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“Difficult to Draw a Balance Sheet”: Ottawa Views the 1974 Canada-USSR Hockey Series

By John Soares, February 2014



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**“Difficult to Draw a Balance Sheet”:
Ottawa Views the 1974 Canada-USSR Hockey Series**

John Soares¹

Of all the international sports events that were part of the cultural Cold War, ice hockey furnished some of the most dramatic and memorable. Czechoslovakia’s emotional wins over the USSR at the 1969 world hockey championships triggered a political crackdown that finally ousted reformist communist leader Aleksandr Dubček. The US gold medal at the 1980 Olympics resonated among Americans who ordinarily paid little attention to the sport. Paul Henderson’s dramatic, series-clinching goal in the last 34 seconds of the final game of the 1972 Canada-USSR “Summit Series” made him a Canadian national hero, and transformed an epic hockey series into one of the most celebrated events in all of Canadian history. Other hockey competitions grabbed national and international attention, including the United States’ surprise gold medal at Squaw Valley in 1960, the various Canada Cup tournaments, and the 1975-76 “Super Series.”

Often overlooked in this litany is the 1974 Canada-USSR series. Team Canada ’74 consisted of stars from the World Hockey Association (WHA), a short-lived and often-denigrated rival to the established National Hockey League (NHL).² At the time, Canadian foreign ministry officials recognized that “the 1974 series, while still important to our relations with the Soviet Union, is by no means the first-rank public event that the 1972 series was.”³ On the ice, Canada managed just one win, against four Soviet victories and three ties, which has

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge research support from Fulbright Canada, the University of Notre Dame, and the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts (ISLA) at Notre Dame, which helped make this article possible. Comments from Hallvard Notaker, Giles Scott-Smith, and David Snyder for an article written for a forthcoming *Diplomatic History* issue on sports diplomacy shaped the author’s thinking about this essay. The author also would like to acknowledge the research assistance provided by Jackson Bruhn and Jack Healy, and the encouragement or assistance he has received from Heather Dichter, Robert Edelman, Randall Germain, Jim Hershberg, Andy Holman, Linda Przybyszewski, Leo Ribuffo, Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, Jeremi Suri and Chris Young.

² The World Hockey Association started play in the 1972-73 season. In 1979-80, four surviving members – the Winnipeg Jets, Edmonton Oilers, Quebec Nordiques and Hartford Whalers – merged into the NHL. For an entertaining introduction to the WHA, see Ed Willes, *The Rebel League: The Short and Unruly Life of the World Hockey Association* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2005).

³ Memorandum, FAI (through FAP) to PDM, PDH, PDQ, 25 July 1974, Record Group [RG] 25 (External Affairs), vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 9, file title: Cultural affairs - Sports competition - Hockey - Between Canada and other countries - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada (hereinafter, “LAC”).

contributed to perceptions that the series was lopsided. Even the present author has dispensed with the '74 series in one dismissive sentence.⁴

The series, though, was more competitive than its end result suggests. The Soviets had a 3-1-2 lead heading into the final two games, meaning Canadian wins in both games would have resulted in a draw for the series. At the end of the seventh game, the referee controversially disallowed an apparent game-winning goal for Canada; the series came that close to a decisive eighth game. Even though the WHA lacked the NHL's prestige, a number of the game's top professionals were on Team Canada '74, including Henderson, hockey legends Bobby Hull and Gordie Howe, and '72 Series veterans Frank Mahovlich and Pat Stapleton. During the series, Canadian goaltender Gerry Cheevers statistically outplayed Soviet superstar Vladislav Tretiak.⁵

Even more important for scholars of the Cold War, Ottawa's External Affairs ministry paid close attention to negotiations for the series and to the games. Canada's ambassador in Moscow during the series was Robert A. D. Ford, a Governor General's laureate in poetry who “spent nearly twenty-one years in the Soviet Union as a Canadian diplomat over a period extending from 1946 to 1980.” In 1971, he became “dean of the [Moscow] diplomatic corps.”⁶ Ottawa's Ministry of External Affairs considered the series “obviously important to C[anada]/Soviet rel[at]ions,”⁷ and an “extraordinary opportunity to project C[anada]'s image in [the] USSR of which we should take full advantage.” External Affairs even planned for the use of “special projects funds” to help with the “considerable unanticipated expense” the series would impose on its Moscow embassy.⁸

The series fit into Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's efforts to improve relations with the Soviet Union, and reduce Cold War tensions. To some degree it helped. The Canadians

⁴ John Soares, “Cold War, Hot Ice: International Ice Hockey, 1947-1980,” *Journal of Sport History* 34, no. 2 (2007), 220.

⁵ Cheevers and Tretiak each played seven games in goal. Cheevers allowed 24 goals (3.42 per game); Tretiak allowed 25 (3.57 per game). *Total Hockey: The Official Encyclopedia of the National Hockey League* 2d ed., ed. Dan Diamond (Kingston, NY: Total Sports Publishing, 2000), 506.

⁶ The Governor General's Awards are among the most prestigious literary prizes in Canada; in the USSR as in many countries, the dean was “the ambassador with the longest time in the country to which he was accredited.” Robert A. D. Ford, *Our Man in Moscow: A Diplomat's Reflections on the Soviet Union* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), xi, 108.

⁷ EXT AFF to MOSCO, No. FAI-2331, 12 July 1974, RG 25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 9, LAC.

⁸ EXT AFF to MOSCOW, No. FAI-2236, 5 July 1974, RG 25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 9, LAC.

and Soviet demonstrated a promising ability to cooperate in overcoming potential obstacles to the series. Canadian star Bobby Hull won plaudits from the Soviets for his conduct. Team Canada surprised Soviet hockey fans with their strong performances in early games.

Despite these positives, though, the series was wracked by problems, which began even before play did. The signing of European stars by WHA teams triggered efforts by the president of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) to kill the series. Travel issues frustrated both sides. Clashing styles of play fueled mutual resentments. A fight after Game Six brought diplomatic headaches. Officiating in the seventh game and official Soviet conduct before the eighth brought calls for the Canadian Embassy to protest officially. The Canadian Embassy dealt with unhappiness over the treatment of the official Canadian delegation, and a special group of VIPs the Soviet Sports Committee had invited to Moscow. In the Embassy's view, the Soviets took a "bloody-minded" approach to negotiations over series-related difficulties.⁹ The official Chinese news agency got in on the merriment, picking up on Canadian complaints and reporting that the Soviets' victory in the series "was aided by punching, crooked referees and bugging devices" in Team Canada's Moscow hotel.¹⁰ When the Series ended, the Canadian embassy reported to Ottawa that while the 1972 Summit Series "probably improved" Canada's relations with the USSR, "[a]t [the] conclusion of [the] second series it is more difficult to draw [a] balance sheet."¹¹

This essay looks at the 1974 series and the diplomacy surrounding it. It is based on research in the files from Canada's Ministry of External Affairs, which had a long history of paying attention to international hockey and its impact on Canada's international image.¹² It also relies on material from Hockey Canada, a quasi-governmental organization responsible for Canada's international representation after its founding in 1969, and the ministry of National Health and Welfare, which was represented in Hockey Canada.

⁹ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2070, 9 October 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

¹⁰ Associated Press summary of official Chinese coverage in "China blasts 'vile' Soviet hockey play," *Montreal Gazette*, 4 November 1974, in RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

¹¹ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

¹² For more on this issue, see John Soares, "'Our Way of Life Against Theirs': Ice Hockey and the Cold War," in *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft and International Relations Since 1945*, ed. Andrew Johns and Heather Dichter (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, forthcoming 2014).

The hockey diplomacy surrounding the 1974 Canada-USSR series shows that despite leaders’ sincere desire for improved relations, East-West détente was much easier with a common adversary to promote unity across the political divide. More significantly, this hockey diplomacy demonstrates the difficulty of utilizing cultural actors for diplomatic purposes. The variety of cultural actors and government organizations, and the differences among and between them, complicated efforts to present a clear, positive international image. This may be unsurprising in an open society like Canada, but the performance of different Soviet agencies in this series shows that even totalitarian dictatorships struggled to use cultural actors for diplomatic purposes. Despite their foreign ministries’ intentions, in this series Canada largely failed to present a positive image of itself in the Soviet Union, and the Soviets raised serious doubts in Canada about whether the Kremlin cared about Soviet-Canadian relations.

Trudeau’s Pursuit of Canadian-Soviet Détente and the Perennial Problem of “Rough Play”

The 1974 series took place at a time when Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was trying to promote East-West détente. Trudeau’s efforts included the “Protocol on Consultations” he signed during a 1971 visit to Moscow. Ottawa explained the Protocol as a “logical development of the process of diversifying Canadian international relations” – by which it meant reducing dependence on the United States – “and of Canada’s growing interest in expanding its relations with the Communist countries of Eastern Europe.” The Trudeau government recognized that Canada and the Soviet Union “share[d] . . . a number of geographical conditions and environmental problems” and could serve as significant trade partners. Ottawa expected that regular consultations “with such an important and powerful country should enable Canada to contribute further to better East-West relations and to arrive at a better informed judgment of world events.”¹³ Trudeau’s aims were well-received in Moscow, where it was noted that Canada’s effort to improve relations, “based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, corresponds to the Soviet objectives defined in the Programme of Further Struggle for Peace and International Cooperation, and for the Freedom and Independence of the Peoples endorsed by the” 25th Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) Congress.¹⁴

¹³ “The Prime Minister’s Visit to the Soviet Union,” *External Affairs* (Ottawa) 23, no. 7 (July 1971), 227.

¹⁴ V. Adashev, “The USSR and Canada Moving to Closer Cooperation,” *International Affairs* (Moscow) (October 1978), 95.

One of the fields in which the Canadians and Soviets sought closer relations was sport, the subject of an “agreement on the principles of cooperation” that “was signed in Ottawa in 1973.”¹⁵ Building on the momentum toward improved Canadian-Soviet relations, and the interest generated by the 1972 Summit Series, Canadian and Soviet negotiators discussed a possible series during an IIHF Congress in Helsinki in March 1974. On 29 April, Soviet and Canadian officials announced that a series would be played between the Soviet national team and “a selected team of WHA players,” with details to be ironed out “in late May or early June.”¹⁶

Although a series between Canadian pros and the top Soviets was innately interesting to hockey fans, Ottawa officials recognized the 1974 version would not be a “first rank public event.” In part this was because the novelty wore off in 1972; in part, the WHA was not seen as the NHL’s equal. Still, the involvement of stars like Hull, Howe, Mahovlich, Henderson and Cheevers ensured that the series would generate attention. That could be a mixed blessing, though, as the rougher Canadian style of hockey had a history of irritating Europeans.¹⁷

Prior to a 1969 rule change that brought the IIHF into alignment with Canada, the IIHF had banned bodychecking outside of the defensive zone; the rule change permitted bodychecking all over the ice. The long history of limited bodychecking, combined with a wider international ice surface and automatic expulsion for fighting, made the European style of play far less physical and more finesse-oriented than the Canadian game. These differences were dramatized by their respective offensive philosophies. European players routinely carried the puck or passed it to teammates to enter the offensive zone and generate scoring chances. Canadians, by contrast, often relied on a strategy of “dump and chase,” in which players shot the puck into the offensive zone, and then tried to knock down opposing defenders to reclaim possession of the puck in better scoring position. The resulting contrast in styles fueled mutual recriminations, as Europeans thought the Canadian barbaric, and Canadians were contemptuous of European “softness.”

The Soviet view of this clash of philosophies was articulated by the Soviet hockey program’s architect in a 1970 article for the Soviet youth magazine, *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*.

¹⁵ Adashev, “The USSR and Canada Moving to Closer Cooperation,” 100.

¹⁶ EXTAFF to MOSCO, No. FAI-1295, 12 April 1974; MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 795, 24 April 1974; PAF to PDM, 29 April 1974; all in RG 25, vol. 10921, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 8, LAC.

¹⁷ For more on the general issue of ice hockey and Canadian-European relations, see Soares, “Our Way of Life Against Theirs.”

Anatolii Tarasov, long-time coach of the national team and the Central Army club,¹⁸ wrote his polemic soon after the IIHF had adopted more liberal bodychecking rules, and after the Soviets had played games against Canadian teams under those new rules. Tarasov asserted, dramatically, that "[h]ockey fans know that all evil winds in the direction of amateur hockey blow from Canada." He reflected conventional Soviet views when he told his readers that "we always knew that professional players could not do without open brutality" and that "body-checking throughout the [ice] is harmful for amateur hockey." The new rules, according to the old coach, "constitute[d] a license for borrowing some elements from fencing, wrestling and boxing," and undermined a coach's efforts to promote "chivalry and nobility" in his players. Tarasov lamented that during games with the Canadians, the Soviets' highly skilled stars "were literally lost against the background of sheer body-checking, attacks and fights which were incessantly initiated" by the Canadians.¹⁹

The Canadians had a similar disdain for the European style of play; NHL President Clarence Campbell denigrated the Soviet style as boring, like "harness racing."²⁰ After their 1976 meeting with the Soviet Central Army Club, Philadelphia Flyers Dave Schultz and Bob Kelly bluntly stated views expressed by many other Canadians over the years. Schultz said the Soviets "don't like bodychecks." Kelly said, "All they do is spear you, hook you, kick you," which he contrasted with the Canadian approach of "dropping the gloves" (and fighting).²¹

It was almost unavoidable that these contrasting views would cause tension in the '74 series. Some of the greatest diplomatic success the series attained was largely a function of the role played by the IIHF president, who turned himself into a source of Soviet-Canadian agreement and cooperation.

¹⁸ Tarasov would be removed from those positions after the 1972 Olympics, officially for reasons of health. See TASS report attached to Canadian Embassy, Moscow to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 29 February 1972, RG25, vol. 10920, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 1, LAC.

¹⁹ "Is This Hockey? Polemical Notes," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 13 January 1970, translation of «Разве это хоккей? Polemicheskie zametki», *Комсомольская Правда*, attached to Canadian Embassy, Moscow, to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, No. 101, 30 January 1970, RG29 (National Health and Welfare), vol. 2176, file: 215-5-9, part 1, file title: Fitness and Amateur Sports - Hockey Canada - Telex Messages From External Affairs, LAC.

²⁰ Quoted in Larry Milson, "Roger Turcotte Has a Beef," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 22 January 1976, p. 44 (ProQuest).

²¹ Admittedly, Kelly said, "I don't know which is better, doing it their way or our way." Schultz and Kelly quoted in "The View From Philadelphia," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 January 1976, p. D2 (ProQuest).

The International Ice Hockey Federation and a Common Adversary

IIHF president John F. “Bunny” Ahearne was a long-time force in the federation who had clashed with Canadians often over the years.²² Ahearne earned his livelihood as a travel agent, and had been criticized for “mak[ing] sure that all the hotel and travel arrangements” for IIHF events were “made by his agency”;²³ according to a bitter gibe from the period, “Mr. Ahearne created the IIHF primarily to serve his own personal business interests.” Canadians also complained that Ahearne exercised powers his office did not possess. On at least one occasion he refused permission for an international tour by a youth team over which he had no authority;²⁴ the threat that he might punish a nation by undercutting its bid for a future world tournament could motivate compliance with his wishes. He displayed a cluelessness about life under totalitarianism when Czechoslovak star Vaclav Nedomansky defected to Canada (as discussed below); Ahearne said, “I would recommend that [the Czechoslovak federation] break off all relationship with the [Canadian federation] over this matter.”²⁵

During Ahearne’s then-current term as president the IIHF had reneged on an agreement to permit Canada to use several minor league professionals and host the 1970 world championships, triggering a Canadian withdrawal from world and Olympic tournaments until professionals were permitted (in 1977).²⁶ In the intervening years, Ahearne hindered Canada’s efforts to arrange competitions between its pros and the best Soviets, Czechoslovaks and Swedes.²⁷ A measure of Canadian disdain for the IIHF head was evident when one of its

²² Ahearne served three terms as president of the IIHF: 1957-1960, 1963-66, and 1969-75. Even when he was not serving as president, he was a powerful voice in the organization. *The World of Hockey: Celebrating a Century of the IIHF*, ed. Szymon Szemberg and Andrew Podnieks (Bolton, Ont: Fenn Publishing Company Ltd., 2007), 192.

²³ Canadian Embassy, Stockholm to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, No. 219, 26 June 1967, RG25, vol. 10527, file: 55-26-HOCKEY, part 4, file title: Cultural affairs - Sports competition – Hockey, LAC.

²⁴ FAP to PDM, 23 December 1971, RG 25, vol. 10920, file: 55-26-HOCKEY, file part 16.

²⁵ EXT AFF to MOSCO, No. FAI-2460, 24 July 1974, RG 25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 9, LAC.

²⁶ For more on Canada’s withdrawal, see Donald Macintosh and Donna Greenhorn, “Hockey Diplomacy and Canadian Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 28, no. 2 (summer 1993), 101-105; and Soares, “Our Way of Life Against Theirs’.”

²⁷ For example, when Hockey Canada proposed an exchange in which teams from Canada, the Soviet Union, Sweden and Czechoslovakia would compete in a “round-robin” tournament in Canada in late September 1971, and “[i]n return Canada would participate in a similar competition in Europe at a later date” that season, Ahearne countered with an offer that excluded Czechoslovakia from the North American leg of the competition, limited the number of games played by the Canadian squad with professionals and required four games by a strictly amateur Canadian team, and required the Canadians to make three separate trips to Europe for games with the USSR, Sweden and Czechoslovakia – a proposal “nowhere near to what” the Canadians “originally proposed,” leading to

embassies referred to the international Ahearne Cup tournament as the “Bunny Ahearne self-memorial competition.”²⁸

With this history, it was easy for Ahearne to earn the enmity of Canadians. But his handling of the series also antagonized the Soviets. The USSR’s national team was officially amateur, determined to remain eligible for world and Olympic championships. Accordingly, the Soviets could not compete unless the series had IIHF approval. This gave Ahearne leverage to promote the interests of countries – most notably Sweden, but also Finland and Czechoslovakia – losing some of their best players to the North American professional ranks. But Ahearne’s apparent determination to kill the series, even after the Europeans were satisfied with the resolution of player-transfer issues, triggered Soviet resentment, Canadian admiration for Soviet consistency in opposing his efforts to scuttle the series, and rare Soviet-Canadian hockey agreement.

The player-transfer problem originated in the expansion of North American professional hockey, and the growing Canadian respect for European players. For decades the rosters in the NHL and minor leagues were filled almost entirely with Canadians; in some years in the early 1960s one or two American players were the only non-Canadians in the entire NHL. Expansion beginning in 1967 brought more NHL and minor league teams into existence, and thus more roster spots. The arrival of the WHA in 1972 created even more. With the growing need for players, the mostly Canadian coaches and general managers began to revisit their long-standing skepticism about Europeans. The infusion of European talent picked up speed in 1974, when the WHA’s Winnipeg Jets acquired a number of Swedish (and Finnish) stars to try to improve the talent surrounding superstar Bobby Hull. The WHA was the driving force behind the increasing numbers of Europeans in North American pro hockey, but its impact persisted even after four surviving WHA teams merged into the NHL in 1979. By 1982, the *New York Times*’ Robin Herman would write that “ten years [earlier] there were no European players at all” in the NHL,

cancellation of the proposed September 1971 tournament. FAI to File, 11 August 1971, RG25, vol. 10920, file: 55-26-HOCKEY, part 15, LAC.

²⁸ Canadian Embassy, Stockholm to Under-Secretary, No. 309, 17 September 1968, RG25, vol. 10527, file: 55-26-HOCKEY, part 7, LAC.

but “[i]n the past five years, more than 50 hockey players from” Europe had played in the league.²⁹

The Finnish and Swedish stars were not the only Europeans to come to North America. Czechoslovak players, too, began to appear. Some older stars came with Prague’s approval; Jaroslav Jiřík became the first East Bloc player to join an NHL club when he signed with the St. Louis Blues in 1969.³⁰ Other Czechoslovak stars chose to defect. The most notable was Nedomansky, who joined the Toronto Toros in 1974 after leading the Czechoslovak league in goals and points on multiple occasions and also starring for the national team in world and Olympic tournaments.³¹ In one of the more theatrical acts of Czechoslovak defiance against their Soviet overlords, Nedomansky had deliberately fired a puck at the Soviet team bench during the Soviets’ win over Czechoslovakia in the final game of the 1972 Winter Olympics.³² With his stature in world hockey, *Sports Illustrated* rated him “the most famous Communist-bloc athlete to defect to the West since 1956.”³³

Nedomansky and his countryman Richard Farda, who also joined the Toros in 1974, were not the only Eastern Europeans the Toros sought. The team made multiple efforts to secure Moscow’s permission for Soviet star Anatoli Firsov to join the team, including a March 1974 letter the club had asked the Canadian embassy in Moscow to deliver to the president of the Soviet Presidium offering Firsov a spot as player and assistant coach on the Toros.³⁴ Despite this interest, neither Firsov nor any other Soviet player played professionally in North America before 1989.³⁵

²⁹ Robin Herman, “Europe’s Icemen Cometh,” *New York Times Magazine*, 3 January 1982, 30. For more on the growing numbers of European players in North American pro hockey in the 1970s, see John Soares, “East Beats West: Ice Hockey and the Cold War,” in Alan Tomlinson, Christopher Young and Richard Holt, eds., *Sport and the Transformation of Modern Europe: States, Media and Markets 1950-2010* (London: Routledge, 2013): 35-49.

³⁰ “Kaleidoscope,” *Czechoslovak Sport* 18, no. 4 (1970), 24; Jeff Z. Klein, “Jaroslav Jirik, 71, Czech Hockey Star,” *New York Times*, 12 July 2011.

³¹ *Total Hockey*, 1464.

³² “USA Pulls a Surprise,” in *1972 United States Olympic Book* (New York: United States Olympic Committee, 1972), 260; and Kevin Allen, *USA Hockey: A Celebration of a Great Tradition* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 1997), 68.

³³ Mark Mulvoy, “Check and Double-Czech,” *Sports Illustrated*, 29 July 1974, 52. In 1956, of course, a number of Hungarian Olympians defected during the Melbourne Olympics.

³⁴ John C. Eaton to Gary Smith, 6 March 1974; John C. Eaton to President N.V. Podgorny, 6 March 1974; and Canadian Embassy, Moscow, to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, No. 209, 14 March 1974; all in RG 25, vol. 10921, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 8, LAC.

³⁵ In the wake of the Summit Series, the Toronto Maple Leafs and Minnesota North Stars sought to acquire Valerii Kharlamov, and the Boston Bruins tried to arrange a cultural exchange in which they would get Aleksandr

Hockey officials in Sweden, Finland and Czechoslovakia could take pride in the growing respect their players received in hockey's homeland, but their irritation at losing their top players threatened the '74 series. In the colorful, ideological language of Communists, the Europeans were displeased by "the despicable practices of the Canadian hockey profiteers."³⁶ Despite these concerns, though, the IIHF Executive Committee, on 6 July 1974, approved the series subject to two conditions:³⁷ 1) that the WHA sign an agreement with the Swedes to govern compensation for WHA signings of Swedish players; and 2) that the Canadian team be called the "internationals" (to prevent any confusion with a "national team," which under IIHF rules had to be amateur).³⁸ It was in his assessment of whether these conditions had been met that Ahearne facilitated a successful Soviet-Canadian condominium.

External Affairs reported to the Canadian embassy in Moscow that the compensation condition was "apparently inserted by [the] Swedes in order to use [the] series" as "lever[age] against [the] WHA." Soviet agreement to this condition raised questions in Ottawa about whether the Soviets were really committed to holding the series, and whether the Soviets thought the WHA and Swedes were closer to agreement than they in fact were.³⁹ The embassy in Moscow cabled Ottawa that the Soviets had accepted the Swedes' condition because they were "close partners in European hockey," and because the Russians wanted Ahearne's support and cooperation in a "variety of areas, particularly [Moscow's] 1980 Olympics bid."⁴⁰

Ottawa asked its Moscow embassy to stress to Soviet sports officials that the WHA accepted the "international" name for the team and agreed "in principle to [the] compensation" agreement with Sweden, but found the "Swedish draft unacceptable as submitted" and that the "WHA intend[ed] to negotiate further." More significantly, the Canadians considered it "impossible to delay preparations" for the series until the IIHF's deadline of 31 August for

Yakushev. In 1983, the Montreal Canadiens later drafted goaltender Vladislav Tretiak. For more, see Soares, "Our Way of Life Against Theirs'."

³⁶ Communist regimes seldom commented on the departure of defectors, but Team Canada '74 played an exhibition against the national team of Czechoslovakia, and the absence of one of the most notable Czechoslovak stars would need an explanation. "Press Reports on Defection of Two Hockey Stars," 22 October 1974, published in Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report, Eastern Europe, FBIS-EEU-74-205, 22 October 1974, p. D5.

³⁷ EXT AFF to MOSCO, No. FAI-2331, 12 July 1974; and J.F. Ahearne to G.W. Juckes, 25 July 1974, Lou Lefave Collection, MG28 I 263, vol. 18, file: 300-6-13 International Committee 1969-74 (1 of 2), LAC.

³⁸ Gordon W. Juckes to J.F. Ahearne, 31 July 1974, Lou Lefave Collection, MG28 I 263, vol. 18, file: 300-6-13 International Committee 1969-74 (1 of 2), LAC.

³⁹ EXT AFF to MOSCO, No. FAI-2331, 12 July 1974.

⁴⁰ MOSCO to EXOTT, No. 1445, 15 July 1974, RG 25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 9, LAC.

meeting the two conditions, and “[e]qually impossible” to proceed with “preparations for [the] series if” it was “not certain” the series would “take place.”⁴¹ The embassy reported to Ottawa that when Canadians expressed concern about their commitment to the series, Soviet sports officials “stated without qualification that [the Soviets] intended to fully adhere to and respect” the Soviet-Canadian agreement to hold the series, “and that as far as they were concerned [the] series was on and planning could proceed accordingly.”⁴²

As negotiations proceeded, Canadian hockey officials and diplomats reported on Soviet frustration with Ahearne. A Soviet official told the Canadian embassy that there had been “extremely hard discussion” involving Ahearne and Soviet and Canadian hockey officials.⁴³ Hockey Canada’s Lou Lefaiwe met with Soviet officials and Ahearne in London on 18 and 19 July, and found Ahearne “totally intransigent.” According to External Affairs, Lefaiwe reported that the “Soviets appeared extremely angry with [the] rigidity of [the] IIHF position.”⁴⁴

Ahearne continued to try to kill the series, even after meetings in Helsinki on 8-9 August had resolved “all the problems regarding transfers [of] European players [to] North American clubs.” On 18 August, Ahearne sent the Soviets a telegram demanding the series “be cancelled on [the] grounds [that] conditions he had set for [the] series had not . . . been met.”⁴⁵ The Canadian embassy cabled Ottawa with the text of the Soviets’ 22 August reply to Ahearne. The Soviets informed the IIHF head that they had received reports from the Swedish, Finnish and Canadian federations “confirming” that the earlier Helsinki meetings had “settled . . . all” player-transfer issues, and that the Canadians had complied with IIHF demands concerning the “title of the team.” Under the circumstances, the Soviets told Ahearne the IIHF’s “conditions have been fulfilled” and the series should proceed.⁴⁶ While the Czechoslovaks were saying little publicly because they did not want Nedomansky’s defection brought up,⁴⁷ the Canadian embassy in Prague reported that Czechoslovak hockey official Miro Šubrt said that “he too ha[d] advised

⁴¹ EXT AFF to MOSCO, No. FAI-2331, 12 July 1974.

⁴² MOSCO to EXOTT, No. 1445, 15 July 1974.

⁴³ V. Khotochkin to G. Juckes, 24 July 1974, Lou Lefaiwe Collection, MG28 I 263, vol. 18, file: 300-6-13 International Committee 1969-74 (1 of 2), LAC.

⁴⁴ EXT AFF to MOSCO, No. FAI-2460, 24 July 1974.

⁴⁵ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 1747, 23 August 1974, RG 25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 9, LAC.

⁴⁶ Soviets’ 22 August cable to Ahearne, quoted in MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 1747.

⁴⁷ Prague to ExtOtt, No. 795, 4 September 1974, RG25, vol. 10920, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-CZECH, part 2, LAC.

Ahearn[e that the] Czechs consider[ed that the] preconditions to [the] series have been fully met."⁴⁸

IIHF members had reached consensus that the conditions for the series had been met, yet Ahearne's opposition continued. On 2 September, just over two weeks before the scheduled series opener, the Soviet hockey federation again notified Ahearne of its belief that the series should proceed and shared the cable with Canadian diplomats. The Soviets pointed out that the hockey "federations of Sweden[,] Finland[,] Czechoslovakia [and the] USSR" all agreed the IIHF conditions had been met and that the "games can be held." The Soviets did "not understand [the] position of the IIHF president" in trying to stop the series.⁴⁹ In response, Ahearne sent another telegram, "again requesting [that the] series be cancelled."⁵⁰

Ahearne's continuing opposition might have been a source of concern, but the Canadian embassy in Moscow reported that the Soviet sports committee was "proceeding with all arrangements for [the] series" and the Soviets planned to send a reply to Ahearne's latest missive "in roughly [the] same terms as" their previous messages to him. The embassy in Moscow told Ottawa that "[a]s far as [the] Sov[iet] side is concerned . . . [the] series is on and [the] team will depart" for Canada "as scheduled" on 14 September.⁵¹ External Affairs in Ottawa professed to be "greatly relieved at [the] consistency displayed by [the Soviet] Sports C[ommi]ttee in their replies to Ahearn[e']s latest moves."⁵²

As late as 11 September, documents show that Canada's External Affairs officials recognized the possibility that Ahearne still could try to derail the series by "threatening disciplinary action" against various national federations. But "the Soviets, Finns and Swedes have replied that as far as they are concerned the WHA and Swedish IHF have satisfactorily resolved the dispute which occasioned the [IIHF's] conditions . . . and therefore" there was "no reason" why the series should not proceed. External Affairs was optimistic: With so many hockey powers approving of the series, and a meeting of the IIHF scheduled to take place only

⁴⁸ Prague to ExOtt, No. 784, 27 August 1974, RG25, vol. 10920, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-CZECH, part 2, LAC.

⁴⁹ Soviets' 2 September cable to Ahearne, quoted in MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 1862, 9 September 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 10, LAC.

⁵⁰ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 1862, 9 September 1974.

⁵¹ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 1862, 9 September 1974.

⁵² EXT to MOSCO, No. FAI-2979, 10 September 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 10, LAC.

after the Soviet team arrived in Canada, it was “unlikely that the Russians would agree to cancel the series, once their team is on Canadian soil.”⁵³

Ahearne failed in his efforts to derail the series. He succeeded, though, in forging a rare Soviet-Canadian consensus, directed against him. Once the competition shifted to the ice, the Soviets and Canadians would find plenty of grounds for anger with each other.

The '74 Canada-USSR Series

The series opened on 17 September with a tie in Quebec City, followed by a 4-1 Canadian victory in Toronto. Through two games the WHA stars were outperforming the more illustrious Team Canada '72.⁵⁴ In Game Three in Winnipeg, though, Canadian coach Billy Harris “played his weak lines,” in order “to give all his boys a chance to play,” and the result was an 8-5 Soviet win.⁵⁵ With its strongest players back for Game Four in Vancouver, Canada opened a 5-2 lead but the Soviets rallied and the game ended in a 5-5 tie.⁵⁶ After the four games in Canada, the series was even.

The series moved to Moscow for the final four games. Game Five, a 3-2 Soviet victory, was a harbinger of things to come. Dick Beddoes, writing in Canada’s national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, described it as “chippy” and “boisterous” – “a game Ivan the Terrible . . . would have enjoyed.” Beddoes quoted Gordie Howe saying, “We were lucky we didn’t start the Third World War,” and warned that “the so-called Friendly Series is about to become Murder Incorporated.”⁵⁷ Yet even after this game, the Canadian Embassy in Moscow believed the “atmosphere between [the] teams [was] better than in 72”⁵⁸ and that the “atmosphere on ice between [the] teams was going to be one of [the] positive aspects” of the series.⁵⁹ That atmosphere soured, and Beddoes’ looked prophetic, in Game Six.

⁵³ Memorandum from FAI to GAP, GEA (Mr. Chistoff), FAI (Mr. Tardif), 11 September 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 10, LAC.

⁵⁴ The 1972 Series had opened with a 7-3 victory for the Soviets.

⁵⁵ Mary Trueman, “Canada’s Big Men Back, But Deadlock Stands,” *Globe and Mail*, 24 September 1974, p. 34 (ProQuest).

⁵⁶ Trueman, “Canada’s Big Men Back”; and “Russian Comeback Didn’t Surprise Coach Kulagin,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 24 September 1974, p. 34 (ProQuest).

⁵⁷ Dick Beddoes, “Play Turns Chippy, Boisterous, As Russians Beat Team Canada 3-2,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 2 October 1974, p. 1

⁵⁸ From MOSCO, No. 2042, 3 October 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

⁵⁹ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2051, 4 October 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

The second Moscow game featured what the Canadian embassy called a “weak and uneven job of officiating,” which fueled frustrations that boiled over in a post-game fight.⁶⁰ During the contest, Soviet Valerii Vasiliev “dropp[ed] his gloves” and “threw at least three punches” at Canadian Bruce MacGregor, who “did not drop his gloves or his stick.” This brought complaints from Canadian coach Billy Harris that under international rules Vasiliev deserved twelve minutes in penalties, rather than the five minutes that he and MacGregor both received.⁶¹ After the game, Canadian Rick Ley gave Valerii Kharlamov “a thorough post-game pummeling” that left “blood pouring from his forehead and eye area.” This incident left Soviet coach Boris Kulagin calling for Ley to be jailed for fifteen days under the Soviet penal code.⁶²

The morning after Game Six, Soviet and Canadian officials met in an effort to calm the situation. After some unpleasanties, the Canadian embassy reported, the meeting ended “on [a] relatively positive note.” Both sides admitted mistakes. The Soviet Sports Committee “would guarantee [a] block of 55 additional good seats” for the Canadians for the two remaining games. During the meeting one of the Soviet officials “emphasized” the “importance [the] USSR attached to relations with” Canada and his “hope that hockey could contribute to improvement of these relations.”⁶³ Game Seven was more cleanly played, with only three minor penalties called in the entire game.⁶⁴ Despite this, Canadian observers thought the referee, Canadian Tom Brown, had let his countrymen get away with a number of penalties he should have called.⁶⁵

Controversy, though, erupted at the end. The clock operator had let the clock run after a whistle had halted play with about ninety seconds remaining, wasting time that might have prevented the controversy. Bobby Hull scored what had appeared to be the game winning goal just before the final buzzer. But Brown ruled that the buzzer had sounded to end the game, negating the goal. Team Canada “lodged [an] official protest.” Ambassador Ford “support[ed]” what he considered this “justifiable protest,” albeit “as a fan, not as ambassador”—even though some Canadians tried to get Ford to go on record lodging an official diplomatic protest.

⁶⁰ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2051, 4 October 1974.

⁶¹ “MacLean Joins Clamor Berating Dombrowski,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 5 October 1974, first sports page (ProQuest).

⁶² Dick Beddoes and Mary Trueman, “Jail Him, Russian Coach Says, As Ley attacks Star Following 5-2 Loss,” *Globe and Mail*, 4 October 1974, p. 1-2 (ProQuest).

⁶³ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2051, 4 October 1974.

⁶⁴ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2056, 7 October 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

⁶⁵ Dick Beddoes, “Diplomat Protests As a Fan,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 7 October 1974, p. S2 (ProQuest).

Following “stormy m[ee]t[ing]s,” Brown “upheld his decision,” and the game ended in a tie that clinched victory in the series for the Soviets.⁶⁶

Canadian unhappiness reached new levels before the eighth and final game. The Soviet hockey federation released a statement that was read in the arena, four times, in English and Russian, claiming Team Canada had “r[e]p[re]s[e]ntatively broken the agreement” governing the series, with their “dirty play, [and] appeals to referees.” Professing to be “guided by a desire to hold such competitions in the spirit of the best traditions of sport and friendship,” the Soviet federation claimed that it would be “forced...to stop play of the last game...at the first infringement of the above-mentioned agreement” by the Canadians.⁶⁷ Predictably, the Canadians were furious. Team Canada general manager Billy Hunter demanded—and was denied—time to respond. Ford personally spoke with the officials from the Soviet hockey federation and sports committee “to say that this insulting and unsportsmanlike act could only cast a cloud over our relations.” Ford reported to Ottawa that he “refused to get involved directly as I considered this [a] matter for [the] two teams;” he admitted that he had “considered walking out but decided” to stay and “support [the Canadian] team.” The game proceeded, and the Soviets won the game, 3-2, despite resting a number of regular players—some of the nine the Soviets claimed had been injured by the Canadians.⁶⁸

The Canadians had lost the series. In the process, they had received considerable negative publicity in the Soviet media, and treatment that raised doubts about the Soviet commitment to improved relations with Canada. The actions of the various groups involved in the series—in both nations—contributed to this state of affairs.

The Difficulties of Delivering a Coherent Message

Canada was an open, pluralist, democratic society with an independent press and judiciary—factors that prevented Ottawa from controlling the image of Canada created in the Soviet Union by this series. The problems started with the team itself. Although the squad was known as “Team Canada,” represented the country, and wore uniforms bearing its name, it was in no way the best possible collection of Canadian pros. Even though it had an impact on the

⁶⁶ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2056, 7 October 1974; also see Beddoes, “Diplomat Protests As a Fan.”

⁶⁷ Soviet announcement quoted in MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2056, 7 October 1974.

⁶⁸ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2056, 7 October 1974.

nation’s image in the Soviet Union, Ottawa had no ability to control the roster makeup. Team Canada’s struggles on ice, as Ford reported, fed Soviet media treatments—sometimes “hysterical” —portraying the Canadians “as poor players and dirty ones at that.”⁶⁹ The embassy also noted a selectivity in Soviet media coverage of hockey brutality: in late November 1974, it sent Ottawa a frustrated account of a Soviet league game in which a player protested a penalty call by “threaten[ing]” the referee with a “raised stick. It was clear” the official “did not consider the raised stick as simply a gesture, but as a real threat.” Yet “this incident received no publicity in the Soviet press, show[ing] up the hypocrisy of the Soviet attacks on Canada’s dirty style of hockey that were so prevalent during” the Canada-USSR series.⁷⁰

The players themselves, though, were not the only components of Canadian hockey that complicated Canadian diplomacy. The structure of the sport in Canada involved leagues and owners at various levels, players and professional players’ unions, and the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association. All of these were private, independent entities. Hockey Canada, a quasi-governmental agency, was nonetheless largely independent of the government in its operations; this independence was demonstrated in 1972 when Bobby Hull was excluded from the original Team Canada because of his move to the WHA. Even personal appeals from the Minister of National Health & Welfare—and Prime Minister Trudeau himself! —failed to get him onto that squad.⁷¹

External Affairs recognized this complex situation as “feudal.” A post-mortem on the ’74 series by External Affairs concluded that “many of the difficulties which plagued this series and the last are directly attributable to the fact that the Canadian hockey world is intrinsically ill-equipped organizationally to manage joint undertakings as complex in nature as these series.” Given the various organizations involved and the fact that there was “no central authority which could direct the organization of the series,” External Affairs admitted it was “amazing” that “so

⁶⁹ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974.

⁷⁰ Canadian Embassy, Moscow, to the Under-Secretary of State, No. 835, 27 November 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

⁷¹ Telegram from John C. Munro to Charles Hay, 14 July 1972, and Telegram from Pierre Elliott Trudeau to Charles Hay, 14 July 1972, both in Hockey Canada Collection, MG 28 I 263, vol. 5, file: 300-16 Hockey Canada Office files - General Complaints - Team Canada & Bobby Hull, LAC.

few things went awry.” Looking toward future series, External Affairs officials thought the ministry needed to get more involved to prevent some of these problems.⁷²

There were, in fact, a number of things that “went awry” owing to the lack of a “central authority.” For example, although the series agreement stipulated that both teams would fly on commercial flights between Canadian cities, Team Canada’s organizers decided to take a charter flight from Quebec City to Toronto before Game Two. This triggered a Soviet threat to end the series; even Hockey Canada president Douglas Fischer admitted that the Soviets “had a good case” for their unhappiness.⁷³ Moreover, it was not simply hockey players and officials who could irritate the Soviets. The Soviet team also had to “wait for rooms in the Royal York,” a two-hour delay that was reported to Soviet citizens as lasting “all night,” keeping the Soviet players from sleeping and causing their loss in Game Two. The Soviets also were displeased by a practice they had to hold two hours late, a stop-over in Montreal on the flight from Quebec to Toronto, “poor ice” and a “broken ice machine.” The Canadian embassy in Moscow noted that issues like this “were carefully detailed” in the Soviet press.⁷⁴

Independent media in Canada also could influence public perceptions, but did not always do so to Ottawa’s benefit. For example, when Canadian officials boycotted one of the Moscow games to protest their bad seat locations, *Globe and Mail* columnist Beddoes criticized their “bitching” and “sulky boycott”; Beddoes castigated participant Lou Lefaive as “an Ottawa civil servant with a penchant for grabbing free rides.”⁷⁵ As mentioned above, the Canadian embassy emphasized the clean play and small number of penalties called in Game Seven, while the Canadian media reported that the Canadians had gotten away with infractions that should have been penalized.

The independent media in a free society might offer an unflattering image of its own country, but the independent judiciary had an ability to interject series-threatening problems that had been demonstrated in 1972. In preparing for the ’74 series, External Affairs recalled the situation in which one citizen with a legal claim “sought to have the Soviet team’s equipment

⁷² FAI to PDQ, 23 October 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

⁷³ Quoted in “Fischer Admits Canada Broke Travel Agreement,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 19 September 1972, p. 47.

⁷⁴ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2072, 9 October 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

⁷⁵ “Dick Beddoes,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 5 October 1974, first sports page (ProQuest).

impounded” through a court action that threatened the entire series.⁷⁶ Michel Dagenais was a Canadian whose car had been destroyed in the 1968 Soviet invasion of Prague. According to media reports, “a Soviet officer gave him a written acknowledgement of responsibility”⁷⁷ but “[t]here was no way he could collect \$1400 for the car.”⁷⁸ While the Soviet team was in Canada for the Summit Series, Dagenais’ lawyer obtained a writ from a provincial court “permitting seizure of [its] equipment.” The Soviet had threatened to cancel the series until Hockey Canada posted a bond for \$1500 to keep the series on track. External Affairs tried both to get the court to recognize the USSR’s sovereign immunity against such a judgment, and to secure compensation for Dagenais from the Soviets.⁷⁹ But in 1974 External Affairs was aware of the potential for what it called an “unforeseeable threat” like this to complicate series diplomacy.⁸⁰

Other private groups and organizations threatened to cause headaches for Ottawa. Even before the series began, External Affairs worried about demonstrations outside of arenas by “the Jewish Defense League and the Free Valentyn Moroz groups.”⁸¹ Soviet treatment of Jews was a persistent issue in its relations with the West; in the summer and fall of 1974 many in the West were concerned with the fate of Moroz, an imprisoned Ukrainian dissident on a hunger strike that reached its 79th day as the series opened.⁸² Of particular concern to Canadian officials was the possibility for unrest “if Moroz’ condition should worsen dramatically while the Soviet team is in Canada.”⁸³ These did not become a problem for Ottawa during the series, but they remained a threat—and one outside Ottawa’s control.

Openness could bring problems for Canada, but its upsides were on display in a quite revealing situation during the previously mentioned defection of Czechoslovakian star Richard Farda. As he and Nedomansky were planning to leave their homeland for North America, Toros

⁷⁶ Memorandum from FAI to GAP, GEA (Mr. Chistoff), FAI (Mr. Tardif), 11 September 1974.

⁷⁷ “Soviet Ice Team May Lose Skates,” *Washington Post*, 3 September 1972, p. D5 (ProQuest).

⁷⁸ Francis Rosa, “Hockey Diary: Not Again, Says Campbell of Pro All-Star Format,” *Boston Globe*, 5 September 1972, p. 23 (ProQuest).

⁷⁹ Memorandum, W.H. Montgomery to the Minister, 14 September 1972, RG25, vol. 10921, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 4.1, LAC; and Rosa, “Hockey Diary.”

⁸⁰ Memorandum from FAI to GAP, GEA (Mr. Chistoff), FAI (Mr. Tardif), 11 September 1974.

⁸¹ Memorandum from FAI to GAP, GEA (Mr. Chistoff), FAI (Mr. Tardif), 11 September 1974.

⁸² Christopher S. Wren, “Soviet Says Jailed Ukrainian Nationalist Is Alive: Hunger Strike in 79th Day,” *New York Times*, 18 September 1974, p. 2 (ProQuest). Also see Valentyn Moroz, *Boomerang* (Baltimore: Smolokyp, 1974); and Valentyn Moroz, *Report from the Beria Reserve: The Protest Writings of Valentyn Moroz, A Ukrainian Political Prisoner in the USSR* (Toronto: P. Martin, 1974).

⁸³ Memorandum from FAI to GAP, GEA (Mr. Chistoff), FAI (Mr. Tardif), 11 September 1974.

officials asked Canada's Ministry of Manpower and Immigration for quick handling of their cases. The Toros pointed out that the NHL's Atlanta Flames also wanted the two players, and US immigration officials were "prepared to accept them," which apparently triggered faster action in Ottawa.⁸⁴ After immigration officials reported receiving "a completed application" from Farda,⁸⁵ he "got cold feet" and reconsidered whether he wanted to defect.⁸⁶ External Affairs pointed out that "this should not be revealed to the press because of the harm it could do to Farda if he wishes to remain with Czechoslovakia."⁸⁷ As an open society, Canada was not going to pressure Farda to see his defection through – and would take steps to protect him even if he turned his back on Canada and returned home.

These details of the Farda case could not be revealed publicly, but show Canada as humane and competent. The Soviet bureaucracy, meanwhile, showed a measure of inconsistency that does not fit the expectations of a totalitarian state. Often during the series, the Canadians were frustrated in their dealings with Soviet officials, especially the Soviet Sports Committee. The Canadian embassy considered this sports body "bloodyminded" and "inflexible";⁸⁸ Ottawa complained about its "bad faith and bloody-mindedness."⁸⁹ When Canadian hockey and embassy officials sought to have their concerns addressed, Sports Committee officials "argued every point" and "in some cases" even refused "to acknowledge commitments made to emb[assy] officers during [the] planning of [the] series."⁹⁰ But the Sports Committee by itself was not the sole problem: Despite the Kremlin's stated commitment to improved Soviet-Canadian relations, and the fact that Soviet foreign ministry officials "admitted" that the Sport Committee "had botched things," the foreign ministry "made no effort to improve [the] situation." Ford wrote that the series suggested the Soviets might have a "declining interest in relations with" Canada, although he believed this was not the case.⁹¹

⁸⁴ MANDIBERN to MANDIOTT, IMM229, 15 July 1974, RG 25, vol. 10920, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-CZECH, part 2, LAC.

⁸⁵ GEA to PDM, 19 Jul 1974, RG25, vol. 10920, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-CZECH, part 2, LAC.

⁸⁶ GEA to FAI, 17 July 1974, RG 25, vol. 10920, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-CZECH, part 2, LAC.

⁸⁷ GEA to PDM, 19 Jul 1974.

⁸⁸ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2070, 9 October 1974.

⁸⁹ FAI to PDQ, 23 October 1974.

⁹⁰ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2070, 9 October 1974.

⁹¹ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974.

For a competition that was supposed to improve the USSR's image among Canadians, the problems were legion. They began with the Canadian team's arrival in Moscow, which the embassy considered a "disaster."⁹² Ford reported that "in spite of firm assurances given to me . . . that [the] team would be moved rapidly through customs and immig[ration], it took over two hours to clear these hurdles." He reported that the players spent "another two hours milling around [the] hotel before they were settled into their rooms," which led to the "cancellation of [a] practice session and created [a] mood of frustration and edginess" at the start of the trip.⁹³ Canadian star Henderson believed the lost practice gave the Soviets "an edge" in the first Moscow game, which the Soviets won by just one goal (3-2).⁹⁴

At that first Moscow game, the embassy reported, seat locations for Team Canada officials, players' wives, and WHA owners and their wives were "among worst seats in arena." This triggered a "long and acrimonious" discussion between Canadian and Soviet officials that culminated with the Soviet Sports Committee "agree[ing] to do [its] best to rectify [the] problem." The Committee "produced only 38 improved seats" for a delegation of 239, a proposed solution rejected by Canadian officials as "unacceptable." In the protest derided by journalist Beddoes, the Canadian steering committee for the tournament decided to boycott the second game in Moscow.⁹⁵ As mentioned above, the Sports Committee later produced fifty-five additional seats, but treatment of Canadians persisted as an issue: Canadian "players were particularly angry to have their wives sitting in seats where they could hardly see play, isolated from main [Canadian] group, and constantly insulted and jostled by [the] hostile crowd."⁹⁶

Adding to the embassy's headaches was the treatment of a special delegation of 270 Canadian VIPs who made the trip to Moscow at the invitation of the Soviet Sports Committee. The Sports Committee had promised a "sightseeing and social program" and even provided the embassy with a "draft program." The Soviets, however, "had done little advance preparation and . . . were also unable to produce circus and theatre tickets for [the] full group as originally

⁹² From MOSCO, No. 2042, 3 October 1974.

⁹³ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974.

⁹⁴ Mary Trueman, "Paul Henderson Has had His Fill of USSR, Will Say Nyet To Future Series," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 8 October 1974, p. 36 (ProQuest).

⁹⁵ From MOSCO, No. 2042, 3 October 1974.

⁹⁶ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974.

promised.”⁹⁷ As a result, the special delegation had “no proper program, the worst seats in [the] arena and worst rooms in [the] hotel.”⁹⁸ The embassy pointed out to the Sports Committee that tourists on Intourist packages fared better than those who had been officially invited – that the Sports Committee had provided less for the VIPs it invited than ordinary tourists obtained on their own.⁹⁹ The treatment of Canadians caused so much friction that on 3 October the embassy cabled to Ottawa that “relations between [the Soviet] sports c[ommi]ttee and Team C[anada] officials are not...good.”¹⁰⁰ After the series, Ford advised Ottawa that Canada could not “simply ignore” the Sports Committee’s “conduct” during the series, and “I would hope that our displeasure can be registered in [an] appropriate way.”¹⁰¹

In his lengthy post-mortem on the series, Ford wrote that it sometimes appeared the Sports Committee “seemed determined to create [the] worst possible conditions for players and officials of Team [Canada] and [the] WHA.” In the embassy’s estimation, “[w]hile part of [the] explanation for this situation may have been [a] deliberate effort to wage psychological warfare against” the Canadians, the “basic cause of most of problems seems to have been” the Sports Committee’s desire to obtain hard currency by inviting a large group of VIPs, then cutting “too many corners” so it was unable to meet its promises.¹⁰²

Even when the foreign ministry was involved, though, Ford found “puzzling” both the Kremlin’s “attitude of indifference to [the] political aspects of series,” and the “way in which Soviet officialdom seemed to ignore” the series’ potential “for making [a] positive contribution to C[anadian]/Soviet relations and projection of [a] favourable Soviet image abroad” and instead “seemed even to go out of their way...to make relations worse.”¹⁰³ Based on his long experience in Moscow, Ford had concluded the Soviets struggled to “figure out exactly how to classify Canada” because that nation “never fitted easily into any of their preconceived categories.” He thought the Soviets “were certain that when the chips were down, Washington would always

⁹⁷ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2070, 9 October 1974.

⁹⁸ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974.

⁹⁹ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2070, 9 October 1974.

¹⁰⁰ From MOSCO, No. 2042, 3 October 1974.

¹⁰¹ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974.

¹⁰² MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974.

¹⁰³ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974.

prevent Canada from any important deviation from American policies.”¹⁰⁴ With such a view of Canada, Moscow might understandably see little reason to pursue improved relations.

Still, Ford hoped that rather than reflecting a lack of Soviet interest in Canadian relations it was the result of the “highly departmentalized” nature of “Soviet bureaucracy” and the foreign ministry’s failure to realize the Sports Committee “was incompetent” until “it was too late.” The important fact, though, is that in a series designed to promote improved Soviet-Canadian relations, the Soviet Sports Committee’s conduct left the Canadians thinking the Soviets “seemed determined to create [the] worst possible conditions for” the Canadians – and the foreign ministry did not seem to care.¹⁰⁵ Added to the media coverage emphasizing Canadian barbarity, and it would appear that Canada gained little foreign policy benefit from this series.

Strangely, in a series designed to improve Soviet-Canadian relations, Canada’s biggest public relations success may have occurred in a very different nation: Communist China (where, coincidentally or not, Trudeau had paid a visit the year before). External Affairs files included clippings of Associated Press stories about official Chinese news agency reports crediting allegations that “Canadian players in Moscow were bugged” and that “it may have hurt their play.”¹⁰⁶ Stories had circulated during the series suggesting that the Canadian team’s hotel rooms in Moscow had been bugged.¹⁰⁷ Canadian star Gordie Howe reported sitting in his room and “when I mentioned we could do with more chairs. We didn’t tell anyone else, but the next day we had two more chairs in our room.” Still, Howe said, “The only bugs I know about for sure were the ones I saw crawling in the bathroom.”¹⁰⁸

The official Chinese news agency, according to the Associated Press, reported that “[a]fter the first game” in Moscow, “Canadian players gathered in one of their rooms to discuss the tactics and weaknesses of the Soviet team to work out a winning strategy for themselves...But the next time on the ice they soon learned that the Soviet team had ‘made a

¹⁰⁴ Ford, *Our Man in Moscow*, 96.

¹⁰⁵ MOSCO to EXTOTT, No. 2068, 9 October 1974.

¹⁰⁶ “China blasts ‘vile’ Soviet hockey play,” *Montreal Gazette*, 4 November 1974.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, “Gord’s Room Was ‘Bugged’,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 4 October 1974, p. 49.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in “Howe Bugged, But Russians Got Message,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 10 October 1974, p. 47 (ProQuest).

rather quick change in their tactics.” The copy in External Affairs files included a handwritten note: “at least someone believes in us.”¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

As the introduction and subtitle of this essay acknowledged, it relied heavily on Canadian government documents in assessing the foreign policy impact of the '74 Series in Canadian-Soviet relations. The view from Moscow no doubt would be different, and an important contribution to our understanding of Cold War hockey diplomacy. Research in Foreign Ministry sources should reveal whether the Soviet government and media shared perspectives on these events, in contrast to their Canadian counterparts. The Soviets likely were far more critical of the Canadians, and far less critical of themselves, than were the Canadian officials. Foreign ministry archives hopefully would tell us whether Ford was accurate in attributing the Soviet Foreign Ministry's "puzzling" unwillingness to address Sports Committee failures to Soviet-style compartmentalization and bureaucratization, or whether the Kremlin really had little interest in improved relations with Canada. It would be interesting as well to see what if any contact took place between the Sports Committee and the Foreign Ministry in connection with the series, and what kind of attention the Sports Committee gave the hockey series in the same summer that so much of its efforts and energies were focused on Moscow's bid for the 1980 Summer Olympics.

In the end, although the biggest diplomatic victory for Canada in the '74 series may have been in Beijing, it was not devoid of diplomatic accomplishments. Bobby Hull was already a household name among hockey fans in the Soviet Union, and made even more friends during the series. Following the Game Six fight, Hull admitted that the referee had made poor calls, but still said, “There was no need for that kind of crap at the end. I don't care who was to blame, Ley or Kharlamov, that's not what this series was supposed to be about.”¹¹⁰ Soviet coach Boris Kulagin, who had demanded the jailing of Ley, called Hull “a great athlete, a good gentleman and...a man of strong moral character.”¹¹¹ After the series Soviet star Aleksandr Yakushev said, “My first idols were [Soviet stars] Boris Mayorov and Anatoli Firsov...After this series, I have another

¹⁰⁹ Photocopy of article, newspaper unspecified, 6 November 1974, in RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.

¹¹⁰ Beddoes and Trueman, “Jail Him, Russian Coach Says,” 2.

¹¹¹ Quoted in “Russian Comeback Didn't Surprise Coach Kulagin.”


hero. Bobby Hull.”¹¹² After Hull was awarded a trip around the Soviet Union for being the most sportsmanlike Canadian player, students at the University of Kazan sent him a congratulatory telegram. The students reported that they had been “[t]hrilled by your play and gentlemanly conduct on the ice” and wished Hull “a happy journey through our country.”¹¹³

Still, the series accomplished less than its proponents might have hoped. The difficulty of controlling different individuals and organizations—even in a totalitarian state—made it hard for national governments to use this cultural form to diplomatic advantage. Thus the Canadians lent credibility to negative Soviet stories about Canada, while the Soviets’ organizational failings and pursuit of short-term aims infuriated Canadians and raised doubts about the Kremlin’s diplomatic intentions. For Canadian diplomats in 1974 it was hard to “draw a balance sheet” of the series’ impact on Soviet-Canadian relations, but for historians of diplomacy this series clearly demonstrated the difficulties of pursuing cultural diplomacy.

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¹¹² Quoted in *Total Hockey*, 506.

¹¹³ Eric Morse to R.M. Hull (c/o Winnipeg Jets Hockey Team), 16 October 1974, RG25, vol. 10922, file: 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 11, LAC.



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