

Crimea Releases Ukrainian Officer After Request From Russia

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A Ukrainian officer, detained after pro-Russian forces stormed a naval base in Crimea, was released Thursday after Russia asked the regional authorities to let him go.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Wednesday urged the Crimean leadership to release Rear Admiral Sergiy Haiduk and allow him to travel unhindered to Ukraine, the ministry said in a statement, Interfax reported.

A further seven people, supporters of the interim government in Kiev, have also been released by the pro-Moscow authorities in Crimea, Ukrainian Deputy Andrei Senchenko said, news agency Kryminform reported Thursday.

Haiduk was detained on Wednesday after pro-Russian forces stormed the Ukrainian naval headquarters in Simferopol. Later that day, a Ukrainian Defense Ministry spokesman said that troops had breached the gates of another naval base in the region, at Novoozyornoye, and had seized a guard's booth at the entrance.

"Currently, Russian soldiers have seized the checkpoint but are advancing no further, Ukrainian officers are armed," Vladislav Seleznyov, a spokesman for the Ukrainian armed forces in Crimea said on his Facebook page on Wednesday.

Ukraine's Defense Ministry has authorized its troops in Crimea to open fire if their lives were in danger, reversing an earlier order not to do so,

Unidentified witnesses of the raid said that in an apparent attempt to prevent Ukrainian soldiers from firing, the front ranks of the assault force was made up of women and children, followed by pro-Russian fighters and Russian troops, Obozrevatel reported.

President Vladimir Putin said at his news conference on March 4 that Russian forces in Ukraine would take cover behind women and children to prevent Ukrainian servicemen from firing at the foreign troops.

"Let those troops fire at their own people, whom we won't be standing in front of, but behind," he said. "Let them just try to shoot at the women and children."

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