

# The Russian Agents, Obama, and the Cover-up

By Cliff Kincaid – July 16, 2010

Our media do not seem to be interested in the curious matter of why the Russian agents accused of trying to acquire sensitive nuclear information from the U.S. Government were so quickly released. Why were they sent back to Moscow less than two weeks after they were arrested?

**It is certainly the case that a continuing spy scandal threatened to undermine U.S.-Russia business “opportunities” and “cooperation.” It is also true that there is evidence that the Russian agents targeted the Obama Administration and former Clinton Administration officials.**

Just before the scandal broke, a \$4 billion deal had been announced between Boeing and a Russian firm. During the visit of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to the U.S., Cisco Systems had announced it was going to spend \$1 billion in Russia, in part to develop a Moscow version of Silicon Valley. The United States Export-Import Bank had also announced a new deal to underwrite, with U.S. taxpayer dollars, U.S. business exports to Russia.

Plus, Obama had submitted a U.S.-Russian nuclear cooperation agreement, backed by powerful business interests, to the U.S. Congress.

**All of this was clearly in jeopardy if the Russian spy scandal led to additional revelations of Russian spying on the American government and businesses. So the scandal had to go away – and quickly.**



**Medvedev and Obama**

The exchange was hammered out so quickly and was so advantageous to the Kremlin, however, that it should have become apparent to some journalist somewhere that there was much more to the story. But the issue was just as quickly dropped by the media, liberal and conservative alike.

Fortunately, some people are paying critical attention to what has transpired.

Writing on the web site of World Affairs, Vladimir Kara-Murza says that Yelena Bonner, the widow of academician Andrei Sakharov and a prominent advocate of human rights in Russia, “called the swap a missed opportunity and denounced the Obama administration not only for agreeing to an unequal exchange (ten for four) but, more importantly, for not requesting the freeing of more political prisoners, of whom there are scores in today’s Russia.”

One of those released by Russia in exchange for its agents was a political prisoner, historian and researcher Igor Sutyagin.

### **Funny Business**

On the Tonight Show with Jay Leno, Vice President Joseph Biden called the exchange a “good deal” and said that he would have preferred keeping the good-looking Russian woman spy and giving Rush Limbaugh to the Kremlin.

Has the possible penetration of the U.S. Government by foreign spies become a laughing matter for the Obama Administration? Are they fearful that a realistic review of what the Russian agents were doing would lead to the conclusion that Obama’s foreign policy plays into the hands of the Russian government and has in fact been manipulated by the Kremlin?

Documents in the scandal demonstrate, as we have reported, that the Russian intelligence service, the SVR, was interested in penetrating “think tanks” with influence over U.S. foreign policy. The SVR, the successor to the KGB, was especially interested in nuclear weapons-related information.

**What we do know, based on public reports, is that one Russian agent had a job at Microsoft, another had been trying to cultivate a fundraiser for and friend of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and another had claimed contacts with a Clinton Administration official by the name of Leon Fuerth, who had been Vice President Al Gore’s top national security aide.**

So we quickly found out that top Obama and Democratic Party officials had been targeted in this intelligence operation. Is this why the scandal had to go away?

The hastily-arranged “spy swap” ended any chance of finding out in detail in a public forum what kind of information the Russian intelligence service had been collecting and

who in the U.S. Government had possibly been recruited or used as assets and contacts.

Scratching the surface of the scandal, Walter Pincus of the Washington Post wonders if all of the Russian agents have been wounded up.

He writes, “The best public indication of the extent of Moscow’s efforts comes from the late Sergei Tretyakov, the former Russian intelligence officer who under the guise of a press officer at the U.N. Mission ran espionage operations in New York City from 1995 to 2000. He served the last three of those years as a double agent for the FBI until he defected to the United States. As Tretyakov told author Pete Earley in the book ‘Comrade J,’ at one time he had more than 60 SVR officers working inside the United Nations and more than 160 contacts made up of illegals, outright spies, and other people who knowingly or unknowingly could supply information useful to Russia.”

According to Earley, Tretyakov died “unexpectedly” on June 13. The circumstances were so suspicious that an autopsy was performed under the supervision of the FBI.

### **The Strobe Talbott Case**

But there is something else that Pincus did not mention. It has to do with those “other people” targeted and used by Tretyakov and the Russians.

The book, *Comrade J*, identifies Strobe Talbott, a former high-ranking Clinton State Department official and the current president of the Brookings Institution, a major liberal think tank, as having been a trusted contact of the Russian intelligence service. Talbott has denied serving as a Russian agent, but when he was up for his State Department job in the Clinton Administration, he admitted a relationship with Soviet “journalist” and KGB agent Victor Louis.

The Talbott case is consistently ignored by the major media because he is respected and trusted by his colleagues in the press. He is also trusted by Senator Richard Lugar, who served as Obama’s mentor when Obama was in the U.S. Senate and traveled to Russia, only to be detained and have his passport examined by Russian authorities. Obama joked about the detention, saying he wasn’t in the Gulag.

Pincus asked, “What will the Russians do now?” He noted that Tretyakov had said that when the Cold War was over, “the United States asked Russia to stop the KGB’s covert propaganda activities that portrayed Washington in foreign media as carrying out terrible activities, such as saying the United States was spreading HIV in Africa.”

In response, Pincus noted that Tretyakov said that the KGB closed down “Department A,” which ran the propaganda and disinformation operations, but then established another program which did the same thing. “Nothing changed,” Tretyakov said.

So the propaganda and disinformation activities continue. Indeed, that is what the Kremlin-financed global Russia Today television channel is all about. It has a major presence in the U.S.

**But wait. Didn't the Reverend Jeremiah Wright repeat the KGB disinformation that the U.S. was spreading AIDS? Indeed he did. In fact, Wright, who was Barack Obama's pastor for 20 years, actually claimed at a National Press Club appearance during the 2008 presidential campaign that the U.S. government had manufactured the AIDS virus to kill black people.**

So we have one identified channel of influence whereby Soviet propaganda and disinformation was spewing from the mouth of someone with direct influence over the president of the United States. But few in the major media were interested then -- or now -- as to whether or not Obama believed any of that nonsense.

### **Holder's Absurd Claims**

One possible reason for quickly deporting the spies, from the point of view of the Obama Administration, is that they had explosive information about Russian influence over the U.S. Government that would have been too incriminating to reveal in a public court case. "Russia considered these people very important to their intelligence-gathering activities," Attorney General Eric Holder admitted. "They didn't pass any classified information," Holder insisted.

Are we supposed to take his word for it? This is one of the most political appointees that Obama has put in power. He is the official suing Arizona over its immigration policy and letting the Black Panthers off the hook for making threats at a polling station. When he was in the Clinton Justice Department, he helped orchestrate pardons for members of terrorist groups.

**It is widely assumed, since they were not charged with espionage, that the Russians were agents of influence who were trying to affect or obtain information about U.S. foreign policy. But this doesn't mean that they did not do significant damage. The documents in the case cite secret money drops and secret messages to "Moscow Center."**

"We did actually make contact with certain people and did obtain certain information from people who were unwitting in their interaction with these people," Holder acknowledged. Who were these "unwitting" people? Were they dupes of Moscow? Were they in the Obama Administration? Were they in the think tanks that we know the Russians targeted?

Holder had no real answer to CBS Face the Nation host Bob Schieffer's question of why, after spending so many years following these agents, they were not prosecuted. Holder could only claim that the 10 were somehow not as valuable as the four we got. In terms of math alone, it just doesn't add up.

Documents in the case, as we have reported, demonstrate that the Russian agents were seeking information about the proposed arms treaty with Russia and other nuclear weapons information. That treaty, the New START, has now been signed and submitted to the Senate for ratification. It is being criticized by conservatives for giving Russia a strategic and tactical advantage in nuclear weapons.

One document says four Obama Administration officials were specifically targeted in the intelligence-gathering effort. But their names were omitted from the Justice Department documents about the case. If they actively conspired with the Russians, shouldn't they be identified and arrested and prosecuted?

However, there is another possible reason for the quick release of the Russian agents. It is that powerful U.S. business interests told the Obama Administration that an unfolding spy scandal – and a public court case – could damage their business dealings with the Russian government.



### **Bad Timing for Business**

There is no question that the timing of the scandal was bad news for these business interests. Before it broke on June 28, a major push had been launched by an entity called the Coalition for a U.S.-Russia Civilian Nuclear Partnership to have Congress approve a Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement with Russia as “a natural next step in deepening the relationship and trade ties between the U.S. and Russia.”

The coalition is supported by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the U.S.-Russia Business Council, the National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC), and Tenex, a Russian company described as the world's leading exporter of nuclear fuel cycle products and services.

The NFTC, an association of some 300 major American multinational corporations, is also behind a “New Strategy of Engagement” with Communist Cuba, including aid and trade for the Castro regime.

**General Electric, a key member of the U.S.-Russia Business Council, has worked in Russia since the 1920s “to develop the country’s energy infrastructure,” it boasts. GE owns NBC and MSNBC. In fact, NBC is itself a member of the U.S.-Russia Business Council.**

Is this why GE-owned media properties have not seen fit to do any in-depth investigative reporting on the Russian spy scandal?

It is interesting to note that Jeffrey Immelt, CEO and Chairman of General Electric, met with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on April 6 of this year. The topic was business in Russia.

Immelt sits on Obama's Economic Recovery Advisory Board.

Even more significant, just four days before the Russian spy scandal broke, the U.S-Russia Business Summit was held, coinciding with the meeting between U.S. President Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev in Washington, D.C. The June 24 event, which featured the chief executive officers of U.S. and Russian companies and business associations, included the announcement that Boeing and Russian Technologies were moving forward with a \$4 billion deal on 50 Boeing 737s.



**Medvedev and Ahmadinejad**

Other announced deals included:

- U.S. engine manufacturer Cummins and Russian truck-builder Kamaz are going to jointly produce a lower-emission engine in Russia.
- The United States Export-Import Bank and Russia's VneshEconBank signed a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation to "finance U.S. sales of medical equipment, energy efficiency equipment and other goods and services to support Russia's economic and technological growth, and U.S. exports and jobs."

**On June 13, as part of his U.S. tour, Medvedev visited the headquarters of Cisco Systems in San Jose, California. Cisco CEO John Chambers used the occasion to announce that it would commit \$1 billion to "the Russian technology innovation agenda over the coming decade," including a high-tech innovation center outside of Moscow, a Russian version of Silicon Valley.**

But there's more.

The Bush Administration had submitted a nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia but it was withdrawn after Russia's 2008 military invasion of Georgia. The Bush Administration came to the belated realization that Putin's Russia was not to be trusted.

Today, however, Russian forces continue to occupy regions of Georgia, even though the Obama Administration claims to be opposed to this Russian aggression, and are even building military bases there.

Nevertheless, the Obama administration re-submitted this U.S.-Russian agreement for peaceful nuclear cooperation to Congress on May 10, 2010. In justifying the measure, Obama said there had been enough “significant progress” in the U.S.-Russia nuclear relationship, including on thwarting the Iranian nuclear weapons program, that it was now appropriate “to move forward with this Agreement for cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.”

Does this claim have any credibility?

**No matter how unbelievable Obama may be, the agreement automatically enters into force after 90 days unless both the House of Representatives and Senate vote to stop it.**

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), co-founder of the Congressional Nuclear Security Caucus, and Congressman Edward Markey (D-MA), founder of the House Bipartisan Task Force on Nonproliferation, have introduced H. J. Res. 85, a resolution of disapproval for the United States-Russia civil nuclear cooperation agreement.

In a “Dear Colleague” letter, they point out:

- “Russia continues to assist Iran’s controversial nuclear program. Russia has a \$1 billion contract for the construction of Iran’s large nuclear reactor at Bushehr, which is scheduled to become fully operational this year.
- “Russia has sold Iran advanced conventional weapons and air-defense systems, and assisted Iran’s ballistic missile production program.
- “Russian entities continue to sell WMD-related technologies to Iran and other countries of concern, resulting in U.S. sanctions. Since 2001, the U.S. Government has sanctioned at least ten Russian entities on eleven separate occasions, including the state-designated arms exporter, Rosoboronexport.
- “Russia still occupies parts of Georgia.
- “Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Syrian President Bashar Assad recently discussed the possibility of Russian-Syrian nuclear cooperation.”

A previous Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on the proposed agreement that was presented -- and then withdrawn -- by the Bush Administration outlined what Democratic lawmakers then said were “significant problems within the executive-branch process for evaluating Russia's nuclear proliferation activities...”

Is there any evidence that the Obama Administration is better able to monitor Russian nuclear proliferation activities?

Will the Democrats this time give the administration a pass, since the president is a member of their own political party?

If so, then relations with Russia, despite the spy scandal, will be back on track and business-as-usual will continue with the Kremlin. Human rights in Russia will continue to suffer and political prisoners will continue to languish in jail. More importantly, Russian intelligence operations, run mainly out of the United Nations in New York, will continue.



Obama's next step, also certain to please the Kremlin, is to seek the 67 votes he needs for passing his new arms deal with Moscow.