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'Traitor' Charged in U.S. Spy Scandal

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Chapman at a fashion show in April. **Luba Sheme**

A former Russian intelligence officer who helped U.S. authorities bust a Russian spy ring last summer has been charged with high treason and desertion in his homeland, news reports said Tuesday.

The indictment for Alexander Poteyev, the man accused of tipping the authorities off about Anna Chapman and her fellow deep cover agents, has been passed to Moscow's main military court, the Federal Security Service said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies.

Poteyev, who controlled U.S.-based spy operations from Moscow, purportedly fled to the United States just before Washington announced that it had uncovered the 10 spies last summer. They were deported in exchange for four suspected agents who had been incarcerated in Russia. It was the biggest spy swap since the Cold War.

The FSB refused to confirm Poteyev's charges to The Associated Press. High treason carries a maximum of 20 years' prison under Russian law, while desertion is seven years.

Kommersant first reported on Poteyev in November, but referred to him under a different

name, Colonel Shcherbakov. It cited an unidentified Kremlin official as suggesting Shcherbakov might be assassinated in the near future, but Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said in December that Russia had long abandoned the Soviet practice of killing turncoats.

The spies received a hero's welcome when they returned to Russia in July, and Putin led them in a patriotic singalong. President Dmitry Medvedev bestowed them with the nation's highest awards in October.

Anna Chapman, the pinup girl for the agents, later visited the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan for the launch of a Russian spaceship, fueling her celebrity in Russia and abroad. She also became the new celebrity face of a Moscow bank and rumors are swirling she may be pursuing a career in politics.

Putin, a KGB veteran who led the FSB before ascending to the presidency in 2000, insisted in a recent CNN interview that the agents had caused no damage to the United States.

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