

Russia's Military Leadership Feels Pressure From Makiivka Fallout

By [AFP](#)

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A rally in the Russian city of Samara commemorating the dead. **Albert Dzen / TASS**

The Ukrainian New Year's missile strike on Makiivka has led to a usually reticent Moscow admitting its largest single loss of life since it sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022 and has been met with anger among the Russian population.

The strike's rising death toll intensified criticism of Russia's military high command, with even pro-Kremlin commentators suggesting the death toll could yet climb into the hundreds.

The deadly strike came after months of domestic anger directed towards the Russian military in the wake of the Kremlin's unpopular mobilization drive.

In the early hours of Wednesday, Russia's Defense Ministry said the death toll had climbed to 89. It also announced a commission would investigate exactly what happened and vowed that any "guilty" officials would be punished.

In a video, Lieutenant General Sergei Sevryukov said the tragedy had likely taken place because Russian troops had used cell phones, giving away their location to Ukrainian forces.

But some critics have accused the military of trying to shift the blame.

State television military correspondents — whose influence has risen during the offensive — have accused top commanders of deadly incompetence.

Related article: [Death Toll From Ukrainian Strike on Makiivka Rises to 89](#)

The strike also led to a rare public display of grief in some cities, including in Russia's Samara region on the Volga River.

In a sign that criticism was being taken seriously, the influential head of Russia's state RT television channel Margarita Simonyan welcomed the army's promise that officials would "be held accountable."

"It is time to understand that impunity does not lead to social harmony. Impunity leads to new crimes. And, as a result, to public dissent."

There have been reports that the servicemen were quartered in an unprotected building which was destroyed because munitions were stored on the premises and detonated in the strike.

The Telegram account Rybar, which has around a million followers, said it was "criminally naive" for the army to store ammunition next to sleeping quarters.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense said Wednesday that claims of ammunition being stored near where troops slept was a "realistic possibility."

"The Russian military has a record of unsafe ammunition storage," it said in a statement.

"This incident highlights how unprofessional practices contribute to Russia's high casualty rate.

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