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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Strikes Kill 20, Including Rescuers, in 'Vile' Odesa Attack

By Oleksandr Gimanov for AFP

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State Emergency Service of Ukraine

Russian missiles pounded Ukraine's Black Sea port city of Odesa on Friday, killing more than a dozen people including rescue workers in an attack President Volodymyr Zelensky described as "vile."

AFP journalists on the scene saw bodies covered by blankets strewn on the street, while images from officials showed exhausted emergency service workers smeared with blood and dirt dousing flames and treating wounded colleagues.

Local authorities said Russian aerial bombardments struck residential buildings, ambulances and a gas pipeline, leaving at least 20 people dead and wounding another 73 people, including rescuers.

Maria Slyzovska, who witnessed the attack, said the first strike rocked her mother's home

leaving "everything broken" before the second missile hit.

"There were a lot of people there. There was blood and ambulances. We all live in the realities of this Russian roulette," she told AFP.

Zelensky said Russian forces had launched a type of attack known as a double-tap strike on the port hub, with the second projectile ploughing into rescue workers at the scene.

City officials said Moscow targeted Odesa with Iskander missiles launched from the Crimean peninsula, annexed by Russia in 2014.

"Russian terror in Odesa is a sign of weakness of the enemy, which is fighting Ukrainian civilians at a time when it cannot guarantee security for people on its own territory," said presidential aide Andriy Yermak.

Kyiv, Moscow exchange barrages

There was no immediate comment on the strikes from Russia, whose forces have routinely targeted the transport hub with drones and missiles.

The strikes came on the first day of presidential elections in Russia, which is also hosting the vote in several occupied regions of Ukraine, angering Kyiv.

Embed:

This month, President Volodymyr Zelensky and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis came under missile attacks in Odesa, when Russia said it was targeting military facilities at the city's port.

That bombardment came just days after a dozen people — including five children — were killed when a Russian drone hit an apartment block in Odesa, in one of the deadliest attacks on civilians in weeks.

Friday's attack was just the latest in a series of fatal barrages between Kyiv and Moscow, as polls opened across Russia.

Kyiv said that a Russian drone strike killed two people in the central Ukrainian region of Vinnytsia, and that shelling on the frontline Zaporizhzhia region killed one woman.

National police said that Russia had attacked the Vinnytsia region, more than 400 kilometers from the frontlines, with drones, leaving a 52-year-old man and his 53-year-old wife dead.

In the southern Zaporizhzhia region, which Moscow claims to have annexed and partially controls, a 76-year-old woman was killed when fragments of a Russian shell hit her in her garden, Ukrainian Governor Ivan Fedorov said.

'Trying to break through'

Moscow-installed officials in the Russian-held city of Donetsk meanwhile said a "barbaric" Ukrainian attack on a residential area had killed three children.

"Three children died. A girl born in 2007, a girl born in 2021, and a boy born in 2014," Alexey Kulemzin, the Russian-appointed mayor of Donetsk, wrote on Telegram.

Russia also said Ukraine launched drone and artillery attacks on areas closer to the countries' shared border.

The governor of Russia's Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said in a post on Telegram: "The town of Grayvoron came under Ukrainian army shelling."

"There is a dead man. He is a member of our territorial self-defense unit," he said.

Gladkov later added another man had been killed and two more injured by shrapnel in shelling of Belgorod city.

The uptick in attacks on Russia's border regions come after its forces last month captured the city of Avdiivka, just a few kilometres north of Donetsk.

It said pushing Ukrainian forces back would help protect residents of areas under its control from shelling.

The head of Ukraine's army said Friday that Russia had launched a wave of attacks to try to advance further in the area.

"The enemy has concentrated its main efforts and has been trying to break through ... for several days in a row," Ukrainian commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said in a statement after visiting front lines around Avdiivka.

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