

Scores of soldiers killed in Ukrainian strike, Russia claims

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: Russia on Monday said more than 60 soldiers were killed in a Ukrainian strike on Russian-controlled territory in a New Year assault, the biggest loss of life reported by Moscow so far. Kyiv took responsibility for the strike, which it said took place in the occupied city of Makiiivka in eastern Ukraine on New Year's Eve. In a rare announcement that followed criticism by Russian military correspondents, the defence ministry in Moscow said 63 Russian servicemen were killed "as a result of a strike by four missiles" in Makiiivka. It was the biggest loss of life reported by the Russian defence ministry so far in a conflict that has dragged on since President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops to invade on February 24 last year.

The Russian ministry said US-supplied Himars rocket systems had been used and the target was a temporary deployment point. Late on Monday, the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said in a statement that its forces were behind the strikes on Makiiivka. "Up to 10 units of enemy military equipment of various types were destroyed and damaged," the general staff said. Earlier in the day, the strategic communications department of Ukraine's armed forces said nearly 400 Russian troops were killed in Makiiivka. The general staff, which usually communicates on such incidents, did not confirm the figure and said the human "losses" were still being established.

Russian war correspondents, who have gained influence in recent months, said hundreds could have been killed in the strike on a vocational school in Makiiivka and accused Russia's top commanders of not learning from past mistakes. Former Russian separatist leader Igor Strelkov said the troops, largely consisting of mobilised Russians, were stationed in an unprotected building that was "almost completely" destroyed because ammunition stored on the premises detonated in the strike. He said "hundreds" had been killed and wounded. "Ten months into the war, it is dangerous and criminal to consider the enemy a fool who does not see anything," said Andrei Medvedev, deputy speaker of the Moscow city legislature.

The Samara governor, Dmitry Azarov, said that among the victims were residents of his region, adding that a hotline was set up for their relatives. On social media, some accused Russian authorities of downplaying the death toll. "Dear God, who will believe in the figure of 63? The building has been completely destroyed," one Russian, Nina Vernykh, wrote on the country's largest social network, VKontakte. An announcement on the social network urged Russians to collect clothes, medicines and equipment for those who survived the strike. "Everything that the mobilised had on them remains under the rubble," said the announcement. Another announcement said that residents in four of the region's cities — Samara, Tolyatti, Syzran and Novokuibyshevsk — will gather on Tuesday to mourn the troops.