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Russian Arctic Scientist Charged With Treason for Passing 'State Secrets' to China

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Valery Mitko is the latest in a string of elderly academics accused or convicted of cooperating with foreign states in recent years. **arcticas.ru**

A Russian scientist has been charged with treason on allegations of passing state secrets to China, Reuters reported Monday.

Valery Mitko, 78, president of the Arctic Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, faces up to 20 years in prison, his lawyer Ivan Pavlov was cited as saying. Pavlov said his client read lectures in China using documents containing only academic and open-source information.

"There were no state secrets there at all," Pavlov was quoted as saying in reference to Mitko's travels to China twice a year to speak as a guest lecturer.

Pavlov denied that his client handed state secrets to Chinese authorities.

"We consider these accusations to be absurd," he added, expressing hope that the treason

case would be thrown out before trial.

Mitko has been under house arrest since February when authorities first accused him of high treason, Reuters cited Pavlov as saying. A court extended Mitko's house arrest earlier this month until Oct. 10.

Mitko had allegedly agreed to collect information "of military nature" for the Chinese secret services out of a "selfish interest," according to a house arrest order cited by the Meduza news website.

The 78-year-old academic had been a guest lecturer at the Dalian Maritime University in China since 2016, traveling there twice a year to give lectures on hydrophysics, Meduza reported.

An unnamed source told Interfax that Mitko passed information on submarine detection technology to China between March 2017 and March 2018.

The academic denies the charges against him.

Mitko is the latest in a string of elderly academics accused or convicted of cooperating with foreign states in recent years. Critics have blasted the charges as manifestations of the state's paranoia.

The Arctic, with vast energy reserves hidden in the permafrost, has emerged in recent years as a staging ground for geopolitical competition between world powers.

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