

What Do We Know About the Il-76 Crash in Belgorod?

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The crash site of the Il-76 transport aircraft. **TASS**

Russian authorities said an Il-76 aircraft [crashed](#) Wednesday morning in western Russia's Belgorod region, killing everyone on board.

Footage posted on social media showed what appeared to be a large plane falling from the sky and then crashing.

The plane was [said](#) to have crashed near the town of Yablonovo, [less than](#) 50 kilometers from the Ukrainian border.

Here's what we know:

Moscow's reaction

Russia's Defense Ministry said the Il-76 had been carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war, six crew members and three personnel to escort the captive soldiers when it crashed.

"At 11:15 a.m. today, the Kyiv regime committed a terrorist act, resulting in the downing of a Russian military transport aircraft. The aircraft was flying along the route from Chkalovsky to the Belgorod airfield to transport Ukrainian military personnel for an exchange," the ministry [said](#).

Related article: [Russia Says Kyiv Shot Down Plane Carrying Ukrainian POWs](#)

It claimed Ukrainian forces stationed in the Kharkiv region, located across the border from Belgorod, had fired two missiles at the transport aircraft and described the incident as a "terrorist act."

Belgorod region Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov joined investigators and emergency crews at the crash site, where he [said](#) that everyone on board the airplane had died. Gladkov had [announced](#) a rocket attack alert around an hour before the Il-76 crash.

Russia's Foreign Ministry [accused](#) Ukraine of carrying out a "deliberate" attack on the plane.

"In Kyiv, they were well aware of the impending exchange. They knew how and by what route prisoners of war would be delivered," it [said](#) in a Telegram post.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Moscow has requested an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council regarding the plane crash.

Russian lawmaker Andrei Kartapolov, who heads the lower-house State Duma's Defense Committee, [claimed](#) that a second Russian military aircraft carrying 80 Ukrainian prisoners of war had been flying behind the downed Il-76 plane but was turned back following Wednesday's crash.

"Now we can't talk about an exchange," Kartapolov [said](#) of the remaining prisoners of war.

On Thursday, the Kremlin called the downing of the plane a "monstrous act."

"No one can say what impact this will have" on extending a prisoner exchange program, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Kyiv's reaction

Ukraine's military has not taken responsibility for the disaster, but neither has it denied Moscow's claims.

In a press release [published](#) several hours after the crash, Ukraine's General Staff said it would "take all measures to protect Ukraine and Ukrainians," including targeting Russian military planes that it believes are used to transport missiles.

Ukrainian military intelligence spokesperson Andrii Yusov [told](#) the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) news outlet that a prisoner swap was planned for Wednesday, but he could not confirm whether any Ukrainian prisoners were on board the Il-76 aircraft at the time of the crash.

"I can state that the exchange planned for today is currently not taking place," Yusov told RFE/RL.

Ukraine also said it had no "reliable information" about who was on board the plane.

"We currently do not have reliable or comprehensive information on who was on board the plane or in what number," Ukraine's main intelligence directorate said in a statement.

Without commenting on whether Ukrainian prisoners of war were on board, the intelligence agency accused Moscow of endangering the lives of its captured soldiers.

"Ukraine was not informed about the number of vehicles, routes and forms of delivery of prisoners," it said.

"It is known that prisoners are delivered by air, rail and road. This may indicate deliberate actions by Russia aimed at endangering the lives and safety of prisoners."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia was "playing with the lives of Ukrainian prisoners."

"It is obvious that the Russians are playing with the lives of Ukrainian prisoners, with the feelings of their relatives and with the emotions of our society," Zelensky said in an evening address in which he did not confirm or deny Russia's claims but called for an international investigation into what brought down the plane.

International reaction

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) [declined](#) to comment on the incident, saying that it "is monitoring" the news.

The Pentagon [told](#) the Russian state-run RIA Novosti news agency that it could not comment on the crash, adding that it "has no access to the information" regarding prisoner swaps between Russia and Ukraine.

What analysts are saying

The independent Russian news outlet iStories, citing Ukrainian open-source investigators, [claimed](#) the Il-76 had flown over Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Red Sea and Iran before disappearing from radars, only to later reappear over Russia's Belgorod region.

It was not immediately possible to verify that report.

Western military analysts [told](#) the BBC's Russian service that video of Wednesday's crash indicated the Il-76 aircraft was shot down.

AFP contributed reporting.

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