

Ukrainian attack on the Black Sea Fleet's headquarters. Day 579 of the war

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In the early afternoon of 22 September, the Ukrainians launched another attack on Crimea using Storm Shadow/SCALP cruise missiles (launched from Su-24M bombers). Two missiles hit the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) headquarters building, destroying its upper floor and causing a fire. The other five were shot down by Russian air defences. The next day General Kyrylo Budanov, the head of the Ukrainian military intelligence service (HUR), reported that nine senior Russian military officers had been killed and 16 wounded in the attack. Two generals were said to be among the injured: the commander of the Russian forces' group in Zaporizhzhia oblast, Aleksandr Romanchuk, and the commander of the 200th Mechanised Brigade, Oleg Tsekov. On 25 September, the Special Operations Forces (SOF) reported that 34 Russian officers, including the BSF's commander Admiral Viktor Sokolov, had been killed and "105 occupiers" had been injured, in what was referred to as 'Operation Crab Trap'. In addition, according to the SOF, on 13 September 62 Russian sailors were killed on the landing ship *Minsk*; it had allegedly been due to leave port the following day on a combat mission, which was why the crew had already embarked (at the time of the attack, the *Minsk* was under repair in dry dock). According to the Russian side, one soldier was killed in the BSF's HQ, and Admiral Sokolov attended a meeting of the Russian Defence Ministry College on 26 September.

Ukrainian forces have continued their attacks on Crimea in recent days. On 23 September, two of six missiles (according to some sources, Neptunes) hit the port infrastructure in the north-eastern part of Sevastopol (specifically the Hollandiya and Sukharna bays, where ships due to be scrapped are waiting), although they did not cause much damage. Meanwhile on the 25th, the Ukrainians launched at least two Storm Shadow cruise missiles, also without results; one of them was shot down as it approached the Belbek airfield near Sevastopol. The day before, a Ukrainian missile attack targeted Tokmak in the occupied part of Zaporizhzhia oblast; this is the main Russian logistical hub at the rear of the frontline. Subsequent attacks by Ukrainian kamikaze drones on the border regions of the Russian Federation were also less successful; the Russians have claimed that they shoot down several drones every day. On 26 September, a power substation in the Kursk oblast was damaged, resulting in seven villages being left without electricity.

On 22 September, Russian rockets hit an infrastructure facility in Kremenchuk (once again, presumably, the defunct refinery). One person was killed and the final number of injured (as of 24 September) was 55. The town of Yurkivka in Zaporizhzhia oblast was also attacked. The Ukrainian General Staff announced that the invaders used five rockets and six Shahed-

136/131 kamikaze drones that day, two of which were shot down. On 23 September, two Oniks cruise missiles struck Odesa oblast (the Ukrainian side reported damage in the 'recreation zone') and kamikaze drones struck the city of Dnipro (a critical infrastructure facility was damaged) and its surroundings (two petrol stations were destroyed, among other structures). In total, according to the General Staff, the Russians used five missiles and 15 Shahed-136/131 drones that day, of which the Ukrainian Air Force Command claimed to have shot down 14.

On 24 September, rocket and drone attacks were launched against the port of Odesa (the Marine Station, among others, was destroyed) and its surroundings (two grain elevators and some company warehouses were destroyed, and two people were killed). The Ukrainian energy ministry also reported that transmission lines had been damaged and power supplies to more than 1000 subscribers had been cut. Local sources reported that the Russians used 12 Kalibr cruise missiles (of which the defenders claimed to have shot down 11), two Oniks and 19 Shahed-136/131 drones (all of which were to be destroyed). Russian drones and (probably) one missile also hit Kryvyi Rih (shrapnel started a fire at an industrial plant) and the Dolhyntseve airfield, located on the city's outskirts. In a summary, the General Staff stated that the invaders had used a total of 24 Shahed-136/131 drones that day (all of which were shot down). On 25 September, two Russian missiles struck an infrastructure facility near Mykolaiv, most likely the Kulbakyne airfield; according to some sources, Su-24M bombers carrying Storm Shadow missiles had operated from there in recent days. There was also further indiscriminate shelling of Kherson and other towns on the River Dnieper on the Ukrainian-controlled side; six people were killed and 10 wounded.

On 26 September, Russian kamikaze drones attacked the port infrastructure of Izmail in the Danube Delta, destroying, among other things, a ferry crossing building to Romania, storage facilities and dozens of trucks. Kryvyi Rih was again targeted, one factory there was hit. An infrastructure facility in Cherkasy oblast was also said to have been hit. The Ukrainian Air Force Command reported that 26 of the 38 Shahed-136/131 drones used by the enemy were shot down.

To the north-west of Bakhmut, according to some sources, Russian forces pushed the defenders out of the village of Orikhovo-Vasylivka (south of the M03 highway towards Slovyansk) and moved about 4 km towards the Donetsk-Donbas canal. In all likelihood, fighting for the village is still ongoing, but the Ukrainian General Staff has indirectly confirmed that the enemy has made some progress, reporting that attacks in the area of Minkivka, west of Orikhovo-Vasylivka, have been repulsed. In turn, the Ukrainians are said to be redeploying further groups of troops to islands on the Dnieper, as well as building up their forces on the right bank of the river; this is probably because Russian forces have increased their shelling of the villages there. On 25 September, the Ukrainian military administration of Kherson oblast ordered the compulsory evacuation of families with children from the coastal communities. The situation in the other directions has not changed significantly; the Ukrainian forces in the south (in Zaporizhzhia oblast and the border of Donetsk oblast) are expected to move to trench warfare.

During President Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to Canada on 22 September, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that he would be joining the coalition of countries training Ukrainians in the use and operation of F-16 fighter jets (the Canadian Air Force does not use

these aircraft, so this is probably a different form of participation than training pilots and technical personnel). Canadian media have reported that a new support package is in the pipeline; it is to be worth US\$482.6 million, spread over several years, and it will include more Leopard 2 tanks. On the same day, Czech defence minister Jana Černočová reported on her country's talks with Sweden about training Ukrainian pilots on Gripen fighters in the Czech Republic. She also recalled that the Czechs should have trained 4000 Ukrainian servicemen on Czech territory by the end of the year (2000 went through the course in spring and summer). For his part, Danish defence minister Troels Lund Poulsen confirmed earlier reports in the German weekly *Der Spiegel* regarding the condition of the Leopard 1 tanks sent to Kyiv. 12 of the 20 tanks are said to be in varying degrees of disrepair, and will be serviced next week by Germany. However, a spokesman for the German defence minister stated that there is a shortage of the spare parts and personnel needed to carry out the overhaul.

According to US media, President Joe Biden's administration took the decision to provide Ukraine with very short-range ATACMS ballistic missiles even before President Zelensky's visit to the United States, but decided not to announce it publicly. In the near future, the Americans are to deliver missiles armed with cluster munitions rather than with conventional warheads; initially these will only be provided in small numbers. In turn, the first Abrams tanks have arrived in Ukraine, as President Zelensky confirmed. According to sources from the *New York Times*, the Americans will hand over more of the 31 tanks promised to Kyiv in the coming months. The following day, the *Washington Post* reported that the Ukrainian army had so far received "fewer than half" of the Abrams (most likely a company set of 10 tanks).

On 23 September, the US Department of Defense announced the appointment of Robert Storch as chief inspector of US military, financial and humanitarian assistance directed to Ukraine; he will have an office in Kyiv. In consultation with the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), he is to provide "comprehensive and effective oversight" of the assistance America provides. He plans to send US observers to the war zone to assess how the military support is being used. The creation of the team comes in response to increasing criticism from Republicans who have questioned the need to send Ukraine further assistance.

Also on 23 September, the head of Ukraine's State Special Communications Service, Yuriy Shchyhol, conveyed that hackers working with Russian special services had intensified attempts to break into the IT systems of the Prosecutor General's Office, as well as Ukrainian courts and law enforcement agencies, with the aim of destroying data confirming Russian war crimes. He announced that the number of documented cyber security incidents had increased by 123% in the first half of this year compared to the second half of 2022. He added that there was also evidence that Russian hackers had gained access to private surveillance cameras in Ukraine.

On 24 September, a spokesman for the Ukrainian border service reported that about 1000 Wagner troops remained in Belarus. The others have returned to Russia, and some have been redeployed to African countries.

On the same day, British defence minister Grant Shapps announced in an interview with Sky News that there were plans to train around 30,000 Ukrainian troops. He announced

increased support for Ukraine in the form of ammunition, equipment and other supplies.

Commentary

- The strengthening of Ukrainian forces west of Bakhmut and on the right bank of the Dnieper, while they shift to trench warfare in the direction of their current main offensive in the south, may suggest that Kyiv has at least temporarily suspended plans to break Russia's overland link with Crimea, and is looking for other opportunities to achieve operational success. The intention to intensify operations in the Bakhmut area is supported not only by the increase in forces there, but also by President Zelensky's pledge in Washington to liberate the town (and an unspecified two others) by the end of the year. It seems unlikely that the Ukrainians can prepare and carry out a landing across the Dnieper on a scale that would allow them to cut off Crimea from Kherson oblast; the enemy has prepared a system of fortifications there similar to those in Zaporizhzhia oblast. However, it cannot be ruled out that they will attempt to seize Enerhodar and regain control of the nuclear power plant there.

