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Tourists Refuse to Leave Egypt

By Alexey Eremenko

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Protesters chanting slogans from atop an Egyptian army tank during a rally in Tahrir Square in Cairo on Saturday. **Lefteris Pitarakis**

Most of the 30,000 Russian tourists currently vacationing in Egypt are reluctant to pack their bags despite violent anti-government protests that have killed at least 100 Egyptians and injured thousands more in the past week and prompted tourists from other countries to rush to the airport, the Federal Tourism Agency said Sunday.

No Russians have been killed or wounded in Egypt as of Sunday, but Azeri diplomat Nidzhat Godzhayev was shot dead in Cairo amid the violence dubbed the "Nile Revolution," which began last Tuesday with thousands of protesters demanding the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, an 82-year-old authoritarian leader who has ruled the country for 30 years.

The street clashes, apparently inspired by similar rallies in nearby Tunisia that toppled the government earlier this month, are mostly confined to the northern cities of Cairo, Alexandria and Suez, located some 600 kilometers north of the main tourist destinations on the Red Sea, Sharm el-Sheikh and Hurghada. Mubarak shook up his government Saturday but refused to

quit.

The United States has advised its citizens to leave Egypt as soon as possible, while Britain and many European countries have advised their citizens not to travel there.

In Russia, the Federal Tourism Agency formally recommended on Saturday that tourist operators halt trips to Egypt and assist those seeking to leave the country. Tourists themselves are advised to not leave hotel premises.

Russian companies LUKoil and Novatek have started evacuating their staff from Egypt, RIA-Novosti reported Sunday.

But no emergency evacuation is being offered to Russian tourists, and the tourist watchdog said most do not want to leave anyway.

“People don't want to interrupt their rest, and all departures from Sharm [el-Sheikh] and Hurghada are proceeding according to schedule,” Federal Tourism Agency deputy head Alexander Radkov said, Vesti.ru reported Sunday.

Army forces moved into Sharm el-Sheikh on Sunday to keep order, but the main complaint of Russian tourists in the area was not the military presence but “lack of attention” paid to them by the normally heedful hotel staff, Vesti.ru reported.

The military has taken over police duties in Cairo and Alexandria after many police officers simply fled their posts. But the army is refusing to take sides between Mubarak and his opponents, mostly trying to prevent violence and rampant looting.

Radkov said Russian tourists were actually flying in, not willing to give up pre-booked tours.

“On the whole, the situation in Egypt's resorts really remains calm. Tourists are vacationing normally. No worries about them so far,” he said, Interfax reported.

Tourists whose trips were interrupted or had to be canceled because of riots may sue for damages, but are advised to reschedule or change destinations instead, a solution offered by many European tourist operators as well, Tourism Industry Union spokeswoman Irina Tyurina told Interfax.

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