

# Russian Soldiers Captured in Ukraine Feel 'Abandoned' by Moscow

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One of the men identified by the Ukrainian government as a captured Russian soldier lies in a hospital bed in Kiev. **Gleb Garanich**

Two Russians captured in eastern Ukraine have said they feel abandoned by Moscow, which has not sent any envoys to visit them even while scores of representatives from major international organizations have come to the hospital where they are recovering from their injuries.

Yevgeny Yerofeyev and Alexander Alexandrov have both said that they were on a military mission in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine — which is the center of fighting between rebel militias and Ukrainian troops — and were hoping that Moscow would show more interest in their fate now that they have been captured by Kiev's forces, according to video interviews with the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper published online Friday.

"I am just saddened by this situation, that we have been forgotten, abandoned, that they want to write us off," Yerofeyev, who said he is a captain in the Russian army, told Novaya Gazeta.

The Russian Foreign Ministry, however, said earlier this week that its embassy in Kiev has asked to meet with the detained men and to provide them with "necessary help in accordance with the norms of international law."

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry responded that it would "study and consider" the request, according to spokesman Oleksiy Makeyev, the Interfax-Ukraine news service has reported.

The soldiers may not have been aware of the diplomatic ping pong, expressing frustrations with Moscow's failure to send its envoys, especially after scores of international organizations and even Russia's media have done so.

"The situation is such that everybody has visited. The United Nations visited, the Red Cross visited, the OSCE," Yerofeyev said from his hospital bed, flipping through a stack of business cards. "Everybody asked how I was doing, whether I was alive and well, whether I was getting treatment. Everybody came, except the embassy [of Russia]."

"I understand that they have abandoned me as an army serviceman, to hell with that," he said. "But I am still a citizen of my country. And I would like to see some kind of a representative here."

Alexandrov, who said he has the rank of a sergeant, told Novaya Gazeta that the only message he had for the Russian authorities was "maybe that they would visit me."

"I think they know there are citizens of the Russian Federation here," he added.

In another twist in a tangle of conflicting narratives that shrouds the Ukrainian conflict, both men insisted that they never resigned from the army and had been on active duty in eastern Ukraine — even while their family members in Russia said on state-run television that the men had resigned from the military around the beginning of the year.

"He was a contract soldier. He resigned in December," Alexandrov's wife, Yekaterina, told state-run Rossia television from the city of Togliatti, where he had served.

She said her husband had told her that he was offered a "good job" in Samara, and was leaving to complete some training courses "somewhere in Voronezh," according to the televised interview.

Alexandrov said he was "shocked" by his wife's account when told about it by a Novaya Gazeta reporter, adding that he has been unable to get in touch with her since his capture, because "calls don't get through."

The story of the soldiers' supposed resignation — which matches a claim made by the Russian Defense Ministry — was seconded by Yerofeyev's father, Vladimir, in a separate interview with the Rossiya television channel on Thursday.

Vladimir Yerofeyev said that his son had resigned from the military "after New Year's" and was heading for Ukraine's separatist Luhansk region.

"I didn't try to dissuade him," the father said. "He is an adult and an officer. He knows what he is doing."

After being pressed by a Russia correspondent as to whether his son was "really an officer," Vladimir Yerofeyev added: "A former one."

Alexandrov and Yerofeyev told Novaya Gazeta they were on an intelligence-gathering mission in eastern Ukraine, on the orders of the Russian military. Yerofeyev added that the mission was a "failure," given their capture, and that "one of the best scenarios" for him would be to resign from the army when he returns home.

While Ukrainian officials said the men would face trial on "terrorism" charges, Alexandrov told Novaya Gazeta that he hoped they would be treated as prisoners of war, and exchanged for Ukrainians imprisoned in Russia.

"I would like to be a prisoner of war," he said. "I like that status better than, say, the status of a mercenary or a bandit."

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