

Top Rebel Commander Killed in Eastern Ukraine

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Alexei Mozgovoi in August 2014

Alexei Mozgovoi, a top rebel commander in east Ukraine, has been killed along with around six others in an attack by an unknown group of assailants, the press service for the separatist Luhansk territory (LITs) reported on Saturday.

Mozgovoi, the leader of the rebel "Ghost" battalion, died after the car he was traveling in was blown up by an "explosive device and then fired on with machine guns," rebel official Sergei Gorenko was quoted as saying in a briefing in Luhansk.

"At the moment, one theory is that it was the work of a group of saboteurs," he said without providing further details or naming the others killed in the attack near the rebel-controlled town of Alchevsk, about 30 kilometers east of the front line.

There have been repeated attempts on Mozgovoi's life, most recently in March, LITs reported.

The other victims of the attack were three of Mozgovoi's guards, his press secretary and two

other civilians, LITs reported Sunday, citing Leonid Tkachenko of the self-proclaimed republic's Prosecutor General's Office. According to Tkachenko, at least three individuals open fired on Mozgovoi's vehicle.

Wide-ranging theories about who could have been behind the attack have emerged in Ukrainian political circles since the incident. The leader of the pro-Ukrainian insurgency group "Darkness," Alexander Gladky, wrote on his Facebook page Sunday that his guerillas had carried out the attack.

Oleksandr Motuznyak, spokesman of the Ukrainian presidential administration specialized on the military operation in the Donbass region, said that Mozgovoi's murder was the product of internal power struggles between rebel groups, the Interfax news agency reported Sunday.

Russian State Duma Deputy Frants Klintsevich, representing the ruling United Russia party, told the TASS news agency he thought the attack had been perpetrated by Western secret services.

"It is clear to specialists that the hand of Western intelligence, mostly American, is behind this [Mozgovoi's murder]. [The attack] was done in the same style and with the same methods," TASS quoted Klintsevich as saying.

Although a cease-fire agreement came into effect in February, there continue to be regular clashes between pro-Russian rebels and Ukrainian armed forces in eastern Ukraine. Fresh fighting that erupted Sunday left at least two dead — one civilian and one Ukrainian serviceman — in the government-held town of Avdiyivka. A member of Ukraine's National Guard and two other guardsmen were also wounded on Sunday at Shyrokyne, near the strategic port city of Mariupol, a military spokesman told Ukraine's 112 television channel.

(Reuters, MT)

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