

Russia Demands U.S. Release Suspected Spy

By [Peter Spinella](#)

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Judge Sarah Netburn listens to defence attorney Sabrina Shroff as Evgeny Buryakov sits in court in New York, Jan. 26, 2015.

Russia's Foreign Ministry on Tuesday demanded that U.S. authorities release a Russian state banker arrested in New York on suspicion of spying as bilateral ties, already strained by the conflict in Ukraine, sink to new lows.

"No evidence supporting the allegations has been presented," Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said in a filmed address posted on the ministry's website.

Yevgeny Buryakov, 39, an employee of state bank Vnesheconombank, was arrested Monday on suspicion of working as a Russian intelligence agent without officially notifying the United States, a crime punishable by a decade in prison.

"We demand that this series of provocations unleashed by the U.S. special services against

Russian representatives comes to an end," and call for Buryakov's release, Lukashevich said.

The Foreign Ministry said that Buryakov had been working at Vnesheconombank, a non-commercial bank that seeks to develop Russia's economy through investments abroad, when he was arrested.

U.S.-Russian relations are currently at a post-Cold War low. A flare-up in the Ukrainian conflict in recent days saw the port city of Mariupol shelled from locations controlled by pro-Russian rebels, according to a statement by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The charge against Buryakov is a "relatively easy one to prove," said Mark Galeotti, a global affairs professor at New York University who specializes in Russian security services. "The real question is: Why now?"

The investigation had been ongoing since 2012, the FBI said in a statement Monday. Galeotti cited three possible reasons for the authorities making the arrest now: Either there was a risk that the investigation would soon be discovered, as in the case of the notorious 2010 Russian spy ring that propelled Anna Chapman to fame; or one of the suspects had stumbled across something important or might soon do so; or the move was political, "a shot across Moscow's bow," Galeotti said.

Banker by Day

On Monday, the day that Buryakov was arrested, the U.S. Justice Department released a 26-page report that alleged the defendant "did knowingly act in the United States as an agent of a foreign government ... without prior notification to the attorney general, as required by law."

The report also alleged that Buryakov had used "his cover as a banker to proactively gather intelligence about matters of interest to the Russian Federation" to fulfill orders from Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR).

Two Russian diplomats who the report said are SVR agents — Igor Sporyshev, 40, and Viktor Podobny, 27 — have also been accused in the case, but left the United States under diplomatic immunity.

Buryakov, who was in the United States on a work visa and lived with his wife and two children in the Bronx, has been denied bail and is due again in court on Feb. 9, international media reported Tuesday.

Two major Russian state television channels, Rossia-24 and Channel One, cited sources as saying the case was politically motivated, echoing the Foreign Ministry's sentiment.

Rossia-24 cited unnamed lawyers as saying that there was a lack of evidence for the case and that it had a "political subtext."

A terse Channel One report said that a main clue in the case was a simple Internet search from Buryakov's work computer for "sanctions, Russia, consequences." That search was listed among many other leads in the U.S. Justice Department report.

'Eye for an Eye'

Russian federal lawmaker Sergei Mironov, who heads the Just Russia party's faction in the lower house of parliament, told the Interfax news agency Tuesday that Russia should respond with "an eye for an eye."

"This is a political show, 100 percent," Mironov said. "The task of representatives of a trade mission is to find investors and contacts. It is comical to accuse these people of espionage."

"There is a very appropriate measure: an eye for an eye," he said, adding that Russian security services know about foreign diplomats who are "not completely" in line with the law.

Igor Morozov, a member of the upper house of parliament's foreign affairs committee, said in comments carried by RIA Novosti that the case is meant to "compromise Russia's participation in international organizations" and "tarnish its image."

Morozov, who previously worked for Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service himself, denounced the case as a "provocation."

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