# US Soldier Sentenced to Penal Colony in Russia for Theft and Threats



A Russian court has sentenced US Staff Sergeant Gordon Black, 34, to three years and nine months in a penal colony. Black was convicted of theft and threatening to kill his girlfriend, Alexandra Vashchuk. The incident occurred in Vladivostok, where prosecutors claimed Black threatened Vashchuk and stole 10,000 roubles (£89) from her during an argument. While Black pled not guilty to the threats, he acknowledged partial guilt regarding the theft.

Prosecutors originally sought a sentence of four years and eight months, while Black's defense requested acquittal on all charges. Following the verdict, Black indicated plans to appeal.

Sergeant Black met Vashchuk in South Korea, violating Pentagon rules by traveling to Russia and China without authorization. Black previously served in Iraq in 2009 and Afghanistan in 2013, and was most recently stationed at Camp Humphreys, US Forces Korea.

Separately, Russian President Vladimir Putin was welcomed with a grand ceremony in Pyongyang, North Korea. President Putin's visit marked his first appearance in the country since 2000, where he was greeted by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The leaders discussed strengthening bilateral ties amidst warming relations since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.