

# Ex-U.S. Marine Detained in Russia Holds British Citizenship, Reports Say

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A former U.S. Marine charged with espionage in Russia is reportedly a dual citizen of the United States and the United Kingdom.

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) detained Paul Whelan, 48, in Moscow last Friday in a case which threatens to aggravate diplomatic tensions with the West. On Thursday, Whelan's lawyer confirmed he had been [charged](#) with espionage, meaning he could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Later Thursday Britain's [The Guardian](#) and [The Times](#) publications reported that Whelan is a dual citizen of the United States and the United Kingdom.

U.S. Embassy officials in Moscow contacted the British Embassy to inform them of "his status as a British citizen," according to [The Times](#).

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Both outlets quoted a Foreign Office spokesman as saying that British diplomats “have requested consular access to a British man detained in Russia after receiving a request for assistance.”

Initial reports also suggested that Whelan, who was born to British parents in Ottawa before eventually settling in Michigan, may hold a Canadian passport. The Canadian CBC broadcaster quoted a Canadian foreign ministry spokesperson Wednesday as [saying](#) that “consular officials are aware that a Canadian citizen has been arrested in Russia.”

Russia’s Foreign Ministry [confirmed](#) Whelan’s British citizenship to the state-run RIA Novosti news agency on Friday.

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said Friday that the U.K. has offered Whelan consular assistance but noted that: "The United States are leading on this because he is a British and American citizen."

U.S. Ambassador Jon Huntsman visited Whelan on Wednesday at the infamous Lefortovo prison in Moscow, where he could remain in custody until at least Feb. 28.

*Reuters contributed reporting to this article.*

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