

Police Disperse Ulyanovsk Anti-NATO Tent Protest

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Police have broken up a camp at the Ulyanovsk airport where activists from the Communist Party were holding a hunger strike to protest a possible deal to let NATO troops use an air base there as a transit point on the way to Afghanistan.

About 100 police officers descended on the camp Tuesday evening.

"They kicked us out of the tents and took all our property with them: tents, generators, and sleeping bags," demonstrator Rafael Lukmanov told Interfax.

Sixteen activists from the Communist Party began the hunger strike over the weekend.

Officials have responded by offering clarification of the plans under discussion.

"There will not be any kind of NATO military base or a transit center in Ulyanovsk, nor is it possible," Interior Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

"There is no suggestion for either military or civilian personnel of NATO countries to be based

there. It is about exploring the feasibility of transit for only non-lethal cargo by the International Security Assistance Force to Afghanistan using combined methods — air, road and rail transport through the territory of the Russian Federation," she said.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov earlier floated the idea of an air base deal with NATO.

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