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Moscow Says Talks Ongoing Over Gershkovich Exchange

By AFP

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Evan Gershkovich seen in court. **Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency**

The Kremlin said Thursday that discussions continued to take place over a possible prisoner exchange involving Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who was detained in Russia nearly one year ago on espionage charges.

The 32-year-old American journalist was detained by Russian security agents in March 2023 and accused of spying, the first such charge against a Western journalist since the Soviet era.

Gershkovich, his employers and the U.S. officials have all vehemently rejected the spying accusations.

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President Vladimir Vladimir Putin has publically expressed a willingness to exchange the

journalist, and on Thursday the Kremlin said talks about a prisoner swap involving Gershkovich were still taking place behind the scenes.

"We have repeatedly said that there are certain contacts, but they must be carried out in absolute silence," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"Breaking this silence will only create additional problems and prevent any result from being achieved in this process," he added, without elaborating.

A court in Moscow this week ruled that Gershkovich, who earlier worked for The Moscow Times and then at AFP, would remain in pre-trial detention until late June.

Peskov said during his briefing on Thursday that there was "no indication" of when the trial would begin. Some observers have said a swap is unlikely before a verdict is handed down.

Washington has accused Moscow of arresting U.S. citizens on baseless charges to use them as bargaining chips to secure the release of Russians convicted abroad.

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