

Russia admits attack on Odesa shortly after agreement signed

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Russian forces have said that they had destroyed a Ukrainian warship and US-supplied Harpoon anti-ship missiles in the Ukrainian port of Odesa.

Russian news agencies quoted the defence ministry as saying on Sunday July 24th that “a docked Ukrainian warship and a warehouse with US-supplied Harpoon anti-ship missiles were destroyed by long-range precision-guided naval missiles in Odesa seaport on the territory of a ship repair plant.”

The Ukrainian military had said Russian missiles hit the southern port on Saturday, threatening the agreement signed on Friday that it was hoped would free up grain exports from Black Sea ports.

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said that the strikes on Odesa were “barbarism”, and proved that Russia could not be trusted to implement Friday’s deal in good faith. The agreement had been mediated by Turkey and the UN.

Initially the Saturday attack was denied. Turkey’s Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said on Saturday that “in our contact with Russia, the Russians told us that they had absolutely nothing to do with this attack and that they were examining the issue very closely and in detail”.

However, on Sunday, after it became clear that the Russian denials would not fly, Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for the Russian foreign ministry, said that “Kalibr missiles destroyed military infrastructure in the port of Odessa, with a high-precision strike”.

“They are in no way related to infrastructure that is used for the export of grain. This should not affect — and will not affect — the beginning of shipments,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.

Even if the targets were designated as “military infrastructure”, the attack could be interpreted as a breach of Friday’s agreement. Russia’s willingness to attack one of the three designated export ports was thought likely to raise concerns for

shipowners, seafarers and insurers who have to decide whether to supply, man or insure calls in Ukraine to load up grain.