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Dear Sir,

I wish to bring to your attention a situation that, in my view, requires an appropriate response from the international academic community.

In October last year a colleague of mine, Igor Sutyagin, a researcher at the U.S. and Canada Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, was arrested by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB, formerly KGB). The FSB has kept Dr. Sutyagin in jail since then, accusing him of treason and espionage. It is one of the aspects of this case I wish to bring your attention to.

The same day the FSB arrested Dr. Sutyagin, it searched the Moscow apartment of Joshua Handler, a Woodrow Wilson School Ph.D. student, who was in Moscow on a visit to the U.S. and Canada Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He shared an office with Dr. Sutyagin, who was helping Handler with his Ph.D. work as well as with a project that he was doing in cooperation with the Federation of American Scientists.

The subsequent events have shown that the FSB seems to believe that the fact that Dr. Sutyagin was helping Handler with his academic research constitutes espionage and high treason. In particular, the FSB claimed on the government television channel that the work Handler was doing at Princeton University is espionage. What is more, people, who were interrogated by the FSB in connection with Sutyagin's case, were directly asked whether they know about Handler's "criminal activity". Although the FSB has repeatedly stated to Mr. Handler that it is not going to bring charges against him, it is extremely likely that these statements about his work will be used by the FSB to prosecute Dr. Sutyagin.

What I find very disturbing here is that the FSB seems to have no respect of the academic nature of Mr. Handler's work, which was done as part of his Ph.D. work at such well known and respected institution as Princeton University. Neither it seems to respect the fact that the work was done in full accordance with the openness standards of scientific research. Equally disturbing is the ease with which the FSB is accusing researchers, foreign and Russian alike, of espionage.