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Russia and Ukraine Exchange 50 POWs in First Swap of 2025

By AFP

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@V_Zelenskiy_official

Russia and Ukraine exchanged 25 prisoners of war each in their first swap of 2025, officials from both countries announced Wednesday.

Thousands of captives have been returned in similar exchanges since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, providing one of the few instances of dialogue between the warring nations.

Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed the exchange on Telegram, stating that, "as a result of the negotiation process, 25 Russian servicemen were returned from territory controlled by the Kyiv regime. In return, 25 Ukrainian servicemen were handed over."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the group returning to Ukraine included soldiers who defended Mariupol's Azovstal steel plant, a key battleground captured by Russia

in May 2022. Zelensky also noted that some of the returnees were civilians, although Russia maintained it had only released Ukrainian soldiers.

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“Bringing our people home is what Ukraine is constantly working on, and we will not stop until we bring all of our people back,” Zelensky wrote on X, sharing photos of the freed prisoners. Among them was a man undergoing a medical check and another holding a Ukrainian flag.

“Many of them have severe injuries and illnesses,” Zelensky added.

Russia said its returned servicemen were receiving medical and psychological care in Belarus, its close ally, before heading back to Russia.

Russian human rights ombudswoman Tatyana Moskalkova shared a video showing her calling the wife of a freed soldier, while another soldier was filmed speaking tearfully to his mother.

Both Moscow and Kyiv said the United Arab Emirates mediated the exchange.

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