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Spy Arrest Contest: US vs Russia

By Andrei V. Lefebvre

On December 29, 2018 FBI had arrested a Russian citizen in Guam in connection with the conspiracy to export defense articles without a license. According to a report from Sputniknews.com, a Russian owned English language news site, the US federal agents took Dimitri Makarenko into custody, following a 2017 indictment.

So far, the only English language news site to report the arrest was Spuntnicknews.com. The website quotes something they call "the document" stating that a petition for transfer has been granted and the "Defendant" has been ordered to be brought to the Southern District of Florida. The Russian language news websites, however, have had more information. Vestrimprim.ru has reported that Makarenko is a native of Vladivostok (a Russian city on the Pacific coast of Siberia) and the charges have included "export of defense products and money laundering." The website reports that the indictment includes eight "criminal episodes, for which he faces up to 45 years in prison."

"According to court documents, Makarenko was a customer from Russia, and Unseen purchased equipment in the US and had to send it to Makarenko in Russia. Invisible bought some samples, receiving money through Chinese and Latvian banks for this, and sent the goods to Russia, without specifying their real identity. One of the parcels was arrested at the US customs, after which Unseen was detained. The accusation says that Makarenko, a Russian from Vladivostok, was trying to take out night vision rifle sights, dual-use thermal imaging

monoculars and ammunition caps from the USA to Russia. The case also includes a native of Ukraine, a US citizen, Vladimir Nevidy, who lives in Florida. In June 2018, he pleaded guilty in a US court to conspire to illegally export dual-use technologies to Russia and received 26 months in prison." Vestrimprim.ru reported in Russian language (translated by the Google AI)

https://sputniknews.com/us/201901051071231399-usa-guam-russia-citizen-arrest-defense-export-charges/?utm_source=push&utm_medium=browser_notification&utm_campaign=sputnik_inter_en

<http://vestiprim.ru/news/ptrnews/72028-amerikancy-arestovali-urozhenca-vladivostoka-za-vyvoz-oboronnay-produkcii-i-otmyvanie-deneg.html>

This news story comes on the heels of the reports that Paul Whelan, a Canadian born retired US Marine, was taken into custody on December 28, 2018 in Moscow by the Russian FSB (successor to KGB) on the charges of Espionage.

"Whelan, 48, was detained during a "spy operation" in Moscow in late December on suspicion of espionage, according to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). On Thursday, a Moscow court ruled to arrest him on espionage charges. Whelan is currently employed as the director of global security with Michigan-based automotive components supplier BorgWarner. Moreover, Whelan was a former US marine. His service record, released by media, showed he had been convicted in 2008 on theft charges. Media have reported, citing his brother, that Whelan went to Russia to attend a friend's wedding but never made it to the event.

Whelan is currently employed as the director of global security with Michigan-based automotive components supplier BorgWarner. Moreover, Whelan was a former US marine. His service record, released by media, showed he had been convicted in 2008 on theft charges," reported [Sputniknews.com](https://sputniknews.com).

According to [CNN.com](https://www.cnn.com), US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has been in touch with the Russian government in regards to this case. So far, the US government has not issued an official statement confirming or denying if Whelan was employed by any American intelligence agency at the time of his arrest.

A Washington Post story reported that Whelan visited Russia regularly since 2017. The same story told of a theft conviction while Whelan was serving in the US Marines.

"He enlisted in the Marines in 1994 and rose through the ranks to become a staff sergeant, serving two tours in Iraq, in 2004 and 2006, according to military records released to The Post. Whelan was discharged for bad conduct in 2008 after being convicted of several charges related to larceny, according to the records," wrote Amie Ferris-Rotman, a Washington Post reporter.

Another Washington Post story, by Siobhán O'Grady and Adam Taylor, reported that Whelan had at least four passports.

"This week, U.S. ambassador to Russia Jon Huntsman visited Whelan in the detention facility in Moscow where he is being held. Whelan, a Michigan resident, was born in Canada, and family ties allowed him also to qualify for British and Irish citizenship. Both European countries are requesting access to him, raising questions about whether Whelan's many passports could affect potential negotiations for his release," the Washington Post reported.

It is unclear which passport Whelan used to enter Russia.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/02/us/russia-detains-us-citizen-paul-whelan/index.html>

<https://sputniknews.com/us/201901041071208449-usa-russia-whelan-espionage-business-trips/>

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/family-of-american-arrested-in-russia-on-spy-charges-fears-for-his-safety/2019/01/01/418f5baa-0dbd-11e9-84fc-d58c33d6c8c7_story.html?utm_term=.a95652a82635

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/amhtml/world/2019/01/04/american-detained-russia-has-four-passports-that-could-help-him-or-hurt-him/>

Washington Post's story by Ferris Rotman links Whelan's arrest to a guilty plea by a Russian citizen Marina Butina in seeking to influence the 2016 elections campaign. Butina had entered her guilty plea in December of last year.

"Butina, 30, attended conferences of groups such as the National Rifle Association and the National Prayer Breakfast, and orchestrated gatherings where influential Americans could meet with Russians. "Butina sought to establish unofficial lines of communication with Americans having power and influence over US politics," prosecutors said Butina admitted to acting "under direction of" a Russian official whom CNN has identified as Alexander Torshin, the recently retired deputy governor of the Central Bank of Russia. While she was in the US, she pursued graduate studies at American University in Washington," reported a [CNN.com](https://www.cnn.com) story.

The Russian government has deemed her a political prisoner. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Artem Kozhin was quoted by AP at the time of Butin's arrest, "Her arrest is motivated solely by the motives of the U.S. domestic and foreign policy, and therefore she is a political prisoner."

In September, russian.rt.com story (translated to English by the Google AI) said, *"Russian-born Maria Butina, arrested in the United States, has become a hostage to domestic political clashes in the United States."*

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/13/politics/maria-butina-guilty-plea/index.html>

<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2018-07-26/russia-calls-woman-held-in-us-as-agent-political-prisoner>
<https://russian.rt.com/world/article/557692-mariya-butina-sestra-intervyu>

We are witnessing a very public political clash between the US and Russia. It is extremely rare

for spies to be arrested. Usually, counter intelligence agencies try to turn the enemy agents they uncover or use them expose a network. Most observers expect more arrests on spying charges by the US and the Russian governments.

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