

Moscow's Deputy FM Claims U.S. Holding 60 Russians 'Hostage'

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Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin **Russian Foreign Ministry**

A senior Russian diplomat has accused the United States of holding more than 60 Russian citizens as “hostages,” the state-run RIA Novosti news agency [reported](#) Tuesday.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin’s comments come nearly two weeks after Russia freed U.S. basketball star Brittney Griner in exchange for Viktor Bout, a notorious arms dealer imprisoned in the U.S.

“The Americans deliberately ignore the existing legal mechanisms,” Vershinin told RIA Novosti, referring to the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters signed by Washington and Moscow in 1999.

“The total number of Russian citizens who have, in fact, been taken hostage, exceeds 60 people,” Vershinin added.

Vershinin did not offer details on any of the Russians who are allegedly held by the U.S.

Related article: [Russia Frees U.S. Basketball Star Brittney Griner in Prisoner Swap](#)

Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed openness to more prisoner swaps with Washington were possible after the Griner-Bout exchange, which took place as ties between the two superpowers remain under historic strain.

"Are other [exchanges] possible? Yes, everything is possible. This is the result of negotiations and the search for compromises. In this case, compromises were found and we aren't refusing to continue this work in the future," Putin said on Dec. 9.

Griner had been serving a nine-year prison sentence in a Russian jail on drug charges after she was detained at a Moscow airport in February.

Bout was arrested in a U.S. sting operation in Thailand in 2008 after being accused of arming rebels in some of the world's bloodiest conflicts. He was subsequently extradited to the U.S. and sentenced to 25 years in prison in 2012.

AFP contributed reporting.

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