

Putin just asked Interpol to find a Russian spy in the US, days after the media revealed his whereabouts

[Sonam Sheth](#)

Business insider Sep 12, 2019, 5:36 PM



Russian President Vladimir Putin. Mikhail Klimentyev/Pool Photo via AP

- The Russian government filed a request with Interpol to get more information about the location of a Russian CIA asset living in Washington, DC, the Russian foreign ministry said this week.
- The move came after several US media outlets revealed personal details about the asset, his work, his identity, and his location.
- Russia likely already knew about the asset's whereabouts, but the Kremlin's interest in the matter appears to have mounted since it gained traction in the US this week.
- Russia has previously targeted former spies living abroad for assassinations, like Sergei Skripal and Alexander Litvinenko.
- [Visit Business Insider's homepage for more stories.](#)

The Russian government has filed a request with Interpol to get information from the US about the location of a Russian CIA asset now living in Washington, DC, the Russian foreign ministry said on Thursday.

The move came after several US media outlets revealed personal details about the asset's identity, work, and whereabouts.

"A citizen of Russia disappeared on the territory of a foreign state along with his family," said Maria Zakharova, a spokesperson for the foreign ministry. "Two years later, American media throws up a story about how he is in the United States ... Interpol was presented with questions regarding the disappearance of a foreign citizen and his presence on the territory of the United States."

Russia likely already knew about the asset's location, but the Kremlin's interest in the matter appears to have heightened significantly since it gained traction in the US this week.

The Russian news agency [RIA reported](#) that the Russian government said in its Interpol request that the asset, Oleg Smolenkov, disappeared two years ago and that now, with the media involved, it's "important to carefully study everything and check it again."

The Russian government also expressed concern that the "spy scandal" was created to hurt [President Donald Trump](#) "because an electoral campaign has begun in the United States."

"This is classic propaganda," Zakharova said.

Read more: [*The US extracted a top spy from Russia after Trump revealed classified information to the Russians in an Oval Office meeting*](#)

[CNN first reported](#) on Smolenkov's existence on Monday but withheld his name, specific information about his work, and his current location. [The report said](#) that Smolenkov had to be extracted from Russia in 2017 in part because of concerns about the way Trump handled classified intelligence following a meeting with two Russian officials that May.

The information Trump shared with the Russians in 2017 wasn't related to the CIA's asset. But the president's disregard for strict intelligence-sharing rules to protect highly placed sources "prompted intelligence officials to renew earlier discussions about the potential risk" that the source in Russia would be exposed, CNN reported.

The White House press secretary, Stephanie Grisham, said in a statement to CNN that its "reporting is not only incorrect, it has the potential to put lives in danger."

Russian officials echoed the White House, calling CNN's story "fake" and describing it as an "order" to discredit Trump.

Later Monday, The New York Times and NBC News followed up with reporting that revealed identifying details about Smolenkov, including the type of work he did in the Russian government and his residence in Washington, DC.

[The Times reported](#) that Smolenkov was a mid-level Russian official the CIA cultivated decades ago who had rapidly moved up through the ranks of the Russian government. Eventually, the report said, Smolenkov became invaluable after landing "an influential position" that included access to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

But as the US learned the extent to which Russia was interfering in the 2016 election - and as the media reported on it and began to examine the CIA's sources in the

Kremlin - US officials reportedly worried about Smolenkov's safety and offered to extract him in late 2016, before Trump took office.

Read more: ['You actually have to give a s--- about your spies': Intel veterans are floored by report that an asset was extracted from Russia in part because of Trump](#)

The Times' report described current Trump administration officials as saying the media's scrutiny was the only reason for the extraction, but CNN reported that officials' concerns for the asset's safety were compounded after Trump's Oval Office meeting with the Russians in 2017.

Crucially, the Times report said officials did not disclose Smolenkov's identity or location because both were "closely held secrets" and his life remained in danger.

[NBC News then published a report](#) saying that Smolenkov lived in Washington, DC. The report also divulged other details about the home and what happened when a reporter knocked on the door.

Russian state-sponsored media later said it had the name of the intelligence asset. The Russian government has previously targeted former spies living abroad for assassinations, like Sergei Skripal and Alexander Litvinenko.

Litvinenko was a former FSB officer who defected to the UK in 2001 after accusing his superiors of corruption. He died in November 2006 after being poisoned. British police determined that the Russian government was behind the assassination.

Skripal is a former Russian military intelligence officer who acted as a double agent for the UK and has been living there since 2010. He and his daughter, Yulia, were poisoned in Salisbury, England, in March 2018 but survived. The UK determined that the Russian government was also behind the Skripals' attempted assassination.

NOW WATCH: [Popular Videos from Insider Inc.](#)