The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ex-U.S. Contractor Faces Life in Prison for Offering Fighter Jet Secrets to Russia

December 17, 2021



A B-1B Lancer from Ellsworth AFB and F-16 Fighting Falcons from Misawa Air Base conduct bilateral joint training. **U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Timothy Moore / flickr (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)**

A former U.S. defense contractor faces life in prison for attempting to pass U.S. fighter jet secrets to Russia, the Department of Justice said Thursday.

John Murray Rowe Jr., a test engineer for multiple defense contractors for nearly 40 years, was said to have raised suspicions after revealing "a fervent interest in Russian affairs," including asking his employer whether he could "obtain a security clearance from the Russian government." These actions resulted in his termination from employment.

A subsequent undercover FBI operation determined Rowe's willingness to communicate classified information to Russia, the Justice Department said in a statement.

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Between March-November 2020, Rowe exchanged more than 300 emails with an FBI agent posing as a Russian government agent. The ex-contractor had confirmed his "willingness to work for the Russian government" and discussed his "knowledge of classified information relating to U.S. national security and military interests."

"Rowe disclosed national defense information classified as SECRET that concerned specific operating details of the electronic countermeasure systems used by U.S. military fighter jets" in one of the emails, the Justice Department said.

Rowe, 63, faces life in prison if found guilty on charges of attempting to communicate national defense information to aid a foreign government.

He is due to make his initial court appearance in his home state of South Dakota on Friday.

Rowe's arrest comes at a time when Russia and the United States are attempting to secure the release of their nationals held in each others' prisons on espionage charges.

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