

Russia Hits Kyiv Missile Factory After Moskva Flagship Sinks

By [Daphne Rousseau for AFP](#)

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Russian Navy's guided missile cruiser Moskva taking part in naval artillery drills Feb. 14, 2022. **Black Sea Fleet/TASS**

Russian strikes pounded a military factory near Kyiv that makes the missiles Ukraine claims it used to sink the Moskva naval flagship, with Moscow on Friday vowing renewed attacks on the capital.

A workshop and an administrative building at the Vizar plant, which lies near Kyiv's international Zhuliany airport, were seriously damaged in the overnight strikes, an AFP journalist saw.

Russia had earlier announced it had used Kalibr sea-based long-range missiles to hit the factory, which Ukraine's state weapons manufacturer Ukroboronprom says produced Neptune missiles.

"There were five hits. My employee was in the office and got thrown off his feet by the blast," Andrei Sizov, a 47-year-old owner of a nearby wood workshop, told AFP.

"They are making us pay for destroying the Moskva," he said. It was the first major Russian strike around the Ukrainian capital in over two weeks.

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The Kyiv regional governor said there were at least two other Russian strikes on Friday, without providing details on damage or casualties.

Oleksandr Pavliuk said civilians thinking about returning to the capital should "wait for quieter times."

The governor of Ukraine's southern Odessa region, Maxim Marchenko, said the 186-meter-long Russian missile cruiser was hit by Ukrainian Neptune missiles on Wednesday.

The Moskva had been leading Russia's naval effort in the seven-week conflict, and the circumstances around its sinking and the fate of its crew of over 500 remain murky.

Russia's Defense Ministry said a blast on the vessel was the result of exploding ammunition and that the resulting damage had caused it to "lose its balance" as it was being towed to port on Thursday.

Natalia Gumeniuk, a spokeswoman for Ukraine's southern military forces, said that Russia would seek revenge for the sinking and that bad weather had meant the Moskva's crew could not be evacuated.

"We saw that other ships tried to assist it, but even the forces of nature were on Ukraine's side because the storm made both the rescue operation and crew evacuations impossible," Gumeniuk said in a briefing.

'NATO frontline'

The fleet has been blockading the besieged southern port city of Mariupol, where Russian officials say they are in full control although Ukrainian fighters are still holed up in the city's fortress-like steelworks.

Moscow, which invaded Ukraine partly because of deepening ties between Kyiv and NATO, on Friday warned of unspecified "consequences" should Finland and Sweden join the U.S.-led defense alliance.

The two countries are considering joining NATO after Russia's devastating invasion of neighboring Ukraine.

"They will automatically find themselves on the NATO frontline," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

Shortly afterwards, Finland's European Affairs Minister Tytti Tuppurainen said it was "highly

likely" that her country would apply for NATO membership.

"The people of Finland, they seem to have already made up their mind and there is a huge majority for the NATO membership," she told Britain's Sky News.

Unlike Sweden, Finland neighbors Russia, from which it declared independence in 1917 after 150 years of Russian rule.

Russia on Friday said it was expelling 18 members of the European Union mission after the bloc kicked out some of Moscow's representatives for spying.

The EU condemned the "unjustified" move, saying in a statement that "Russia's chosen course of action will further deepen its international isolation."

Russian forces last month started withdrawing from around the Ukrainian capital as they were redeployed to focus on territory in the east of the country, but the city remains vulnerable to missile strikes.

Evacuations

"The number and scale of missile strikes against targets in Kyiv will increase in response to any terrorist attacks or sabotage committed by the Kyiv nationalist regime on Russian territory," Russia's Defense Ministry said.

"As a result of the strike on the Zhulyansky machine-building plant 'Vizar,' the workshops for the production and repair of long-range and medium-range anti-aircraft missile systems, as well as anti-ship missiles, were destroyed," the ministry said.

Seizing the eastern Donbas region, where Russian-backed separatists control the Donetsk and Lugansk areas, would allow Moscow to create a southern corridor to the occupied Crimean peninsula.

Ukraine said that Russian strikes had killed five people in the area, after President Volodymyr Zelensky said Moscow's forces were aiming to "destroy" the region.

A Russian attack on buses ferrying civilians from the war-torn east killed seven people and wounded more than two dozen, Ukraine said on Friday.

Ukrainian authorities have been urging people in the south and the Donbas area in the east to quickly move west in advance of a large-scale Russian offensive.

Mariupol is in ruins 50 days into Russia's so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Thousands of civilians are believed to have died in the strategic city, many of their bodies still trapped in apartment buildings.

'Starved to death'

Mariupol's residents have started coming outside in search of food, water and an escape route.

The UN's World Food Program appealed for access to Ukrainians trapped in war zones including Mariupol, saying those besieged were starving to death.

"It's one thing when people are suffering from the devastation of war. It's another thing when they're being starved to death," WFP Executive Director David Beasley said in a statement.

In Geneva, the UN refugee agency said that more than 5 million people have now fled Ukraine since the Russian invasion, in Europe's worst refugee crisis since World War II.

Moscow on Thursday accused Ukraine of sending helicopters to bomb a village in Russia's Bryansk region -- not far from the border with Ukraine — injuring eight people.

Kyiv has denied the helicopter attack, instead accusing Russia of staging the incidents to stir up "anti-Ukrainian hysteria" in the country.

Separately, the Russian Defense Ministry said Friday its strategic rocket forces "eliminated up to 30 Polish mercenaries" in a strike on the village of Izyumskoe, not far from the city of Kharkiv in northeastern Ukraine.

In Kharkiv itself, Russian strikes killed at least seven, including a child, the region's governor said Friday, as Moscow's forces stepped up attacks.

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