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# Spy vs. Spy

By Richard Lourie

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Like the poor, spies are always with us. Everybody does it: Enemies spy on each other, but so do allies. During the Cold War, the Soviets were, of course, the most active in spying on the U.S., but the Israelis were right behind them in second place.

Recently, several former and current Russian nationals were arrested in Houston on charges of illegally exporting $50 million worth of microchips and other advanced electronics for use in Russia's missile guidance systems, bomb triggers and police surveillance equipment. What matters more than the incident itself are the questions it raises about U.S.-Russian espionage — how, and in what strategic context, it should be conducted.

Stephen Morrier, the Houston FBI agent in charge of the case, referred to "countries hostile to the United States [that] seek to improve their defense capabilities and to modernize their weapons systems."

Hostile? Is this an echo of U.S. presidential hopeful Mitt Romney's antiquated characterization of Russia as the U.S.'s "No. 1 geopolitical foe," or is it a preview of coming

attractions?

President Vladimir Putin's campaign of repression; aggressive, although unsuccessful, espionage against the U.S.; and spoiler tactics to thwart U.S. initiatives on Syria could lead to the increased ostracism of Russia. A sustained paranoia can create real enemies.

U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta raised negative sentiments when he warned in a speech earlier this month of a "cyber-Pearl Harbor," while attending U.S. officials identified the nation's adversaries as China, Russia, Iran and militant groups.

Cybernetics and espionage make for a natural pair. They're both all about information. Both the spying and the combat of future wars will be conducted as much online as on the battlefield.

Information technology is the stone in the sling, the cheap weapon that can bring down a Goliath. Though it confers advantages on adversaries that don't have the funds to counter the U.S. with traditional or nuclear forces, it also confers advantages on the U.S. in its spying on Russia. This is because Russia is not as socially open as the U.S., making sleeper agents a la Anna Chapman much less possible. (Whether they're of any use is another question.) Russia also does not have desirable sensitive electronics for sale in its markets.

Yet for all the information increasingly available to us, the major events of the past several decades pretty much took everyone by surprise. The Iranian revolution of 1979 came as a shock. No one, neither on the U.S. or the Soviet side, foresaw the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. And even though there was actionable information in the system, 9/11 still seemed to come out of nowhere.

Futurology was more popular in the late 20th century when the 21st still shimmered in the distance. Now that we know that all we're getting is flat screens and fancy phones, it seems to have gone out of favor. Yet we need futurology now more than ever. Books like George Friedman's "The Next Hundred Years" or Andrei Amalrik's "Will The Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?" are models of bold and vigorously projected intellect.

Google and NASA cooperated in creating a futurology school, the Singularity University, in Silicon Valley. More of this is needed, but with an emphasis on the course of events rather than on technology. In the conflicts of tomorrow, decisive advantage will go to those who possess the best intelligence both in the sense of useful information and in the sense of acuity of mind. That's another reason for nations to invest in education: It wins wars.

Richard Lourie is the author of "The Autobiography of Joseph Stalin."

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