

Russia, U.S. Deny That American Hubbard Was Released in Exchange for Russian War Blogger

By [Reuters](#)

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U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff and Kremlin envoy Kirill Dmitriev attend a meeting with Stephen Hubbard in St. Petersburg on Oct. 21. **Reuters/Handout**

Russia and the U.S. have both denied that Russia had released American national Stephen Hubbard from prison in exchange for the recent release of a Russian war blogger detained in Montenegro whom the U.S. has accused of election interference.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that Hubbard, a 74-year-old U.S. citizen held in Russian custody since 2022, had been freed in what the Kremlin called a humanitarian goodwill gesture.

U.S. President Donald Trump said he had asked Putin to free Hubbard and that Russia had not asked for anything or anyone in return for letting the retired U.S. schoolteacher return home.

But some people, including a former U.S. ambassador, suggested that Hubbard may have been freed in connection with the case of Mikhail Zvinchuk, a high-profile Russian war blogger who was briefly detained in Montenegro earlier this month before being let go.

"This case had no connection to Stephen Hubbard's release," a State Department spokesperson said. "The Russian government made the unilateral decision to release Mr. Hubbard. Mr. Hubbard's release was not part of an exchange, and no other concessions were provided."

Related article: [Montenegro Expels Founder of Russian Pro-War Blog Rybar for 'Security Reasons'](#)

In October 2024 the U.S. State Department offered \$10 million for information leading to the identification or location of employees of the Russian media organization Rybar, listing Zvinchuk as its director.

The department's Rewards for Justice program says on its website that Rybar was previously funded by the late Russian mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin and managed social media channels promoting Russian government political interests in the U.S., including by stoking divisions over immigration in the run-up to the 2024 presidential election. Britain imposed sanctions on Zvinchuk and others linked to Rybar in July, having already designated the media company for spreading false narratives about Ukraine and interfering in European elections.

Moscow has regularly denied accusations of misinformation and sabotage campaigns, saying the West is spreading anti-Russian propaganda.

Zvinchuk, a former Russian Defence Ministry official, was detained in Montenegro on charges of spreading "Russian influence," then expelled with three other Russians on Oct. 9.

The State Department spokesperson declined to say whether Washington was involved in Zvinchuk's detention by U.S.-ally Montenegro or whether it had requested his extradition.

Asked to comment on Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Hubbard was not released in exchange for Zvinchuk.

"That's not right," Peskov said of the claim.

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