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FBI: 3 Russians charged with spying, 1 arrested in New York

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Federal prosecutors in the United States have announced charges against three Russian men who allegedly operated an international spy ring based out of New York City.

US attorneys said Monday that Evgeny Buryakov, Igor Sporyshev, and Victor Podobnyy have been charged “in connection with Buryakov’s service as a covert intelligence agent on behalf of the Russian Federation.” Buryakov unlawfully acted as an unregistered agent of a foreign government, the federal complaint alleges, and his co-defendants are charged with conspiracy thereof.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation says that their investigation into the three co-defendants began shortly after ten alleged Russian spies, including Anna Chapman, were arrested in 2010 following a multi-year investigation. “Within a few months” of the Russians’ subsequent guilty pleas, according to this week’s statement, the FBI began investigating Buryakov, Sporyshev and Podobnyy.

According to the FBI, Buryakov maintained a cover job in the US as an employee in the Manhattan office of a Russian bank, but actually worked to gather intelligence for Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service, SVR. A public LinkedIn profile for a man with the same name as Buryakov suggests he may have been working as a deputy representative in the US for Russia’s Vnesheconombank.

Sporyshev and Podobnyy posed as a Russian trade rep and a United Nations attaché, respectively, but allegedly worked as intermediaries between Buryakov and the SVR, according to the Department of Justice.

Together, the three are accused of aiding the Russian Federation's intelligence gathering operations by collecting details on economic issues and other matters that could be exploited for the Kremlin's gain.

According to a sealed complaint entered last week in the Southern District of New York and made public on Monday, the individuals fished for details on potential sanctions against Russia, as well as America's efforts to develop alternative energy resources, then sent them back to the Kremlin.

Additionally, Buryakov was "formulating questions to be used for intelligence-gathering purposes by others associated with a leading Russian-state-owned news organization," according to the complaint, and the individuals sought to recruit Americans from a New York City university and unnamed "major" companies to help spy on behalf of Moscow.

Buryakov was arrested Monday by law enforcement in New York, according to a statement released by the Department of Justice, but the other two men are no longer in the US and, according to the FBI, "protected by diplomatic immunity from arrest and prosecution."

"We will use every tool at our disposal to identify and hold accountable foreign agents operating inside this country – no matter how deep their cover," US Attorney General Eric Holder said Monday.

"The attempt by foreign nations to illegally gather economic and other intelligence information in the United States through covert agents is a direct threat to the national security of the United States, and it exemplifies why counterespionage is a top priority of the National Security Division," Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin said in the statement.

Paperwork filed against the three men in US District Court for the Southern District of New York suggests that physical and electronic surveillance conducted by American law enforcement against the individuals over the course of two-and-a-half years led to the filing of federal charges.