United States v. Robinson

Docket No.: 25-1428

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Case Information

Court: U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit

Date Decided: October 1, 2026

Judges: Circuit Judge Jacobs, Circuit Judge Wesley, Circuit Judge Park

Lower Court: U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York (Judge Morrison)

Parties and Attorneys

Appellant: United States of America; Represented By: Gilbert Rein, Saritha Komatireddy, Amy Busa

Defendant-Appellee: Jason Robinson; Represented By: Ashok Chandran

Amicus Curiae: Project for Privacy and Surveillance Accountability, Inc.

Overview

Issue: Whether a warrantless manual cell-phone search at the international border violated the Fourth Amendment and tainted a subsequent warrant-authorized forensic search.

Lower Court Held: The district court suppressed evidence from both searches because the manual search required a warrant and no exception to exclusion applied.

What Was Overturned: The Second Circuit reversed the suppression order and remanded for further proceedings.

Why: Intervening circuit precedent established that manual cell-phone searches at the border are routine searches requiring neither a warrant nor individualized suspicion, eliminating the asserted taint.

Background

Agents manually searched Robinson's cell phone upon his arrival at JFK Airport after international travel and found images of child sexual abuse. Using those discoveries, the government obtained a forensic-search warrant and uncovered at least 235 images and 457 videos. Robinson was indicted for transportation and possession of child pornography.

Lower Court Decision

The district court classified the manual search as nonroutine and held that it required a warrant supported by probable cause. It suppressed the forensic-search evidence because the warrant rested on the initial search. It also rejected good-faith reliance and found that the warrant affiant knowingly misled the magistrate judge about whether the initial search was routine.

Second Circuit Reversal

The Second Circuit reviewed legal conclusions de novo and factual findings for clear error, viewing the evidence most favorably to Robinson. United States v. Alisigwe, decided after oral argument, established that manual border searches of cell phones are routine and may proceed without suspicion. Accordingly, neither the manual-search evidence nor the evidence obtained under the resulting warrant should have been suppressed. The Second Circuit did not need to decide reasonable suspicion or the good-faith exception, although it expressed disagreement with the adverse good-faith findings in light of Alisigwe.

Legal Significance

This nonprecedential summary order applied Alisigwe to both a manual border search and a subsequent warrant based on its discoveries. It left open whether sophisticated forensic border searches might be nonroutine and require reasonable suspicion.

Key Takeaway

Distinguish manual border searches from forensic examinations: Alisigwe foreclosed the warrant requirement imposed here, and the lawful manual search could support a later forensic-search warrant.

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