

Activists Begin Hunger Strike Against NATO Base

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The Ulyanovsk airport, where activists have erected tents and declared a hunger strike. **Valery Volkov**

Activists from the Communist Party have begun a hunger strike to protest plans to allow NATO to use an air base in Ulyanovsk as a transit point for Afghanistan.

The protesters created a tent camp near the city's airport, Interfax reported Sunday.

"We have 16 people," and Communist activist Rafail Lukmanov told the news agency.

"We have four tents for housing and one as headquarters. ... NATO doesn't go anywhere without reason, and therefore government assurances that the base will be used for only transport are in serious doubt," he said.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in March that the deal in the works to allow NATO to use an air base in the city for the transit of troops and military cargo to Afghanistan would be good for Russia, adding that the success of NATO's mission is essential for fending off the spread of terrorism and illegal drugs from Afghanistan into the country.

The ranks of the protesters, aged 20 to 60, include local politicians, as well as business and youth leaders, a representative of the Communist Party told RIA-Novosti.

City authorities in Moscow have spoken out strongly against the pitching of tents in protests by political opposition groups and has moved aggressively to prevent their use. Two activists in Nizhny Novgorod were detained for attempting to erect tents on a central square in March.

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