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Russia Targeted Infamous Double Agent in U.S. Assassination Attempt – NYT

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Russia attempted to assassinate a former intelligence officer in the United States in a "brazen" failed bid that led in part to tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions, The New York Times reported Monday, citing three anonymous former senior U.S. officials.

Alexander Poteyev was a former colonel in Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) who shared state secrets that helped U.S. authorities bust a deep-cover Russian spy ring known as "the illegals" in 2010.

Poteyev fled to the U.S. days before the FBI arrested the spy ring, and Russia in 2011 sentenced him in absentia to 25 years in prison for treason.

According to NYT, Russia in 2019 recruited Mexican scientist Hector Alejandro Cabrera Fuentes to locate Poteyev in Miami Beach, Florida, where the double agent had settled.

The clandestine operation crossed Russia's previously avoided line of targeting a U.S.

informant on American soil, the newspaper wrote.

Fuentes was arrested while trying to fly back to Mexico days after botching the operation outside Poteyev's guarded residence, the newspaper said.

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Fuentes disclosed to U.S. authorities his contacts with a Russian official, which the Department of Justice detailed in a 2020 criminal complaint that charged him with acting on behalf of a foreign government.

"The Russian government official provided Fuentes with a physical description of a U.S. Government source's [Poteyev's] vehicle," the Department of Justice statement said, "and told Fuentes to locate the car, obtain the source's vehicle license plate number, and note the physical location of the source's vehicle."

"Fuentes admitted to law enforcement officers that he was directed by a Russian government official to conduct this operation. According to court documents, messages on Fuentes's phone showed that the Russian official initiated and directed the meetings," it added.

The plot was among a series of Russian activities that led the U.S. to announce sanctions and the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats, including alleged spies, in April 2021.

Russia expelled 10 American diplomats in retaliation.

Those expelled included top intelligence officials in Moscow and Washington, according to NYT.

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