

Evan Gershkovich Says His Arrest in Russia Was Carefully Planned FSB Sting

By [Reuters](#)

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Evan Gershkovich in a Russian court hearing. **Donat Sorokin / TASS**

U.S. reporter Evan Gershkovich, in his first detailed published account of his arrest in Russia in 2023, says he was the victim of an elaborate sting operation by the FSB security service.

In an extract from his book "This Cursed Beautiful Land," Gershkovich [says](#) that while working on a story for The Wall Street Journal about Russian military production, he held two meetings with the union boss of a factory in Yekaterinburg, a major defense-industry hub.

At their second encounter, in a steakhouse, the source produced papers with hand-copied tables of figures, telling the reporter that they related to the production of tanks.

As he jotted down notes, Gershkovich said, he heard the sound of marching feet and looked up to see a group of masked men approaching their table.

"A pang of guilt ripped through me: Had I compromised a source? But panic immediately

replaced that thought. Instinct took over, my hands moving to hide the papers in the gap between the bench and the wall," he wrote in the book extract, published by the Journal on Friday.

"The men quickly descended on us. An arm was yanking my neck, pulling me off the couch... Someone shouted: 'You are under arrest by the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation'."

A long sentence, then a prisoner swap

Gershkovich, then 31, became the first U.S. reporter arrested on espionage charges in Russia since the Cold War. He was later sentenced to 16 years in prison before being freed in an East-West prisoner swap in August 2024.

He writes that he and his editors had considered the risks of the reporting trip and agreed that the source should not bring any documents to the meeting; if he did so, Gershkovich should not accept anything from him.

But at the meeting, the source had "thrust the papers into my hands."

Related article: [Russian Judge Who Convicted Gershkovich Says Court Did Not Examine Material Evidence](#)

Although he had reported on the arrests of other Americans in Russia, and on the targeting and even murder of Russian journalists, Gershkovich writes that the "unspoken rule" was that foreign correspondents enjoyed a degree of immunity: they might be expelled, but not arrested.

Reeling with shock, he was handcuffed, had a black sack placed over his head and was whisked into a van where he was placed in a chokehold and punched in the abdomen while being questioned, he writes.

FSB 'backup plan'

Gershkovich said that since his release he had learned of evidence that the FSB had a "backup plan" to arrest him on another of his planned reporting trips, to Siberia, if the Yekaterinburg operation had failed.

He said he believes the two meetings with the source in Yekaterinburg were designed to help the FSB persuade President Vladimir Putin that he was a spy and secure approval for his arrest at the second meeting.

"Putin, it seems to me, fully bought into this narrative," he said.

The Kremlin did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Putin said in a February 2024 interview with U.S. television host Tucker Carlson that Gershkovich had been "caught red-handed" while collecting confidential information.

The journalist, his newspaper and the U.S. government all strongly deny the allegation that Gershkovich was a spy.

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