Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 16.11.2022 www.osw.waw.pl

Ukraine without electricity. 265th day of the war

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On 15 November, Russia launched its most significant missile attack against Ukrainian infrastructure. The published summary of the Ukrainian Air Force Command shows that it used 96 sea- and air-based cruise missiles (Kalibr, Ch-101, Ch-555), i.e. 12 more than on 10 October, as well as an unspecified number of air-to-ground guided missiles (Ch-59) and drones (Shahed-136/131, Orion and Orlan-10). The air defence was to shoot down 75 cruise missiles, two air-to-ground missiles and 12 drones (including 10 Shahed-136/131). Proportionally, the largest number of enemy cruise missiles were shot down in the Kyiv area (18 out of 21) and the smallest in the area of responsibility of the Operational Command 'South' (10 out of 23). The effects of the shelling also reached the village of Przewodów in the Lublin Voivodeship, a few kilometres from the border with Ukraine.

According to the Ukrainian authorities, 30 facilities were damaged in the attacks, including 15 energy infrastructures. The shelling and the emergency shutdowns they forced (to protect the energy system) resulted in power cuts in Kyiv and 17 Ukrainian oblasts. Nearly 10 million citizens were to be left without electricity in the evening. The situation was particularly severe in the Kharkiv (Kharkiv and the oblast were almost completely without electricity), Lviv (700,000 users were still without power in the morning), Ternopil (power was out in 90% of the oblast), Vinnytsia (a water pumping station was cut off in Vinnytsia), Volyn (Lutsk and surrounding areas were still without power in the morning) and Zhytomyr (Zhytomyr was completely without power for a time) oblasts. The attack caused a halt to train traffic and disruptions to mobile communications and the internet. Kyiv renewed calls to citizens to prepare for long power cuts.

The rocket and drone attacks were accompanied by artillery shelling of energy infrastructure in border and frontline areas. The most severe damage was caused by a hit on a transformer station near the border with Belarus, which supplied power to one of the Druzhba oil pipeline pumping stations. As a result of the voltage drop, oil pumping to Slovakia and Hungary was stopped. Facilities in the Sumy Oblast and the Beryslav Raion of the Kherson Oblast were also damaged. Aggressor forces continued to shell and bombard enemy force positions and facilities along the line of contact and areas bordering the Russian Federation. Targets included the Chornobaivka airfield near Kherson, freshly occupied by Ukrainian forces. Ukrainian artillery and aviation, meanwhile, focused on attacking enemy positions and facilities in the main combat areas. Further acts of Ukrainian diversion were to occur in Melitopol.

After weeks of fighting, Russian troops were to push the defenders out of some of their positions in Donetsk Oblast and to occupy three smaller localities near Avdiivka, Horlivka

and Vuhledar. The Ukrainians are to systematically repel further attacks to the northeast and south of Bakhmut, north of Avdiivka, west of Donetsk and in the western part of the oblast, in the Velyka Novosilka area. Another Russian offensive in Luhansk Oblast also failed. On the Svatove and Kreminna directions, Ukrainian forces are also expected to be the attacking side.

On 14 November, the European Union officially launched a training mission for 15,000 Ukrainian troops. As part of it, Germany reiterated its earlier announcement that 5,000 military personnel would be trained on its territory by June 2023. On the other hand, Spain offered to train 400 soldiers every two months (a total of 2,400 over a year; the Spaniards are currently training 112 Ukrainian servicemen).

Vilnius provided Kyiv with a further 12 M113 tracked transporters (a total of 62 vehicles of this type have so far been provided to the Ukrainians from the Lithuanian army's resources) and ammunition. Berlin agreed with Bratislava to set up a technical service centre on the Slovakian territory for German-supplied armaments. Sweden has announced a military support package worth $287 million, including an air defence system (it was not stated which one) and an additional set of missiles. A new Canadian aid package to the Ukrainian army is expected to be worth close to $400 million. The Netherlands has promised an additional €25 million in military support to the invaded state.

On 15 November, commenting on the massive enemy missile attacks, President Volodymyr Zelensky stated, 'Russian terror is not limited to Ukraine's borders, and Russian missiles have hit Poland'. He regarded launching missiles on NATO territory as an escalation and an attack on collective security. On the same day, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba denied Russian reports that Ukrainian anti-aircraft missiles had fallen on Poland and called for the army to be retrofitted with F-15 and F-16 aircraft and air defence systems. A day later, defence ministry chief Oleksii Reznikov pointed out that Russian missiles striking Poland were 'a reality we warned against'. He recalled that Kyiv has repeatedly called for a no-fly zone over Ukraine because of Russia's threat to the EU and NATO countries. In the afternoon, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine Oleksiy Danilov encouraged the investigation of the incident 'jointly with partners' and the transfer of access to the site of the explosion to the Ukrainian side and expressed readiness to hand over evidence of a 'Russian footprint' in the attack.

Also, on 15 November, the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation considered information about the downing of 'alleged' Russian missiles on Polish territory as a deliberate provocation to escalate the situation. It stressed that Russian forces had not carried out any attacks on targets near the Ukrainian-Polish border. The head of the Federation Council's international affairs committee, Grigory Karasin, said, ' Polish hysteria after the missile fall testifies to the growing schizophrenia in the minds of Western politicians, which has taken dangerous forms'.

On 14 November, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, in a telephone conversation with the head of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, assured that the situation on the frontline was stable and under control. He also stressed that enemy activities on the border with Belarus were being closely monitored and that a 'shield' was being erected to protect Ukraine from the north. A day later, Secretary Danilov indicated that the ongoing construction of an engineering barrier on the border with

Belarus was not just due to an assessment of the military situation – another wave of migration from Belarus and Russia was also to be expected. He declared that sealing the border was necessary for the security of the EU and recalled that Poland had already taken similar steps.

Commentary

- The subsequent missile attack on the Ukrainian energy system tested its resilience. It confirmed that makeshift repairs after previous strikes do not ensure a stable power supply. It also demonstrated that Russia's depletion of its missile stockpile, for the time being, is not enough to prevent it from continuing its destructive actions. Moscow has once again demonstrated that it treats massive missile attacks on critical infrastructure as retaliation and uses them to camouflage unfavourable developments on the frontline and/or its inability to push through its way of resolving the conflict with the west. The increase in the effectiveness of Ukrainian air defence following the receipt of the first systems from abroad (IRIS-T, NASAMS) in previous weeks remains an open question. According to Kyiv, they are supposed to shoot down up to 100% of attacking missiles, which should, however, be seen primarily as a suggestion of a significant increase in the number of systems being delivered. It should be considered highly probable that Russia – aware of the negative consequences of the attacks on the Ukrainian energy system and, thus, the functioning of the state – will repeat the strikes despite the risk of running out of stocks of certain types of missiles.
- The explosions on Polish territory, which the authorities in Kyiv considered a direct Russian attack on a NATO and EU state, will be another argument for them to increase pressure on the west in terms of supplying modern weaponry and closing the skies over Ukraine. Highlighting Russia's aggressiveness and pointing out that it has crossed another 'red line' will be used by President Zelensky and Ukrainian diplomacy to seek new solutions to increase US and NATO involvement in the country's defence.