

Defector May Have Been Recruited Years Ago

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Senior State Duma Deputy Gennady Gudkov said Sunday that a Foreign Intelligence Service colonel who betrayed 11 sleeper agents was possibly recruited by the United States "several years ago."

"There is indirect evidence that Shcherbakov was recruited by the Americans several years ago and, thus, he was able to prepare his escape, taking files of our agents and even information he might have obtained from other departments," said Gudkov, himself a retired intelligence official, Interfax reported.

President Dmitry Medvedev confirmed Friday that the U.S. arrests of the Russian agents in June was the result of the defection of a senior intelligence official. The defector, identified by news reports by only his last name, Shcherbakov, had headed the Foreign Intelligence Service department overseeing agents in the United States. Kommersant reported that he fled to the United States in June, just six days before the arrests.

U.S. intelligence analyst David Wise told NBC television on Saturday that Shcherbakov must be

under FBI protection. U.S. intelligence agencies have neither confirmed nor denied news reports about Shcherbakov.

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