

THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WAS BRIEFED ON ANNA CHAPMAN BEFORE HER ARREST

I frankly wasn't all that interested in the news that Russian spy Anna Chapman was setting a honey trap for an Obama cabinet official...

In a documentary broadcast last night, FBI counter-intelligence chief Frank Figliuzzi claimed the glamorous Russian agent got close enough to 'disturb' U.S. spy catchers.

He said the fear that Miss Chapman was close to seducing a sitting member of the Obama administration spurred agents to swoop on the 10-strong spy ring of which she was a part.

Mr Figliuzzi told the Channel 4 documentary the auburn-haired spy got 'closer and closer to higher and higher ranking leadership... she got close enough to disturb us.'

'We were becoming very concerned,' he said. 'They were getting close enough to a sitting US cabinet member that we thought we could no longer allow this to continue.'

Until Laura Rozen noted that Peter Orszag left the White House in July 2010. Since most of the cabinet level officials with some base in NY, where Chapman lived and socialized—like Hillary Clinton and Susan Rice—are female, I simply hadn't thought that much about who her target could have been. Though Orszag presents an interesting possibility (not least because he was personally involved in our cybersecurity

efforts at the time). And an even more interesting date, to me, is the day the White House announced his departure: June 22, just 3 days before they started rolling up the Russian spy network.

Now, whether or not Orszag was the target (I've got some other suspicions, and if he was, Chapman would have been targeting Orszag during the period after he got engaged but before he got married), her comment was enough to get me to refer back to my coverage on Chapman's arrest.

And there are a few interesting details about it. Here's a timeline I put together:

June 9: Chapman's laptop chats with Russian Official #1 surveilled

June 11: Obama briefed about Russian spy swap

June 16: Chapman's laptop chats with Russian Official #1 surveilled

June 18: Obama chairs NSC meeting on Russian spy swap

June 24: Obama and Dmitri Medvedev go to Ray's Hell Burger

June 25: Complaint against 9 spies dated

June 26: FBI collects evidence against last two remaining spies; FBI agent says to Chapman, "I know you are going back to Moscow in two weeks."

June 27: Spies arrested

June 29: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov complains about timing of arrest; Obama reported to be miffed about timing of arrest; DOJ attributes timing to pending travel—presumably Chapman's

Week of July 5: White House almost cancels spy swap because names of proposed spies in Russia leaked

July 10: Two weeks after FBI Agent said Chapman would be traveling to Russian in two weeks

Of particular note is the June 18 NSC meeting. Most key cabinet members that would make interesting targets for Russian spies are members of the NSC. Director of OMB attends NSC meetings that pertain to its area of responsibility. They all learned—at least in the abstract—of the looming spy trade on June 18, 2010, a week before the FBI started rolling up the spies.

Now consider the excuse for the timing of the spy arrests DOJ gave at the time.

As we previously reported, charges issued so far against the alleged “illegal” long-term Russian penetration agents do not accuse them directly of espionage—stealing or attempting to steal U.S. intelligence or defense secrets. Instead, court documents portray them as talent spotters, alleging that they were assigned to identify and ingratiate themselves with influential Americans who had access to U.S. policymakers or government secrets, the idea being that those individuals could then be targeted for more aggressive recruitment by other Russian spies.

As the timeline above makes clear, Chapman was the one about to leave the country. Also note that DOJ admitted one of the spies was targeting “a personal friend” of a “current cabinet official.”

According to court papers, the individuals who were targeted included a former high-ranking U.S. national-security official; an American working on nuclear-weapons research; and someone described by the FBI as a “prominent New

York-based financier” who was “prominent in politics,” “an active fundraiser” for a U.S. political party, and “a personal friend” of a person described as “a current cabinet official.”

So the info on a cabinet official was out there—though now the FBI has revealed that the apparent intent was to set a honey trap.

Finally, look how squeamish Rahm got when asked whether Obama had triggered the timing of the arrests.

Now, on Thursday, Rahm pushed back against any indication that Obama might have been involved in the decision to roll up the spies. First, Rahm claims that the decision to arrest the spies now was entirely that of law enforcement and intelligence.

JIM LEHRER: Was the decision on this spy swap the president’s?

RAHM EMANUEL: Well, first of all, what the president does appreciate is the work of the law enforcement community, as well as the intelligence community for their hard work in this case.

It wasn’t the decision of the president. It was the decision, obviously, of the law enforcement community and the intelligence community. But he does appreciate what they did and making America safer and the hard work that they did to get this done.

JIM LEHRER: Did the president – let me rephrase it then. Did the president sign off on this spy swap?

RAHM EMANUEL: The president was

briefed about it.

Then when Lehrer presses (sort of), Rahm goes all spooky on his.

JIM LEHRER: Was the president aware that this spy ring existed before it was revealed publicly and these guys – these people were arrested?

RAHM EMANUEL: I think, Jim, it's important – there will be a lot of postscripts on this.

JIM LEHRER: OK.

RAHM EMANUEL: And I think that what you should take away from this, obviously, the president was informed appropriately, known what was going on.

And they made the decision to go forward on this action. There will be a lot of writing about it, but I think, at this time, let me just say the cautionary note, the less said, the better.

JIM LEHRER: OK.

(CROSSTALK)

RAHM EMANUEL: Or how about, as I always like to say, less is more?

JIM LEHRER: Less is more.

RAHM EMANUEL: Yes.

JIM LEHRER: Yes, sir, whatever you say.

Ix-Nay on the Resident-Pay's involvement in spy Wap-Say!

Rahm was clearly trying to distance the

President from this decision. Is that because
the timing was dictated by a honey trap?