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Russia and Ukraine Announce Third POW Exchange This Week

By AFP

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Russian Defense Ministry

Ukraine and Russia on Thursday confirmed a new prisoner exchange, the third this week under a deal reached during peace talks in Turkey.

At last week's negotiations in Istanbul, both sides agreed to release more than 1,000 prisoners each, all either wounded or under the age of 25, and to return the bodies of soldiers killed in combat.

"Today, warriors of our Armed Forces, National Guard and Border Guard Service are back home," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a social media post. "They all require medical treatment," he added, describing the returned soldiers as "severely wounded and seriously ill."

Russia's Defense Ministry also confirmed the exchange, saying a group of Russian servicemen

had been returned from Ukraine and were now in Belarus.

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“We continue working to bring everyone home from Russian captivity,” Zelensky said. “We thank everyone who helps make these exchanges possible — so that each and every one of them can be home, in Ukraine.”

He published photos of the returned soldiers, many draped in Ukrainian flags with freshly shaved heads. The oldest was 59 and the youngest 22, according to Ukrainian ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets. Some had previously been listed as missing in action.

Russian state media showed returning troops wrapped in Russian flags and chanting “Russia.”

The exchanges mark the only tangible outcome from two rounds of recent peace talks in Istanbul. Russia has so far rejected calls for an unconditional ceasefire, demanding that Ukraine abandon its NATO bid and cede occupied territories.

On Wednesday, Russia handed over the bodies of 1,212 Ukrainian soldiers killed in the war.

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