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Russia Jails Former U.S. Consulate Employee Nearly 5 Years for 'Collaborating' With Foreign State

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Robert Shonov. **FSB / TASS**

A former employee of the U.S. consulate in the Far East city of Vladivostok has been sentenced to four years and ten months in prison for "secret collaboration with a foreign state," Russian state media reported Friday.

Robert Shonov, a Russian citizen, had worked for more than 25 years at the U.S. consulate. He was forced to quit in 2021 when Russian authorities imposed restrictions on local staff working for foreign missions.

Afterward, Shonov worked as a private contractor for the U.S. Embassy in Moscow compiling press accounts from publicly accessible Russian media, according to the U.S. State Department.

He was arrested in early 2023 on suspicion of passing secret information about Russia's war in

Ukraine to the United States in exchange for money. However, Russian law enforcement authorities officially announced his arrest only in September of that year.

Related article: Russia Charges Former U.S. Consulate Staffer With 'Collaboration'

According to a ruling published on the Primorye region court website, 400,000 rubles ($4,103) and an electronic device linked to Shonov's private contractor work were seized.

In September 2023, Moscow expelled U.S. Embassy employees Jeff Sillin and David Bernstein, whom it accused of acting as liaisons for Shonov.

Russian-U.S. relations have sharply deteriorated since President Vladimir Putin ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Washington was forced to suspend its two remaining consulates in Vladivostok and Yekaterinburg before the war due to Russian-imposed staffing rules.

AFP contributed reporting.

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