

Kiev Official Claims 'Kidnapped' Ukrainian Pilot on Hostage Swap List

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Nadezhda Savchenko, 33, was seized by pro-Russian rebels in June while she was fighting with pro-government militia on the outskirts of Luhansk on the border with Russia.

A Ukrainian helicopter pilot who Moscow claims is a suspected accomplice to murder and Kiev claims was illegally smuggled to Russia by rebel forces is on the list of prisoners to be released in accordance with the cease-fire accords signed last week, Interfax-Ukraine reported Wednesday, citing official Kiev.

The Minsk protocol, signed by representatives of Russia, Ukraine, pro-Russian insurgents and the OSCE, stipulates that all hostages and illegally held individuals should be released.

"Nadia Savchenko ... is listed among the Ukrainians, who have to be returned as they were kidnapped, held and persecuted illegally," head of the Ukrainian Security Service Valentin Nalivaychenko told Interfax-Ukraine.

The claim that Savchenko is among the "hostages and illegally held individuals" to be released could not be independently verified.

No Russian officials had confirmed or denied the claim by the time of this article's publication.

The fact that Russia is not a formal party to the conflict casts significant doubt on whether the country can be compelled to release a detainee in accordance with the cease-fire agreement.

For their part, authorities of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic told Interfax-Ukraine that Savchenko's purported inclusion in the list is "a provocation."

Savchenko was charged in July by a Voronezh court with having aided in the murders of two Russian reporters in eastern Ukraine in June. Specifically, she is accused of having provided the reporters' locations before their position was shelled.

Savchenko denied any involvement in the incident and said she was abducted by rebels and then illegally smuggled to Russia, handcuffed and with a sack over her head. Russian authorities said she was detained after crossing the border into Russia on her own, posing as a refugee.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry referred to Savchenko's detention as a case of "illegal trafficking," and the U.S. Embassy in Moscow called for Savchenko's immediate release after news of her detention broke.

At the end of August a court in Voronezh extended the pilot's detention until Oct. 30.

Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko said on Wednesday during a government meeting that 700 Ukrainian citizens have already been released with 500 more expected to be freed by the end of this week.

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