

Russia intercepted over 300 foreign spies in past 4 years - FSB

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MOSCOW, October 10 (RIA Novosti) - The head of Russia's Federal Security Service told a popular weekly that the FSB had identified over 300 foreign spies over the past four years.

"More than 270 actively operating agents and 70 foreign intelligence recruits, including 35 Russians, have been exposed since 2003," Argumenty i Fakty quoted Nikolai Patrushev as saying. He said that 14 agents and 33 recruits have been caught this year alone.

Patrushev said six Russians were caught in an attempt to transfer state secrets to foreign countries, and have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

Retired Colonel Valentin Shabaturov was given a 12-year sentence this year for treason and espionage. The court proved he had actively cooperated with foreign intelligence for seven years, from 1999 to 2006, and revealed state secrets to them.

Igor Arsentyev, a lieutenant colonel in the reserves, was sentenced to nine years in prison on the same charges in September.

Patrushev said another person is facing court proceedings, and that an investigation is underway into three other cases.

He said the United States and Britain actively used the secret services of Poland, Georgia and Baltic states against Russia.

"This concerns a wide spectrum - from staff composition and budget allocations to strategic guidance and organization of joint operations," Patrushev said.

He also said some Georgian secret agents use their connections with the criminal underworld for their operations, and to stage various acts of provocation.

According to Patrushev, British intelligence is particularly active against Russia, in its attempts to influence the country's domestic political developments.

A major spying scandal clouded relations between Russia and the U.K. at the start of last year, when Moscow claimed four British agents in the Russian capital had been caught procuring information from a high-tech communication device disguised as a rock.

The FSB had linked the discovery of the agents and their equipment to financing of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Russia. Authorities have cracked down on some foreign NGOs suspected of offering funds for political purposes in Russia.

"Pursuing certain political interests, Britain has recently placed its bets on individuals facing criminal charges in Russia and hiding from justice abroad," he said in reference to fugitive oligarch Boris Berezovsky, among others.

The FSB chief mentioned Vyacheslav Zharko, a Russian ex-security service officer who admitted previously working for British intelligence, as saying that Berezovsky and his former colleague Alexander Litvinenko, who was murdered in a high-profile polonium poisoning case last year, had introduced him to Britain's MI6.

Patrushev said Turkish secret services were striving to influence political and business elites in Russian regions with predominantly Muslim populations. He said Pakistani intelligence aimed to secure access to Russian military and dual-purpose technologies, and to obtain information on Russia's military and technical cooperation with a number of countries.

The FSB chief said foreign intelligence services were particularly interested in the state of affairs and progress of reforms in Russia's Armed Forces, including the strategic missile forces. They are also closely observing the development of the defense industry and scientific research, the situation in the North Caucasus, the Far East, and Siberia, along with the country's mineral resources and their transportation infrastructure. Patrushev said foreign countries have annually increased their intelligence budgets by an average of 15-20%.

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