

U.S. Search for Sanction-Hit Russians' Luxury Stash Under Way, Report Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has begun searching for luxury hidden assets belonging to Russians who have had sanctions imposed on them over the situation in Ukraine, a news report said.

Agents are looking for "shiny toys" — including planes, yachts and mansions — that have been concealed in the U.S. by sanction-hit Russians, said John Tobon, head of the department's financial investigations unit in Miami, Bloomberg reported.

The U.S. government has so far blacklisted 19 companies and 45 political and business leaders in connection with the annexation of Crimea and Russia's perceived failure to de-escalate tensions in the east of the Ukraine.

Tobon said that the U.S. Treasury Department would confiscate any assets that can be traced back to blacklisted Russians, but that the search would not be easy.

"These cases generally take many years because the individuals are deliberately trying to hide assets," Tobon was quoted as saying. "They are powerful and smart and will use every conceivable tool to delay and buy time and muddy the water."

Despite Russian government officials and executives of state-owned companies being prohibited from holding bank accounts or financial instruments abroad, the Central Bank recorded a net flight of \$51 billion in the first quarter of this year — the biggest quarterly outflow since 2008, Bloomberg reported Wednesday.

Neil Shearing, chief emerging market economist for Capital Economics in London, believes that U.S. efforts to find and freeze hidden Russian assets could lead to political pressure being exerted on President Vladimir Putin.

"Russian oligarchs made money in Russia and enjoyed the fruits of that money in the West," said Shearing was quoted as saying by Bloomberg. "If you squeeze that, then it will create some kind of pain."

News of the investigation comes as no surprise to Moscow, though Russia has not been informed about it, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Bloomberg.

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