# US Army Staff Sgt. Gordon Black Sentenced to Penal Colony in Russia for Theft and Threats



On June 19, 2024, a Russian court in Vladivostok sentenced Staff Sgt. Gordon Black of the US Army to three years and nine months in a penal colony for charges of theft and making threats of murder. Black, 34, had flown to Vladivostok to visit Alexandra Vashchuk, a woman he considered his girlfriend, after traveling unauthorized from his base in South Korea. He was detained on May 2 following accusations from Vashchuk that he assaulted her and stole 10,000 rubles (approximately £90).

Black denied the threats but admitted to stealing the money. He plans to appeal the ruling. The Pervomaisky District Court also ordered him to pay 10,000 rubles in damages. Prosecutors initially sought a sentence of four years and eight months.

His case adds to a list of Americans imprisoned in Russia amid heightened US-Russian tensions, including former Marine Paul Whelan and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich. Black's case has notably strained relations further as the US State Department advises against American travel to Russia.

Black, who has a wife and child in Texas, met Vashchuk while stationed in South Korea. His relationship with his wife reportedly deteriorated in 2018, leading to a divorce filing after discovering Vashchuk’s presence through social media. The US Army confirmed that Black did not seek the required authorization for international travel, which would have been unlikely given current geopolitical tensions.