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Kremlin Denies Talks on Freeing Political Prisoners for U.S. Sanctions Relief

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Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. **Sputnik / Alexander Kazakov / Reuters**

The Kremlin on Wednesday dismissed press reports that it was discussing the release of political prisoners in exchange for easing U.S. sanctions.

Earlier, The Atlantic reported that U.S. President Donald Trump had "signed on" to White House special envoy John Coale's initiative to pull back sanctions gradually if Moscow would agree to free Russian political prisoners.

Coale has spearheaded a similar arrangement with neighboring Belarus, a close Russian ally, where President Alexander Lukashenko has pardoned hundreds of prisoners for sanctions relief.

The White House envoy is now reportedly hoping to turn that strategy toward Moscow in order to break the deadlock in U.S.-Russian relations and "help advance the cause of peace."

However, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists on Wednesday that U.S. and

Russian officials have not discussed the idea.

“In this formulation, the issue was not discussed and could not be discussed because we categorically deny the existence of any political prisoners,” Peskov said during a daily briefing.

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Nobel Peace Prize-winning rights group Memorial currently recognizes 1,826 people as political prisoners in Russia.

Peskov described the framing of The Atlantic’s report as “completely inappropriate.”

The spokesman did acknowledge, however, that Russian and U.S. intelligence services remain in regular contact regarding prisoner exchanges.

Russia and the U.S. have carried out two prisoner swaps since Trump took office in January 2025.

Earlier this week, the White House nominated Coale to serve as its special envoy for hostage affairs.

Coale, a lawyer who previously represented Americans released during the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, was officially appointed to the Belarus role in November, though he had negotiated prisoner releases before that as deputy Ukraine envoy.

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