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Former U.S. Paratrooper Detained in Russia on Drugs Charges

By AFP

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Screencap ABC News

A Russian court has detained a U.S. citizen on drugs charges that could see him jailed for several years.

Moscow's Khamovniki District Court said Travis Leake, a "former paratrooper and musician," had "organized the sale of drugs to young people."

He will be remanded in custody "until Aug. 6, 2023," pending a possible trial. The detention period could be extended, the court said on Telegram.

"We are aware of reports of the recent arrest of a U.S. citizen in Moscow," a State Department spokesperson told AFP.

U.S. broadcaster CNN said Leake was a musician and music producer who has lived in Russia for many years.

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Arrests of U.S. citizens in Russia have increased in recent years, against a backdrop of deteriorating relations between Moscow and Washington, which have hit new lows since Russia sent troops into Ukraine.

Washington has accused Moscow of arbitrarily detaining U.S. citizens for use as bargaining chips to secure the release of Russians jailed in the United States.

In March, Russian security services arrested U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich on accusations of "espionage," which he denies.

Former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan is serving a 16-year jail term in Russia, where he was found guilty of "spying."

In December, a prisoner swap was arranged between Moscow and Washington for U.S. basketball star Brittney Griner, jailed in Russia on drug charges, and Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout, who was imprisoned in the United States for weapons smuggling.

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