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Sudan Rules Out Paying Ransom for 2 Russians Taken Hostage

By The Moscow Times

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A view of Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, at sunset.

Two Russians working for UTair airline have been kidnapped in Sudan's Darfur region, the Russian airline and the Russian Embassy in Khartoum said Tuesday, and Sudan dismissed the possibility of a ransom payment for their freedom.

UTair, which has a contract for work with the UN-African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur (UNAMID), said two of its employees had been seized in the town of Zalingei on Jan. 29.

"A UNAMID minibus was blocked by six cars. The passengers were forced to get off the minibus at gunpoint and led off in an unknown direction," the company said in a statement, adding that the hostage-takers had not yet made any demands.

A Russian Embassy spokesman in Khartoum confirmed the men had been captured but gave

few details. Egyptian state television reported the two were pilots but the company did not confirm this.

Sudan's Foreign Ministry said the kidnapping was not a political act, and ruled out paying a ransom for their release.

"We condemn this kidnapping and we assure you that we will not succumb to the blackmail by paying a ransom. We have a consistent policy on this," Minister of State Kamal al-Din Ismail told a news conference.

However government officials who requested anonymity said that Sudan has facilitated ransom payments for kidnapped foreigners in the past.

A UTair helicopter with the UN mission in neighboring South Sudan (UNMISS) was shot down last year and three of its crew were killed.

UTair operates domestic and international passenger flights, helicopter services and charter flights.

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