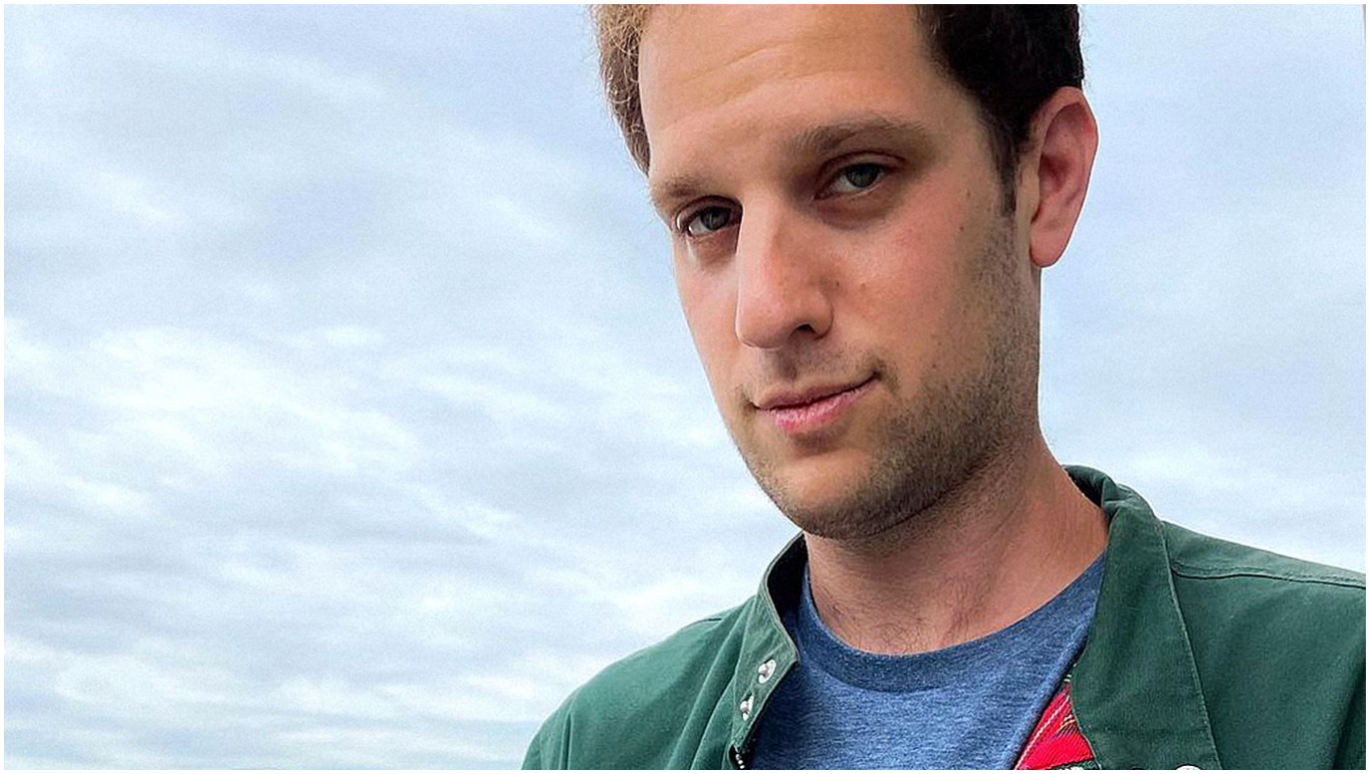
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WSJ Reporter Formally Charged With Spying – Russian Agencies

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Sam Silverman / instagram

Russian authorities have formally brought espionage charges against arrested U.S. reporter Evan Gershkovich, Interfax reported Friday, citing sources familiar with his case.

Gershkovich, a journalist with The Wall Street Journal, categorically denied the espionage accusations, the state-run TASS news agency reported.

Gershkovich was detained while reporting in the Ural Mountains city of Yekaterinburg last week on accusations of espionage. He was then transferred to Moscow and placed in detention until May 29 pending trial.

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Gershkovich, 31, a U.S. citizen and former Moscow Times reporter, is believed to be the first foreign journalist arrested on spying allegations in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union.

He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

His arrest sparked a widespread outcry, with U.S. President Joe Biden and numerous media organizations as well as Russian independent journalists calling on Russian authorities to free him.

The Wall Street Journal vehemently denies the charges against its journalist.

On Friday, the Democratic and Republican leaders of the U.S. Senate unanimously denounced Gershkovich's arrest and called for his immediate release.

"Let there be no mistake: journalism is not a crime," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said in a rare joint statement. "We demand the baseless, fabricated charges against Mr. Gershkovich be dropped and he be immediately released."

Schumer and McConnell also reiterated their "condemnation of the Russian government's continued attempts to intimidate, repress, and punish independent journalists and civil society voices."

Russia's deputy foreign minister this week said that attempts to pressure Moscow over his case were "pointless."

According to The Moscow Times' sources, Gershkovich could be viewed by the Kremlin as leverage for a future prisoner exchange.

The Moscow Times also reported that Gershkovich's surveillance and detention were organized by the Federal Security Service (FSB)'s military counterintelligence department.

AFP contributed reporting.

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