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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Moscow and Kyiv Return Over 300 POWs in Latest Exchange

By AFP

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Ukrainian prisoners of war on a bus. **Volodymyr Zelensky / Telegram**

Russia and Ukraine swapped more than 300 prisoners of war on Monday in an exchange brokered by the United Arab Emirates ahead of New Year's Eve, officials from both countries said.

The two sides have exchanged hundreds of captive soldiers since Russia launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, in one of the few areas of cooperation between the warring countries.

"On Dec. 30, as a result of the negotiation process, 150 Russian servicemen were returned from territory controlled by the Kyiv regime. In return, 150 Ukrainian prisoners of war were handed over," Russia's Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv received 189 prisoners as part of the deal,

including soldiers, border guards and two civilians from the Russian-occupied city of Mariupol.

"We are working to free everyone from Russian captivity. This is our goal. We do not forget anyone," Zelensky said.

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Ukraine said Monday that Moscow had released a total of 3,956 people — including both soldiers and civilians — in exchanges since the start of the war.

Both sides said the latest exchange had been brokered by the United Arab Emirates.

A video published by Russia's human rights commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova showed soldiers gathered outside buses, wearing winter clothes and military fatigues.

"I thank you for your service, patience and courage," Moskalkova said, wishing them a happy New Year's holiday.

"Very soon our guys will embrace their relatives and friends and celebrate the New Year in their native land," she wrote in a Telegram message accompanying the video.

Zelensky posted photos showing some of the exchanged men sitting on a coach bus holding up yellow-and-blue Ukrainian flags.

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