

Russian missile attacks on Odesa. Day 512 of the war

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Both sides have intensified their strikes on the other's rears with missiles and drones in recent days; the Russians have a significant advantage in terms of the means of destruction at their disposal. According to the Ukrainian Air Force Command, on the night of 18–19 July the invaders launched 16 Kalibr cruise missiles, eight Kh-22 cruise missiles, six Oniks cruise missiles and one Kh-59 guided missile against Ukraine, as well as 32 Shahed 136/131 drones. All the missiles and drones were launched from Crimea, Krasnodar *krai* or the Black Sea area, and were mainly aimed at targets in southern Ukraine. Anti-aircraft defences claimed to have shot down 13 Kalibrs and one Kh-59 missile as well as 23 drones. 17 missiles of various types and 9 drones reached their targets.

According to communiqués from the Ukrainian administration, the attacks damaged the grain and oil terminals and other port facilities in Chornomorsk and Odesa (60,000 tonnes of grain were destroyed). According to the Air Force Command, on the following night (19–20 July) the Russians launched seven Oniks cruise missiles, four Kh-22 cruise missiles, three Kalibr cruise missiles, five Iskander-K cruise missiles and 19 Shahed 136/131 drones. The Ukrainian air defence claimed to have shot down two Kalibr missiles, three Iskander-K missiles and 13 drones. Again, the south of the country was the main target of the attacks. The Ukrainian administration reported damage to residential infrastructure in the aforementioned cities (including historic buildings in Odesa) and the deaths of at least three people. The Russians also continued missile strikes on the night of 20–21 July. According to the Ukrainian administration, at least three Kalibr rockets successfully attacked a grain warehouse in the Odesa oblast.

On the morning of 19 July, the Ukrainians carried out a successful strike on ammunition storage facilities located at a military training ground near the town of Staryi Krym on the Crimean peninsula. Pictures and videos published on social media show a massive explosion at the training ground; the large scale of the destruction has also been confirmed by satellite images. The authorities in occupied Crimea announced the evacuation of residents of at least four villages and shut down a section of the Taurida highway. According to Russian commentators, the attack was carried out with long-range missiles, probably Storm Shadow/SCALP-EGs or Ukrainian Grom-2s.

There was no significant change in the warring parties' position during the period from 18 to 21 July. Intense fighting continued on the Zaporizhzhia front (particularly at the Robotyne-Verbove and Pryutne-Staromayorske-Urozhaine sections), at Avdiivka and Bakhmut (there were direct clashes in buildings of the villages of Klishchiivka and Kurdiuvivka south of the town, where the Russians had brought in additional reinforcements), as well as at the

section of the front located between the Ukrainian-Russian border and the River Donets (particularly in the area of Novoselivske and further south along the Zherebets river). Of note is the consistently high level of Ukrainian artillery and drone activity, which has been inflicting significant losses on the enemy's artillery, logistics and command posts. On 18 July, news emerged of the death of another Russian brigade commander (Colonel Denis Ivanov of the 123rd Motorised Rifle Brigade), who was killed in the frontline zone after an attack by a Ukrainian FPV drone.

On 19 July, the Russian defence ministry warned that all vessels heading to Ukrainian ports, regardless of their flag, would be considered potential carriers of military cargo. On 20 July, the Ukrainian defence ministry issued a statement accusing Russia of brutally violating the right to free navigation, and warned in turn that as of 21 July all vessels navigating in the waters of the Black Sea towards ports of the Russian Federation or located in the temporarily occupied territories could also be considered by Ukraine as carrying military cargo "with all the associated risks". The Ukrainian side stressed that the ban on navigation also covers the Russian-controlled areas of the north-eastern Black Sea and the Kerch Strait. On the same day, US National Security Council spokesman Adam Hodge reported that Russian forces had placed naval mines on approaches to Ukrainian ports.

On 19 July Mykhailo Podolak, an adviser to the head of the Ukrainian President's Office, admitted that the progress of the Ukrainian offensive was "slower than we would like". The effectiveness of the combat operations is complicated by the huge scale of the area which has been mined, as well as problems concerning logistical security, especially the supply of weapons. He also stressed that Ukraine needs an additional 200–300 tanks and 60–80 F-16 fighters to break through the Russian defensive positions in the south and east of the country.

Also on 19 July General Serhiy Nayev, the Commander of the Combined Armed Forces of Ukraine, announced that the army was prepared to defend the northern border. His remarks came in reference to reports that Russian mercenaries were being deployed in Belarus. He added that a 40 km anti-tank ditch had been dug in the Chernihiv region, and said more than 30,000 mines had been laid.

On 18 July, the 14th meeting of the contact group of countries supporting Kyiv militarily was held in a remote format. Ukraine's defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov stressed that the talks focused on air defence systems, munitions and armoured vehicles. He also thanked his counterparts from Luxembourg and Estonia for their IT support, as well as the Lithuanian defence minister for launching an initiative to develop demining capabilities. On the same day, it was reported that Ukraine had concluded two contracts with the French company Europlasma to supply forged bodies for 155-mm calibre artillery shells. The first contract provides for the delivery of 60,000 such forgings in 2024, and the second for 360,000 between 2026 and 2028.

On 19 July, the US announced another military aid package for Ukraine. It is worth \$1.3 billion, and will include four NASAMS short-range air defence system batteries with missiles (AIM-120 AMRAAM), artillery munitions of the Russian 152-mm calibre, demining equipment, TOW anti-tank missiles, Phoenix Ghost and Switchblade drones, precision aerial munitions (JDAM), equipment to combat drones and electronic warfare detection equipment, 150 fuel trucks, 115 tactical vehicles to tow and haul equipment, 50 tactical

vehicles to recover equipment, port and harbour security equipment, tactical secure communications systems and support for training, maintenance, and sustainment activities. This package will not be drawn down from the Department of Defence resources, but has been procured from industry, and so it will take some months to deliver. The following day, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby announced that the US was preparing another military assistance package (to be announced in the coming days), and announced that F-16 aircraft would probably arrive in Ukraine by the end of the year.

On 20 July, the German government reported the delivery to Kyiv of the first 10 Leopard 1A5 tanks, a further 20 MG3 machine guns for mounting on combat vehicles, 3369 155-mm shells (including 2064 smoke shells), one heavy bridge system with 12 trailers, four all-terrain vehicles, 10 battlefield radars, 16 Zetros trucks and 100,000 first aid kits. In addition, Germany pledged to supply 80 RQ-35 Heidrun reconnaissance drones. On the same day, the EU Council approved the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), which will allocate half a billion euros to increasing the EU's production of artillery shells for Ukraine.

On 20 July, CNN reported on the theft and embezzlement of Western military aid provided to Kyiv. It cited a special report by the US Department of Defense, which uncovered several cases of theft of small arms, their ammunition and personal equipment during the period from February to September 2022. However, the scale of the practice can be considered as minimal in the light of the overall amount of arms and military equipment transferred, and the incidents were detected by the Ukrainian services.

Commentary

- From 17 to 20 July, the Russians launched massive attacks on the south of Ukraine, combining missile attacks of various types and drone strikes. In terms of the number of weapons used, these were the most serious attacks since 9 March, when the invaders launched almost 100 rockets on a single day. Ukraine's anti-aircraft defence showed relatively low effectiveness: it reported the destruction of only 25 out of 56 rockets. Once again, the inability of the Ukrainians to shoot down Kh-22 and Oniks-type cruise missiles was confirmed. Such strong attacks by the invaders should primarily be seen as a response to the Ukrainian attack on the Crimean bridge on 17 July. Their choice of targets was also not coincidental. Following Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative on Monday, Moscow is striking at the export potential of the Odesa port complex, in order to trigger a crisis in the agricultural sector which coincides with the start of the harvest.

