

Data reveals how OSCE mission member spied for NATO in Donbass

RT

Wed, 25 Oct 2023 21:55 UTC



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RT has gained access to data retrieved by Russian prosecutors as part of an espionage case against a former OSCE mission member.

Russian prosecutors have provided RT with exclusive access to evidence in the high-profile case of a British national who was found guilty of spying on local militias for NATO while working for the monitoring mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Donbass.

Emails and maps stored by a man identified as David Orrells in password-protected archives had been earlier retrieved by Russian prosecutors as part of an espionage case against the former OSCE mission member. The British national was found guilty and sentenced to 19 years in a high-security prison in absentia in September.

"The court has established that the accused ... acted in the interests of a foreign organization representative and against the security of the Lugansk People's Republic and conveyed information of military nature" to a foreign nation, a Russian court deemed at the time.

In one of the emails seen by RT, a person - whose identity is not disclosed - urges Orrells to send "data needed by the alliance" via email as they cannot meet in person. The "alliance" referred to in the message appeared to be NATO, according to RT's Murad Gazdiev, who spoke to the prosecutor of the Lugansk People's Republic, Gleb Mikhailov, about the case.

Some other data presented to RT included a series of maps of a Donbass town named Stakhanov, which featured local militia "military sites." According to Russian prosecutors, Orrells, who worked as a drone team lead with the OSCE mission, collected such data using his team's unmanned aerial vehicles. He had the right to do so as part of the OSCE mission mandate, but he was not permitted to share them with third parties.

Orrells has acted in the interests of foreign intelligence since at least 2021, Mikhailov told RT. He **"collected and transmitted data to the representatives of foreign intelligence about the locations of the military units of the Lugansk People's Militia. Subsequently, strikes were carried out by the Ukrainian forces at the transmitted coordinates,"** the prosecutor said, adding that the attacks resulted in personnel casualties and material damage.

The British national joined the UN-backed monitoring mission in 2016. A criminal case against him was opened in Russia in January 2023, months after the Lugansk People's Republic officially became part of Russia together, with three other former Ukrainian territories, following a series of referendums.

Orrells, who left Ukraine in February 2022, shortly before the start of the conflict between Moscow and Kiev, dismissed the accusations against him as "laughable." He also said he was "perfectly safe" back in the UK in January 2023, when contacted by Reuters, while insisting that he only shared images taken by his drone team alongside colleagues and analysts within the OSCE.

Established in March 2014 - soon after the conflict broke out in Donbass in the wake of the Maidan coup in Kiev - the OSCE mission de facto wrapped up its activities in early March 2022, at the very beginning of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

It was designed to be a civilian observer mission tasked with contributing to reducing tensions and documenting the situation on the ground. Russia had repeatedly accused it of a "selective approach to facts" and even "spying" for Kiev. Its mandate expired in late March 2022.

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