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Veteran FBI agent charged with espionage

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WASHINGTON (CNN) -- A 27-year veteran FBI agent who worked a sensitive assignment sniffing out Russian spies has been arrested and charged with espionage, FBI officials told CNN on Tuesday.

Robert Philip Hanssen was arrested on Sunday night and arraigned before Judge Theresa Buchanan in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Virginia on Tuesday morning. He was ordered held without bond. FBI spokesman Bill Carter said Hanssen was arrested in his home in Vienna, Virginia.

Hanssen was said to have held the highest security clearance and was fully aware of U.S. intelligence operations.

Attorney Plato Cacheris, who has represented such notables as Monica Lewinsky and convicted spy Aldrich Ames, said he had been appointed to represent Hanssen. Cacheris said he met Hanssen Tuesday morning and described him as "quite upset" adding he was "very emotional."

Hanssen, accused of providing classified information to Russian intelligence for more than 15 years, spent the last 25 years in counter-terrorism operations

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intended to catch spies, most recently at the U.S. State Department where his job was to help ferret out Russian spies.

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U.S. officials, taking the breach of security very seriously, said that former FBI and CIA director William Webster would head a blue-ribbon commission to investigate the damage done by Hanssen's alleged spying.

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FBI plans news conference

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The FBI is holding a news conference at 12:45 P.M. EST. FBI Director Louis Freeh, Attorney General John Ashcroft, CIA Director George Tenet and possibly Webster are expected to attend.

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Former Deputy Attorney General George Terwilliger told CNN "no case like this would be brought unless it was very, very strong."

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White House officials said on Tuesday that U.S. President George Bush was briefed on the investigation into alleged espionage by Hanssen and informed of plans to arrest the veteran FBI agent on charges he spied for Russia.

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The officials were reluctant to provide details, referring most questions to the Justice Department.

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FBI had eye on Hanssen four months

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The FBI said it had been watching Hanssen, in his mid-50s and a father of six, for four months after obtaining documents from the Russian KGB indicating he was spying.

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He was picked up after putting classified information into a dead drop -- where it allegedly was to be picked up by his Russian contacts -- in Virginia.

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Justice Department officials told CNN that Hanssen may have confirmed information given to the Russians by Ames. Ten U.S. agents were executed in Russia as a result of the information Ames passed on.

A Russian Embassy spokesman in Washington had no comment on the reports of Hanssen's arrest, nor did Russian government officials in Moscow.

CNN Correspondents Jeanne Meserve, Steve Harrigan, Eileen O'Connor, David Ensor and Kelli Arena contributed to this report.

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