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U.S. expels 10 Russian spies after guilty pleas

Paved way for biggest U.S.-Russian spy swap since the end of the Cold War



The many faces of sultry Russian spy Anna Chapman

NEW YORK--All 10 of the people suspected of operating under deep cover in the U.S. for Russian intelligence pleaded guilty in a Manhattan courtroom Thursday and were expelled from the United States, leaving late in the day on a flight chartered by the Russian government to Vienna, Austria, a federal law enforcement official said.

U.S. marshals were on board the flight which left at 10 EST from New York's LaGuardia Airport. It paved the way for the biggest U.S.-Russian spy swap since the end of the Cold War. The Russian government released four people whom it had convicted of spying for the U.S.. Their families will be able to join them in the United States.

Each of the secret agents in New York

admitted to a single charge: acting as an unregistered foreign agent. It is a relatively minor offense that carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and no minimum penalty. Prosecutors agreed to drop a second charge of conspiring to launder money, which could have meant a 20-year sentence in exchange for their pleas.

"This was an extraordinary case developed through the years of work by investigators, intelligence lawyers and prosecutors, and the agreement we reached provided a successful resolution for the United States and its interests," Attorney General Eric Holder said in a written statement.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the move was made "in the general context of improving Russian-American relations, and the new dynamic they have been given, in the spirit of basic agreements at the highest level between Moscow and Washington on the strategic character of Russian-American partnership."

One of the reasons the case was resolved so quickly was because none of the 10 ever faced espionage charges. It

appears after more than a decade of living in the U.S. they never managed to discover anything secret to pass on to Moscow.

The hearing lasted two hours. Some of the defendants were dressed in street clothes, others in prison garb.

The most dramatic part of the hearing came when the defendants stood and stated their names. All but three of them had Russian names and all but one, Vickey Pelaez, a Spanish-language newspaper journalist in New York, admitted they were Russian citizens. The judge told the defendants that they would have to return to Russia and were not permitted to come back to the United States. The group forfeited their houses and cars to the U.S. government as part of their plea deal.

Palaez was given special dispensation. She will not be permitted to go on to any third country after she arrives in Russia-including her native Peru-and will be given \$2,000 a month for the rest of her life if she should stay in Russia, her housing there would be paid for and her children will be provided with visas wherever she is living.

Anna Chapman, whose sultry photo gleaned from social-networking sites made her a tabloid sensation, pulled back her red hair as she glanced around the courtroom. The 28-year-old divorcee has a masters degree in economics, and had an online real estate business, a fancy Financial District apartment and possesses a Victoria Secret's body.

Medvedev pardons four convicted foreign spies

A Kremlin statement carried by the Russian news agencies says that President Dmitry Medvedev signed a decree pardoning four convicted foreign spies for the exchange to take place. They included Russian citizens Alexander Zaporozhsky, a former colonel in the SVR; Sergel Skripal, a retired military intelligence colonel sentenced in 2006 to 13 years in jail for spying for Britain; and Igor Sutyagin, a Russian academic jailed as a CIA spy in 2004.

The identity of the fourth person on the list, Gennady Vasilenko, was unclear. One such name turns up to be a former KGB officer working for Russia's NTV television. He was arrested in 2005 and sentenced the following year three years in prison on murky charges of illegal weapons possession and resistance to authorities.

The most prominent of the four Russians to be released was Sutyagin. His lawyer said her client was spotted stepping off a plane in Vienna Wednesday. Sutyagin has insisted on his innocence, saying that the information he provided to a British company that investigators claimed was a CIA cover came from open sources. His family told reporters last week he was forced to sign a confession. He was serving a 15-year jail term for treason.

U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner denied Thursday that Sutyagin had been a spy.

No Bull, the Heat is on; LeBron going to Miami

"Hopefully the fans will be respectful but at the same time I didn't expect them to be. It's going to be a challenge to go in their ...They can have mixed emotions of course. Akron is always home for me. I'm going to still live there."

LeBron James

Basketball superstar is not coming to Chicago to play for the Bulls. Neither is he going to New York or back to his team in Cleveland. LeBron James announced Thursday night he is signing with the Miami Heat.

The NBA's reigning MVP ended months of speculation and suspense by telling his ESPN television audience that he is leaving the Cleveland Cavaliers after an unsuccessful seven-year quest for the championship he covets.

James will be playing with shooting guard Dwayne Wade and power forward Chris Bosh in Miami. "We're going to be a really good team," he said. Multiple sources said that James had been in contact with Bosh and Wade for several weeks, including

a meeting between the three of them had at James Bath house in the last week in June to discuss the marriage.

James, Bosh and Wade entered the pros in the same year, the respective 1,4 and 5 picks in the 2003 draft. They went their separate ways: James to Cleveland, Bosh to Toronto and Wade to Miami where he won a championship partnering with Shaquille O'Neal in 2006. That year, the trio signed matching contracts, ensuring they were free agents at the same time.

James said he will sign a 5-year contract, longer than any deal he signed with the Cavs. "It's going to give me the best opportunity win and win for multiple years, James said. "I want to win a championship and I feel I can compete down there.

James said he made the decision Thursday morning after a phone call with his mother who he said supported his decision.

"I didn't want to make an emotional decision. I wanted to do what was best for me and what would make me happy," James said.

"This is a business and I had seven great years in Cleveland. I hope the fans

understand...maybe they don't."

There was heartbreak in Cleveland. Fans quickly left the city's crowded bars soon after hearing LeBron make his announcement. It was a different story in Miami. Fans wasted no time in beginning the celebration. Horns honked outside the arena and on Miami Beach where Wade was watching the announcement with members of the inner circle.

Season-ticket sales for the Heat's coming 41-game season were suspended Thursday afternoon after the entire supply of available seats were sold out. Not every seat had been released for sale yet and some will be held back for single-game purchases at the 19,900-capacity arena.

Besides the Heat, the Boys and Girls Club of America and Twitter were beneficiaries of James' decision to appear on national television. The club expected to receive about \$2.5 million in support from the show and related activities.

"The money will be used to support James' vision to construct basketball courts for youth across the country," ESPN officials said.

