

Afghanistan Says Negotiating Release of Helicopter Hostages

By [The Moscow Times](#)

April 22, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

KABUL — The Taliban may free a group of hostages that includes Turks and a Russian captured when their helicopter made an emergency landing in a Taliban-controlled area of eastern Afghanistan as early as Tuesday night, a provincial official said.

Negotiations between village leaders and the Taliban were underway, and that was leading to hopes they could be freed within hours, a spokesman for the governor of the Logar province said.

"Tribal elders are playing an important role in this incident. They have already talked with the Taliban, and we hope the hostages could be freed this evening," Din Mohammad Darwish said.

The eight Turkish engineers, an Afghan and two pilots from Russia and Kyrgyzstan were onboard a Russian Mi-8 helicopter when it made a "hard landing" in a remote part of Logar

province due to bad weather on Sunday afternoon.

They were taken captive by the insurgency, which controls the area, according to officials and a Taliban spokesman.

A group of police were sent to Azra district to investigate on Monday but were fired upon by unknown men and had to leave, Rais Khan Sadiq, the deputy head of Logar police, said, adding that there is no NATO or Afghan army presence in the district.

Since being captured, the 11 had been moved from Logar's conflict-riven Azra district to Hesarak district in neighboring Nangarhar province, Sadiq said.

No operation to rescue the hostages was being planned while the village elders negotiated with the Taliban, Sadiq said.

"We want to solve this problem with mediation of local elders. If we don't reach any conclusion then we will plan a military operation," he said.

He also denied a Taliban statement that the helicopter had been set fire by the insurgents, saying it had been seen by police and was still intact.

The engineers from a Turkish construction company were returning to Kabul from the eastern border province of Khost, when the helicopter, owned by air charter company Khorasan Cargo Airlines, was forced to land.

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