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Lukashenko Says Biden Had 'Nothing to Do With' Historic Prisoner Exchange

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Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. **kremlin.ru**

Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko said Friday that U.S. President Joe Biden had "nothing to do with" the biggest prisoner exchange between Russia and the West since the Cold War.

Washington and Moscow carried out a historic prisoner swap on Thursday, with Russian authorities releasing American journalists Evan Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva, former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan and German citizen Rico Krieger, as well as several Russian political prisoners. In total, both sides released 24 people.

"You saw it happen, the [prisoners] were released. We were asked [to participate] and we got involved, helped in what ways we could," Lukashenko was quoted as saying by Belarusian state media. "People who were sentenced for life in the West were freed."

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Russian President Vladimir Putin thanked Lukahsenko on Thursday for his "gesture of goodwill and the pardon of a German citizen sentenced to death, R.Krieger." Earlier this week, the Belarusian leader granted the pardon for Krieger, who was convicted on six criminal counts including terrorism in a secret trial held in late June.

"Of course, someone like the U.S. President will boost his authority with this, even though he had nothing to do with it," Lukashenko said, referring to Thursday's exchange.

"Special services carried out negotiations, not even diplomats were involved," he said. "We had agreed to do this quietly [and diplomats] started yelling to the entire world. This should be done quietly, it's people's lives."

Despite the Belarusian leader's claim, according to reporting by CNN and The Wall Street Journal, both Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris were deeply involved in the negotiations to release U.S. citizens detained in Russia.

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