The Moscow Times
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U.S. Man Wanted for Child Pornography Possession Confirms Joining Russian Military

August 19, 2024



Russian Defense Ministry

Russia's Defense Ministry on Monday published an interview with a former Massachusetts city councilman who is wanted in the United States on child pornography charges, an apparent confirmation of previous reports that he fled the U.S. and enlisted in the Russian army.

Wilmer Puello-Mota, a former city councilman in Holyoke, Massachusetts, is believed to have fled the United States in January in violation of a court order while awaiting trial in Rhode Island for possession of child pornography.

Puello-Mota soon resurfaced in Russian military videos showing the capture of the Ukrainian town of Avdiivka in February. Russian regional authorities in April published a video of what at the time appeared to be Puello-Mota inside an army enlistment office, but they identified him only as former U.S. soldier "Will."

Like the previous videos featuring Puello-Mota, the Russian Defense Ministry's video published on Monday refers to the American only by his first name and makes no mention of the criminal charges against him in the United States.

"I'm Will, I'm from Massachusetts," Puello-Mota said in the five-minute video interview wearing full combat gear. "My callsign is 'Boston'."

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The American said he had served 10 years in the U.S. Air Force, several years in the Massachusetts National Guard and two years as a city councilman — where he said his involvement in politics led him to travel to Russia and join the military.

"I've definitely been able to apply some of those skills, leadership skills as well, here," he said.

Earlier, U.S. media reported that Puello-Mota was a member of the U.S. National Guard before being separated from the service due to child pornography charges in October 2022.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the American was serving as a recon-drone operator with the military's Central group of forces, which is involved in the capture of villages in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region.

It also identified Puello-Mota as an "American with Russian citizenship" and a "former American citizen." It was not immediately clear whether Puello-Mota renounced his U.S. citizenship.

"I don't consider myself a traitor. The United States and Russia aren't at war," Puell-Mota said in the Defense Ministry's video.

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