

EUROPE

# Russians Arrested on Treason Charges Helped U.S. Catch Hacker, Report Says

By ANDREW E. KRAMER    AUG. 25, 2017

MOSCOW — In December, Russia arrested two of its most senior cybersecurity officials on treason charges, prompting speculation that the pair might have tipped off the American authorities about Russian hacking during the 2016 election campaign.

Prosecutors have released no details since, and the case remains shrouded in mystery. But this week an independent Russian television station, Dozhd, reported that the men had been arrested on charges that they helped the United States detain a prominent criminal hacker two years before the election.

The United States Secret Service, which investigates some online financial fraud, detained the hacker, Roman V. Seleznev, the son of a member of the Russian Parliament, during a vacation in the Maldives in 2014.

He was accused of stealing credit card data in the United States that was traded in the digital underground. In April, a court sentenced him to 27 years in prison.

That the two Russian officers had helped the Americans detain Mr. Seleznev would not rule out some role for them in the electoral hacking case, as more

evidence emerges that the Russian government cooperated with cybercriminals in the election meddling.

In December, for example, the Obama administration imposed sanctions for election meddling against two Russian hackers who were already wanted by the F.B.I. for online fraud.

The pair detained in December were high-ranking employees of the Federal Security Service, the main successor agency to the K.G.B.: Sergei Mikhailov, a deputy director of the agency's computer crime department, the Center for Information Security, and his aide, Dmitri A. Dokuchaev.

In its report on Wednesday, Dozhd cited sources within the F.S.B., whom it did not identify, saying the treason arrests sprang from helping the United States arrest Mr. Seleznev.

“Specifically, as a result of processing information received from the ‘Mikhailov group,’ according to those Dozhd spoke with, there was the high-profile arrest in 2014” of Mr. Seleznev, the television station reported.

The F.S.B. also arrested Ruslan V. Stoyanov, a senior malware researcher with the antivirus company Kaspersky, and Georgy Fomchenkov, a man who more than a decade ago was known to associate with hackers but whose role in the case today is unclear. The arrests remained secret until January, when they were reported by Kommersant, a Russian newspaper.

Thickening the plot of this cyberspy tale, while the Russian prosecutors have accused Mr. Dokuchaev of treason, federal authorities in Washington and San Francisco say that he doubled as a cybercriminal while working for Russia's F.S.B. and that he is wanted for hacking Yahoo and stealing 500 million passwords.

Ivan Y. Pavlov, a defense lawyer specializing in treason cases, has said he represents one of the four accused but was not authorized to say which one. In a post on Facebook on Thursday, Mr. Pavlov denied that the men were accused of assisting the United States in the Seleznev case.

“I am familiar with the accusation, though for now cannot reveal details,” he wrote. He suggested the latest leaks were merely “under-the-rug intrigues of the special services.”

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