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Missile Strike Hits Russia's Black Sea Fleet HQ

By AFP

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Smoke over the Russian Black Sea Fleet headquarters after Friday's missile strike. **Sergei Malgavko / TASS**

Ukraine claimed responsibility for a missile attack that struck the headquarters of Moscow's Black Sea fleet in annexed Crimea Friday, sparking a huge fire and leaving at least one Russian serviceman missing.

The strike on the symbolic heart of Russia's Black Sea fleet marks a major blow for Moscow, which has suffered a string of attacks on the strategically important port in recent months.

Plumes of thick smoke could be seen pouring out of the Russian naval headquarters, video shared on social media showed, while officials said missile fragments had fallen close to a nearby theater.

"The headquarters of the fleet has been hit in an enemy missile attack," said Mikhail

Razvozhayev, the Kremlin-installed governor of Sevastopol, Crimea's largest city.

Embed:

Ukraine confirmed the strike had hit Moscow's naval command base on the peninsula, which Kyiv has vowed to take back since it was annexed by Russia in 2014.

"Ukraine's defense forces launched a successful attack on the headquarters of the command of the Black Sea Fleet of Russia in temporarily occupied Sevastopol," the Ukrainian army said on Telegram.

A spokesman for the Ukrainian navy told AFP the attack appeared to be a "missile hit," but declined to confirm Kyiv's involvement.

"These measures will continue in the future," the spokesman said.

Russia's Defense Ministry said one serviceman was missing following the attack, after having initially reported that he had been killed.

"The historic headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet were damaged," it said, claiming air defense systems had shot down five missiles.

Related article: Russian Ships Damaged in Ukrainian Strike on Annexed Crimea

The attack sparked a flurry of warnings from Kremlin-installed officials, who urged residents to stay indoors and avoid taking photos from the scene.

"Attention everyone! Another attack is possible. Please do not go to the city center. Do not leave buildings," said Razvozhayev, who governs the city of some 500,000 people.

"Everyone who is near the headquarters of the fleet — at the sound of the siren proceed to shelters," he added.

Rescue workers were at the scene, Razvozhayev said: "Firefighters are taking all measures to eliminate the fire as soon as possible."

The peninsula was simultaneously hit by an "unprecedented cyberattack" on its internet providers, according to Oleg Kryuchkov, an adviser to annexed Crimea's governor.

Ukrainian and Russian attacks in and around the Black Sea have increased since Moscow withdrew from an agreement that allowed safe passage to civilian cargo ships from three Ukrainian ports.

Kyiv said this week it struck a military air base near the Crimean town of Saky, while Ukrainian forces have repeatedly targeted the sole bridge connecting the peninsula to the Russian mainland.

Russian officials said Friday that road traffic across the bridge had been temporarily halted, while maritime traffic was also briefly stopped following the attack on Sevastopol.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who visited Washington this week, has urged his allies to provide Ukraine with long-range missiles so it can target positions deeper inside Russia-controlled territory.

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