



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on May 24, 2023

Russia Bans U.S. Officials, Opens Criminal Cases Against ICC Officials

On May 19, Russia's Foreign Ministry declared entry bans for 500 high-ranking U.S. officials, including former President Barack Obama, in what was described by Russia as a [tit-for-tat measure](#) after the United States and its Western allies imposed anti-Russian sanctions.

The ministry said that these entry bans were in retaliation against "anti-Russian" sanctions "designed by Washington to inflict maximum damage on Russia," which the Biden administration had [announced](#) during the G7 summit in Japan. Interestingly, American television hosts and comedians Jimmy Kimmel and Seth Meyers were also included in the list.

"It is high time Washington learned that Russia will not just sit by and watch as it unleashes its hostile campaigns against Russia," the Foreign Ministry continued, cautioning that "retribution will never be far away."

The ministry also dismissed a recent U.S. request for a consular visit to detained *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, who was arrested over allegations of espionage in March. The move was "in response to the refusal to issue visas to Russian journalists" who were supposed to travel with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to the UN's New York headquarters.

Furthermore, Russia [opened a criminal case](#) against International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Karim Ahmad Khan and judges Tomoko Akane, Rosario Salvatore Aitala, and Sergio Gerardo Ugalde Godinez, who in March had declared an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Russian investigative committee in charge of the ICC cases recalled that on March 22, ICC prosecutor Karim Ahmad Khan lodged a motion with the ICC Pre-Trial Division for issuing a warrant for the arrest of Russian citizens. The case against Putin accused the Russian leader of war crimes, particularly the illegal deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia. Moscow has dismissed such claims.

"The criminal case is knowingly unlawful, since there are no grounds for bringing them to criminal responsibility," the investigative committee pointed out, highlighting that based on the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons dated December 14, 1973, heads of state have absolute immunity from the jurisdiction of foreign states. Hence, the ICC's criminal charges against Putin would have limited impact on the Russian leader, save for restricting his travel options.

Also, the Russian branch of the environmental group Greenpeace had to end [operations](#) after Russian authorities categorized it an "undesirable organization," making operations difficult. Russia claims that



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The Kremlin



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Greenpeace had tried to “interfere in the internal affairs of the state” and “engaged in anti-Russian propaganda” by advocating for sanctions against Moscow.

Similarly, three scientists working at the Institute of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) Siberian Branch, who contributed to the development of Russia’s hypersonic Kinzhal missiles, were charged on suspicion of high treason for reportedly divulging state secrets on missile technology.

Valery Zvyagintsev, doctor of technical sciences and chief researcher and founder of the institute’s laboratory of high-speed aerodynamics; Aleksandr Shiplyuk, the director of the institute; and Anatoly Maslov, the institute’s chief researcher, were the three scientists charged.

Zvyagintsev’s lab, located in the city of Novosibirsk, has been focusing on the research and development of hypersonic missile technology since 2001.

Shiplyuk and Maslov, who have been helping develop hypersonic missiles for more than a decade, were arrested in Moscow last August and charged with high treason under Article 275 of the Russian Federation’s Criminal Code. Shiplyuk was put in the Lefortovo pre-trial detention center, while Zvyagintsev has been under house arrest since April 7.

Russian state media contend that Maslov and Shiplyuk supposedly [transferred state secrets](#) — data linked to hypersonic technologies — to the Chinese government.

In response, RAS colleagues of the three scientists penned an [open letter](#), published on May 11, stating that the arrests had an adverse impact on their research and risk impeding Russia’s progress in hypersonic technology.

In the letter, the authors hinted that their colleagues’ arrests were linked to research findings they published, positing that these arrests show that “any article or report can lead to accusations of high treason.”

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov addressed the open letter, saying that Russia’s security services were working on the case. “We have indeed seen this appeal, but Russian special services are working on this. They are doing their job. These are very serious accusations.”

Meanwhile, in Germany, police are looking into the suspected poisoning of exiled Russians, first reported by the [Russian portal Agentstvo](#), and confirmed by a spokesman for the German police force on May 21. “An investigation has been opened. The probe is ongoing,” the spokesman [told](#) AFP, declining to give further details.

News [reports](#) stated that the two victims are an unnamed journalist who was treated at the Charité hospital in Berlin, and Natalia Arno, a U.S.-based activist and head of the Free Russia Foundation. Both of them attended a gathering of Russian dissidents in Berlin organized by Moscow oligarch-turned-Kremlin-critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky on April 29 and 30.

Arno publicly named herself on Facebook as one of the suspected victims. In a long post, she testified that she encountered bizarre symptoms that she mistakenly thought were due to jet lag. These symptoms began in the first European city she was in and escalated in the second; she said her hotel room door was found ajar and the room reeked of cheap perfume. The next day, she experienced acute pain and modified her flight to return to America as fast as she could. After running tests in the United States, hospital physicians were unable to name the cause of the symptoms but told Arno that they were neurological.



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“Briefly: there is a suspicion that during my recent trip to Europe, I was poisoned, possibly by some nerve agent, investigated by one (or not even one) Western intelligence agency. I still have neuropathy symptoms, but overall I feel much better,” Arno published on Facebook.

She warned her fellow dissidents and activists to be vigilant, and suggested that the Kremlin was responsible for her suspected poisoning. “The enemy has long tentacles, there is the opportunity to endanger U.S. outside of Russia, so we need to be vigilant always, but not be afraid,” she wrote.

“Digital security training is always part of all our educational programs, but physical and situational awareness needs to be strengthened and deepened,” she also said in her post. “It’s terrible to think that you can be poisoned at any moment.”



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