

# Spies and More Lies Add Confusion to the Ukraine Conflict

The secret war that is being fought in the shadows

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*As has frequently been the case in America's recent wars, in Ukraine a largely hidden clandestine conflict is paralleling the actual fighting on the ground. One should assume that a variety of western spies using various kinds of cover are operating at all levels as well as in adjacent areas in Poland and the Baltic states. The Russians certainly have their own informants inside the Ukrainian government itself and Kiev has proven itself capable of carrying out so-called covert actions in Moscow, to include the car bombing assassination of Darya Dugin on August 20<sup>th</sup>. At the same time, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Britain's MI-6 are known to be working assiduously to collect information that suggest vulnerabilities in the Russian offensive capabilities while also seeking to identify those potentially recruitable individuals who do not support President Vladimir Putin's intervention to liberate Donbas. The activities of spies and the agents that they direct should be considered a major part of the overall war effort by both sides.*

Recently there have been some interesting articles revealing what some of the spies and their political masters have been up to over the past six months. Bear in mind, however, that the business of spying is 50% dissimulation to conceal what is actually taking place, so what the various intelligence services have been revealing is more than likely to include at least some deliberate misdirection. One recalls how in February 1981 Bill Casey, the new CIA Director appointed by President Ronald Reagan, [famously quipped](#) "We'll know our Disinformation Program is complete when everything the American public believes is false."

If the quote is accurate, Casey would probably be delighted to see the massive propaganda effort carried out by the Joe Biden White House to initiate and sustain a proxy war against Russia that was completely avoidable and serves no national interest beyond testing how one can restart the Cold War complete with threats of nuclear annihilation. And one should observe that Casey might well have been delivering a subtler message within his apparently off-the-cuff comment. He might have been suggesting that no one should trust anything

coming out of the mouth of a high government official, particularly if that official is an intelligence officer.

With that in mind, it was interesting to read an account of some recent remarks delivered in London by the head of MI-5, Ken McCallum. McCallum is no fool and his comments clearly were intended on one level to reinforce the message that the British government is taking good care of national security. In other words, he intended to spin a narrative that would reassure a public that has become increasingly concerned over the course of the Ukraine war and the possible painful consequences derived from British direct involvement in it.

What McCallum is selling is a suggestion that the Ukraine war is actually good for national security because it has enabled the expulsion of hundreds of Russian intelligence officers all over Europe. [CNN's story](#) on MI-5's annual assessment of the state of Britain's security describes how the Kremlin's "...ability to spy in Europe has been dealt the 'most significant strategic blow' in recent history after coordinated expulsions of [Russian] diplomats since the invasion of Ukraine, with a hundred diplomatic visa requests refused in the UK alone in recent years."

McCallum stated that in this year alone 600 Russians officials had been expelled from Europe, 400 of whom were considered to be intelligence officers under cover. He expanded on the details in additional comments after his speech how "We've continued to work intensively to make the UK the hardest possible operating environment for Russian covert action. In the UK's case, since our removal for 23 Russian spies posing as diplomats, we have refused on national security grounds over 100 diplomatic visa applications ... the serious point is that the UK must be ready for Russian aggression for years to come."

What does it all mean? McCallum explained how there has been "a very, very large dent in [Russian intelligence capabilities] across Europe. Since counter-intelligence information is shared throughout NATO it's not easy for the Russians to cross post [one officer] expelled from country A to Country D... I hope what will continue to be true is that a very large volume of trained, experienced Russian intelligence talent, if I can use that term, will be of far less utility [in] the world for many years to come."

McCallum concluded his address with some obligatory comments on the threats coming from adversaries like Iran and China. The MI5 tale presumably warmed the hearts of each and every American neocon hoping for some good news for Hanukkah, but there is something big that is missing from the Russia story. That would be that mass expulsions of Russian diplomats and "spies" clearly began long before the Ukraine war was a twinkle in Volodymyr Zelensky's eye, so it would seem that MI-5 and NATO were planning something well in advance, which is certainly interesting. But more important, is the fact that expulsion of diplomats is reciprocal, meaning that what is being done to the Russians is served up in return by Moscow, which has also been expelling suspected foreign intelligence officers and refusing to accept the credentials of many individuals submitted to the Foreign Ministry as replacements. That means that reducing Russia's ability to spy through its diplomatic and trade missions also results in reducing your own capabilities.

I do not know if western intelligence has penetrated the Kremlin by recruiting one or more Russian officials within the inner circle of Vladimir Putin's government, but I would assume that to be the case. Spies at that level are routinely given secure electronic means of communicating with their American or British intelligence handlers, but every case officer

knows that the ability to meet personally, even fleetingly in Moscow, produces vastly more directed intelligence than exchanging texts electronically. The Russians are surely aware of that just as they more-or-less know who the diplomat-spies in their midst are. Kick them all out and what do you have left? Which is why the boasting by McCallum reflects something of a Pyrrhic victory at best.

There are other indications that western intelligence is seeking new sources of information, and it is being reported on by the Russians themselves. To be sure, [there have been numerous stories](#) in the western media regarding discontent among ordinary Russians over the war, to include suggestions that some senior Putin advisers and military officers have also become highly critical of developments. These stories, leaked from western governments hostile to Russia, may or may not be true, though domestic Russian opinion polls indicate that Putin's favorability rating continues to be over 70%.

Russia Today (RT), the state-owned media outlet, [reports that](#) the CIA is stepping up its efforts to recruit the presumably disgruntled Russians. Relying on [coverage](#) of a recent "CIA at 75" event held at George Mason University in Virginia, RT quotes the Agency's Deputy Director for Operations David Marlowe, who told a "select audience" that CIA officers abroad have recently been engaged in a major effort to exploit "fertile ground" to recruit Russian agents from "among disgruntled military officers, oligarchs who have seen their fortunes thinned by sanctions, and businesspeople and others [who have fled the country.](#)"

Marlowe elaborated how it works, saying "We're looking around the world for Russians who are as disgusted with [the conflict in Ukraine] as we are. Because we're open for business." Marlowe did not explain how dissident Russians who have fled the country will be able to provide useful intelligence information on decision making in the Kremlin, but perhaps he is being optimistic. Russia has in fact [denounced](#) several overt attempts to recruit its remaining diplomats and military attaches in Europe and the US using what are referred to as "cold pitches," where someone approaches a target on the street or in a social setting and offers money or other inducements in return for information. Russian reports indicate that American officers have been hanging around Russian Embassies passing out to those leaving or entering the building cards with phone numbers to contact the FBI and CIA. Inevitably, cold pitches very rarely work because even if the target were so inclined, he or she would have to consider the possibility that his or her own loyalty was being tested by the agency that he or she works for.

So, there is a certain inconsistency in McCallum and Marlowe, representing MI-5 and CIA respectively, claiming that they are winning the secret war against Russia by expelling their potential targets to make them go back home to Moscow while at the same time increasing their own efforts to recruit those very people that they just kicked out. Well, espionage is a profession like no other, and what is playing out now in and around and regarding Ukraine tends to prove that axiom. But bear in mind that the CIA is now "open for business."

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