

Pro-Russian Separatists Capture American Civilian in Ukraine – Reports

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A Russian serviceman patrols a destroyed residential area in the city of Sievierodonetsk. **Olga Maltseva / AFP**

Pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine have captured a U.S. citizen for allegedly taking part in pro-Ukrainian rallies, accusations that his friends and family deny, [The Guardian reported](#) Wednesday.

Suedi Murekezi, 35, is the third American national known to be held by pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine's separatist-controlled city of Donetsk. He had moved to Ukraine in pursuit of a cryptocurrency venture after serving eight years in the U.S. Air Force, according to [The Guardian](#).

Murekezi's friends noticed his disappearance in the southern Ukrainian port city of Kherson, which Russian forces captured in the early weeks of the war, sometime around June 8.

He was spotted two days later being forced to declare "glory to the Russian army" in a video circulating on the separatist Telegram channels. Pro-Russian rebels have not publicly spoken

about Murekezi's detention.

Murekezi reportedly told his brother on the phone that he is being falsely accused of participating in pro-Ukrainian protests.

"I know for a fact that he did not go out and protest," Leo De Lang, a Dutch friend of Murekezi, told The Guardian.

"They are using him as a pawn for their own propaganda purposes," his brother Sele said.

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Murekezi, who was born in Rwanda and immigrated to the U.S. after the 1994 genocide, faces the added danger of racial discrimination, his friends say.

Murekezi is reportedly being held with two other U.S. military veterans, Alexander Druke and Andy Huynh, who had been fighting alongside the Ukrainian army.

The Kremlin has [labeled](#) Druke and Huynh "soldiers of fortune" and vowed criminal retribution for "endangering" the lives of Russian soldiers.

Three other foreign fighters, two Britons and one Moroccan, have been sentenced to death on "mercenary" charges. The head of the separatist Donetsk People's Republic said Wednesday that the execution would be carried out by firing squad.

Murekezi is unlikely to be tried as a mercenary as there is no evidence to suggest he had fought against Russian soldiers, The Guardian reported.

The U.S. State Department said it was "aware of reports" of Murekezi's detention but did not comment further due to "privacy considerations."

The exact number of Americans held by pro-Russian rebels is unknown.

Project Dynamo, a U.S. nonprofit specializing in evacuating Americans from Afghanistan and Ukraine, has [said](#) it had rescued a number of U.S. citizens alongside Ukrainian civilians during the conflict.

Bryan Stern, the project's co-founder, said Murekezi is "in peril" because "the Donetsk People's Republic has the death penalty and doesn't adhere to international norms."

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