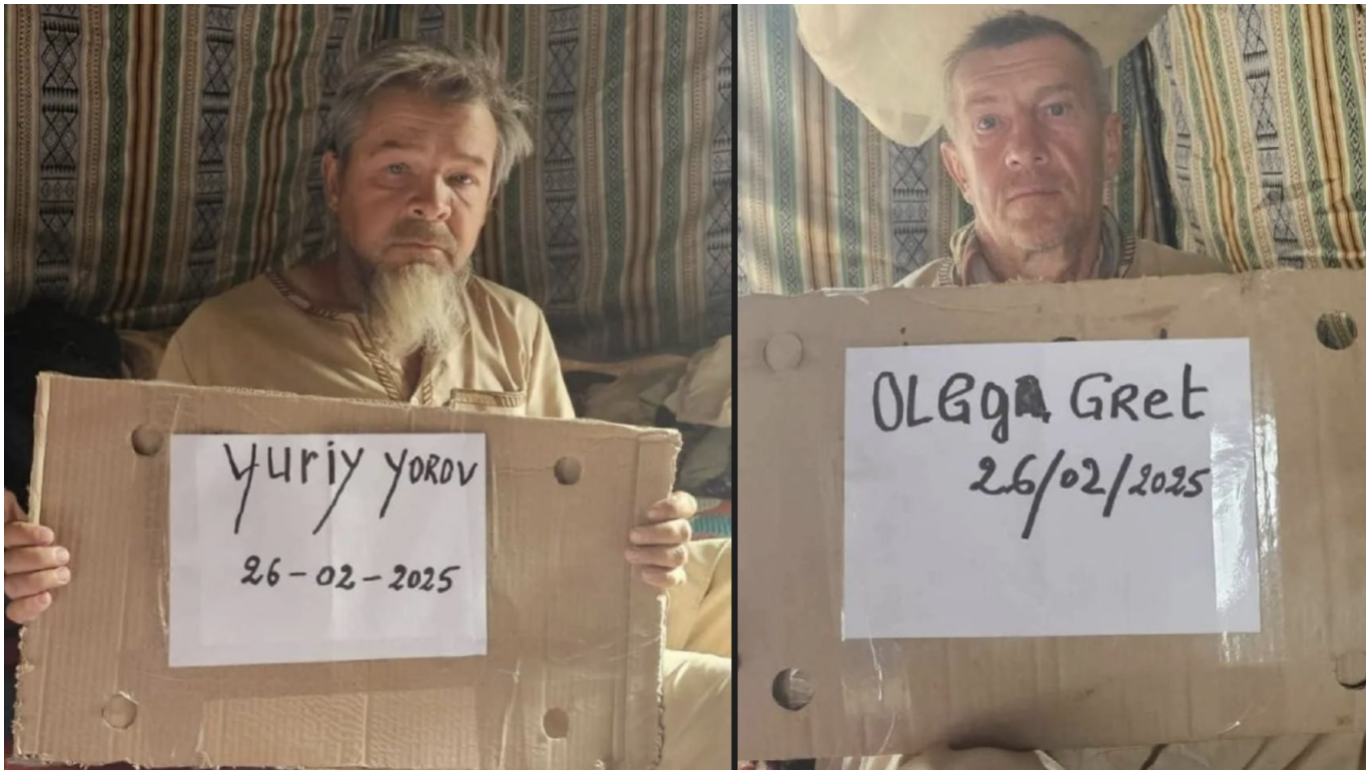
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Says Freed 2 Hostages Taken by Jihadists in Niger

By AFP

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Yuri Yurov (left) and Oleg Greta (right) pictured in captivity. **Russian Defense Ministry**

Russia's army said Tuesday its Africa Corps unit had freed two hostages — employees of Russian geology company — held in Mali, almost two years after they were captured by an al-Qaeda-linked group in neighboring Niger.

In August 2024, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) released a video featuring two men it said had been captured in Mbanga, southwest Niger, from a Russian geology company.

Moscow said they had been taken hostage the month before.

The two men — Oleg Greta, a Russian citizen born in 1962 and Yuri Yurov, a Ukrainian born in 1970 — were freed by a "special operation" carried out by Russia's Africa Corps in Mali, Russia's Defense Ministry said.

"An initial medical examination by Russian doctors at the Africa Corps hospital revealed that they suffer from numerous medical conditions and severe physical exhaustion," it said in a statement on social media.

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It published video of the pair slouched down, one leaning against a pillow under a blanket.

The Africa Corps has largely taken over the operations of Russian mercenary group Wagner on the continent, which had a widespread presence there, deploying fighters alongside the armies of countries including Libya and Mali.

Mbanga, where the hostages were taken, is in the Tillaberi region near Niger's borders with Burkina Faso and Mali. Several gold mines are located there.

There have been several instances of hostage-taking there over the last six years.

Russia has despatched military instructors and paramilitary groups to several juntas in Africa's Sahel region, fighting off jihadist insurgencies.

Amid its war on Ukraine, Moscow has sought to expand its political, economic and military footprint in Africa.

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