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Russia and Ukraine Begin First Phase of Large POW Exchange

May 15, 2026



Ukrainian prisoners of war released during an exchange on May 15, 2026. **@V_Zelenskiy_official / Telegram**

Russia and Ukraine each exchanged 205 prisoners of war on Friday, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky saying it represented the first phase of a large swap that U.S. President Donald Trump announced last week.

Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed the exchange in a statement on Telegram and said its servicemen were sent to Belarus to undergo physical and mental health evaluations.

It added that "the United Arab Emirates provided humanitarian assistance during the return of the Russian servicemen from captivity."

Zelensky said that the Ukrainian soldiers who were released on Friday had been in Russian captivity since 2022, when President Vladimir Putin ordered the full-scale invasion.

"Today, warriors of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard and the State Border

Guard Service are returning from Russian captivity. This is the first stage of the 1,000-for-1,000 exchange," Zelensky wrote on X.

Russian state media reported that both countries also exchanged several hundred bodies of fallen soldiers.

Trump said last week that Ukraine and Russia had agreed to the large prisoner swap as he announced the countries had agreed to a three-day ceasefire during Victory Day celebrations.

Both Russia and Ukraine accused each other of violating that ceasefire.

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