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RUSSIA

Russian Government Says Kremlin Hit by Ukraine Drones, Blames Kyiv

Moscow says nobody injured; Ukraine says it wasn't involved

By [Bojan Pancevski](#) [Follow](#), [Thomas Grove](#) [Follow](#) and [Ann M. Simmons](#) [Follow](#)

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Two drones crashed into the Kremlin early Wednesday, according to the Russian government, which blamed Kyiv for the attack in the heart of Moscow that could embarrass President Vladimir Putin as he tries to rally support for his war effort in Ukraine.

Russia said an electronic-warfare system downed two unmanned aircraft, which exploded over the Kremlin grounds. The Kremlin said no one was injured and no major damage was caused.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denied that Ukraine was behind the attack. “We didn’t attack Putin,” he said in Helsinki, where he was meeting with the leaders of Nordic states.

An adviser to Mr. Zelensky, Mykhailo Podolyak, suggested those responsible were domestic opponents of Mr. Putin.

If Ukraine or its supporters were behind the attack, it would highlight serious vulnerabilities at the heart of Russian power days ahead of Victory Day, a major Russian holiday commemorating Moscow’s victory over Nazi Germany.

It comes before Ukraine’s planned offensive aimed at retaking territory from Russian troops in the country’s east and south.

Questions were also raised as to whether the Kremlin itself was responsible for the incident, which some observers noted could give Mr. Putin political cover for further military mobilization.



A sign prohibiting unmanned aircraft near the Kremlin in Moscow on Wednesday. PHOTO: EVGENIA NOVOZHENINA/REUTERS

In Washington, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the U.S. couldn't verify the authenticity of the reports from the Kremlin, noting that "the United States is certainly not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders."

Ms. Jean-Pierre also said Russia has carried out so-called false flag attacks before. "Obviously Russia has a history of doing things like this," she said. "But again, I don't want to speculate. I don't want to get into hypotheticals from here."

Video circulating on social media appeared to show a quadcopter-type drone flying over the green dome of the Kremlin's Senate Palace before it exploded and fell into the complex below. The video images couldn't be verified.

"Retaliatory strikes against Ukraine are to be expected," said Nico Lange, a defense analyst and Russia expert who served as chief of executive staff in the German Defense Ministry. He added that any massive retaliation could consume increasingly scarce missiles that the Russians need to defend the occupied territories from the expected Ukrainian counteroffensive.

"Any way you slice it, whether it was Ukraine or Russian opponents of Putin, the drone attacks on the Kremlin make Putin look extremely bad, and he has few response options that improve his situation," Mr. Lange said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Mr. Putin wasn't in the building at the time of the alleged attack and spent Wednesday working from one of his private residences at the Novo-Ogaryovo estate near Moscow.



The dome of the Senate building in the Kremlin on Wednesday. PHOTO: EVGENIA NOVOZHENINA/REUTERS

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he couldn't comment on the Kremlin allegations of Kyiv's responsibility.

"I've seen the reports. I can't in any way validate them. We simply don't know," he said. "I would take anything coming out of the Kremlin with a very large shaker of salt."

The U.S. has provided intelligence to Ukrainian troops throughout the conflict and about \$36 billion in military aid, but has warned Kyiv against attacking Russian territory.

The Biden administration announced a new aid package of about \$300 million on Wednesday that includes more ammunition for U.S.-supplied HIMARS rocket systems, howitzers, artillery and mortar rounds, and antiarmor weapons. The package represents the administration's 37th such assistance package for Ukraine.

A string of attacks, explosions and sabotage that Moscow blames on Kyiv has hit targets inside Russia and brought the conflict home to the Russian people. On Wednesday, a fuel depot caught fire in another apparent drone attack.

The violence has also targeted some of Russia's loudest proponents of the war.

Earlier this spring, an influential military blogger who wrote under the name Vladlen Tatarsky was killed when a bomb lodged inside a statue that had been given to him exploded. Last year, Daria Dugina, daughter of one of Russia's most hawkish voices and a prominent proponent of the war herself, was killed in a car bomb on the outskirts of Moscow.

The Kremlin comprises a number of official buildings used as Moscow's seat of power and is also the president's official residence. Starting last year, Russian authorities placed aerial defenses atop official buildings in the capital, in what some experts said was a sign of anxiety about Ukrainian drone attacks.

“The Kyiv regime made an attempt to strike with unmanned aerial vehicles on the Kremlin residence of the President of the Russian Federation,” the Kremlin said.

“We regard these actions as a planned terrorist act and an attempt on the life of the President of the Russian Federation, carried out on the eve of Victory Day,” it added. Victory Day is celebrated on May 9.

The Kremlin said it reserved the right to take retaliatory measures.

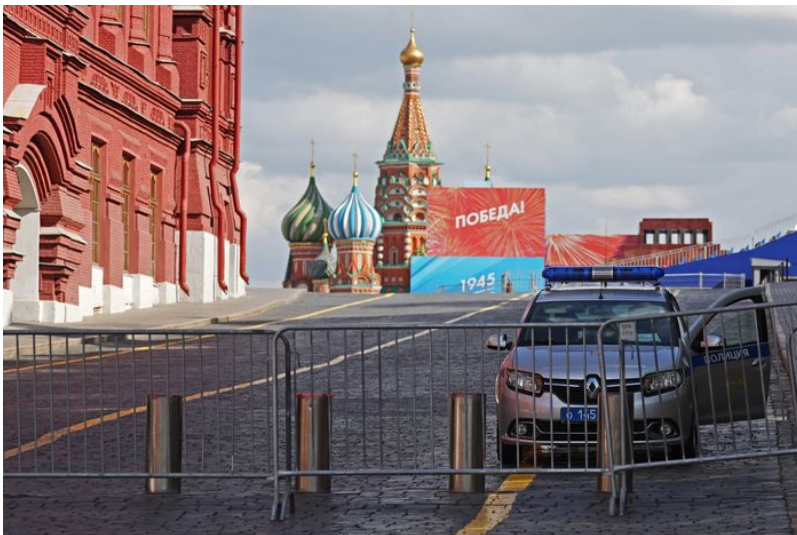
Russia’s military has previously threatened to strike Kyiv’s government headquarters following earlier Ukrainian attacks on Russian territory.

“The situation is changing dramatically,” Sergei Markov, director of the pro-Kremlin Institute for Political Studies, said on Telegram. “There is a sharp escalation.”

Earlier this week, Russia said it hit a number of military sites and defense-industry facilities in a barrage of missile strikes.

Western-supplied Patriot air-defense systems have been deployed to protect central Kyiv and government buildings there and could potentially repel a Russian attack there.

Mr. Peskov said that the Victory Day parade that takes place annually on Red Square would proceed as planned, state news agency TASS reported.



Barricades at Red Square in Moscow on Wednesday. PHOTO: SERGEI BOBYLEV/ZUMA PRESS

Mr. Putin is known to spend long stretches of time outside Moscow in the several residences at his disposal in Sochi, Valdai and elsewhere, potentially making any attempt to strike the Kremlin more a symbolic act to show the weaknesses in Moscow’s most important air defenses rather than an actual attack on the Russian president.

Authorities closed down Red Square, beginning on April 27, ahead of the Victory Day commemoration, and several regions had canceled celebrations citing security concerns. Pro-Kremlin pundits and military analysts have said Kyiv might use the May 9 holiday to launch its much-anticipated spring offensive, a narrative that has gained traction in state media in recent days.

Dr. Scott Crino, founder of Red Six Solutions, a Washington-based strategic consulting firm that specializes in drones, said the one in the video could have been a small, low-cost quadcopter, which would have to be controlled from a location near the target, but that it was impossible to tell what kind from the footage.

Dr. Crino said it appeared the blast was caused by a timed fuse on the drone or the pilot directing the quadcopter. There was no sign that it had been brought down by air defenses, Dr. Crino said.

In 1987, a German amateur pilot flew from Finland to land on the edge of Red Square.

—Dion Nissenbaum, Catherine Lucey and Warren Strobel contributed to this article.

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