

Deported Spies Get Top State Award

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President Dmitry Medvedev bestowed the country's highest state honor Monday on the Russian sleeper agents deported from the United States as part of the countries' biggest spy swap since the Cold War.

"A ceremony took place in the Kremlin today to give the highest state awards to members of the Foreign Intelligence Service, including intelligence officers working in the United States who returned to Russia in July," Medvedev's spokeswoman Natalya Timakova said, Interfax reported.

No other details on the ceremony were available.

In early July, 10 Russian agents who infiltrated suburban America were deported in exchange for four people convicted in Russia of spying for the West.

Although the spies have received the country's top state honor, the U.S. court complaint against them described their many spying blunders, leading to some embarrassing coverage for the Foreign Intelligence Service in the Western press.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who served as a spy in East Germany before going into politics, said in July that he had met with the spies to celebrate their return and led them in a patriotic singalong. He also warned that the "traitors" who exposed them could end up "in a ditch."

The most famous of the agents, Anna Chapman, visited the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan this month for the launch of a Russian spaceship, fueling her celebrity at home and abroad.

Chapman was in Baikonur ostensibly as an adviser of a Moscow bank, FondServisBank, which works with Russian companies in the aerospace industry. She is also writing a book about the Internet.

(AP, MT)

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