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Car Blast Kills Soldier in Annexed Crimea, Russian Officials Say

November 13, 2024



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A Russian soldier was killed early Wednesday when his car exploded in Sevastopol, a major port city in annexed Crimea, in what officials say was likely caused by an improvised explosive device.

Sevastopol Governor Mikhail Razvozhayev said emergency services received a call about a vehicle exploding and then catching fire just before 10:00 a.m. local time.

"There was a driver inside the car, he was quickly evacuated and handed over to medics, but it was not possible to save him. He died from his injuries," Razvozhayev wrote in a post on Telegram.

He said the victim was a Russian serviceman, adding that "an act of sabotage cannot be ruled out."

Shortly after, Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, launched a

terrorism investigation into the incident after law enforcement officials said the explosion was likely caused by an improvised explosive device attached to the bottom of the vehicle.

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Video and photos posted on social media showed the car wreckage. The entire vehicle was badly damaged and the front grill and bumper were torn off.

An unverified report by the Telegram news channel Baza, which has purported links to Russian security services, claimed that the soldier, identified as 47-year-old Valery T., was a captain of the Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet.

The BBC, citing an unnamed Ukrainian military intelligence source, reported later on Wednesday that the car explosion was a deliberate attack orchestrated by Ukraine's security services. Like Baza, the source also identified the serviceman killed in the blast as a naval captain named Valery Trankovsky.

"Trankovsky is a war criminal who gave orders to launch cruise missiles from the Black Sea at civilian targets in Ukraine," the source was quoted as saying. "He was an absolutely legitimate target in terms of the laws and customs of warfare."

Russian military personnel and Kremlin-backed officials have been regularly targeted in assassination plots since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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