

Russia renews its attacks on Ukraine's energy sector. Day 575 of the war

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On 21 September, the Russians launched their largest missile attack in many months; it also represented the first massive strike targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure in six months. According to Ukrenerho, facilities in the central and western regions of the country were destroyed or damaged. The biggest problems with energy supply were caused by the attacks in the Zhytomyr and Rivne oblasts; in the latter, 49,000 consumers in 90 towns were left without electricity. The attacks also led to smaller-scale difficulties in the Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Kyiv oblasts (damage to a transmission line cut off electricity to 5000 consumers in the capital and 1000 in the surrounding area). In total, 398 towns and villages lost access to electricity. In addition, in Kyiv, the attack caused damage in four areas of the city (an industrial infrastructure facility in the district of Darnytskyi was hit), and seven people were injured. A further three were injured in Kyiv oblast; the target of this attack was an industrial zone in Vyshneve in the region of Bucha. In the Slobidskyi district of Kharkiv, a production hall was damaged. In Cherkasy, a powerful explosion was reported: shrapnel was reported to have caused damage to the city centre and 11 people were injured. In Drohobych, on the other hand, two rockets hit an industrial facility and one a warehouse. Explosions were also reported from Khmelnytskyi and Vinnytsia oblasts. According to reports from the Ukrainian General Staff, in this attack the defenders shot down 38 of the 44 Kh-101/Kh-555/Kh-55 cruise missiles used by the invaders (the Kyiv military administration reported that 20 had been destroyed). Kharkiv city was hit by six missiles from S-300 systems, none of which were neutralised.

On the same day, in the evening, at least one Russian Oniks cruise missile hit near Bilhorod on the River Dniester in Odesa oblast, and two Iskander missiles hit Kurakhove in Donetsk oblast. The Russians used a total of 59 cruise and ballistic missiles on 21 September. That day also saw some of the heaviest shelling in recent times of Kherson city and its environs (seven civilians were killed and 12 wounded) and Nikopol.

On 20 September, Russian kamikaze drones hit the facilities of the refinery in Kremenchuk in Poltava oblast; this had largely been destroyed last year, and since then it has mainly been used for storage purposes. According to the Ukrainian Air Force Command, the invaders used 24 Shahed-136/131 drones that day, 17 of which were destroyed. The previous day, Russian missiles struck Kupiansk in Kharkiv oblast (a Grom-E1 hybrid missile) and Petropavlivka in Donetsk oblast (three Iskanders and one Kh-35 missile). The Ukrainian General Staff reported two missile attacks on 20 September, and nine the day before.

Also on 20 September, the Ukrainian air force launched an attack on occupied Crimea using Storm Shadow cruise missiles. According to the Russians, five missiles were shot down over the Tarkhankut peninsula and the Belbek airfield, and three hit the area of Verkhniy Sadove near Sevastopol. The Ukrainian army's Strategic Communications Board reported a successful strike on a Black Sea Fleet (BSF) command post. In turn, Ukrainian kamikaze drones attacked targets in Krasnodar *krai* (one tank at a fuel base in Sochi was set alight), as well as in Belgorod and Orlov oblasts, without success in these cases. On the same day, Ukrainian military intelligence (HUR) stated that on 18 September, two aircraft of the 354th Special Aviation Regiment (an An-148 and an Il-20) and a Mi-28N combat helicopter were damaged as a result of saboteurs' actions at Chkalovsky airfield near Moscow. According to HUR, these aircraft will not be repaired any time soon, but the damage described has not yet been confirmed by satellite imagery.

On the night of 21 September, Ukraine launched a kamikaze drone attack on Crimea. It was initially reported as having targeted the Novofedorivka airfield, but explosions were reported from Yevpatoria, Sakha and Sevastopol. Some Ukrainian media later reported that the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), together with the Navy, struck the airfield at Saki, first with drones and then with Neptune missiles, severely damaging aircraft and other equipment there. This report has not yet been confirmed, and there are no reports of damage elsewhere. The Russian defence ministry reported that 19 drones were shot down or neutralised by radio-electronic means over Crimea, and one each over Belgorod, Kursk and Orlov oblasts.

In the combat areas, the situation has not changed significantly. Ukraine's offensive operations have lost their earlier momentum: the defenders are now expected to concentrate their forces north-west and south-west of Bakhmut, and to repel counter-attacks in these areas. Andriivka will most probably end up in the 'grey zone' once more, as it is not a base for either side – due to its complete destruction. The Russians stormed Ukrainian positions in the western part of Marinka without success, and launched a counterattack in the area of the village of Robotyne, south of Orikhiv. The Ukrainians improved their position slightly between Robotyne and Verbove, while the invaders managed to return to their earlier positions in the area of the village of Novomayorske, south-east of Velyka Novosilka. On 21 September, the Ukrainian National Guard reported enemy activity in the areas of Kupiansk and Lyman: the assault and armoured subunits were being replenished, and sappers were preparing minefield crossings. This indicates that the Russians might resume offensive operations there.

On 19 September, the 15th meeting of the Ramstein-format contact group of countries supporting Ukraine militarily was held. US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, who opened it, recalled that the United States and other partners (nearly 50 countries in total) have collectively set aside more than \$76 billion for military assistance. The Danish defence minister Troels Lund Poulsen announced plans to hand over a further 30 Leopard 1 tanks and 15 upgraded T-72 tanks to Kyiv. The Czech defence ministry explained that these were Czech T-72AE tanks, the handover of which was to be funded by Denmark and the Netherlands (Prague had previously delivered 45 T-72s in a joint project with the US and the Netherlands). Norway's defence minister Bjørn Arild Gram announced his country was sending 50 NM199 tracked 'trucks' (the Norwegian version of the M548, based on the M113 transporter), which had been withdrawn from service. The German defence ministry

announced the dispatch of 200 MRAP armoured vehicles, two A1 Dachs armoured engineering vehicles and armoured recovery vehicles (the number and type of which were not specified), 50 surface drones, 30,000 155-mm artillery shells and 3800 incendiary shells of the same calibre, 105,000 120-mm mortar shells of various types, and 480 AT2 anti-tank mines which can be fired from MARS launchers. British defence minister Grant Shapps has promised additional artillery shells; London has so far planned to provide 300,000 of these (the British have also so far supplied 12,000 anti-tank missiles). His Spanish counterpart Margarita Robles has promised armoured cars, air & coastal defence launchers & missiles, specialised vehicles and pontoons.

The new head of the Ukrainian defence ministry Rustem Umierov met his Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts. Latvia's defence minister Andris Sprūds announced the transfer of additional mortars, air defence systems and 'large calibre' ammunition, while Lithuania's Arvydas Anušauskas announced the transfer of ammunition for Carl Gustaf anti-tank grenade launchers, naval radars and remote detonation systems. Leopard tanks supplied to Kyiv are also to be overhauled in Lithuania. The defence ministers of Ukraine, Estonia and Luxembourg held the inaugural meeting of a new 'IT coalition'; Belgium, Denmark, Lithuania and Latvia have also joined the initiative to support Ukraine's cyber security.

On 21 September, representatives of the Swedish armed forces confirmed the dispatch of 10 Strv 122 tanks (the Swedish version of the Leopard 2A5) to Kyiv. Some of these have already taken part in combat. On the same day, Berlin announced that 17 SatCom satellite terminals, four HX81 trucks with trailers and 12 Zetros trucks had been handed over to the Ukrainian army. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced a new package of US military support, worth \$325m; it includes AIM-9M missiles for air defence systems, additional ammunition for HIMARS launchers (probably including a GMLRS), 105-mm and 155-mm calibre artillery munitions (these latter including a second batch of cluster shells), Javelin & TOW anti-tank guided missiles and AT4 anti-tank grenade launchers, Avenger short-range anti-aircraft systems (with Stinger missiles), 50 anti-drone machine guns, 59 light armoured vehicles and 3 million rounds of small-arms ammunition. According to media reports, as of July this year Albania had supplied Ukraine with 22 US MaxxPro armoured vehicles (Kyiv was to receive 500 in total from various partners) and 82-mm mortar grenades.

On 21 September President Volodymyr Zelenski, who was in the United States, once again appealed for support for embattled Ukraine, including supplies of F-16 aircraft and ATACMS very short-range ballistic missiles. Washington has not ruled out sending the Ukrainian army such missiles in the future, but at present the US has no plans to do so. Instead, President Joe Biden stated that Kyiv would receive its first Abrams tanks next week. In Zelensky's presence, memoranda on cooperation and development of joint projects were signed between the Ministry of Strategic Industries of Ukraine and local associations of arms and military equipment manufacturers: these include the Global Defense & Industry Coalition, the Arizona Defense & Industry Coalition and the Utah Aerospace & Defense Association.

On 19 September, *Der Spiegel* published a report about the problems affecting the Leopard 1 tanks which have been delivered to Ukraine. Kyiv was said to have refused to accept a second batch of 10 tanks due to their poor technical condition and the lack of spare parts and service technicians. It also notified the German defence ministry that the Leopards

brought to Poland (where the Ukrainian side was to have taken them over) were in need of overhaul, sometimes to a great extent. The German experts sent to Poland assessed that the tanks had been severely worn out during the training of the Ukrainian crews, and were indeed in need of repairs. The newspaper also revealed that some of the first batch of 10 tanks which had been delivered to Ukraine in July were also unfit for use.

On 21 September, Air Force Command spokesman Colonel Yuri Ihnat referred to media reports that Ukrainian pilots were allegedly training on French Mirage 2000 fighters, and that these planes might be transferred to Ukraine. He stated that the Ukrainian air force needed modern multi-role combat aircraft that could gain the upper hand in the air, and the French aircraft was not one of these. He described the idea of using Mirage 2000 fighters as irrational, as it would only lead to “exhausting the work of our people”, and said the aircraft itself was obsolete.

On 20 September, the Ukrainian parliament backed an increase in budget spending of 328.5 billion hryvnia (more than \$8.8 billion) in 2023. Of this amount, 303 billion hryvnia (\$8.1 billion) will be allocated to defence. The Armed Forces will receive 195.7 billion hryvnia (more than \$5.3 billion), the National Guard will receive 39.7 billion hryvnia (\$1.07 billion), the State Border Service will receive 20.4 billion hryvnia (more than \$500 million), the police will receive 19 billion hryvnia (more than \$500 million), the SBU will receive 4.2 billion hryvnia (more than \$113 million), and military intelligence will receive 2.5 billion hryvnia (about \$67 million). 13.2 billion hryvnia (more than \$350 million) were allocated for the purchase and modernisation of equipment and armaments, and 4.4 billion hryvnia (\$119 million) for the production of arms and ammunition in Ukraine. A day earlier, the finance ministry summarised the spending in the January–August period. Military salaries consumed 594.5 billion hryvnia (more than \$16.5 billion), and purchases for the armed forces took 316.8 billion hryvnia (about \$8.5 billion).

On 21 September, the Ukrainian parliament passed a special resolution obliging the government to guarantee the possibility for defence industry companies to make a profit under contracts with the defence ministry. The decision is a reaction to the findings of the State Audit Service (DSA), which indicated that defence companies were obliged to pay all their profits (totalling around \$70 million) to the state budget. The PSA’s conduct sparked fierce protests from defence establishment representatives and social activists. They maintain that depriving the companies of their profits would threaten them with financial collapse, and has the hallmarks of an act of sabotage.

On 20 September, HUR spokesman Andriy Yusov announced that the Russian special services had stepped up their intelligence activities to obtain information on the state of Ukraine’s energy infrastructure. He stated that the likelihood of attempts to destroy it was increasing, by means not only of airstrikes but also of sabotage. A day later, Colonel Ihnat warned that as the heating season approaches, the enemy will intensify their attacks on Ukraine’s fuel and energy infrastructure. He stated that the rapid strengthening of air defences was a prerequisite for reducing their effectiveness.

On 21 September Serhiy Nayev, the commander of the Combined Armed Forces of Ukraine, confirmed that large-scale military exercises will take place on 22–26 September at five training grounds in the Brest, Grodno and Minsk oblasts of Belarus. Ukraine has pointed out that although these exercises do not pose an immediate military threat, Ukraine’s forces in

the north of the country have been placed on heightened alert.

Also on 21 September, HUR estimated that around 20,000 people per month were being inducted into the Russian army as part of an ongoing process of 'silent mobilisation'.

Commentary

- The reports from *Der Spiegel* confirm a growing problem with the suitability of the old weapons and military equipment being handed over to Ukraine. As early as 2022 there were indications that Kyiv was receiving unusable ammunition from its partners. However, this marks the first occasion when the Ukrainians' refusal to accept substandard equipment was brought out into the open. The sheer variety of the types of armaments being accepted into service, even if they were relatively modern and fully operational, was already causing problems for the army there. Indeed, during their maximally abbreviated training, the Ukrainians were unable to master their maintenance properly, and only a few countries (including Poland) decided to send them support in the form of service personnel. Another issue was the high failure rate of some of the armaments transferred; the most notorious example was the problems with the German PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzers. In this situation, Ukraine's refusal to accept worn-out and/or inoperative tanks – which would not have been of any help on the battlefield, but only involved the expenditure of already inadequate service resources – should be regarded as a pragmatic decision. The declaration of the Ukrainian Air Force's lack of interest in acquiring French Mirage 2000 fighters must be seen in the same light.

