Two Russian Hostages Freed in Syria

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Two Russians and an Italian were freed in Syria in exchange for three captured rebels after being held hostage for nearly two months, the Russian Foreign Ministry said Monday.

The ministry said Viktor Gorelov, Abdessattar Hassun and Mario Belluomo, who were taken hostage by rebel forces Dec. 12, had been released Sunday and were in good health.

"The Russians have already been brought to the Russian Embassy in Damascus," the ministry said in a statement on its website. "An Italian citizen who was kidnapped with them, M. Belluomo, will be handed over to the Italian authorities through the Syrian Foreign Ministry."

The ministry said the three had been seized by rebels on the way to the Syrian port of Tartus from the city of Homs.

Italian media have said Belluomo, who was 63 when kidnapped, was working in Syria as an engineer at a steel plant near the port city of Latakia.

The Foreign Ministry did not say what the two Russians were doing in Syria, but media reports have suggested they also worked at the steel plant. Russia is Syria's main arms supplier and has long been an ally of President Bashar Assad.

Moscow has blocked three UN Security Council resolutions aimed at putting pressure on Assad. It says his departure must not be a precondition for a negotiated settlement of the 22-month-old conflict, which has killed more than 60,000 people.

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