from the Netherlands in October 1961 for involvement in a

physical altercation at the airport involving the wife of defector Alexei Golub. Two other Soviet Embassy officials involved in the fight were compelled to leave. Ponomarenko went on to become the Soviet Representative of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna.

President Sekou Toure of the Guinea Republic or Guinea-Bissau expelled Soviet Ambassador Daniel Semyonovich Solod the following Christmas for meddling in their internal political situation. Even close friends of Russia found their meddling insufferable. Sergei Mikhailovich Kudryavtsev who was Soviet Ambassador in Cuba from 1960 was expelled in May 1962. He went on to become a Soviet representative in UNESCO.

The most recent expulsion of a sitting envoy was the Soviet Ambassador to Liberia Anatoliy Andreyevich Ulanov who was expelled in November 1983 before going on to the same appointment in Guyana. The expulsion history of present and recent Ambassadors remains in the double digits including such prominent diplomats as Aleksandr Alekseyevich Avdeyev expelled from France in April 1983 only to return as Ambassador in February 2002. He was also Ambassador to Luxembourg, Bulgaria and the Vatican.

Being declared personae non gratae did not hinder espionage activities.

The number of espionage incidents during the tenures of these Ambassadors range from fifty-three with US Ambassador Anatoliy Fedorovich Dobrynin to ten arising with Canada Ambassador Aleksandr Nikolayevich Yakovlev.

Cultural and scientific exchanges have also exposed the West to espionage as Soviet pretenders trawl institutions for opportunities to steal state secrets. Perhaps Vladimir Fedorovich Grenkov put it best during an August 1986 cultural exchange visit to the USA under President Reagan's U.S.-Soviet Exchange Initiative that: "As we say in Russian, these are three little birds; after these, we hope, will follow flocks".

Grenkov was among his compatriots expelled from France on 5 April 1983.

Source note: includes Associated Press, Diplomat Mouse-Trapped, 1 April 1971

Peter Polack is the author of Encyclopedia of Soviet Spymasters to be published by McFarland in 2021. The Encyclopedia is a compendium of Russian espionage activities with nearly five hundred Soviet spies expelled from nearly 100 countries worldwide.

Extracted from Soviet Spymasters: The UK Military Connection

On 6 December 1956 twenty-six years old RAF pilot Anthony Maynard Wraight went absent without leave and travelled to the Soviet Union via Berlin after contact with a Soviet Embassy London Sovexportfilm officer. He had flown to Berlin before taking a taxi to East Germany.

While in East Germany radio broadcasts critical of the UK and US government actions against extremists in Cyprus. not unlike the World War Two German broadcasts of Lord Haw Haw or William Joyce who ended up on the gallows, were attributed to him.

Wraight subsequently taught English at the Moscow National Film Institute but surrendered to US Embassy Moscow and returned to the United Kingdom 15 December 1959 after three years in the Soviet Union. It was initially reported that the Air Ministry would take no action.

Wraight pleaded guilty to passing military information on RAF aircraft and standing orders for the outbreak of war to the Soviet Union 31 March 1960 and sentenced to three years imprisonment.

The Soviet Ambassador in London at the time was Yakov Aleksandrovich Malik.