

Putin Says 'Obvious' Ukraine Behind Army Plane Crash

By [AFP](#)

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In this photo taken from video released by Russian Investigative Committee on Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024, the wreckage of the IL-76 is seen near Yablonovo in Russia's Belgorod region. **AP/TASS**

President Vladimir Putin said Friday it was "obvious" Ukraine shot down a Russian IL-76 military transport plane carrying Ukrainian prisoners over the border region of Belgorod this week.

According to Moscow, the plane was traveling to the region ahead of a prisoner swap on Wednesday when it was struck by anti-aircraft missiles. It said there were 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war on board.

Ukraine has not confirmed or denied its involvement in the crash, but officials have appeared to question whether prisoners were really on board.

"I don't know whether they did it on purpose or thoughtlessly, but it is obvious that they did

it," Putin told student soldiers in his first reaction to the crash.

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He also alleged Ukraine knew how Russia planned to transport the prisoners when they struck the plane, an accusation that Kyiv has fiercely disputed.

"The main intelligence department of the Ukrainian army knew that we were taking 65 servicemen there. And knowing about it, they struck this aircraft," he said.

"In any case, it is a crime," he said.

Kyiv and Moscow have opened criminal investigations, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called for an international probe.

Ukraine confirmed that a prisoner exchange was due to take place, but said it had not been told the soldiers would be transported to the border by plane, as in the past.

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