

Crimea at Risk of Ukrainian Attacks, Kremlin Says

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A field voting in a referendum on the Donetsk People's Republic joining Russia in Mariupol. **Yegor Aleyev / TASS**

Russian-annexed Crimea remains at risk of Ukrainian attacks, the Kremlin said Thursday after Russian-aligned authorities [claimed](#) to have shot down a drone over the Black Sea peninsula.

The Crimean affiliate of the U.S. news organization RFE/RL [reported](#) hearing powerful explosions in the port of Sevastopol, which is home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet.

Sevastopol's Kremlin-aligned Governor Mikhail Razvozhayev said the sound was that of a drone being shot down.

“There are risks, undoubtedly, because the Ukrainian side continues its policy of organizing terrorist attacks,” spokesman Dmitry Peskov [told](#) reporters in a daily briefing.

Russian military sites in Crimea, as well as the bridge linking mainland Russia to the

peninsula, have been hit by a series of strikes since Moscow's forces invaded Ukraine in February, prompting its Kremlin-aligned governor to order the construction of defensive fortifications last month.

Peskov on Thursday called Crimea's steps to fortify defenses "effective," but stopped short of assessing whether they were enough to protect against future attacks.

Kyiv has vowed to retake Crimea — which Russia seized in 2014 following pro-democracy protests in Ukraine and the ouster of Kyiv's Kremlin-friendly president — as it has liberated nearby Russian-held areas.

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Peskov denied that Russia launched its invasion to capture new Ukrainian territories, clarifying President Vladimir Putin's comments the previous day that newly Moscow-annexed territories signify "significant results" in the military campaign.

"One of the main goals of the special military operation, as announced by the president on Feb. 24, was to protect the people who live in southeast Ukraine, in the Donbas," Peskov said.

"These territories were annexed as a result of referendums in line with that protection," Putin's spokesman said in a daily briefing with reporters.

International observers have widely criticized the September referendums in Ukraine's Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk regions as a sham.

When asked how long the war would continue, Peskov redirected the question to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who [predicted](#) "peacetime" by next year in an interview with Politico Europe.

"Zelensky knows when it can all end, it can all end tomorrow if he wants to," Peskov said after Putin [conceded](#) Wednesday that the campaign could become "lengthy."

AFP contributed reporting.

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