

U.S. Urges Russia to Free 'Wrongfully Detained' American Journalist Gershkovich

By [AFP](#)

April 11, 2023



Secretary of State Antony Blinken "made a determination that Evan Gershkovich is wrongfully detained by Russia," State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said. **Evan Gershkovich / Instagram**

The United States on Monday officially determined that Russia had wrongfully detained Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich and urged his immediate release, stepping up pressure on his behalf.

The formal decision by the State Department on Gershkovich, who was taken into custody on March 29, was unusually swift and indicated the seriousness attached by Washington to the case, the first time Moscow has accused a U.S. journalist of espionage since the Soviet era.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken "made a determination that Evan Gershkovich is wrongfully detained by Russia," State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said.

"We call for the Russian Federation to immediately release Mr. Gershkovich," Patel said in a statement."

"Journalism is not a crime. We condemn the Kremlin's continued repression of independent voices in Russia, and its ongoing war against the truth," Patel added.

Related article: [The Evan Gershkovich I Know](#)

There had been little doubt that the United States would reach the determination on Gershkovich, with Blinken telling reporters last week that he felt the detention was unjust.

President Joe Biden had earlier called for Gershkovich's release when asked by reporters.

But U.S. officials said they were required to work through a legal process and show due diligence on the case.

In practical terms, the determination means that Gershkovich's detention will be handled by the U.S. special envoy on hostage affairs, Roger Carstens, giving more resources to the case.

The hostage negotiator in December helped arrange a prisoner swap to free Brittney Griner, a U.S. basketball star who had been arrested in Russia over traces of cannabis found in her possession and who had also been determined to be wrongfully detained.

She was exchanged for Viktor Bout, a Russian arms dealer imprisoned in the United States.

The State Department on Monday also renewed a call for Russia to free another American classified as wrongfully detained — Paul Whelan, a former Marine accused of spying, which he denies.

Gershkovich was detained in Yekaterinburg, some 1,800 kilometers (1,100 miles) east of Moscow.

Russian news agencies said Friday he was charged with espionage, an allegation denied both by Gershkovich and The Wall Street Journal and which the White House called "ridiculous."

The State Department said that Russia formally notified the United States over the weekend of Gershkovich's arrest but has not yet let U.S. diplomats see him.

"They have still not provided consular access," Patel told reporters earlier Monday. "This is in violation of the obligations they have."

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