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Zelensky Slams ‘Weak’ U.S. Reply to Russian Strike on His Hometown

By AFP

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State Emergency Service of Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday slammed the U.S. embassy for what he called a "weak" statement that did not blame Russia for a missile strike on his hometown which killed 18 people, including nine children.

In one of the deadliest strikes in recent weeks, a Russian missile on Friday evening struck a residential area near a children's playground in the central Ukrainian town of Kryvyi Rih.

Seventy-two people were wounded, 12 of them children, Dnipropetrovsk Governor Serhiy Lysak said after the end of emergency operations overnight, with city officials declaring three days of mourning.

Zelensky in an emotional statement on social media named each of the children killed in the attack, accusing the U.S. embassy of avoiding referring to Russia as the aggressor.

"Unfortunately, the reaction of the American Embassy is unpleasantly surprising: such a strong country, such a strong people — and such a weak reaction," Zelensky wrote.

"They are even afraid to say the word 'Russian' when talking about the missile that killed the children."

Zelensky singled out the United States for criticism at a time when U.S. President Donald Trump is pushing for a partial ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine while seeking a thaw in ties with Moscow.

'Spade a spade'

The Ukrainian president took aim at U.S. Ambassador Bridget Brink after she posted a message on X on Friday evening that said: "Horrified that tonight a ballistic missile struck near a playground and restaurant."

Brink, who was appointed by Trump's predecessor Joe Biden and has been ambassador since May 2022, added that "this is why the war must end."

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Zelensky wrote on Saturday: "Yes, the war must end. But in order to end it, we must not be afraid to call a spade a spade."

"It is wrong and dangerous to keep silent about the fact that it is Russia that is killing children with ballistic missiles," Zelensky reiterated in his evening address.

"It only incites the scum in Moscow to continue the war and further ignore diplomacy."

The Ukrainian leader was born in the industrial city of Kryvyi Rih, which had a pre-war population of around 600,000 people.

Located in Ukraine's central Dnipropetrovsk region, it is about 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the front line, and has regularly been targeted by Russian drones and missiles.

Zelensky said the children killed by the latest attack ranged in age from a three-year-old boy, Tymofiy, to a 17-year-old teenage boy, Nikita.

Oleksandr Vilkul, the head of Kryvyi Rih's military administration, said three days of mourning had been declared on April 7, 8 and 9.

"This is nothing less than a mass murder of civilians," he said.

Pictures circulated by rescue services showed several bodies, one stretched out near a playground swing.

"This is the kind of pain you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy," Lysak said.

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Russia's Defense Ministry said it "delivered a precision strike" in the city "where commanders of formations and Western instructors were meeting."

The General Staff of the Ukrainian army retorted that Moscow was "trying to cover up its cynical crime" and "spreading false information." It accused Russia of "war crimes."

'Not human'

Trump, who said during his re-election campaign he could end the three-year conflict within days, is pushing the two sides to agree to a ceasefire but his administration has failed to broker an accord acceptable to both.

Zelensky said the missile attack showed Russia had no interest in stopping its full-scale invasion, launched in February 2022.

"Russia does not want a ceasefire and we see it. The whole world sees it," he said, adding that after the missile strike Moscow launched attack drones "right during the rescue operation" and "one more person died."

"People who are capable of that kind of thing aren't human," Zelensky said.

The president hailed "tangible progress" after meeting British and French military chiefs in Kyiv on Friday to discuss a plan by London and Paris to send a "reassurance" force to Ukraine if and when a deal on ending the conflict is reached.

Zelensky wrote on social media that the meeting with British Chief of the Defense Staff Tony Radakin and French counterpart Thierry Burkhard agreed "the first details on how the security contingent of partners can be deployed," without giving details.

This is one of the latest efforts by European leaders to agree on a coordinated policy after Trump sidelined them and opened direct talks with the Kremlin.

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