

# Annual UN gathering a hotbed for spies, many from US adversaries

By **Hollie McKay**, | Fox News



**The United Nations headquarters in New York.**

The annual September gathering at the U.N. General Assembly (UNGA) headquarters in New York attracts thousands of world leaders, their aides, diplomats – and a darker, behind-the-scenes element that’s rarely mentioned in all the international media coverage. Behind the buzz of official diplomatic activity, experts agree the meetings are a prime time opportunity for any foreign government - particularly foes of the U.S - to dispatch networks of spies to creep through the cracks of the endless parties, protests, backroom dinners and debates that dominate the sessions.

“Only 50 percent of the UNGA is about diplomacy, the other 50 percent is pure intelligence gathering. Within the U.N. building’s walls it is very diplomatic, but outside it is pure chaos - a total spy game,” said Larry Johnson, a 24-year veteran of the U.S. Secret Service and currently CEO of CyberSponse.

“Every country is engaged in spying at this event, and they have their intelligence/surveillance teams come in at least a week in advance, often from different ports of entry, so they are harder to trace,” said Johnson. “They will be doing every type of surveillance you can imagine, from intercepting cell phone traffic and WiFi to bugging hotel rooms, visual surveillance (photography) and in-person reconnaissance.

Johnson said the “in-person reconnaissance” is especially active at the UNGA. “They take advantage of the dining, networking and informal meetings ... People tend to be less guarded in those moments, especially if they’ve been drinking, so it can be a gold mine for intel collection.

Johnson and other experts agree Russia, Iran, Israel – and the U.S. – are among the most active spying operations, and as much as half the visiting delegations from some countries are intelligence operatives.

“With the city becoming the world’s melting pot for the month of September, those interested in espionage can essentially have a one-stop shop for assisting a country or being a double agent for another, with plenty of cover story options given the numerous events,” Erik Rasmussen, Principal Head of Cybersecurity and Risk Management Solutions for private security firm Grobstein Teeple, told Fox News.

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