

Kiev to Prosecute 2 Russian Soldiers Captured in Ukraine for 'Terrorist Acts'

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A fighter with the separatist self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic Army stands guard at a checkpoint along a road from Vuhlehirsk to Debaltseve in Ukraine, Feb. 18, 2015.

KIEV — Ukraine on Monday accused two captured Russian servicemen of having killed Ukrainian troops in fighting in its east and said they would be prosecuted for "terrorist acts."

The Ukrainians seized on the capture of the two Russians, both wounded, to support their accusations of direct Russian military involvement in the separatist conflict despite a cease-fire signed in February. Russia denied any role there.

In a video posted online by the Ukrainian interior ministry, one of the prisoners gave his name as Alexander Alexandrov. He said he had been on a spying mission in Ukraine as part of a 14-member special forces group from the central Russian city of Tolyatti.

"We were discovered. I was wounded in the leg as I tried to get away. ... We've been here four or five days," he said.

The capture and possible prosecution of the two Russians and the potential embarrassment for Russia's Vladimir Putin come as the United States and its European Union allies press Moscow to fully implement the Minsk peace accords as a step to ending the crisis.

More than 6,100 people have been killed and Russia-West ties plunged into crisis since pro-Moscow separatists rebelled against a pro-Western leadership when it took power in Ukraine more than a year ago. Russia accuses Kiev of violating the truce.

Military spokesman Andriy Lysenko alluded to a similar previous incident and the explanation offered then by Putin.

"The leadership of the Russian Federation will have difficulty saying that these guys just got lost," he said.

As Kiev sought to reap maximum propaganda capital from the latest incident, Ukrainian chief of staff Viktor Muzhenko told journalists that a Ukrainian soldier had carried one of the wounded Russian officers on his shoulders "while small arms and mortar fire" had continued around him.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin said in Brussels that other Russians had been trying to kill the two captured men.

"We are completely certain and can state that these are citizens and servicemen of the Russian Federation," said Markiyan Lubkivsky, a senior Ukrainian state security official.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, asked to comment, said: "Both we and the Defense Ministry have said multiple times that there are no Russian servicemen in the Donbass." The Donbass is the colloquial term for Ukraine's industrialized east.

One Ukrainian soldier was killed in the fighting at Shchastya near the city of Luhansk, on Saturday, while some Ukrainian state security officials were wounded, state security chief Valentyn Nalivaychenko told journalists.

Nalivaychenko said the two captured Russians had personally killed Ukrainian troops.

"These [Russian] soldiers were completing their military task. They were going to kill our troops, kill our people," military spokesman Lysenko said.

Nalivaychenko said the captured soldiers had been part of a group that had carried out acts "with a terrorist aim with guns in their hands against our citizens."

They would be prosecuted for "terrorist activity and terrorist crimes," he said.

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