

Ukraine attacks Kerch Bridge to Crimea

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17 July 2023

The Ukrainian military carried out an attack Monday on the Kerch Bridge, which links Crimea to the Russian mainland, according to reports by Ukrainian newspapers.

The attack, executed with two kamikaze drone boats, resulted in two civilian deaths and destroyed one span of the bridge. A young girl was severely injured.

While Ukrainian officials have not publicly accepted responsibility for the bombing, multiple Ukrainian publications, including *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, the Ukrainian public broadcaster Suspilne, and the *New Voice of Ukraine*, have cited sources claiming the Ukrainian government's involvement.

The attack illustrates that, following the Vilnius NATO summit, which significantly increased the alliance's preparations for global war, the conflict in Ukraine continues to escalate.

This was the second major attack on the Kerch Bridge. In October, a suicide bomber detonated explosives in a truck, destroying one span of the bridge and damaging a train running on a parallel span. Although initially not acknowledging their role the earlier attack, Ukrainian officials later accepted responsibility for it in May.

Russian officials claimed that while the bridge's pillars were undamaged in the latest attack, one span would need to be completely replaced. The parallel span was displaced by approximately 70 to 80 centimeters.

Although not officially admitting responsibility for the attack, Mykhailo Podolyak, adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said, "Any illegal structures used to deliver Russian instruments of mass murder are necessarily short-lived."

Significantly, the United States did not distance itself from the bridge attack. Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh, when asked about the attack, declared, "Crimea is part of Ukraine."

"On the Kerch Bridge," said Secretary of State Antony Blinken, "Ukraine must decide how it conducts this war in defense of its territory, its people, its freedom."

Indeed, former US officials had previously encouraged attacks on Crimea and the Kerch Bridge in particular.

In July 2022, the *Times of London* published an article titled "Bomb Russia's bridge to Crimea, Ukraine urged," featuring statements from US General Philip Breedlove, NATO's former supreme allied commander Europe.

In his interview with the newspaper, Breedlove declared, "Kerch Bridge is a legitimate target." He said, "Several people I have spoken to say 'dropping' [destroying] Kerch Bridge would be a huge blow to Russia."

The US has privately authorized Ukrainian strikes inside mainland Russia and publicly endorsed Ukrainian strikes inside Crimea. "Those are legitimate targets," Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland said in February, referring to Ukrainian strikes on Crimea. "Ukraine is hitting them. We are supporting that."

Just hours after the attack, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov announced that Russia would withdraw from an agreement that allowed the export of Ukrainian grain through a Russian blockade of the Black Sea. Peskov claimed the move was not a response to the attack. The agreement, known as the Black Sea Grain Initiative, was set to expire on Monday.

Last month, Ukraine initiated a military offensive that has so far failed to penetrate any main Russian defensive lines. This week, the *New York Times* reported that as much as 20 percent of Ukraine's battlefield equipment was destroyed or damaged during the offensive, including advanced Western tanks and armored vehicles.

Given these enormous losses, the Ukrainian ground

offensive has at least partially halted. Instead, Ukraine is aiming to conduct long-range strikes deep into Russian territory, using new weapons recently provided by its NATO backers.

Last month, Ukraine attacked the Chonhar Bridge between Crimea and southern Ukraine, using Storm Shadow missiles provided by the UK.

In May, Ukrainian forces launched a drone attack on Russian President Vladimir Putin's residence in the Kremlin in Moscow. Similar to the latest attack, the United States did not rule out even an attempted Ukrainian assassination of the Russian president.

When asked to comment on "Ukraine having tried to assassinate President Vladimir Putin with a drone strike," Blinken replied, "We leave it to Ukraine to decide how it's going to defend itself."

The latest attack occurred just one day ahead of a scheduled meeting of the Ukraine Contact Group, chaired by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley.

Ahead of the meeting, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov hinted that it will herald further announcements of additional armament shipments to Ukraine.

"Let me remind you that for every type of foreign weapon that has been on the front for a long time, I first heard 'No, this will not happen, this is impossible.' In fact, it is possible, but only in due time and with our perseverance. On July 18, we will continue to do the impossible at the next meeting in the Ramstein format," Reznikov said.

The contact group meeting will be the first since last week's NATO summit in Vilnius, which pledged to increase the number of NATO troops stationed in Eastern Europe and significantly expand NATO members' defense spending.

As Biden was leaving the summit, he was asked about sending longer-range missiles to Ukraine. "Sir, are you thinking about sending ATACMS — the surface-to-surface missiles?" to which Biden replied, "We're working on that."

On July 14, Andrii Yermak, head of Ukraine's Presidential Office, told journalists that Ukraine is "very close" to receiving the ATACMS long-range missiles from the United States, the *Kyiv Independent* reported.



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