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The 'U.S. Spy' Just Arrested in Russia Is Allegedly an Infamous Hacker, Too

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Sergei Mikhailov — the top cybersecurity specialist in Russia's Federal Security Service arrested for treason on Wednesday — could be a member of the infamous hacker collective "Anonymous International," known in Russia as "Shaltai Boltai," according to the pro-Kremlin television network Tsargrad TV.

Anonymous International has gained notoriety over the past several years for leaking private emails and other correspondence that has embarrassed public figures with ties to the Kremlin.

Tsargrad TV, which often reports outlandish conspiracy theories, also speculates that "maybe the CIA" is behind Anonymous International, accusing Mikhailov of designing plans to use information technology to influence Russia's election results.

Related article: Police Arrest Alleged U.S. Spy Working in Heart of Russian Cybersecurity

For more than three years now, the hacker collective Anonymous International has leaked documents embarrassing several prominent figures in Russian politics.

In December 2013, the group leaked an advance copy of Vladimir Putin's New Year's speech. In May the next year, it published emails revealing the political work of a company owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin, "the Kremlin's caterer," including evidence that he sponsors Russia's infamous "Internet troll factory." In September 2014, Anonymous International shared documents and emails showing how the Moscow mayor's office frequently placed stories in the news media surreptitiously.

In 2014, the group even released correspondence between Eurasianist philosopher Alexander Dugin, who heads Tsargrad TV, and Konstantin Malofeyev, the board chairman at Tsargrad TV.

In 2015, the hackers published emails and text messages stolen from Timur Prokopenko, a Kremlin official supposedly tasked with stymying the anti-Putin opposition, Alexander Zharov, the head of Russia's state censor, and Natalya Timakova, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's press secretary. A year later, the group also targeted Dmitry Kiselyov, "the Kremlin's chief propagandist," and Aram Gabrelyanov, the owner of several pro-Kremlin tabloids and news outlets.

None of Anonymous International's leaks has put anyone behind bars in Russia, and the content of the group's revelations is generally more embarrassing than criminal. With this in mind, and the hackers' surprising access to materials no one else seems to have, there has been rampant speculation about the group's origins, including theories that it is run by members working inside Russia's intelligence community.

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