

## After attack on Kerch Strait bridge, Russia launches “massive strike” against Ukraine



Kerch Strait bridge after attack Saturday morning (Maxar Technologies satellite image, Oct. 8)

On Saturday morning, a bomb in a truck crossing the Kerch Strait bridge that connects Russia with Crimea exploded. In the absence of a land corridor between Russia and Crimea, the 12-mile bridge, built after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, provides an essential – indeed, the only – landline by which Russian forces in Crimea – most notably, those in Sevastopol, the large base of its Black Sea fleet – can be resupplied. And it provides the only secure means of reinforcing the Russian forces in southern Ukraine that are attempting to hold territory in Kherson region in the face of a sustained Ukrainian offensive.

As the satellite image above illustrates, the blast heavily damaged two large segments holding two of the four lanes in the roadway. The force of the blast and the flames also caused a fire in several tank cars carrying fuel in a train that passed by on the rail bridge just as the bomb exploded. Limited traffic resumed in the two lanes of the road that weren't damaged about ten hours after the explosion and by Sunday freight and passenger trains resumed their normal schedules. But obviously the road will require very extensive repair, made even more difficult by the need to keep open the two lanes that remain open.

Yesterday, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Alexander Bastrykin, a former First Deputy Prosecutor General and former chairman of the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor General's Office and, since 2011, the head of the Investigative Committee of Russia. On Saturday, Putin had directed him to investigate the attack and yesterday Bastrykin reported the preliminary results of the investigation. According to the Kremlin readout of the meeting, Bastrykin said investigators, including forensic and explosive experts, had examined the site, had

established that the truck carrying the bomb had driven through Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, North Ossetia and Krasnodar, had identified the persons who took part in arranging the movements of the truck, and had identified suspects from among those who could have arranged the attack. While the investigation continues, he told Putin that, “All our preliminary investigation data allow us to come to an unequivocal conclusion – this was a terrorist act which had been prepared by Ukrainian special services with the aim of destroying a large civil infrastructure facility of crucial importance to the Russia Federation, especially to Crimea.” Putin said, “I see. There is no doubt here, as you have just reported, that it was a terrorist act aimed at destroying critical civilian infrastructure of the Russian Federation... And Ukraine’s special services were the initiators, performers and masterminds.” Bastrykin said, “Ukraine’s special services and citizens of Russia and foreign countries who assisted in preparing this terrorist act.” Putin thanked him and the Kremlin subsequently announced that Russia’s Security Council, which includes the highest-ranking members of the government, would meet today.

This morning Russia fired more than 80 missiles at command centers and communications and energy facilities in Ukraine, more than half of which got through Ukrainian air defenses to their targets. The missiles hit command centers and facilities in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia and seven other cities. At this morning’s briefing session for the thirteen permanent members of the Security Council, Putin summarized what Bastrykin had reported: “The forensic and other expert data, as well as operational information, show that the October 8 explosion was an act of terrorism aimed at destroying Russia’s civilian and critical infrastructure. It is also clear that the Ukrainian special services were the organisers and perpetrators of the attack.” Continuing, Putin said, “This morning, at the proposal of the Defence Ministry and in accordance with the plan of Russia’s General Staff, a massive strike was launched with long-range precision air, sea and land-based weapons against Ukrainian energy, military and communications facilities. In the event of more attempts to stage terrorist attacks on our territory, Russia’s response will be harsh and commensurate with the threats posed to the Russian Federation. Nobody should have any doubts about that.”

On February 24, Putin announced that Russia had begun a “special military operation” to “protect people [in the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics] who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime.” Over the past eight months, the “special military operation” has obviously become much more than an exercise to protect those living in the Donbas. It is quite possible Russia will soon formally declare what the “special military operation” has already become: War against Ukraine.

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