

U.S. Blames Fax for Diplomatic Gaffe

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WASHINGTON — The United States has apologized to Russia for failing to give it prompt notice that a Russian citizen was in U.S. custody and blamed the error on an official hitting the wrong fax button, the U.S. State Department said.

The notification went to Romania instead of Russia, said U.S. officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"We pressed the wrong button on the fax machine, to be brutally honest," State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said at a daily briefing late last week, declining to identify which country received the notice. "We have apologized to Russia."

As part of a major drug bust, Liberian authorities took custody of Russian pilot Konstantin Yaroshenko in Liberia on May 28, and he was handed over to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency on May 30.

According to a federal indictment, Yaroshenko flew "thousand-kilogram" shipments of cocaine throughout South America, Africa and Europe. He has been charged with conspiracy to distribute cocaine, which carries a minimum sentence of 10 years in prison and a maximum

of life imprisonment.

Under standard diplomatic practice, countries typically provide prompt notification if they are holding a citizen of another nation. Diplomats are expected to have access to the prisoners and be able to communicate freely with them.

According to the Russian Embassy, a bilateral agreement dating to 1964 requires the United States to inform Russia when it is holding a Russian within "the shortest possible time."

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