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Ukraine Denies POWs Were On Board Downed Russian Plane

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Oleksiy Danilov. **Nstlv (CC BY 4.0)**

Ukrainian prisoners of war were not on board the Russian Il-76 transport plane that crashed near the border with Ukraine last month, a senior Ukrainian national security official said Friday.

Moscow claims 65 Ukrainian servicemen en route for a scheduled prisoner exchange were killed in the air disaster in southwestern Russia's Belgorod region on Jan. 24.

"I can tell you for sure there were no Ukrainian prisoners there," Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, told the Ukrainian news outlet Babel.

Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said last week that genetic tests of nearly 700 body fragments recovered from the crash site had "unambiguously" confirmed the 65 soldiers' identities.

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Danilov disputed that claim, telling Babel: “If it was the case, believe me... they would show it all.”

“[Russia has] nothing to show, because if it really happened, there would be a completely different picture," he stressed, speculating that the evidence would be widely shared on Russian state television and by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the UN.

Moscow accuses Kyiv of using a U.S.-made Patriot surface-to-air missile system to shoot down the aircraft.

Kyiv has neither confirmed nor denied its involvement, though it did say a prisoner exchange had been planned for the same day as the Il-76 crash.

Ukrainian military intelligence spokesman Andriy Yusov claimed last month that Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) had ordered their military and political leadership to not board the Il-76 at the last moment.

It was not possible to verify Yusov’s claims.

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