

Pressure Putin to Release Jailed Americans, Ex-Marine Whelan Urges Biden Ahead of Summit

June 02, 2021



Paul Whelan was sentenced to 16 years in a Russian penal colony in June 2020 on espionage charges he denies. **Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP / TASS**

U.S. President Joe Biden should urge the release of U.S. citizens detained in Russia at his first summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan, who was jailed in Russia for spying, has [said](#).

“I would ask President Biden to aggressively discuss and resolve this issue with his Russian counterparts,” Whelan told CNN by phone from his penal colony 500 kilometers east of Moscow.

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“It’s really up to the governments to sort out an exchange or some sort of resolution,”

Whelan said in CNN's report published Wednesday.

Biden [said](#) Sunday that he plans to press Putin on human rights abuses when the two meet in Geneva on June 16. He did not directly mention the plight of U.S. citizens imprisoned in Russia, which include Trevor Reed, another former Marine who is serving a nine-year sentence for a drunken assault on police.

Whelan told CNN that he “knows” that Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken “are working towards my release and return home.”

“This is not an issue of Russia against me; it's an issue of Russia against the United States, and the United States needs to answer this hostage diplomacy situation and resolve it as quickly as possible,” Whelan said.

“Decisive action is needed immediately. The abduction of an American citizen cannot stand anywhere in the world.”

Whelan spoke to CNN several months after his Russian lawyer told Reuters that Moscow was in talks with Washington on a [prisoner swap](#) that could see him sent home.

Officials in Moscow denied the report and Whelan’s brother David later told The Moscow Times that “there doesn’t seem to be any credible activity by any one official” who is working toward his release. Russia has called previous reports of a possible prisoner swap a “pressure campaign” to extract “unilateral concessions” from Moscow.

A Moscow court sentenced Whelan, 51, to 16 years in June 2020 after finding him guilty of receiving classified information at an upscale Moscow hotel in 2018.

Whelan, who also holds Irish, Canadian and British citizenship, continues to deny the charges, telling CNN “there was no crime, there was no evidence, the secret trial was a sham.”

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