

Why does Washington prefer war drive over negotiating Brittney Griner's release?

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Brittney Griner in the 2021 WNBA semifinals in October.

On Aug. 4, a Russian court convicted Brittney Griner of drug smuggling and possession and sentenced her to nine years in jail. She was arrested in February for carrying cannabis vaping cartridges through the Moscow airport.

Griner, an African American athlete, played during the off-season in Russia. Many WNBA stars take similar international gigs due to unequal pay compared to their male counterparts.

[NPR reports](#): "The Olympian and [W]NBA champion says she must have put the cannabis in her bag by mistake. Her defense team notes that Griner has a medical marijuana card in Arizona to help her cope with injuries sustained over years of competition. But personal cannabis possession is illegal under any circumstances in Russia, similar to U.S. federal law."

Brittney Griner should be free. Instead, she has the misfortune of being one of the few diplomatic cards Russia holds at a time when U.S. imperialism is waging a global war against that country. Currently, it takes the form of a proxy war in Ukraine and economic sanctions. But like the recent U.S. provocations against the People's Republic of China, it threatens to spill over into a world war.

A socialist government, or even a progressive bourgeois-nationalist one, would understand the value of releasing Brittney as a gesture of goodwill to the Black community in the U.S. Unfortunately, that is not the Putin government's orientation.

But the movement and community here need to know that there are nongovernmental organizations in Russia that oppose the U.S./NATO proxy war in Ukraine and support the cause of the Donbass republics, which have been working for Griner's release.

Among these groups is the [Foundation to Battle Injustice](#) headed by Mira Terada, an unjustly convicted Russian citizen kidnapped by the U.S., who spent two-and-a-half

years in U.S. prisons. It was Terada who proposed the prisoner swap idea that the Biden regime is now taking credit for.

On Aug. 5, Russia Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said [Russia is ready to discuss a prisoner swap](#) for Griner, “within the framework of the channel that has been agreed by the presidents. There is a specified channel that has been agreed upon by [Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden], and no matter what anyone says publicly, this channel will remain in effect,” Lavrov explained at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit.

Biden & Co. ignored Brittney Griner’s plight for months, refusing to negotiate with the Russian authorities in good faith while they were busy [setting up the war crisis in Ukraine](#) and vicious sanctions on Russia. Griner’s case might never have reached the point of a trial or conviction had Washington acted differently.

It must be pointed out that many thousands of Black and Brown people have languished in U.S. prisons for years, even decades, for possession of marijuana and other recreational drugs. In 2020 [Forbes reported](#), “An estimated 40,000 people today are incarcerated for marijuana offenses even as the overall legal cannabis industry is booming.”

The best way we can support Brittney is to demand that the White House make serious concessions to gain her release and allow her to return home - including ending the multi-billion-dollar weapons shipments fueling Ukraine’s war on Donbass that began more than eight years ago.

On the same day Griner was convicted, U.S./NATO-supplied long range weapons were used to [target a funeral in the capital of Donetsk](#), killing at least 8 people, including a 12-year-old girl. U.S.-supplied weapons have also recently been used to [scatter anti-personnel mines](#) across the city streets, killing and wounding civilians.

The people's movement in this country must fight to stop the brutal U.S.-NATO-Ukraine war that is killing people daily and end the sanctions and military threats against Russia's people. The billions of dollars being spent on the U.S. proxy war are dollars stolen from the Black community and other poor and working-class people here at home.

Tell Joe Biden: Free Brittney Griner! And stop the U.S. war on Russia and Donbass!

