The Moscow Times
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Ukraine and Russia Trade Strikes as U.S. Gears up for Key Vote

By Daria Andriievska for AFP

April 20, 2024

Telegram/VCHK-OGPU

Ukraine and Russia both accused each other of deadly strikes on civilians Saturday, as U.S. lawmakers prepared to vote on a $61 billion aid package Kyiv hopes will boost its flagging war effort.

Ukraine's biggest ally Washington has not approved large-scale support for the war-torn country in nearly a year and a half, a delay Kyiv says has halted its battlefield progress and left its civilians vulnerable.

"I believe we will push on and pass it," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said ahead of the vote, slated to take place in the U.S. House of Representatives later Saturday.

Russian strikes killed three people in central and northeast Ukraine, local officials said, while cross-border Ukrainian attacks left three dead in Russia's western Belgorod region, according

to the local governor.

A source in Ukraine's defense sector told AFP Kyiv targeted eight Russian regions overnight in a "large-scale" drone strike, which was aimed at "energy infrastructure that feeds Russia's military-industrial complex."

"At least three electrical substations and a fuel storage base were hit and caught fire," the source said, calling it a "joint operation" of Ukraine's SBU security service, army, and military intelligence.

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Russia's Defense Ministry said it had intercepted 50 Ukrainian drones overnight, some of them hundreds of kilometers from the border, including near the capital Moscow.

Video on social media purportedly showed a large blaze burning at a fuel depot in Russia's western Smolensk region, an attack that the governor confirmed was caused by the drones.

"Air defense forces shot the aerial vehicles down. However, as a result of falling debris, a tank with fuel and lubricants caught fire," Governor Vasily Anokhin said.

Kyiv has ramped up strikes on Russian oil and gas facilities in recent months, part of what it calls "fair" retaliation on infrastructure used to fuel Russia's war.

'Doctors did everything'

Ukrainian drones killed two people in Russia's Belgorod border region, its governor said early Saturday, while shelling later in the day fatally wounded a pregnant woman.

A residential building and a barn in the village of Poroz, less than two kilometers from the frontier, were "completely burned down," Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Another building was severely damaged.

"As a result of the release of two explosive devices, a private residential building caught fire. Tragically, two civilians died — a woman who was recovering from a fractured femur, and a man who was caring for her," Gladkov wrote on Telegram.

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He later said Ukraine shelled the village of Novaya Tavolzhanka, killing a pregnant woman and her unborn child.

"Doctors did everything possible to save both mother and child. But to great grief, the woman and the unborn baby died from their wounds," he said.

'We can't wait'

A Russian attack killed a man in Ukraine's central Dnipropetrovsk region, while artillery strikes on residential buildings in the northeastern city of Vovchansk left two others dead, officials said.

"A direct hit was recorded on a nine-story residential building. A woman and a man were injured. Both victims are 61 years old. At other addresses, two men aged 50 and 84 died as a result of shelling in the city," prosecutors from the local Kharkiv region said.

The region's governor, Oleh Siniehubov, shared a photo showing a pile of rubble next to the collapsed section of a multi-story residential block.

Russia fired at least seven missiles at Ukraine overnight, two of which were shot down by air defenses, Ukraine's air force said.

Ukraine has in recent months pleaded for more air defenses from its Western allies as it struggles to fend off a surge in deadly attacks on civilian infrastructure.

Zelensky on Friday urged NATO to quickly deliver more aid to help his struggling forces, which have ceded ground to Russia in recent months.

"This year, we can't wait for decisions to be made," he told NATO defense ministers.

"We need seven more Patriots or similar air defense systems — and it's a minimum number. They can save many lives and really change the situation," Zelensky said.

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