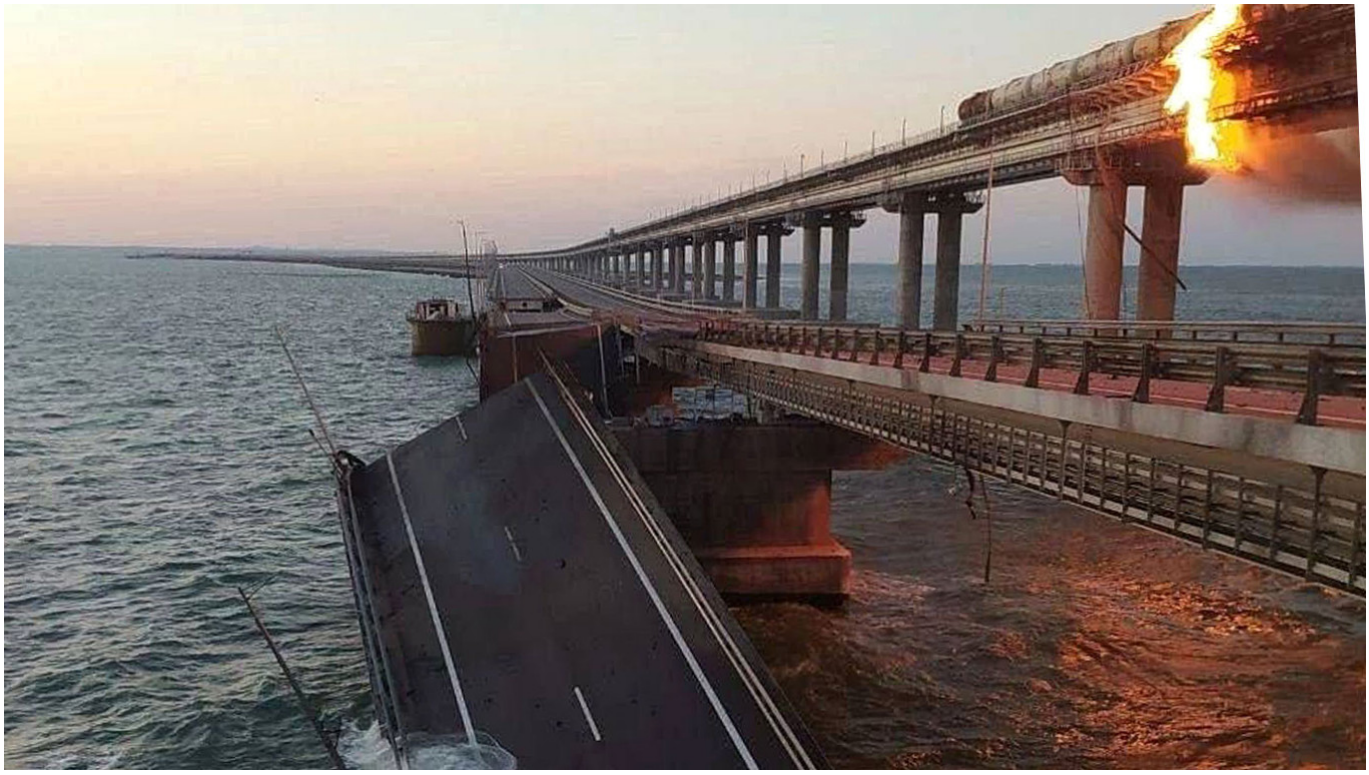
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Russia Says 3 Killed in Crimea Bridge Blast

By AFP

October 08, 2022



vk.com/myfeo_ru

Russian investigators Saturday said three people were killed after a truck exploded on its bridge linking Moscow-annexed Crimea to the mainland, adding that the owner of the vehicle had been identified.

"According to preliminary information, three people were killed," Russia's investigative committee said in a statement. It said they were likely to be "passengers of a car that was near the truck that exploded."

The statement said the bodies of two victims — “a man and a woman" — had been lifted out of the water.

It said their identities were being confirmed, giving no details on the third body.

Investigators said a resident of Russia's southern Krasnodar region, which it did not name,

was the owner of the car.

"Investigative actions have been launched at his place of residence," the investigators said.

They added that the truck's "route movement documentation" was being studied.

Moscow announced earlier that a truck exploded igniting a huge fire and damaging the key Kerch bridge — built as Russia's sole land link with annexed Crimea — and vowed to find the perpetrators, without immediately blaming Ukraine.

Russia said the blast set ablaze seven oil tankers by transported by train and collapsed two car lanes of the giant road and rail structure.

Dramatic social media footage showed the bridge on fire with parts plunging into the sea.

"Today at 6:07 am [0307 GMT] on the road traffic side of the Crimean bridge ... a car bomb exploded, setting fire to seven oil tankers being carried by rail to Crimea," Russian news agencies cited the national anti-terrorism committee as saying.

Embed:

> The Crimean Bridge has been hit, either by a missile or a sabotage attack. Strikes at the heart of Vladimir Putin's prestige. He went to war to take Kyiv only to find that he can't even protect Crimea. He'll be looking for some way to respond. pic.twitter.com/3j9kvksp5O
>
> — Andrew Roth (@Andrew___Roth) October 8, 2022

The bridge, personally inaugurated by President Vladimir Putin in 2018, is a vital transport link for carrying military equipment to Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine.

Moscow had maintained the bridge crossing was safe despite the fighting.

The Kremlin spokesman said Putin had ordered a commission to be set up to look into the blast, Russian news agencies reported.

Russia's powerful investigative committee opened a criminal probe into the explosion and sent detectives to the scene.

It said a truck exploded "on the automobile part of the Crimean bridge from the side of the Taman Peninsula."

This "caused seven fuel tanks to ignite on a train heading toward the Crimea Peninsula. As a result, two lanes partially collapsed."

While officials in Moscow stopped short of blaming Kyiv, an official in Russian-installed

Crimea pointed the finger at "Ukrainian vandals."

Another in the neighboring Kherson region said repairs could "take two months."

And the spokeswoman of Russia's foreign ministry said that Kyiv's reaction to the blasts showed its "terrorist nature."

"There is an undisguised terrorist war against us," Russian ruling party deputy Oleg Morozov told the RIA Novosti news agency.

"If we stay quiet and do not give an adequate response, then such attacks will multiply," he said.

The head of the office of Ukraine's presidency, Mykhailo Podolyak, took to Twitter posting a picture of a long section of the bridge half-submerged in the waters.

Embed:

> Crimea, the bridge, the beginning. Everything illegal must be destroyed, everything stolen must be returned to Ukraine, everything occupied by Russia must be expelled. pic.twitter.com/yUiSwOLlDP
>
> — Михайло Подоляк (@Podolyak_M) October 8, 2022

"Crimea, the bridge, the beginning," he wrote.

"Everything illegal must be destroyed, everything stolen must be returned to Ukraine, everything occupied by Russia must be expelled."

The Ukrainian post office announced it was preparing to print stamps showing the "Crimean bridge — or more precisely, what remains of it."

There have been several explosions at Russian military installations in the Crimean peninsula and if it is established that Ukraine was behind the latest blast, alarm bells may sound with the bridge so far from the front line.

The blasts come after Ukraine's recent lightning territorial gains in the east and south that have undermined the Kremlin's claim that it annexed Donetsk, neighboring Luhansk and the southern regions of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

The Moscow-installed head of the peninsula, Sergei Aksyonov, called on Crimeans to remain "calm" as authorities appeared to downplay the blasts.

"I call on everyone to clam down and not spread fake information," he said on Telegram. "The situation is being controlled, professionals are working on the ground."

He said rail links to Russia had been halted and added that authorities had set up food and

heating points to help stranded drivers.

Authorities also tried to calm fears of food and fuel shortages in Crimea, which is fully reliant on the Russian mainland since Moscow annexed it in 2014.

Russia's transport ministry said a ferry service has been launched. Its energy ministry told agencies that the peninsula is fully provided with fuel.

The blasts came a day after President Vladimir Putin's 70th birthday.

Russian forces said Friday they had captured ground in Donetsk in east Ukraine, their first claim of new gains since a Kyiv counter-offensive rattled Moscow's war effort.

The announcement came as Russia's Orthodox leader said President Vladimir Putin's rule had been mandated by God, congratulating him on his 70th birthday, and as the Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to rights defenders in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Embed:

> Huge blast has taken out sections of Kerch Bridge, Putin’s pet project to connect Russia with occupied Crimea. Its partial destruction could disrupt Russian supply lines for troops in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. But perhaps more than anything, a big, embarrassing hit against Putin. pic.twitter.com/tNgfB6Qt1E
>
> — Christopher Miller (@ChristopherJM) October 8, 2022

Russian gains

Separatist forces in the war-battered Donetsk region said they had retaken a series of villages near the Ukraine-controlled industrial town of Bakhmut, which has been under Russian shelling for weeks.

AFP journalists in the center of Bakhmut heard the sound of heavy artillery and multiple rocket launch systems near the remains of a smashed bridge over the Bakhmutka river.

"On the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic, a grouping of troops of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics, with fire support from Russian forces, liberated Otradovka, Veselaya Dolina and Zaitsevo," separatist forces said on social media.

The Donetsk region, which has been partially controlled by Kremlin-backed separatists for years, is a key prize for Russian forces, which invaded Ukraine in February.

But Ukraine's troops in recent weeks have been pushing back against Russian soldiers across the front lines in the south and in the east, including in parts of Donetsk.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said late Friday his forces had recaptured nearly

2,500 square kilometers (965 square miles) in the counter-offensive that began late last month.

"This week alone, our soldiers liberated 776 square kilometers of territory in the east of our country and 29 settlements, including six in Luhansk region," he said.

But Ukraine continues to suffer serious losses. Fourteen people died Thursday when Russian missiles struck the industrial town of Zaporizhzhia, the local council's secretary announced late Friday.

Thirty people were killed last week when a convoy of civilian cars in the Zaporizhzhia region was shelled in an attack Kyiv blamed on Moscow.

Zelensky has pushed to punish Russia in other areas, urging Brussels to ramp up pressure on its energy sector — a day after the EU imposed a fresh round of sanctions on Moscow.

The International Monetary Fund also announced Friday it would provide $1.3 billion in emergency aid to Ukraine.

In the more than seven months since Russia's offensive, Putin has made thinly veiled threats of using nuclear weapons.

U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday warned the world was facing "Armageddon" as Putin may use his atomic arsenal.

But by Friday the White House dialed back the alarm, saying the president's comments did not reflect new intelligence.

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