

Russian spies row raises diplomatic tensions

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

conspiracy	elite	expel	alleged	dossier
sabotage	hardliner	paymaster	amateurish	groundless

1. If someone is _____ to have done something wrong or illegal, people claim that this is true even though it has not yet been proved. (para 1)
2. A _____ is a secret plan by a group of people to do something bad or illegal. (para 1)
3. A _____ is someone who gives money so that something can happen and therefore has a lot of control. (para 1)
4. If something is described as _____, it is not based on evidence or good reasons. (para 2)
5. To _____ means *to force someone to leave a foreign country, especially for political reasons or for breaking the law*. (para 4)
6. A _____ is a set of documents about a person or a situation. (para 5)
7. If something is described as _____, it is done without much skill. (para 5)
8. An _____ is a small group of people who have a lot of advantages and power. (para 8)
9. A _____ is someone who is strict or extreme in their political views and unwilling to change them. (para 9)
10. To _____ means *to deliberately prevent a plan or process from being successful*. (para 9)

2 Find the information

Look in the text and find this information as quickly as possible.

1. Where was the alleged paymaster arrested?
2. How many alleged spies have been arrested?
3. Who is Sergei Lavrov?
4. How long is the American dossier?
5. When did the FBI first know about the spy ring?
6. Where did Vladimir Putin work as a KGB agent?

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Luke Harding in Moscow, Helena Smith in Athens, and Peter Walker
30 June, 2010

- 1 Russia and the US were facing their most serious diplomatic crisis of the Obama presidency after Russia angrily criticized the arrest of ten US-based Russian spies and said the FBI operation was an unsavoury cold war plot. The alleged spies are under arrest in the US, after being charged in court with conspiracy to act as an agent of a foreign government. Police in Cyprus arrested the ring's alleged paymaster and 11th spy, Christopher Metsos, as he attempted to catch a flight to Hungary.
- 2 Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, questioned the timing of the arrests, three days after Barack Obama hosted Russia's president, Dmitry Medvedev, on a successful US visit. "The moment when all this was done was chosen quite cleverly," Lavrov said. In a statement, the foreign ministry suggested the "groundless" arrests were an attempt to undermine the improvement in US-Russian relations "announced by the US administration". It said the suspects were Russian citizens who had never acted against US interests.
- 3 Obama made no comment on the case when asked about it during a briefing on the economy. Later, a White House spokesman said Obama had known of the investigation when he met Medvedev but had not known any arrests were about to take place. The spokesman stressed that the arrests were a law enforcement matter and not driven by the president. A US justice department official said they had made the arrests because one of the suspects was about to leave the US. "Operational considerations were the only factor in the timing of the arrests," said the justice spokesman.
- 4 The spy case puts Medvedev in one of the most difficult dilemmas of his two-year presidency. He has to consider Russia's response and whether to expel or even arrest Americans living in Russia. Relations between Washington and Moscow have improved significantly since the semi-cold war days of the Bush era, with both Obama and Medvedev investing heavily in their friendship; and there have been results: a new, if modest, START treaty on nuclear arms reduction, a deal on civilian nuclear cooperation; the US has supported Russia's long-delayed WTO application, and Russia has taken a tougher line on Iran. The Russian foreign ministry said yesterday, "We are relying on the American side to show appropriate understanding in this matter, including taking into account the positive character of the current stage of Russian-American relations."
- 5 A 55-page US dossier reveals in detail the often amateurish activities of Moscow's alleged agents, who lived in suburban homes in Boston, New York and Washington, DC. The FBI said they were told to adopt Americanized names to blend in and gather information from think tanks and government officials. It seems that the FBI has known about the spy ring since at least 2000 and tracked its every move, secretly observing numerous encounters in Manhattan coffee bars, in which the 'agents' would send data to their Russian bosses via wireless from their laptops. Often, however, the technology broke down, leading to desperate pleas for Moscow to sort out the problem.
- 6 The US court documents also reveal the textbook spying methods used by the Russians to identify their own side. In one encounter, spy Anna Chapman is told her contact will ask: "Excuse me, but haven't we met in California last summer?" Her reply is: "No, I think it was the Hamptons." Another alleged spy, Mikhail Semenko, posted personal photos on a Russian social networking website. One shows him posing in front of the White House, another in his swimming costume on Miami beach, a third with a blonde in Manhattan.
- 7 "They [the Russians] are going to have to make a calculation," Sam Greene, deputy head of Moscow's Carnegie Centre, said yesterday. It would be incredible if they did not respond, he

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said, but it was unclear what form this response might take. None of the alleged spies was a diplomat or consular official – so a classic tit-for-tat expulsion was unlikely. Russia might say it had uncovered a spy ring of its own, possibly Russians working for US companies. Or it could target Americans.

- 8 Either way, the FBI arrests appear to be further evidence of the increase in Russian intelligence activity abroad over the past ten years. Since 2000, when Vladimir Putin became president, western governments have reported a dramatic increase in spying activity by Moscow in Europe, the US, Africa and Latin America. Putin, a former KGB agent in East Germany, tripled the budget for the FSB, the KGB's domestic successor, which he led until 1999. Former intelligence officers now make up a huge proportion of Russia's ruling elite.
- 9 Hardliners on both sides are likely to see the spy scandal as an opportunity to sabotage

improving US-Russian relations. Despite the recent improvement in relations, both the US and Russia had continued to spy on each other, Mark Urnov, of Russia's higher school of economics, said. "This [spy scandal] is an issue dating from previous years. The security services can't stop their activities immediately. Until recently there was a semi-cold war between US and Russia. So why not spy?"

- 10 According to Urnov, Moscow was unlikely to change its current positive attitude to Washington. "Of course there are some groups inside the [Russian] political elite who would prefer to continue with more or less cold relations. But the trend now is to be friendly. I don't see any forces on either side who could be interested in making this situation worse, or in causing trouble now between these countries."

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. Vladimir Putin is the Russian president.
2. President Obama ordered the arrest of the alleged spies.
3. Russia has applied to join the World Trade Organization.
4. The alleged spies were very professional in their activities.
5. The Russians will probably respond in some way to the arrest of the alleged spies.
6. Spying activity by the Russians has decreased over the past ten years.

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4 Find the word

Look in the text and find the following words and phrases.

1. an adjective meaning *involving unpleasant, dishonest or immoral things that you do not want to talk about* (para 1)
2. a verb meaning *to deliberately say or do things that make someone or something appear less impressive or less important* (para 2)
3. a noun meaning *a meeting in which people receive information* (para 3)
4. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *to be similar to the people around you so people do not notice you* (para 5)
5. a two-word noun meaning *a group of people who work together to produce new ideas on a particular subject* (para 5)
6. a noun meaning *a meeting, especially one that was not planned* (para 5)
7. a three-word expression meaning *something you do to harm someone because they have harmed you* (para 7)
8. a verb meaning *to increase something so that it is three times bigger than before* (para 8)

5 Verb + noun collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------|
| 1. make | a. information |
| 2. catch | b. a problem |
| 3. sort out | c. an application |
| 4. show | d. an arrest |
| 5. gather | e. understanding |
| 6. support | f. a flight |

6 Word-building

Complete the table using words from the text.

	verb	noun
1.	apply	
2.	conspire	
3.	enforce	
4.	reduce	
5.	understand	
6.	respond	

7 Discussion

Would you like to be a spy? Why? Why not?

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KEY

1 Key words

1. alleged
2. conspiracy
3. paymaster
4. groundless
5. expel
6. dossier
7. amateurish
8. elite
9. hardliner
10. sabotage

2 Find the information

1. Cyprus
2. 11
3. the Russian foreign minister
4. 55 pages
5. 2000 (but possibly earlier)
6. East Germany

3 Comprehension check

1. F
2. F
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. F

4 Find the word

1. unsavoury
2. undermine
3. briefing
4. blend in
5. think tank
6. encounter
7. tit-for-tat
8. triple

5 Verb + noun collocations

1. d
2. f
3. b
4. e
5. a
6. c

6 Word-building

1. application
2. conspiracy
3. enforcement
4. reduction
5. understanding
6. response