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Gruesome Video Appears to Show Ukrainian PoW's Beheading

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General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

This story contains graphic content that may be disturbing to some readers.

A disturbing video that circulated online this week shows the apparent beheading of a Ukrainian prisoner of war by Russian troops.

In the clip, a uniformed man with a yellow armband — an identifying mark of the Ukrainian military — can be seen on the ground screaming "it hurts" as another uniformed man wearing a white band on his leg — an identifying of the Russian military — kneels over him and cuts his head with a knife.

"Cut it," a voice behind the camera is heard in the video shared on a closed pro-Russian channel on the Telegram messaging app.

"Break his spine. Haven't you cut heads off before? Finish the job," the voice continues.

At the end of the minute-and-a-half video, the voice is heard instructing the soldier to

display the severed head on camera and place it in a bag to “send it to the commander.”

The Moscow Times has chosen not to republish or link to the footage due to its graphic nature. It remains visible on other Telegram channels.

The authenticity of the video and its location could not be independently verified.

Observers suggested it may have been filmed last summer due to the number of plants visible in the background.

Pro-Russian military bloggers appeared to justify the clip as a reality of war, the independent news site The Insider reported.

President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed “legal responsibility” for the beheading, saying that “the defeat of terror is necessary.”

“There is something that no one in the world can ignore: how easily these beasts kill,” he said in a video address.

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The EU also condemned the brutal acts seen in the footage and pledged to hold all war criminals to account.

"We don't have more information on the veracity of the video. Having said that, if confirmed, this is yet another brutal reminder about the inhumane nature of the Russian aggression," EU spokesperson Nabila Massrali said.

European Council president Charles Michel later tweeted that he was "mortified" by the "atrocious video."

"Accountability and justice must prevail over terror and impunity. The EU will do all possible to ensure that. The EU will continue to stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes," he wrote.

The Kremlin said the authenticity of the "horrible" video needed to be verified.

"First of all, the authenticity of this horrible footage needs to be verified," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters Wednesday, adding that "we live in a world of fakes."

Ukraine’s prosecutor general’s office said it was establishing the Russian soldiers' identities in connection with a criminal case into the violation of the laws and customs of war.

Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba slammed Russia as “worse than ISIS” and called for the country’s removal from the United Nations.

“It’s absurd that Russia, which is worse than ISIS, is presiding over the UNSC [Security Council],” Kuleba tweeted Wednesday.

“Russian terrorists must be kicked out of Ukraine and the UN and be held accountable for their crimes,” he said.

According to CNN, another video allegedly filmed by Russia’s Wagner mercenary group and posted on a pro-Russian social media channel last week showed the beheaded corpses of two Ukrainian soldiers next to a destroyed military vehicle.

Citing Russian social media accounts, the U.S. broadcaster said the second video may have been shot near Bakhmut, the site of some of the fiercest battles of the war in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow and Kyiv have repeatedly accused each other of killing prisoners of war since Russia invaded Ukraine more than a year ago, and several videos alleging to show PoW killings have made the rounds on the internet.

AFP contributed reporting.

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