

U.S. Charges 4 Pro-Russian Troops in Ukraine With War Crimes

By [AFP](#)

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The United States charged four pro-Russian soldiers with war crimes on Wednesday for the abduction and torture of an American national in Ukraine.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said the charges against the four "Russia-affiliated military personnel" were the first to be brought under a U.S. war crimes statute passed by Congress nearly 30 years ago.

Garland, speaking to reporters, said Russian forces in Ukraine had committed "atrocities on the largest scale in any European armed conflict since the Second World War."

"As the world has witnessed the horrors of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, so has the United States Department of Justice," he said. "The Justice Department will work for as long as it takes to pursue accountability and justice for Russia's war of aggression."

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According to the indictment, two of those charged — Suren Seiranovich Mkrtchyan, 45, and Dmitry Budnik — were commanding officers of military units of the "Russian Armed Forces and/or the so-called Donetsk People's Republic."

The two others charged in the indictment brought in a federal court in Virginia were lower-ranking military personnel, identified by only their first names: Valerii and Nazar.

The Justice Department said Mkrtchyan and the others abducted the U.S. national in April 2022 from his home in the village of Mylove in the Kherson region in southern Ukraine where he had been living with his wife.

Mock execution

The American, who was not identified, was not participating in the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the department said in a statement.

"Acting on behalf of the Russian Armed Forces and the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, these four individuals allegedly violated the human rights of an American citizen," said Katrina Berger, executive associate director of Homeland Security Investigations.

"According to the charges, they unlawfully detained and tortured the American citizen, and even went so far as to carry out a mock execution," Berger said.

The American was held for at least 10 days, repeatedly interrogated, threatened with sexual assault and tortured.

"Mkrtchyan, Valerii, Nazar, and others allegedly threw the victim face down to the ground while he was naked, tied his hands behind his back, pointed a gun at his head, and severely beat him," the Justice Department said.

At one point, Budnik allegedly threatened to kill the victim and asked for his last words.

"Shortly thereafter, Nazar and others allegedly conducted a mock execution," the Justice Department said. "They allegedly forced the victim to the ground, put a gun to the back of his head, then moved the gun slightly and shot a bullet just past the victim's head."

The four are charged with three war crimes — unlawful confinement, torture, and inhuman treatment — and one count of conspiracy to commit war crimes.

If taken into custody and convicted they face a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Garland told reporters more indictments could be expected under the war crimes statute, which gives the Justice Department jurisdiction to prosecute war crimes committed against U.S. citizens abroad.

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