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Russia and U.S. cheer cooperation on missile sting

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Cold War enemies FBI, FSS join forces for an arrest in war on terror

Russia and the United States yesterday hailed cooperation between old Cold War rivals — the FBI and former KGB — for establishing a new era of cooperation in the war on terror through the joint arrest of an international arms dealer.

Sergei Ignatchenko, the chief spokesman of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSS), the successor agency to the old Soviet KGB, called Tuesday's arrest of a British arms dealer a "new stage in the development of our cooperation with the special services."

"[This] has been carried out for the first time since the end of the Cold War when our special services

fought against each other," Mr. Ignatchenko said in Washington.

Hemant Lakhani, a Briton of Indian descent, was arrested in Newark, on Tuesday while attempting the sale of a shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missile to an undercover FBI agent whom he had met in Russia. Such missiles could be used for shooting down low-flying commercial airlines.

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said yesterday in an interview with the Spanish-language Univision TV network: "The arrests that took place yesterday were very significant because the United States and the Russian Federation worked

together to stop this kind of traffic in arms.

"Small arms, surface-to-air missiles — all of these in the hands of terrorists put us all at risk. . . . And that is why the world must work together. All of us have a part to play in this campaign against terrorism, and I am pleased this time it worked and we caught them. I think we are making progress, and we'll be making more progress in the months and years ahead."

Federal authorities in the United States described the undercover sting operation as "unprecedented," saying it included agents from the FBI, the Russian FSS and British in-

telligence officers.

The operation lasted for more than 18 months, beginning when Mr. Lakhani was spotted in St. Petersburg and Moscow attempting to buy black market weapons.

The FBI and Department of Homeland Security set up a team of undercover agents to pose as Muslim extremists, including an FBI agent who arranged to buy and take delivery of the SA 18 Iгла missile.

An FBI agent, who had received permission from Russian President Vladimir Putin to conduct undercover operations in Russia, made contact with Mr. Lakhani to negoti-

ate the sale.

The agent told the British arms dealer he wanted something that could be used to shoot down a commercial jetliner in the United States, authorities said.

Despite the operation's success, there is still plenty of distrust between the secret services of the two former enemies.

The Russians are not very happy with the cooperation they have now, said Nikolai Sokov, from the Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

"The U.S. accepts the information the Russians give, but they do

not give anything back. It is a one-way street," he said.

Analysts say it will be difficult to halt trade in shoulder-fired missiles.

"There is so much hardware in Russia that the occasions for temptation are irresistible," said Jolin Pike, director of GlobalSecurity.org.

With a global inventory of thousands of missiles — such as Strela, Igla, Stinger and others — of up to a few million, it is difficult to track them, Mr. Pike said.

In July, eight shoulder-fired missiles were reported missing from a depot in St. Petersburg, and 10 missiles from the Russian province of Chechnya were suspected.

• Jerry Seper and Nichole Kravev contributed to this report.