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Ukrainian drones attack Moscow. Day 523 of the war

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Russian forces have probably succeeded in widening their bridgehead on the left bank of the Zherebets river, and they may have occupied the hills between Nadiya and Novoyehorivka (according to some sources, the latter has now been completely occupied) and levelled out the front line. Kyiv has not denied the reports of the losses of territory, but has indirectly confirmed the Russian advances. The Ukrainian General Staff has reported fighting in the area around Novoyehorivka, while on 31 July deputy defence minister Hanna Maliar reported unsuccessful Russian attempts to push the defenders beyond the Oskil river, which is the next Ukrainian defence perimeter in the area after the Zherebets (the distance between the two is 20–25 km). Ukrainian military circles have highlighted the failure of the Russian attacks several kilometres north of the bridgehead, on the border of Luhansk (Novoselivske) and Kharkiv (Berestove) oblasts. Instead, the invaders may have made slight advances north-east of Kupiansk (in the area of Synkivka).

The Russians have pushed Ukrainian forces out of the village of Staromayorske south of Velyka Novosilka, which they seized the previous week; however, they have been unable to re-establish control over it. The town was completely destroyed, and fighting is still going on there. However, the attacks both sides have launched in other directions – the Ukrainian attacks in the area of the village of Robotyne south of Orikhiv, and in the area of Klishchiivka south-west of Bakhmut; and the Russian attacks south-west of Kreminna and in the area of Marinka – have not brought about any changes. The Ukrainian General Staff has highlighted a drop in the activity of the invaders' troops near Avdiivka and Bakhmut, where the Russians were said not to have attempted an assault in recent days. On 31 July, deputy minister Maliar summarised the progress of Ukrainian operations over the past week: in the south, the defenders have recaptured a further 12.6 km^2 of territory, and 2 km^2 in the area around Bakhmut. This has increased the areas liberated since the start of the counter-offensive to 204.7 km^2 and 37 km^2 respectively. Clashes between the two forces have occurred more than 170 times.

Russian forces continued to launch missile attacks on the Ukrainian forces' immediate hinterland. On 28 July, two Iskander-M missiles hit the city of Dnipro, including the local SBU headquarters. A nearby building was also damaged, and five civilians were injured. On 29 July, Russian rockets targeted Zaporizhzhia, from where it was reported that two people were killed and two wounded, and Sumy, where two people were killed and 20 wounded. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Russians carried out a total of eight missile attacks that day. Before midnight on 30 July, Russian S-300 missiles struck Kharkiv (including warehouses and the airport) and Velykyi Burluk in Kharkiv oblast. On 31 July, the Russians attacked Kryvyi Rih, where a residential building partially collapsed, leaving six people dead

and more than 80 wounded; the Kramatorsk industrial zone (three S-300 missiles hit there), Vesely in Donetsk oblast and Shevchenkove in Kharkiv oblast. In total, the General Staff recorded the use of nine missiles by the invaders. On the same day, Kherson was the target of a massive artillery barrage: four people were killed and 18 injured. On the night of 1 August, Kharkiv was again attacked by kamikaze drones. On 31 July, deputy minister Maliar reported that over the past week the defenders had shot down 37 of the 41 Kh-101 cruise missiles used by the Russians, three out of six Kalibr missiles and 21 out of 43 Shahed drones.

On 30 July and 1 August, there were further kamikaze drone attacks on Moscow. Although the Russians claimed to have neutralised all of them (i.e. three in each attack) by means of air defence and electronic warfare, they nevertheless inflicted a small amount of damage and injured one person. A skyscraper in the Moscow-City business centre was damaged in both attacks. According to the Russian defence ministry, on 1 August three Ukrainian surface kamikaze drones (unmanned motorboats filled with explosives) were destroyed as they attempted to strike Russian ships operating 340 km south-west of Sevastopol.

In the evening of 29 July, the Strategic Communication Board of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported that on the morning of the same day there had been an air strike on the Chonhar bridge connecting Crimea and the Donbas. In contrast, on the morning of 29 July the Crimean occupation administration reported that Storm Shadow cruise missiles had struck the railway link between Crimea and Kherson oblast (the Russians claim they shot downall 12 missiles). It was not until 31 July that material confirming the incident emerged (Ukrainian media had previously published photos of the attack carried out on the Chonhar bridge on 22 June); this showed that the railway line on the embankment by the exit of the bridge had been damaged. Also on 29 July, Ukrainian military intelligence (HUR) reported that the previous evening there had been an explosion of an ammunition depot in the Kozacha Bukhta area of Sevastopol. On 28 July, the Russians reported that a Ukrainian S-200 missile had been shot down over Taganrog in Rostov oblast (damage was caused in the city centre). On 30 July the Russian side reported a kamikaze drone attack on Crimea (according to the Russians, all 25 drones were shot down or neutralised by means of electronic warfare).

On 31 July, in an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, Ukraine's minister for strategic industries Oleksandr Kamyshin announced that since this January Ukraine had increased its munitions production tenfold, but this was still insufficient to meet its needs. Kyiv is still looking for international partners to help increase Ukraine's production capacity. Kamyshin pointed out that Ukraine offers Western arms companies a unique opportunity to test their products under real war conditions; he was discussing Ukraine's artillery munitions needs and the US's efforts to meet them in a *Financial Times* interview on 1 August. Following the launch of the offensive, the consumption of artillery shells by Ukrainian forces has risen to 8000 per day (from a rate of 5000–7000). Washington has initiated steps to increase its own production, including launching new production lines to reach an output of 90,000 shells (mainly 155-mm calibre) per month by 2025. Currently, US industry is expected to supply 24,000 rounds per month, compared to 14,000 in 2022. As part of their search for alternative sources of supply, the Americans have reached agreements with Bulgaria and South Korea to supply ammunition to Ukraine; they are also in talks with Japan.

On 28 July, the German Chancellery announced the transfer to Kyiv of another batch of armaments and military equipment: these will include 10 Bandvagn 206 articulated tracked transporters, six Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns and 15,000 rounds of ammunition for them, “several thousand” 155-mm artillery ammunition, 20 RQ-35 Heidrun and 13 Vector reconnaissance drones. On 31 July, the Ukrainian defence ministry and the Turkish Baykar Makina company signed an agreement to build an unmanned aircraft repair and maintenance centre in Ukraine. According to Slovak media, on 1 August Kyiv is expected to receive the first two Zuzana 2 self-propelled howitzers out of a package of 16; their production is being financed by Denmark, Germany and Norway.

According to Colonel Andriy Chernyak of the HUR, since the beginning of 2022 the forced mobilisation in the occupied territories of the so-called Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics has involved some 55,000–60,000 men. According to him, their level of training is low and the mobilisation itself was often brutal in nature: people were taken straight out of the streets, workplaces and schools. Chernyak’s estimate does not include the professional soldiers of the 1st and 2nd Army Corps, the former ‘people’s militias’ of the two puppet republics, which were formally incorporated into the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation at the end of 2022. According to unofficial data from the end of 2019, the full-time staff of both corps numbered around 35,000 soldiers, excluding officers from other force structures. Since the beginning of 2022, the ranks of the 1st and 2nd AC have grown significantly, not only as a result of forced mobilisation, but also as a result of the (nominally voluntary) recruitment of professional soldiers from among the impoverished and unemployed population of the Donbas, including prisoners.

On 29 and 31 July, two more truck columns of Wagner mercenaries, comprising a total of around 100 vehicles, are believed to have entered Belarusian territory from Russia. This means that the number of Wagner Group mercenaries located in Belarus at a camp near Asipovichy, may have increased by at least another 300–350 people, meaning that their total numbers are now close to 5000. On 1 August, reports based on satellite images appeared in Belarusian social networks claiming that the mercenaries were using military warehouses in the village of Poplavy, which is also in the Asipovichy area. The training of Belarusian military units (including mechanised troops and artillery) by instructors from the Wagner Group has continued in recent days. On 1 August, Alyaksandr Lukashenko stated that the mercenaries were not moving towards the so-called Suwałki Gap, but were being used to train Belarusian army soldiers, including at training grounds near Brest and Grodno.

Commentary

- The repeated attacks on Moscow, which have most likely been masterminded by Ukrainian military intelligence, are highly symbolic. They have not caused any significant damage, but they do provide evidence that the Russians are unable to guarantee full security in their own capital city, not even for the financial elite (this was highlighted by the double strike on a skyscraper in Moscow’s business centre). On the other hand, these attacks may indicate that Ukrainian forces are finding it increasingly difficult to achieve their military objectives on Russian territory. In all likelihood, the air defence and electronic cover of Russia’s most important military facilities is now so tight that attacks on them are no longer viable. The Ukrainians carried out their last strikes on military airfields on the Russian side of the border in December 2022 (according to some

sources, they did attack an airfield near Voronezh in January this year, but this has not been confirmed). Strikes on Russian military infrastructure in Crimea which bring about significant results are also increasingly uncommon.

