

Kerch Strait bridge blast damages key Russian land supply route

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The road bridge across the Kerch Strait between southern Russia and Crimea was badly damaged by an explosion early on the morning of October 8th. The rail bridge that runs parallel to it was also hit by fire, although the extent of structural damage was not known.

Sea traffic between the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea was reported to be continuing as the main central span under which vessels sail had not been impacted by the blast and subsequent fires.

Three people were killed in the blast, Russian authorities said. Russia's National Anti-Terrorism Committee said that a truck bomb caused seven railway cars carrying fuel to catch fire, resulting in a "partial collapse of two sections of the bridge." A man and a woman who were riding in a vehicle across the bridge were killed by the explosion and their bodies were recovered, Russia's Investigative Committee said. It didn't provide details on the third victim.

Two spans of the road bridge collapsed into water, leaving only one – damaged – part of it available to light traffic.

The rail bridge had a cargo of oil passing by as the explosion occurred. It caught fire, temporarily shutting the rail link. Russia has claimed that this has now been re-opened.

While celebrating the explosion(s), Ukraine stopped short of claiming responsibility. The speaker of Crimea's Kremlin-backed regional parliament immediately accused Ukraine, although Moscow did not. Ukrainian officials have repeatedly threatened to strike the bridge. The location of the attack was some 100 miles from Ukrainian held territory. The partial destruction of the bridge was thought likely to affect, at least temporarily, supplies to Crimea.

Although Kerch Strait transit remained possible, ship owners were being advised to calculate the risk, as it would appear that The Azov Sea has now become a war zone.

A ferry service temporarily will carry military and civilian traffic across the strait, reported Russian news agency TASS.

The 12-mile bridge across the Kerch Strait linking the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov opened in 2018 and is the longest in Europe. The \$3.6bn project was a physical symbol of Russia's assertion that Crimea was a part of Russia, which annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014.

Russia's Energy Ministry said Crimea had enough fuel for 15 days, adding that it was working on ways to replenish stock.

Mikhail Razvozhayev, the head of Sevastopol, initially announced a ban on sales of car fuel in cannisters and said that the sales of groceries would be limited to 3kg per person to avoid a panicky run on supplies. However, an hour later he changed his line, stating that there would be no restrictions.

The Association of Russia's tourist agencies estimated that about 50,000 tourists were on holiday in Crimea – a popular Russian tourist destination prior to the Russian attack on Ukraine in February.

TASS said that there was no timeline at the moment for a reopening of the Crimean Bridge.