

Russian Prosecutors Seek 18-Year Jail Sentence for U.S. Journalist Evan Gershkovich

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Evan Gershkovich. AP / TASS

Updated with sentence request.

Russian prosecutors have asked a judge to sentence Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich to 18 years in prison on spying charges, state media [reported](#) Friday, as a court in the Sverdlovsk region heard closing arguments in the closed espionage trial that has been condemned as a sham in the West.

Journalists outside the Sverdlovsk Regional Court [said](#) a final verdict in the trial against Gershkovich was scheduled to be announced at 5:00 pm local time. Closing arguments began earlier on Friday.

The U.S. journalist [pleaded not guilty](#) to the espionage charges, Russian media reported.

A judge had earlier agreed to resume hearings this week — instead of the originally scheduled

date of Aug. 13 — after Gershkovich’s defense team requested that the date be moved up. The trial, which has been closed to the media, began in late June.

After resuming proceedings on Thursday, the Sverdlovsk Regional Court announced that closing arguments would be heard the next day.

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The Wall Street Journal correspondent and former reporter for The Moscow Times became the first Western journalist to be arrested in Russia on spying charges since the Cold War after he was detained during a reporting trip in March 2023.

The United States considers Gershkovich to be “wrongfully detained,” meaning it effectively regards him as a political hostage. So, too, has The Wall Street Journal slammed the accusations of espionage as “bogus.”

The Kremlin claims to have caught the journalist “red-handed” but has otherwise not made any details of his case public. Russia’s prosecutor general last month accused Gershkovich of working for the CIA and “collecting secret information” about tank maker Uralvagonzavod in the Sverdlovsk region where he was arrested.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has suggested he is open to a prisoner exchange with the United States involving Gershkovich. After the trial opened last month, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said U.S. officials “should still seriously consider the signals that they in Washington received through the relevant channels.”

If found guilty of espionage, Gershkovich faces up to 20 years in a penal colony.

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