
RUSSIA DETAINS, DEPORTS U.S. PROPAGANDA CHIEF BEFORE KERRY'S TRIP

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WASHINGTON - Russian authorities briefly detained and then deported the chief of the board that oversees U.S. government broadcasting overseas, including the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, the agency said Wednesday, the latest move amid heightening friction between Washington and Moscow.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors said in a statement that its chairman, Jeff Shell, was denied entry into Russia on arriving at Moscow's main international airport late Tuesday despite having a valid U.S. passport and Russian visa. He was detained in a locked room for several hours before being escorted onto a flight to Amsterdam.

The statement said Russian authorities did not explain the expulsion. But it said that Shell told colleagues traveling with him that airport security officials told him he was subject to a lifetime ban on entering Russia. Shell is a presidential appointee who serves part-time as chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors and is also the chairman of NBCUniversal's Filmed Entertainment Division. The board said it had been in touch with both the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the State Department about the incident and thanked them "for their urgent attention to the matter."

There was no immediate comment from the State Department or the Russian government.

Secretary of State John Kerry is expected to arrive in Moscow on Thursday to discuss the conflicts in Syria, Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

But the expulsion of the U.S. broadcasting executive also takes place amid a spike in other tensions between the United States and Russia, including a tit-for-tat expulsion of diplomats from both nations last week related to an altercation between an American diplomat and a Russian security guard outside the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. The U.S. had earlier complained that American officials in Russia have been increasingly harassed by Russian security services, including home break-ins, for the past two years.

Russia has denied the allegations and countered that Russian officials in the United States are harassed. The State Department has rejected the Russian charges as unfounded and untrue.

Kaynak/Source: