



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on January 25, 2024

Russia Accuses Ukraine of Shooting Down Plane Near Belgorod, Demands Security Council Meeting

On Wednesday, January 24, Russia [asked for an emergency session](#) of the UN Security Council to discuss the downing of a military plane carrying Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs), Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told a press conference in New York.

The Il-76 cargo plane crashed in Belgorod region on Wednesday morning, killing 65 Ukrainian POWs, as well as six crew members and three Russian soldiers, per the Russian Defense Ministry. The prisoners were on their way to Belgorod, a city near the Ukrainian border, to be exchanged for captured Russian troops. After the crash, footage spread online portraying the crash on snow-covered fields. A distinctive church distinguishable on video soon revealed the crash site to be around the village of Yablonovo, Korochny District, in Belgorod region.



AP Images
Wreckage of Il-76 near Belgorod

Almost immediately, Ukrainian Telegram channels, both anonymous and verified (such as Unian and Ukrainskaya Pravda), were flooded with posts citing sources close to the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU). These posts claimed that a) the plane was purportedly carrying missiles for Russia's S-300 systems intended for use in attacks on Kharkov, and b) the downing was a result of Kyiv's actions.

[Lists](#) disclosing the names of Ukrainian servicemen soon emerged.

Russia's Defense Ministry pointed out that Kyiv had been informed of the flight, its passengers, and destination ahead of time. The POWs were supposed to participate in a prisoner swap later that day, based on Russian and Ukrainian sources.

The Russian ministry condemned Ukrainian forces for shooting the plane down, most likely with U.S. Patriot missiles. "By committing this terrorist act, the Ukrainian leadership showed its true face, disregarding the lives of its citizens," the ministry declared.

Addressing reporters at UN headquarters, Lavrov said that he had called for the Security Council's French chairmanship to grant the meeting without delay.

"We do not want to repeat the situation of April 2022 after the staging of Bucha," he added, alluding to the alleged massacre of Ukrainians by Russian forces, which Moscow contends was staged by Kyiv to draw international support. At the time, the U.K. chairmanship of the Security Council declined Russia's request for an emergency sitting for 72 hours.

The General Staff of Ukraine's armed forces said that military transport aircraft approaching Belgorod



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often carry weapons, and that Ukrainian forces “take measures to destroy delivery means and control the airspace to eliminate the terrorist threat.” Nonetheless, the military command did not explicitly claim credit for shooting down the Il-76.

At first, *Ukrainskaya Pravda* reported that the plane had indeed been downed by the country’s military, but amended its article on the incident later to omit these details.

The newspaper lauded the downing as a success for the country’s “victorious armed forces,” Lavrov told the press conference. Nevertheless, once it became known that the plane was carrying POWs, “the Ukrainian propaganda started to sweep it under the carpet ... and find other explanations.”

Moscow is still trying to ascertain Kyiv’s motives, he said. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the plane crash was Ukraine’s murder of its own citizens in an attack on a Russian military Il-76 plane, calling it “a monstrous act.”

Peskov declared that Kyiv’s actions “defy understanding” and that it was difficult to explain the logic behind the attack, hinting that the Zelensky government should explain their actions.

He also added that it is presently unclear how Kyiv’s attack will impact future prisoner exchange negotiations, but stated that it was too early to say anything definitively on that matter.

Ukrainian forces used a U.S.-supplied Patriot missile to shoot down the Russian cargo plane carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war, French state broadcaster Radio France reported, citing a source in the country’s military. The French broadcaster’s source did not provide additional information, but its allegation supports an earlier claim by a senior Russian MP that “Patriot or Iris-T air defense missiles” were employed to bring the aircraft down.

Furthermore, the defense ministry revealed that the missiles were fired from the Liptsy suburb of Kharkov, around 100 kilometers from the site of the crash. Both the American Patriot and German Iris-T systems can strike targets from this range, and the General Staff of Ukraine’s armed forces stated that it regularly uses such systems to strike Russian military flights in the area, without explicitly acknowledging that it shot down the Il-76.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has not acknowledged that his forces were responsible for the downing of the plane. In a statement on January 24, he asked for an “international investigation” to decide “all the hard facts” surrounding the incident. Although Kyiv has officially disputed Moscow’s claim that the Il-76 was shot down by a Ukrainian missile, the closest Ukraine got to admitting its responsibility were remarks by the country’s military intelligence agency, the GRU. In a statement on the night of January 24, the agency maintained that it “was not informed about the need to ensure the safety of the airspace” over the border, and that it was unaware of how the prisoners would be transported.

As for Zelensky’s suggestion to launch an international investigation, Russia’s Peskov responded that “if he means an international investigation of the crimes committed by the Kyiv regime, then it is undoubtedly necessary.”

The White House has not commented on the alleged use of Patriot missiles in the incident. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said that the United States was “not in a position to confirm” any reports on the attack, and was working to “get more clarity and more information on it.”

One of the Ukrainian prisoners who died in the crash, Konstantin Danilchenko, had spoken to Russia Today (RT) in 2022 about why he surrendered.



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RT found Danilchenko's name on the passenger list of the doomed flight, at number 11.

"I wanted to live," Danilchenko said in the video. "We are considered 'meat', and everyone understands why our leadership is so cold towards us."

Ukraine has accused Russia of using "human wave" attacks on the battlefield. According to many Ukrainian POWs, it is Kyiv that is actually doing so.



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