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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Anna Chapman 'Contacts' Arrested

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The house in Marburg where the spy suspects were arrested last Tuesday.

Russian intelligence has come under a new barrage of criticism for using ineffective Cold War-era tactics following the arrest of two suspected deep-cover spies in Germany.

The suspects — apparently caught red-handed while listening to 1970s-style encrypted radio messages from Moscow — appear to have much in common with the 10 sleeper agents uncovered in the United States last year — and reportedly maintained close contacts with one of them, the red-haired sensation Anna Chapman.

German prosecutors said Friday that a couple living in Marburg, a town in the central state of Hesse, had been arrested on accusations of spying for an unspecified foreign intelligence service, which media identified over the weekend as Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service.

German bloggers identified the suspects as Andreas and Heidrun Anschlag, information also published by Kommersant on Monday.

The couple was said to have operated in Germany for more than 20 years, similar to the 10 agents arrested in the United States in June 2010. They were in close contact with Chapman, who has become a national celebrity since returning to Russia in a prisoner swap, the Focus magazine reported, quoting unidentified investigators.

Heidrun Anschlag was caught by investigators while listening to encrypted radio messages from Moscow, the report said, adding that the couple moved to Germany in 1990 via Mexico using false Austrian passports.

A video by the local Oberhessische Presse newspaper showed a bungalow in Michelbach, a suburb of Marburg, where the two were arrested by masked commandos last Tuesday.

Neighbors said the family, with a grown-up daughter, led an unassuming life since renting the house a year ago, the daily reported.

Reached by telephone in Karlsruhe, Steffen Haidinger, a spokesman for the German prosecutor general's office, refused to comment on the reports.

A spokesman for the Russian Embassy in Berlin also refused to comment, explaining that German authorities had not offered any official information about the case.

Just as after the exposure of the U.S.-based spy ring in 2010, experts expressed bewilderment as to how the German-based couple could have gathered any meaningful information. They pointed out that Marburg, which has a famously left-leaning university, might have served as a recruiting ground for spies during the Cold War but could hardly be a useful base today.

"This is absurd. There are no U.S. forces or anything else of interest anywhere nearby," said Alexander Rahr, an analyst with the German Council of Foreign Relations.

But German media reports suggested that the pair was engaged in industrial espionage because Andreas Anschlag worked in an auto components firm.

Research by The Moscow Times also showed that the family lived in Landau, Rhineland-Palatinate, not far from the U.S. air bases Ramstein and Büchel, before moving to Marburg.

Other experts said that working with encrypted radio messages seemed bizarre in the 21st century, where the Internet offers intelligence agencies far easier and safer communications. Vladislav Belov, a researcher with the European Studies Center and the Moscow State International Relations Institute, noted that the Federal Security Service voiced fears earlier this year that the uncontrolled use of certain e-mail and voice services could threaten national security.

"Remember that they are against Skype and Gmail because they cannot control them," Belov said.

But an unidentified official in the Foreign Intelligence Service, or the SVR, told Izvestia that the couple was part of a group that had effectively retired from the agency.

Known as "sleeping agents," the group is still used by the SVR as "mailboxes" for occasional communication but is otherwise left alone because they have "residency permits, pension

rights and families," the official said.

"A good and proven agent becomes like a member of the family," he said. "It would be a pity to let him down."

Andrei Soldatov, one of the country's most prominent intelligence experts, said the affair only showed that the SVR was holding onto outdated methods.

"The work of illegals was already of dubious effect in the Soviet Union," said Soldatov, who works at the Agentura.ru think tank.

The case follows a range of spy spats with the West, including one with a German helicopter engineer who was given a suspended sentence in 2008 for selling Eurocopter documents to an SVR agent.

Other cases this year include the expulsion by Russia of defense attaches from Israel and the Netherlands. The Israeli was expelled in May on accusations of gathering intelligence about Moscow's military cooperation with Arab states, while the Dutch attache was expelled in a July tit-for-tat over allegations that a former Dutch fighter pilot had sold sensitive information to Russia and Belarus.

Hans-Henning Schröder, an analyst with the Berlin-based German Institute of International and Security Affairs, said he was not surprised about the latest spy case.

He said Moscow has focused on industrial targets as it has continued its intelligence activities, an observation that regularly features in official German intelligence agency reports.

"These games continue, but they don't have much effect on mutual relations," he said, pointing out that the U.S.-Russian "reset" was not much affected by the 2010 spy affair.

Schröder was himself at the center of a test for mutual ties when he was refused entry at Domodedovo Airport last month, apparently for national security reasons. Schröder said Monday that Oleg Krasnitsky, Moscow's deputy ambassador in Berlin, had formally apologized over the incident.

"He sat down with me for a cup of tea in the embassy," Schröder said. He added that the only reason for the incident given was "a technical mistake."

"I have not heard a convincing explanation so far," he said.

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