Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 10.10.2022 www.osw.waw.pl

Massive rocket attacks on Ukraine. 228th day of the war

Andrzej Wilk, Piotr Żochowski

In the early morning of 10 October, the Russian army launched a massive attack on critical infrastructure facilities (mainly energy) across Ukrainian territory, using various types of missiles and so-called long-range kamikaze drones. The targets were: Kyiv (facilities in four districts were attacked), Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Dnipro, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kropyvnytskyi, Kremenchuk, Kryvyi Rih, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Poltava, Ternopil, Vinnytsia and Zaporizhzhia, as well as smaller towns in Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Vinnytsia, Zaporizhzhia and Zhytomyr oblasts. According to Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, by 11 am Kyiv time, 11 major facilities in eight oblasts and the city of Kyiv had been damaged. According to local reports, some districts of Lviv and Ternopil were without electricity. In Kharkiv, there is no electricity in the entire city, and in some parts of Lviv, there is also no running water. The capital's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, announced temporary power cuts in Kyiv and Kyiv Oblast.

The Ukrainian Air Force Command reported that by 11.40 am, the Russians had launched 80 missiles, 45 of which were to be shot down. Of twelve Shahed-136 drones, Ukrainian forces were to down nine. Russian forces used land-based, sea-based and air-launched cruise missiles. Among others, 11 Tu-95 and Tu-160 strategic bombers took part in the attacks.

On the morning of 8 October, there was a fire and collapse of two spans of one of the strands of the Crimean Bridge over the Kerch Strait. Presumably, it was caused by a truck explosion, which also ignited fuel tanks being transported simultaneously on the adjacent railway bridge. Car traffic resumed after a few hours (excluding private lorries and buses diverted to the ferry crossing), while rail traffic was restored the same day in the evening. The ships passing between the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea were also suspended for several hours. Initially, the Security Service of Ukraine suggested it was the author and executor of the attack, but in an official communiqué the spokesperson gave an evasive response. Advisor to the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Mykhailo Podolyak placed responsibility on the Russian side and presented the attack as a manifestation of internal rivalry between the civilian and military special services of the Russian Federation.

Since 5 October, Zaporizhzhia has been the main target of Russian shelling and bombardment. The city is attacked several times a day, and at least 60 civilians have been killed up to and including 9 October. Enemy artillery and aviation also continued to strike Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Nikopol and Sloviansk, smaller towns along the line of contact and in the immediate hinterland of Ukrainian troops and the border areas of Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts. The defenders' shelling and bombardment mainly covered Russian positions and hinterland in Kherson and Luhansk oblasts.

Ukrainian forces advanced to the east, seizing more villages on the border of Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts. Also in the Kherson Oblast, the restoration by defenders of control over localities in its north-western part, from which the invading troops had withdrawn, continued. Russian units intensified their push on Bakhmut, allowing them to advance to its southern and northern outskirts. Further attempts at a hostile assault in the Horlivka, Avdiivka area, west of Donetsk, were to fail.

On 10 October, at a meeting of the Russian Security Council, Vladimir Putin again accused the authorities in Kyiv of carrying out terrorist activities. As examples, he cited, in addition to the damage to the Crimean Bridge, three attacks on the infrastructure of the Kursk nuclear power plant and the attempted damage to the TurkStream pipeline. He stressed that today's shelling of Ukraine was a response to acts of terror and assured that attacks would continue in the event of further Ukrainian activity.

On 8 October, 55-year-old Sergey Surovikin became the first officially appointed commander of Russian forces operating in Ukraine. He is an experienced military officer, one of the commanders of Russian forces in Syria and, since 2017, the Air and Space Forces commander. In June 2022, the Russian defence ministry announced that he had been temporarily seconded to command Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast. Surovikin is known for his brutality in the conduct of combat operations and his disregard for civilian casualties.

On 10 October, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, at a meeting with the military and security apparatus, stated that he had reached an agreement with Russia on the deployment of a regional grouping of troops of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus in the country because of the aggravation of the situation on the western borders of the Union State. Its roll-out is expected to occur over the past two days, and Russian units will be deployed on Belarusian territory.

Defence Minister Viktar Khrenin said on 6 October that the Belarusian army was ready to respond to possible provocations on the state border. He stressed that the regional military grouping of the Belarusian and Russian armed forces is ready to carry out tasks related to the defence of the Union State. He added that "measures are envisaged to curb military provocations on the borderland". According to Khrenin, a real threat of provoking an internal conflict in Belarus due to hostile actions conducted by Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine cannot be ruled out.

The Belarusian authorities deny emerging information about the possibility of announcing mobilisation. However, Alyaksandr Valfovich, secretary of the Belarusian Security Council, admitted on 6 October that reservists are being called up for exercises lasting 25 to 30 days as part of a review of mobilisation capabilities. According to an assessment by Ukrainian military intelligence, the Kremlin is putting pressure on Lukashenko in a bid to force him to take an active part in the aggression: six battalion tactical groups of the Belarusian army are concentrated near the border with Ukraine, and include mechanised and airborne units of the Special Operations Forces. Ukrainian intelligence highlights that Russian troops are removing artillery ammunition (13 rail transports) from Belarusian warehouses.

German media reported that details of the establishment of an EU military mission to support Ukraine had been agreed upon between EU countries. Foreign ministers will take a formal decision on the creation of the mission in mid-October. The EU is also expected to increase funding for arms purchases for Ukraine from the European Peace Facility (EPF,

currently €2.6 billion has been disbursed from it). As part of the mission, 15,000 Ukrainian troops will be trained in EU countries in the coming months. There are to be two multinational commands in Poland and Germany. In Poland, there is to be a group of instructors at the operational level. The training will cover protection against weapons of mass destruction and cyber-attacks, medical support, military logistics, arms overhaul, street fighting, artillery and air defence. Training is to take place in Germany in, among other things, demining and tactics. Training is also planned to take place in other EU countries. Small groups of Ukrainian soldiers are currently training in using the IRIS-T and Spada Aspide air defence systems in Germany and Spain, respectively. The Ukrainian army is expected to receive the first launchers later this autumn. In addition, Slovakia has donated two 155 mm Zuzana 2 self-propelled howitzers to Ukraine, Germany has donated two Bergepanzer 2 armoured recovery vehicles (on a Leopard 1 tank chassis), and Spain has donated eight all-terrain vehicles, two ambulances and five tonnes of medical supplies.

On 7 October, the commander of the Ukrainian army's combined forces, Gen Serhiy Nayev, presented information on the increased Russian military involvement in Ukraine. The total size of the grouping is estimated at 162,000 troops, with nearly 120 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) at its core. By comparison, at the start of the aggression, it numbered less than 140,000 military personnel and 90 BTGs. According to Nayev, the Russians are said to be experiencing a shortage of missiles for the Iskander, Tochka, Smerch and Uragan systems (for the latter two to be sourced from Belarus; after 24 February, the Russians were expected to export 250 wagons of more than 10,000 tonnes of ammunition from that country). However, the overall reduction in ammunition consumption is linked to the shortening of the front line. The joint force commander did not rule out a renewed Russian strike on Kyiv but estimated that it would now take the Russians two to three months to prepare for it. He pointed out that Kyiv is now better prepared to defend itself than it was on 24 February.

Commentary

- The attacks conducted since the morning of 10 October on energy infrastructure facilities across Ukrainian territory should be seen as a form of revenge for the damage to the Crimean Bridge and the successes of the Ukrainian military. These are terrorist attacks – it is not military facilities or places where Ukrainian forces are dislocated that are being destroyed, but energy and transport infrastructure targets and civilian facilities. The Kremlin's intention with these tactics is to cause panic among the population and shake confidence in the authorities in Kyiv, assuring them of the possibility of victory over Russia.

- It should not be ruled out that the attacks mark the beginning of another phase of the operation, in which Moscow has decided to take Ukrainian society collectively hostage. The destruction of energy infrastructure has negative consequences primarily for the population (deterioration of access to electricity and water), with little impact on Ukraine's military capabilities. The attempt to paralyse the functioning of the state may be a preparation for an intensification of Russian military action. However, observations of troop movements suggest that, at least in the coming weeks, Russia will not yet be ready for a new offensive.

- The attack on the Crimean Bridge poses another significant image problem for Moscow – it highlights Moscow's inability to maintain a stable connection to the peninsula (the land connection is permanently vulnerable to Ukrainian sabotage attacks, especially around Melitopol). It is also a blunder for Rosgvardiya, who was responsible for securing the anti-diversion crossing. The Ukrainian authorship of the attack and, at the same time, the unpreparedness of the Russian side to protect the bridge in non-military terms (air defence systems, underwater surveillance, and other) is supported by the decision to halt the movement of large private vehicles across the crossing. It demonstrates that the Russians are seriously concerned about the possibility of a repeat attack in which the second leg of the bridge could be destroyed.
- The appointment of Sergey Surovikin as commander of Russian forces in Ukraine signifies that the Kremlin has set its sights on a military man with no qualms about multiplying civilian casualties during a military operation. His experience in leading the air and space force component was also recognised – Surovikin was responsible for strategic aviation operations, including aircraft armed with nuclear weapons, among other things. His appointment is also part of a Russian psychological operation to support the thesis that Russia could use nuclear weapons.
- Russian pressure on Belarus to become actively involved in the aggression in Ukraine and to take hostile actions against NATO states has resulted in Lukashenko being forced to agree to the deployment of Russian troops on the territory of the Belarusian state (most likely up to several thousand troops) under the banner of a joint force grouping. Its main component will be the Belarusian army. The number of the Russian contingent is unknown. It can be assumed that the task of the grouping will be to participate in combat operations in Ukraine and to increase the forces that could potentially be used against NATO's eastern flank.

Map. The Kerch Strait road infrastructure. The site of the attack on the Crimean Bridge

