



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# After Brittney Griner, anyone can become a Russian hostage



After nine months, Brittney Griner's drama ended happily, in Cold War style, when she arrived home in the US. However, her most difficult life experience is a warning. All those who find themselves in Russia today could go through the same ordeal - regardless of whether they are guilty before the law or not.

The WNBA star and twice Olympic champion was released from a Russian prison and exchanged for notorious international arms dealer Viktor Bout in Abu Dhabi. Brittney Griner was arrested in Russia in February, just seven days before the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and found guilty of possessing drugs: a small amount of medicinal cannabis oil, and sentenced to nine years in prison. The man she was exchanged for, however, is nicknamed the "merchant of death", and was sentenced to 25 years in prison in the US.

The gravity of the sins of the two exchanged prisoners is not even close, but that was not the motive that led the US and Russia to agree on the exchange. This is reminiscent of the old Cold War days, when the two countries generally exchanged arrested spies.

A person who has reached the highest peaks of fair play, skill and effort, everything that top sports brings, a person who, like a basketball star and Olympic champion, is a role model for young people, has returned to America. However, one of the most notorious arms dealers, a man who bribed corrupt governments around the world, has returned to Russia. Each of the parties, therefore, chose the values they wanted to liberate and return to their homeland, and those values were personified in Griner and Bout.

And this is exactly what one of the stars of Putin's propaganda, Margarita Simonyan, the head of the media kolkhoz Russia Today, is talking about, but understandably from a completely different angle. "American voters were given a choice: a hero who suffered while serving his fatherland ... or a black lesbian, hooked on drugs, who suffered for a vape with hashish". Simonyan was referring covertly to the fact that after the release of Brittney

Griner, another well-known Putin detainee, former US Marine Paul Whelan, convicted of espionage, remained in a Russian prison.

## Griner was a hostage taken in order to extort us (John Sipher)

Author and long-time CIA member with experience of working in Russia, John Sipher, is pleased Brittney Griner has been released, but he used the word "hostage" when mentioning her on Twitter. "Griner was a hostage taken in order to extort us". Almost four years ago, on the occasion of Paul Whelan's arrest, Sipher used the word "setup" in an article for The Atlantic. "While there may be any number of motivations for Whelan's arrest, most attention has centred on the notion of a potential swap for the recently arrested Russian operative, Maria Butina".

The arrest of Brittney Griner, her draconian sentence and final exchange for a notorious criminal, confirm that Putin's Russia sets traps and takes as hostage foreigners of a profile that would motivate the opposing party when exchanging prisoners. With the invasion of Ukraine, this kind of abduction and imprisonment without a fair trial became part of Russia's conquest campaign.

Brittney Griner's story is a warning to any citizen of any Western country residing in Russia that while Russia is at war, they cannot be certain about their safety. They do not have to commit any offence. They just have to fit into the profile the Kremlin thinks can be "cashed in" as a lever of influence to achieve its war goal.