

Ukraine Destroyed the Kakhovka Dam: A Forensic Assessment

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The [Kakhovka dam](#) was a massive two-mile-long structure that dammed the Dnieper River which bisects Ukraine. It was built by the Soviet Union in 1956 and raised the Dnieper by 16 meters (52 feet), creating the Kakhovka Reservoir. The dam was destroyed on 6 June 2023, resulting in massive flooding downstream on both sides of the river which created a social and environmental disaster. The city of Kherson, located near the river's mouth with the Black Sea, was also flooded.

[Both Ukraine and Russia deny blowing up the dam](#) and blame the other. At this stage, all the evidence is circumstantial and conjectural, but a forensic assessment of that evidence overwhelmingly suggests Ukraine destroyed the dam. Despite that, US and Western European politicians and media have uniformly sought to implicate Russia as the perpetrator.

In multiple ways, the dam's destruction echoes the 2022 destruction of the Russian-owned [Nord Stream 2 pipeline](#). That pipeline was a piece of civilian infrastructure; was destroyed by an explosion; its destruction caused a massive environmental disaster; [Ukraine denies any role](#); many [European governments claimed Russia had blown up its own pipeline](#); and Western media either explicitly claimed Russia had done it ([Time](#)) or tendentiously sought to implicate Russia ([New York Times](#), [Guardian](#)).

The evidence: a forensic assessment

The evidence regarding the dam's destruction is circumstantial, conjectural, and multi-dimensional. The best starting point is motive.

(1) *The main argument against Russia is it blew up the dam to disrupt Ukraine's pre-*

announced counter-offensive and gain military advantage. That argument is easily dismissed.

The dam's destruction flooded both sides of the Dnieper. Ukraine's forces were stationed far in the rear, out of range of Russian artillery. In contrast, Russian forces were dug in on the east bank in anticipation of Ukraine's offensive. [The Guardian recently reported](#): "The explosion – which Kyiv and Western governments say Moscow carried out – washed away Russian frontline positions..... The hydroelectric dam explosion has made crossing the river easier after water levels receded leaving behind a sandy plain." Indeed, Ukraine has now established a small bridgehead on the east bank of the river, near the destroyed Antonivskyi bridge.

Russia was undoubtedly aware that flooding would be militarily counter productive. Thus, [The Moscow Times \(which is highly critical of President Putin\) reported back in November 2022](#) that: "(T)errain levels mean the flooding would likely be worse on the Russian-held left bank of the Dnipro, making a detonation of the explosives on the dam an unlikely move for Moscow. '[Destroying the dam] would mean Russia essentially blowing off its own foot' military analyst Michael Kofman said on the War on the Rocks podcast last month. '(I)t would flood the Russian-controlled part of Kherson [region]... much more than the western part Ukrainians are likely to liberate'."

(2) Another reason why Russia would not destroy the dam (and Ukraine would) is Crimea's water supply. [The Kakhovka reservoir is a major source of water supply to the parched Crimea peninsula via the North Crimea canal.](#) Ukraine cut off that supply in 2014. On capturing the Kakhovka dam in early 2022, Russia immediately restored supply, showing its high priority. Russia destroying the dam would be a self-inflicted wound. Ukraine destroying it would fit with Ukrainian aspirations to disrupt and recapture Crimea.

(3) Prior Ukrainian attacks on the dam show Ukraine's willingness to destroy it. [In November 2022, during its Kherson counter-offensive, Ukraine shelled and damaged the dam](#) in an unsuccessful attempt to cut-off Russia's retreat across road and rail lines on top of the dam. Moreover, President Zelinsky publicly warned that Russia had mined the dam's generating room, so Ukraine was aware of that. In keeping with its practices, Ukraine denied those attacks — as if Russia were shelling its own troops, cutting-off its line of retreat, and risking flooding its positions in Kherson which were then on both sides of the river.

Even more damning, [The Washington Post \(December 29, 2022\) reports](#) Ukraine's General Andriy Kovalchuk, commander of the southern front, acknowledged using high precision US-supplied HIMARS missiles to attack the dam in November 2022: "Kovalchuk considered flooding the river. The Ukrainians, he said, even conducted a test strike with a HIMARS launcher on one of the floodgates at the Nova Kakhovka dam, making three holes in the metal to see if the Dnieper's water could be raised enough to stymie Russian crossings but not flood nearby villages. The test was a success, Kovalchuk said...."

(4) The silence of US and UK military intelligence suggests Ukraine did it. The US and UK are deeply involved in the war and committed to discrediting and indicting Russia. Yet, neither country's intelligence services have released official pronouncements that Russia blew up the dam. The reason is if they made such pronouncements, they would have to provide evidence which they either do not have or (more likely) shows Ukraine did it. Silence can be revealing, as in the Sherlock Holmes story in which the decisive clue is the dog that did not

bark.

(5) *The timing of the destruction makes no sense from a Russian standpoint.* Russia has held the dam since early 2022. It did not destroy it when Russian forces were retreating from Kharkiv in September 2022, and nor did it destroy the dam when Russian forces withdrew from western Kherson in November 2022. Now, the tide of war has turned in Russia's favor as evidenced by the capture of Bakhmut and the failing Ukrainian counter-offensive; Ukraine's calls for both additional and more advanced weaponry; and [calls by former NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen to put Polish troops in Ukraine](#). Those circumstances speak to why Ukraine had a military incentive to blow the dam now, and not Russia.

(6) *Lastly, Kherson is a heavily ethnically Russian region which would discourage Russia from flooding it and encourage Ukraine to do so.* Throughout the conflict, demographic considerations have been almost entirely neglected by Western media. The war has been fought in the Donbas and Kherson regions which are almost exclusively ethnically Russian. Concern for the safety of ethnic Russians is a high priority for Moscow, which explains why Russia has evacuated locales in advance of conflict. In contrast, Ukraine is controlled by Azov/Bandera forces which are committed to extinguishing the ethnic Russian presence. That was evident in the [battle for Mariupol in which occupying Azov forces used the civilian population as a human shield](#). It is also evident in [Ukraine's on-going purge of Russian culture, prohibition of the Russian language, and banning of political rights for ethnic Russians](#). Given those attitudes, the destruction of ethnically Russian centers suits Ukraine and helps explain its psychological willingness to commit a crime of such proportions.

How was the dam destroyed?

The above evidence points to Ukraine's culpability. However, there remains the question of how the dam was destroyed. Two possibilities suggest themselves.

The first possibility is Ukraine again targeted the Kakhovka dam gates with HIMARS missiles, as it had done in November 2022. This time the dam gave way owing to accumulated structural weakness from lack of maintenance and abnormal operating procedures. That explanation would account for both the explosion signatures that were seismographically detected and the infra-red heat signatures that were detected by US spy satellites. It is also consistent with the structural collapse argument made by the [Conflict Intelligence Team \(CIT\)](#), which is an anti-Putin organization that monitors Russia's global military activity.

The second possibility is Ukraine fired HIMARS missiles at a detonator mechanism that was atop the dam. The dam was mined for military purposes, as would-be all bridges and crossings. Ukraine knew that and [photos have surfaced showing a car packed with explosives and wired into the structure of the dam](#). That explanation would be consistent with an explosion from within the dam. It would also be consistent with the detected seismic and infra-red signatures, and the CIT explanation would also be relevant as the dam was vulnerable owing to inappropriate wear-and-tear.

Consequences

There are important consequences to Ukraine's probable destruction of the Kakhovka dam and the West's complicitous concealment thereof.

First, [President Zelensky](#) and [Western leaders](#) have accused Russia of ecocide and a war crime. If it is now shown that Ukraine is responsible, that makes Ukraine guilty of those crimes. If HIMARS missiles were used in the attack, that would make the US an accessory, at least in spirit. If British Storm Shadow missiles were used, the UK would be an accessory. The extent of US or British personnel involvement is unknown.

Second, the West's concealment of Ukraine's probable attack renders it complicit and carries dangerous consequences. Letting Ukraine get away with it promises to further embolden Ukrainian recklessness. There have long been fears Ukraine would attack the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant and claim Russia had done so. The Kakhovka dam attack can be viewed as a trial run, and [President Zelensky has already begun stepping up the Zaporizhzhia nuclear rhetoric](#).

An attack on Zaporizhzhia would be a catastrophe for all Eastern Europe, Central Europe, and even Western Europe. Beyond that is the risk Russia interprets such an attack as akin to a dirty bomb and responds in kind. Complicity has its consequences.

Third, the West's concealment of the probable Ukrainian Kakhovka dam attack resonates with other coverage regarding the war, and it threatens Western democracy. Mendacity about foreign affairs does not stay outside. Instead, it bleeds inward and affects the domestic body politic.

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