

‘Difficult to Keep Calm’: Tatarstan Residents Shaken by Ukraine-Linked Drone Strikes

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The dormitory in the Alabuga special economic zone that was struck Tuesday. **Govorit_NeMoskva / Telegram**

Unprecedented drone [strikes](#) on two industrial sites in Tatarstan on Tuesday have stirred fear and panic among residents of the Turkic-majority republic in Russia’s Volga region.

The purported Ukrainian attacks, which targeted an oil refinery in the city of Nizhnekamsk and a military drone production site in the Alabuga special economic zone, are the farthest-reaching strikes on Russian territory since the start of the war in Ukraine and the first to target an ethnic republic.

“The public in Tatarstan is scared and shocked by the fact that...the war came to them, who are 1,300 kilometers away from the front line,” Tatar political expert Ruslan Aysin told The

Moscow Times.

At least 13 people — including two minors — were injured as a result of the attack on Alabuga, where an aircraft-style drone crashed into a workers' dormitory, the local news outlet Business Online [reported](#), citing Tatarstan's Health Ministry.

All of those injured have been identified as students of Alabuga Polytechnic College. At least four were foreign nationals from unspecified countries in Africa and Southeast Asia, [according](#) to Business Online.

Students at the college are involved in assembling Iranian Shahed drones, which have been produced in the special economic zone since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, [according](#) to an investigation by news outlet Protocol and YouTube channel Razvorot.

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Many of them are forced to work at the factory under threat of expulsion, according to the investigation, while parents must reportedly pay the institution "compensation" of several thousand dollars if their child is expelled.

Some students also complained of being subjected to inhumane conditions and forced to work with no food or sleep for days on end, according to Protocol and Razvorot.

Tatarstan's head Rustam Minnikhanov [issued](#) an official confirmation shortly after the first media reports of an attack early Tuesday and has since called on residents "to remain calm."

"It is especially important right now to remain calm and not to succumb to panic, which is being spread deliberately by those who committed this crime," Minnikhanov [wrote](#) on social media.

Related article: [Russia Reports Drone Attacks Over 1,000 Km From Ukraine](#)

Later Tuesday, Minnikhanov visited the town of Yelabuga, where the special economic zone is located, and met with the students of the Polytechnic College, who greeted him with Tatarstan's green-white-red flags in their hands.

"I see that you are doing great, you can't be frightened," local news outlet Groza [quoted](#) Minnikhanov as saying to students. "But you need to be more alert, more careful."

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Despite Minnikhanov's best efforts, fear appears to have already set in among Tatarstan's residents.

"I live a two-to-three-hour drive away from Yelabuga and there is a factory near me. I am packing an emergency grab bag," a Tatar woman from the republic told The Moscow Times, requesting anonymity out of fears that speaking to the press could put her on local security

forces' radar.

"I was very shocked at first, but that quickly passed because we have been observing these 'events' [the war] for two years now. We know that tragedies like this can happen," she added.

Similar sentiments were expressed by concerned residents who flooded the comments under Minnikhanov's [announcement](#) of the attack on the VKontakte social media site.

"It is difficult to keep calm when you...take your kids to a kindergarten that is one kilometer away from the biggest industrial sites," wrote local resident Alina Andreyeva.

"If something [worse happens], then we can't even get out of Nizhnekamsk. It looks like there are no measures to protect the people," said user Yulia Spravedlivaya.

In the same comments section, user Rasim Khurmatov questioned why Tatarstan officials did not respond to "long-known warnings" and up the security measures in the region, likely referring to the fact that drone-making factories on Russian territory have been [deemed](#) legitimate military targets by Ukraine.

Some social media users also voiced fears that the many oil refineries and chemical plants in the neighboring republic of Bashkortostan could be targeted next.

"Our neighbors are first in everything," one user from Bashkortostan [wrote](#) in response to the news that the republic's emergencies ministry had started distributing safety instructions in the event of a drone attack, referencing a long-running political rivalry between the neighboring republics.

Though [media reports](#) have cited sources in Ukraine's military intelligence as saying that it was responsible for Tuesday's attack, Kyiv is yet to issue an official statement on the matter.

Tatarstan's head Minnikhanov has also stopped short of blaming Ukraine in his official statements.

Political expert Aysin said it is unlikely that the attack will lead to a major wave of public outrage, even if state propaganda tries to stoke anti-Ukrainian sentiment.

"In more than two years of war...the feeling of hatred [among war supporters] has faded out and became routine, so it will be difficult to get some kind of emotional response, though Russian authorities will try, of course," said political expert Aysin.

"It will be difficult to raise the levels of hatred towards Ukraine...More likely [this attack] will backfire on local authorities who are unable to ensure the safety [or residents]," he added.

At the same time, Aysin warned that Russian authorities might use the attack to "tarnish" the reputation of decolonial and indigenous activists and movements from Russia's ethnic republics — most of which vocally support Ukraine in its war against Moscow.

"[They will say] that decolonization is a bloody, criminal, enemy-made thing and that by speaking of decolonization one simply supports the enemy," he said. "This emotional aspect

will be used proactively now, though it will die down.”

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