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Kremlin Denies Allegation It Is Using Paul Whelan as Diplomatic Pawn

By Reuters

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Paul Whelan / Courtesy Whelan Family

The Kremlin on Wednesday rejected a British suggestion it might use a former U.S. Marine detained in Russia on espionage charges as a pawn in a diplomatic game and said it reserved the right to conduct counter-intelligence activities.

Paul Whelan, a former U.S. Marine who also holds a British passport, was detained by Russia's Federal Security Service on Dec. 28. His family have said he is innocent and that he was in Moscow to attend a wedding.

Related article: Paul Whelan's Arrest in Russia Brings Civilians Back Into the Crosshairs (Op-ed)

Commenting on the case earlier this month, British Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt said

individuals should not be used as pawns of diplomatic leverage.

Asked about Hunt's remark, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters:

"In Russia we never use people as pawns in diplomatic games. In Russia we conduct counter-intelligence activity against those suspected of espionage. That is done regularly."

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