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Russian Consul to Ukraine Visits Suspected Russian Soldiers

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A man, according to Ukraine's state security service one of two Russian servicemen recently detained by Ukrainian forces, lies on a bed at a hospital in Kiev, May 19.

The Russian consul to Ukraine has visited two Russian men captured earlier this month in eastern Ukraine and suspected of helping separatist fighters there, the TASS news agency reported Tuesday.

The two Russians, Alexander Alexandrov and Yevgeny Yerofeyev, were detained on May 16 in eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian insurgents and Ukrainian armed forces are still fighting in spite of a formal cease-fire. Ukrainian authorities and the men themselves say they are serving Russian soldiers who were on a military intelligence mission for Moscow. Russia insists both are former servicemen who had quit the army at the time of their capture.

Alexandrov and Yerofeyev were both "feeling alright," Oleg Grishin, a spokesman for the Russian embassy in Kiev, told TASS after consul Alexei Gruby visited them in a Kiev hospital.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement earlier Tuesday that Russian representatives

were being prevented from seeing the men, who earlier complained to reporters that their country had "forgotten and abandoned" them.

"Not only is the Ukrainian side denying access to the detained men, it is also politicizing this issue via the media," the statement said.

Russia's Defense Ministry maintains that Alexandrov and Yerofeyev had served in the army in the past but were no longer active servicemen at the time of their capture.

Alexandrov contradicted this claim in an interview with investigative newspaper Novaya Gazeta last week.

"I gave my oath to the motherland. ... There was an order and, as a military man, I carried it out," he said.

President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly denied that Russian soldiers are present in eastern Ukraine.

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