



By: TA | AP Brief

South Korea to recall its ambassador to Ukraine over North Korean POW dispute



South Korea said it will recall its ambassador to Ukraine, stepping up its protest against Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's recent revelation of a supposedly secret transfer of two **North Korean prisoners of war** to South Korea.

The South Korean announcement came days after its President Lee Jae Myung threatened to take unspecified punitive steps if Ukraine refuses to apologize over the **revelation**.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry didn't say when the ambassador, Park Ki-chang, will be brought back home.

A ministry statement said that South Korea will continue consultations with Ukraine, adding it hopes the dispute between the two countries would be resolved smoothly.

Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Heorhii Tykhyi said Ukraine remains open to "constructive dialogue" despite Seoul's decision to recall its ambassador.

"Diplomacy must prevail over emotions," he said, according to local media outlet RBC-Ukraine.

South Korea and Ukraine became embroiled in a diplomatic row after Zelenskyy spoke about the transfer of the North Korean soldiers during his **U.N. speech** on Sept. 23.

South Korea has accused Ukraine of violating a nondisclosure agreement on their transfer in mid-September, but Kyiv has denied agreeing to such a deal.

The soldiers were among thousands of North Korean troops deployed to support Russia's war against Ukraine.

Since their capture in early 2025, the soldiers had expressed their desires to resettle in South Korea, because they could face persecution if repatriated home.

South Korea had said it would accept them, because it legally regards the North as part of its territory and has a policy of accepting and

financially supporting North Korean defectors.

Maintaining good relations with Ukraine

South Korean officials said the nondisclosure agreement was made because they were concerned about the safety of the North Korean soldiers and their relatives in the North.

But many experts say South Korea's liberal government likely also worries the disclosure of their arrival may hurt its **efforts to improve ties** with North Korea.

North Korea's state media hasn't commented on the soldiers' transfer. But the North previously reacted with fury to major defections of its citizens, accusing South Korea of kidnapping them.

North Korea has shunned any talks with South Korea and the U.S. and focused on bolstering its nuclear program since 2019.

Maintaining good relations with Ukraine is in South Korean national interests

It's unclear what other steps South Korea would take. Experts say maintaining good relations with Ukraine is in South Korean national interests because Kyiv could provide Seoul with intelligence about North Korea's expanding cooperation with Russia and its battlefield experiences.

They say cooperation with Ukraine is important for South Korea's partnerships with many Western countries supporting Ukraine over the war.

Observers say Zelenskyy disclosed the transfer of the North Korean POWs to expose the danger of North Korea's military support to Russia as a way to win more international assistance.

South Korea has provided \$445 million in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine since 2022. In July, Lee pledged \$100 million in aid to Ukraine in a meeting with Zelenskyy.