

Ukrainian attacks on Crimea. Day 547 of the war

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On 23 August, an explosion occurred at the location of an S-400 air and missile defence system in the area of the village of Olenivka on the Tarkhankut peninsula, the westernmost part of Crimea. A drone video showing the explosion was published by the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (HUR). According to journalist Yuri Butusov, the S-400 system's radar was destroyed as a result of a hit by a Ukrainian Neptune cruise missile. On 24 August, the HUR reported that a Ukrainian *spetsnaz* unit subordinate to the intelligence service had landed near Olenivka at night. It damaged four speedboats, and the enemy's losses were estimated at 30 men. The operation was a demonstration of the Ukrainian forces' ability to operate in the enemy's rear.

On 23 August, Ukrainian military intelligence revealed information about the success of a special operation, which had lasted more than six months, as a result of which a defecting Russian pilot hijacked a Mi-8 AMTSh helicopter carrying a cargo of spare parts for combat aircraft and landed in Kharkiv oblast. In addition to the pilot, there were two crew members on board who were unaware of his intentions; these men died while trying to resist. Prior to the operation, the security services had ensured the safety of the pilot's family, who were taken out of Russia to Ukraine.

Ukrainian drones have once again attacked facilities located deep inside Russia. On the night of 22–23 August, one hit a high-rise building located in the Moscow City business complex. On the night of 24–25 August, Russian air defence was active in Tula and Kaluga oblasts, and air traffic was once again halted at Vnukovo and Domodedovo airports. In addition, the Russian defence ministry reported that 42 Ukrainian drones had attacked Crimea on the same night; all of them were allegedly neutralised by Russian air defence or through radio-electronic means.

Heavy fighting continued along the Zaporizhzhia front from 22–25 August. Ukrainian assault groups are moving towards Novoprokopivka, Verbove and the hills in between. According to Russian 'war correspondents', the situation of the Russian 58th Army troops defending themselves in the area has become difficult. According to unofficial Ukrainian sources, the enemy has engaged its reserves to fight here. It is likely that they have also pulled some troops of the 19th Motorised Rifle Division out of the defence zone into the area of Novoprokopivka. On 23 August (Ukraine's State Flag Day), General Valerii Zaluzhnyi published a video showing the Ukrainian flag flying on a school building located in the southern part of the village of Robotyne, confirming the retention in recent days of this recaptured village.

Heavy clashes are continuing at Bakhmut, where both sides are showing initiative and trying to improve their positions by launching local strikes. Nevertheless, the course of the front line in this area has not changed significantly in recent days. The same applies to the situation near Kupiansk: despite their superiority in drones and artillery, the invaders have failed to push the Ukrainians from their positions near Synkivka towards the Kupiansk-Svatove road.

On the night of 22–23 August, the Russians attacked the south of Ukraine with some 20 Shahed 136/131 drones that took off from occupied Crimea and Krasnodar *krai*. According to the Ukrainian Air Force Command, 11 drones were shot down over Odesa and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. The others allegedly hit granaries and warehouses in the western part of Odesa oblast (the port infrastructure in Izmail and Reni on the Danube were allegedly hit). In addition, at least three Russian drones attacked Sumy oblast on 23 August: one hit a school in Romny, destroying the building and killing four employees, and the other two were neutralised. On the night of 23–24 August, there was a rocket attack on the River Dnieper: Ukrainian air defence reported that one Iskander-K type cruise missile had been shot down, although other missiles hit various targets located within the city (injuring seven people and damaging several industrial and public facilities). On the next night, the invaders attacked the south of Ukraine with two Kh-59 guided missiles and two Kalibr cruise missiles, launched from the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. According to the Ukrainian Air Force Command, all the missiles were shot down, as was one Shahed 136/131 drone.

On 23 August, Finland's prime minister Petteri Orpo visited Kyiv, and announced that his government was preparing an eighteenth military support package, expected to be worth \$94 million. As is usual for Finland, the details of the package will not be disclosed. A day later, the website of the German Chancellery reported that over the past week Berlin had supplied Kyiv with missiles for Patriot air defence systems, 10 unmanned aircraft detection systems, 40 RQ-35 Heidrun reconnaissance drones, 16 Zetos trucks and 510,000 small arms ammunition, among other items. It was also announced that Germany will send Ukraine 90 UAV detection systems, 42 Zetos trucks and 31 million small arms ammunition in the future.

On 24 August Magdalena Andersson, former Swedish prime minister and now leader of the opposition Social Democrats, stated that her party favours the transfer of JAS-39 Gripen fighter jets to Kyiv, after Sweden obtains NATO membership. The incumbent defence minister Pål Jonson stated that the government has been considering the issue of providing Gripens to Ukraine for a long time. On the same day, Norwegian prime minister Jonas Gahr Støre paid a visit to Kyiv, during which he announced that his country had decided to donate Ukraine a number of single-seat F-16AM multi-role fighters – between five and nine, depending on how many of the stockpiled aircraft can be brought back into service. In addition, Oslo will make two two-seater F-16BMs available for training purposes. Norway has also announced that it will send an unspecified number of IRIS-T anti-aircraft missiles and sapper equipment. A Pentagon spokesman announced that Ukrainian pilots will begin training flights in the US in October.

Also on 24 August, Lithuania announced another military support package. This one will be worth €41 million, and includes ammunition for Carl Gustaf recoilless rifles, small arms, maritime surveillance radar sets, 5.56-mm calibre ammunition, generators, unmanned

combat systems and missiles for the NASAMS air defence system.

On 23 August, independent Belarusian media reported the partial dismantling of the field camp near Asipovichy where mercenaries from the Wagner Group had been based. A day later, the Ukrainian border service confirmed that an 'exodus' of Wagnerians from Belarus had been reported, but gave no estimate of its scale. This may mean that some of them have been diverted to Russia, from where they could be transported onwards to Africa. Since the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin, confusion prevailed among the mercenaries about their future fate; on their social networks there were calls for calm. On 24 August, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky stated that deprived of their leader, the mercenaries (whose number he estimated at 20,000) still pose a threat not only to Poland and Ukraine, but also to Belarus and Russia itself. He suggested that the death of their leader was the result of an order from Vladimir Putin, and denied that Ukraine had anything to do with the plane crash.

From 1–6 September, Belarus will host an operational and strategic exercise for the signatory states of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation entitled Combat Brotherhood 2023. A communiqué from the Belarusian defence ministry states that the exercise will be held at training grounds in Brest, Hrodna and Minsk oblasts. It is planned to involve around 2500 soldiers and use more than 500 pieces of military equipment from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. The stated aim of the exercise is to "improve coordination and consistency of command during the preparation and conduct of a joint combat operation".

Commentary

- The Ukrainians have gained some victories in the information war by reporting the attack on the S-400 system site, the landing of a sabotage group near Cape Tarkhankut in Crimea, and the HUR's recruitment of a Russian pilot and the seizure of a Mi-8 helicopter on the days of the State Flag Day and Independence Day (23 and 24 August). These events were widely reported on Russian social media as well. In particular, the destruction of an element of the S-400 system, which is considered to be one of the most modern designs developed by the Russian arms industry over recent years (it has been sold to Turkey and India, among others), is a major blow to Moscow's reputation. The Russian air defence was further compromised by the fact that the moment of destruction was recorded by a Ukrainian surveillance drone.

