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Ukraine attacks the Black Sea Fleet. Day 568 of the war

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On 13 September, Ukrainian forces carried out a combined attack on Russian naval facilities in Sevastopol and the missile corvette *Vasily Bykov* which operates in the Black Sea; the Ukrainians used surface kamikaze drones and Storm Shadow cruise missiles. As a result of the missile strike on the repair yard in Sevastopol, serious damage was done to the ships in dry dock: the landing ship *Minsk* (the attack destroyed the upper part of the superstructure together with the installations on it) and the submarine *Rostov-na-Donu* (the forward part of the hull was damaged). Russia reported the neutralisation of seven out of 10 Storm Shadow missiles and all three drones used in the Ukrainian attack. The following day, Ukrainian surface kamikaze drones attacked the twin corvette *Sergei Kotov*. The invaders reported that all five drones were destroyed, while the Strategic Communications Board of the Ukrainian army reported that two corvettes had been attacked and "there had been some damage" (the available footage does not confirm this). On 14 September, the Ukrainians also carried out a combined attack on an enemy air defence unit in the Yevpatoria area of Crimea, initially using kamikaze drones (the Russians claimed to have shot down all 11 of them) and then striking with two Neptun missiles. According to the first communiqué from the Security Service of Ukraine, the S-300/400 launchers were hit, although later reports in the Ukrainian media claimed that it was only S-400 systems which were referred to. Most probably, at least one of the launchers was destroyed.

On 13 September, Russian kamikaze drones again attacked the ports of Reni and Izmail in the Danube Delta. More portside infrastructure facilities were destroyed and seven people were injured. Several drones also struck targets in the Sumy oblast. According to the Ukrainian Army General Staff's summary, the defenders shot down 35 of the 47 attacking Shahed-136/131 drones. The following day, Russian kamikaze drones struck the Dnipropetrovsk (including the city of Dnipro), Zaporizhzhia and Sumy oblasts; the Ukrainian Air Force Command stated that 17 of the 22 Shaheds used by the invaders had been neutralised. On 15 September the Khmelnitsky and Vinnytsia oblasts were targeted, and the Ukrainian air defence shot down all 17 drones. According to the Ukrainian General Staff the frequency of missile attacks has decreased, from seven on 12 September (during which the city of Zaporizhzhia was targeted in the afternoon and evening, including by an Iskander missile which hit an infrastructure facility) to two per day on subsequent days.

On 15 September, the General Staff of the Ukrainian Army and the 3rd Assault Brigade, operating south-west of Bakhmut, reported that the town of Andriivka had been retaken. Over the previous days the Russians carried out a successful counterattack in which they drove the defenders back from the Bakhmut-Horlivka railway line, thus also pushing them out of Klishchiivka (each side controls the opposing outskirts of this settlement). Fierce

fighting is continuing in the area. Earlier reports that the Ukrainians had retaken Opytne south-west of Avdiivka have not been confirmed. Communiqués from the Ukrainian General Staff further indicate that the Ukrainian forces operating there have been pushed back to the north, and are holding off the invaders near the village of Lastochkyne west of Avdiivka. According to some sources, both sides have gone into action south and south-east of Siversk, but their positions have changed only slightly. There were no significant changes in the other directions of operations; according to reports from the Ukrainian General Staff, the enemy forces south of Orikhiv and Velyka Novosilka launched a series of unsuccessful counterattacks. However, there are reports from Zaporizhzhia oblast that the invaders have expanded their defensive positions.

On 13 September, the UK Ministry of Defence reported that Russia had moved the first sub-units of the newly-formed 25th Combined Arms Army (CAA) into Ukraine earlier than originally planned; according to London, the Russians had not intended to roll out the 25th CAA units into Ukraine until December. The reason for this, so it is assumed, was the over-stretching of the Russian forces along a front where the Ukrainians are attacking in three locations. The 25th CAA is to form a reserve which will give the Russian command greater operational freedom. The British report was confirmed by Ukrainian military intelligence spokesman Andriy Yusov. However, at the same time he noted that the 25th CAA's units are being sent to Luhansk oblast because of the high personnel losses the Russians are suffering there.

On 13 September, the German Chancellery announced the transfer of another batch of armaments, equipment and other equipment to Kyiv as part of their programme of wide-ranging military support. This included 20 Marder 1A3 infantry fighting vehicles with ammunition, two WiSENT 1 armoured recovery vehicles, 20 RQ-35 Heidrun reconnaissance drones, 3000 155-mm artillery shells and 1.5 million rounds of small-arms ammunition. A day earlier, Reuters reported on Denmark's plans to provide Ukraine with almost 5.8 billion kroner (about $830 million) worth of military aid by the end of 2025: 4.3 billion kroner by the end of this year, 1.4 billion kroner in 2024 and 52 million kroner in 2025. This is to include supplies of tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and anti-aircraft guns. On 14 September, the UK Ministry of Defence confirmed the transfer of a batch of Malloy T400 heavy-lift drones to Kyiv. On the same day, the Pentagon announced that language training for future Ukrainian F-16 fighter pilots and ground support personnel would begin in the US by the end of September.

Also on 13 September, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that next year Ukraine plans to increase its budget spending on the arms industry, in particular on the production of drone and armaments. Military spending is expected to be no less than this year, amounting to a minimum of 1.6 trillion hryvnia ($43.3 billion). The following day, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal announced that the government had sent a bill to parliament which will allocate an additional 25.8 billion hryvnias ($700 million) this year and 93.7 billion hryvnias ($2.54 billion) next year to the domestic production of drones and armaments.

The *New York Times*, citing high-ranking US officials, published a story on 13 September about a significant increase in Russian arms production. Western sanctions were thought to have slowed down production (mainly of missiles) during the first six months after the full-scale invasion against Ukraine was launched. However, by the end of 2022 it had started to

pick up again, as the Russians learned how to circumvent the restrictions and import the necessary components via third countries (Armenia and Turkey were mentioned). Russia's arms production now apparently exceeds the pre-war rates. In addition to rockets, tanks were cited as an example; previously Russia was able to produce 100 a year, but now the figure runs at 200. The Russians are also said to be approaching a production level of 2 million artillery munitions a year – twice as many as before the war. At the same time, the newspaper's interlocutors stressed that this is still far less than the consumption of shells, which reached 10 million during 2022. The following day, *Business Insider* posted a similar piece: citing a senior Estonian defence ministry official, it indicated that Russia is currently producing seven times more artillery munitions than the US and Europe combined. The article emphasised that it costs Russia much less to produce such munitions than it does the West, but the equipment supplied is of inferior quality.

On 13 September, Russia announced that part of the Bulgarian economic zone in the Black Sea would be closed to shipping by the end of September this year due to planned military exercises. In response, Bulgarian defence minister Todor Tagarev described the move as a provocation, before adding that there was currently no imminent risk or threat of a Russian attack on commercial vessels in Bulgarian territorial waters. The issuing of the no-navigation warning is a demonstration of Russia's strength and its declared ability to control the situation in the Black Sea at the interface with NATO countries.

A day earlier, President Zelensky signed a decree calling for a review of the legitimacy of all decisions confirming unfitness for military service issued by military medical commissions since 24 February 2022. Oversight of this review has been entrusted to the Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, and direct action is to be carried out by the Ministry of Health and law enforcement agencies. Earlier, it was announced that the names of doctors who issued false documents and draft evaders would be made public.

On 15 September the independent Ukrainian portal Nashi Hroshi reported the results of a journalistic investigation exposing the practice of conscripts in the Lviv oblast who were obtaining permits to travel abroad through humanitarian organisations. More than 2200 men were identified as having left the country on the basis of permits issued by the Lviv Regional State Administration issued through the Shlak electronic system, which was originally designed for the use of truck drivers. According to various estimates, it costs between $3000 and $5000 for each person to obtain a false certificate.

On 14 September, the independent Belarusian news channel Belaruskiy Hayun announced that large-scale military exercises are expected to be conducted in the country at the end of the month. Four mechanised brigades and the 336th Rocket Artillery Brigade, equipped with Smersh and Polonez systems, will take part.

On the same day, the field office of the International Criminal Court began its work in Kyiv. The Prosecutor General of Ukraine Andriy Kostin stated that the office's activities will raise the effectiveness of Ukraine's response to the crimes that the invaders are committing. In doing so, he stated that law enforcement agencies have already registered more than 104,000 cases of Russian war crimes.

Commentary

- The strike on the docks of the Sevastopol repair yard is primarily a propaganda success. Unlike the August attacks on the airport in Pskov and, before that, the Black Sea Fleet base in Novorossiysk, the facilities attacked did not now pose a direct threat to the Ukrainians, and the confirmed level of damage undercuts reports that the repairs will not be cost-effective (although given the practice of the Russian shipbuilding industry, repairs could take several years). The attack was also unrelated to the operations Ukrainian forces are carrying out in the south, which allows us to assume that the main purpose of the operation was to boost Ukrainian morale. The strikes carried out on 13 and 14 September against other facilities in Crimea and the Black Sea once again confirmed that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Ukrainians to achieve success in direct attacks against enemy forces in any operational depth (that is, outside the combat areas and the immediate Russian hinterland). On the other hand, these actions once again proved that the Russians are not prepared to repel strikes against targets which have previously not been attacked, and that the Ukrainian forces are ready to use new tactics, despite the fact that they themselves have operated in a similar manner: that is, they use drones to activate air defence systems, which they then strike with missiles.
- The revelation of corruption in the Lviv oblast is yet another indication that the martial law regime has failed to curb such behaviour. The question of how to combat it effectively is becoming an problem for President Zelensky's image. In a poll by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation published on 11 September, 78% of respondents held him directly responsible for corruption in the government and military administration. It is to be expected that in response to growing public disillusionment the government will intensify its anti-corruption operations – not just those involving the state administration, but also those in which some NGOs have used humanitarian aid to commit fraud.

