The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Despite Cheap Wigs, the CIA Are Big Spenders

By Vasily Kashin

May 21, 2013

The spy scandal involving U.S. diplomat Ryan Fogle reveals some interesting points about relations between the U.S. and Russia.

First, Fogle supposedly offered a Federal Security Service officer $100,000 for the first meeting and $1 million annually, plus bonuses, if he agreed to share classified information with the U.S. This is much more than informants have been paid in the past. By comparison, the KGB and FSB paid CIA mole Aldrich Ames, who handed over to Russian intelligence perhaps more classified information than any other CIA betrayer before him, a modest $4.6 million between 1985 and 1994. The information he provided enabled Soviet authorities to dismantle a large part of the CIA's intelligence network in this country. Yet Fogle allegedly offered the unidentified Russian intelligence officer, who is responsible for the North Caucasus, twice what the Soviet Union paid Ames during the peak of the Cold War. Even when you adjust the two sums for inflation, that is a lot of money.

The Fogle case shows the CIA's newfound readiness to pay big money to obtain secrets from foreign intelligence agents.

Intelligence services have historically been rather stingy when it comes to paying their field operatives and informants. Although the U.S. intelligence community had what might seem to have been a large official budget of $53.1 billion in 2010, which does not include the cost of war-related intelligence, most of the money was spent on military assets such as satellites, supercomputers and radio intercept systems. Even such a high-value informant as former Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri, who served under former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and cooperated with the CIA for several years prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, was paid just $100,000 for his efforts.

The Fogle case shows the CIA's newfound readiness to spend big money on recruiting foreign agents and to take serious risks. It also shows the difficulty the agency is having obtaining much-needed classified information from foreign sources. Most recently, a CIA agent tried to recruit a Russian intelligence officer in Moscow but failed, which resulted in the expulsion of the U.S. agent in January. Meanwhile, the FSB, which has noticed an increase in U.S. intelligence activity in Moscow since 2011, warned the resident CIA chief to scale back his agency's work in the Russian capital. Yet when Washington refused to comply and continued its recruitment activities, Moscow decided to demonstratively slap Uncle Sam's wrist and stir up a scandal by parading Fogle's arrest and expulsion on national television.

The final act in the current scandal came after Fogle's arrest. Interfax published an interview with an FSB representative who revealed the identity of the CIA station chief in Moscow and the name of the CIA agent who was expelled this January. Publishing the names of the resident chief and a failed spy in the media was a nasty blow below the belt to U.S. intelligence and was intended to show the degree of displeasure that the FSB feels over their activities. The spies whose names and faces have been broadcast in this way will now be unable to work not only in Russia but in any country of the world.

Intelligence agencies in nearly every country are extensions of foreign policy. If agents plow forward, offering great sums of money to potential informants even after previous attempts have ended badly, it must reflect their agency's official policy. It is very possible that a new dynamic will soon be seen in U.S.-Russian relations.

As for Fogle, the Russian media portrayed him as a comic Austin Powers figure. But nothing about the circumstances of his arrest indicates that he was incompetent. Working in a foreign city where mobile telephone operators are required to cooperate with the police and intelligence agencies and where the streets are brimming with private and government video surveillance cameras, it is clear that Fogle had to move about primarily on foot and limit

his use of modern electronic gadgets to cheap mobile phones that could be thrown away after one call.

It is common for intelligence officers to conduct "test runs" prior to meeting with an important source or target for recruitment. The maneuver might last for hours as the agent tries to determine if he is being watched or followed and could easily take place on a city's periphery where there are fewer cameras. (Fogle was apprehended near the Vorontsovo Park in southern Moscow.) Since Moscow is not the easiest city to navigate, there is nothing unusual about carrying a city map, or even a compass, to help in the task. As for the infamous blond wig that Fogle was wearing when he was arrested, he might have used it to blend into the crowd to evade being caught by Russian authorities.

Vasily Kashin is an analyst with CAST, a Moscow-based think tank. This comment appeared in Vedomosti.

Related articles:

- How a U.S. Spy Saved an FSB Agent's Rear End
- Alleged CIA Spy Leaves Russia
- FSB Says U.S. Spying Case Was 2nd This Year

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/05/21/despite-cheap-wigs-the-cia-are-big-spenders-a24252