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MT Journalist Detained by Armed Men in Slovyansk

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A Moscow Times journalist was briefly detained Wednesday in Slovyansk by camouflaged men with assault rifles.

When this reporter asked pro-Russian activists near the building for an interview and presented his press card and passport, one of the men suddenly twisted his arms behind his back and escorted him to the City Hall building, where he was subsequently searched and his passport checked.

"Do not blame us, this is what the situation dictates," a person later identified by one of the protesters as Vyacheslav Ponomaryov, "the people's mayor of Slavyansk," told the reporter. Ponomaryov was elected mayor by pro-Russian protesters after Nelya Shtyopa, the official mayor of the city, was ousted.

After being searched, the reporter was led to the second floor of the building, where he

witnessed an eerie scene: a blindfolded man tied to a chair. The unidentified man was being guarded by a camouflaged man with an AKM assault rifle.

The camouflaged man was then asked to escort the reporter to another room.

"Do not worry, he will not flee on my watch," he said.

The man led the reporter to a small room with a bed and a computer and said the blindfolded person was also a journalist. No negotiations were possible with the "Kiev junta," he said, adding that the pro-Russian activists would fight the Ukrainian Army if it invaded.

Later, another protester — one without weapons or camouflage — apologized to the reporter for the brief detention and invited him to a room adjacent to the mayor's office for some tea.

He showed several pictures of Shtyopa and ridiculed her for having so many portraits of herself in her office. At that point, the reporter was allowed to leave City Hall.

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