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Massive drone attacks on Ukraine. Day 971 of the war

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The situation on the frontline

The Russians are continuing their offensive operations towards Kurakhove. They seized more villages to the north and east of it, widening the starting base for the attack expected by the defenders, and made further advances to the south of the town (attacking from the Vuhledar area). After Russia cut the railway line to Pokrovsk, the road leading from the west became the main supply route to Kurakhove.

The flanking of Selydove is extending, as it has lost freedom of communication with its rear as a result of further Russian attacks to the north and west of it. Depending on sources, the invaders' positions are between 1-3 km from the roads connecting them to Pokrovsk. The Russians were also thought to have re-entered Selydove from the north-east.

Russian forces broke through enemy defences west of the Donets–Donbas canal and advanced to the southern outskirts of Chasiv Yar. They also made slight advances in and to the north of the city itself. **In addition, the Russians have broken the road and rail link along the Oskil River south of Kupiansk**, occupying part of the junction town of Kruhliakivka. The Ukrainians are still believed to be defending access to the river and the crossing area, the capture of which would allow the enemy to launch a flanking attack on Kupiansk.

The reintroduction of elite sub-units from the Ukrainian 47th Mechanised Brigade into the Kursk Oblast stopped the Russian attack near Malaya Loknya and, as a result, saved the forces north of it from encirclement. However, Russian troops are thought to have regained control of further areas west of the Sudzha–Korenevo road and south of Sudzha.

Russian air attacks

Critical infrastructure in the hinterland of Ukrainian forces remains the main target of Russian airstrikes – using drones and guided aerial bombs (Russian: KAB). Destruction or damage to facilities has occurred in Mykolaiv (17 October), Cherkasy and Chernihiv (19 October), Sumy (19, 20, 21 and 22 October), Kharkiv (20 October) and Kherson (22 October) oblasts. The result of repeated attacks is permanent disruption to energy supplies in the frontline regions.

Kryvyi Rih was the target of Russia's ballistic missiles from 19 to 21 October, where, according to some sources, mainly airport infrastructure was attacked. Enemy missiles also

struck Odesa (18–19 October) and Zaporizhzhia (19 and 21 October), where the invaders used, among other things, KABs. As a result of the second Zaporizhzhia attack, civilian facilities were also damaged. Russian missiles also fell on Kharkiv (15 and 20 October) and Sumy (17, 21 and 22 October). On 16 October, Russian missiles damaged an industrial facility in the Ternopil oblast.

Between the evening of 15 October and the morning of 22 October, the Russians used a record 650 Shahed/Geran drones and other unidentified types. As many as 344 drones are thought to have been shot down and 249 locally lost, possibly due to the impact of Ukrainian radio-electronic warfare systems. So far, the aggressor is thought to have used an average of 200–300 Shaheds per week. It is also thought it used 27 missiles, of which Ukraine announced the destruction of four.

Ukrainian operations against Russia

On 22 October, Ukrainian suicide drones attacked three distilleries in the Tula and Tambov oblasts and an industrial plant in the Voronezh oblast. There is no information that they caused more serious damage. Reports from the Ukrainian General Staff that hostile infrastructure at the Lipetsk military airfield and the plant in the town of Dzerzhinsk (Nizhny Novgorod Oblast) were hit have not been confirmed.

The 19 October strike on the microelectronics-producing Kremniy El plant in Bryansk, which had to halt production, **was successful**. Due to its relative proximity, it is one of the more frequently selected targets for Ukrainian drones. It may be inferred that the work stoppage is the result of the cumulative effects of the attacks.

Western support for Ukraine

On 16 October, the Pentagon released details of the 67th military assistance package, worth $425 million. As part of the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), the following will be transferred from US Army depots. missiles for NASAMS air defence systems, RIM-7 Sea Sparrow anti-aircraft missiles along with additional air defence equipment (most likely for use in FrankenSAM hybrid kits based on post-Soviet launchers), Stinger man-portable surface-to-air guided missiles, air-to-ground guided missiles (type not disclosed), HIMARS launcher ammunition, 155-mm and 105-mm calibre artillery shells, Javelin and TOW anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) and AT-4 anti-tank grenade launchers.

On 21 October, US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, who was in Kyiv, announced another package under the PDA, worth $400 million. It included additional missiles for HIMARS launchers, 155-mm (including 10,000 RAAM remote anti-armor mine) and 105-mm artillery ammunition and 120-mm, 81-mm and 60-mm mortar rounds, Javelin and TOW ATGMs and AT-4 grenade launchers, as well as 100 M113 armoured personnel carriers.

On 17 October, Australia confirmed its intention to deliver 49 decommissioned M1A1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine. Their value was estimated at $164 million. Kyiv had been seeking to receive them for several months since Canberra decided to purchase newer machines. The Ukrainians have yet to receive approval from Washington, but this should be considered

a formality. The tanks will arrive in the country no earlier than 2025. They will first go for overhaul and/or refurbishment in the US, where they will be adapted for use in Ukraine (following the example of the Abrams donated by America a year earlier) and where crew training will take place. The vehicles from Australia will make it possible to replenish the losses suffered by Ukraine's only Abrams battalion to date (according to the Oryx website, 16 of the 31 tanks donated by the US were lost, at least nine of them irreparably) and to form a new one.

On 17 October, Germany updated its supply list for Ukraine with previously announced armaments and military equipment. This included IRIS-T SLM and IRIS-T SLS air defence systems, Sea Sparrow missiles, Leopard 1A5 tanks (in cooperation with Denmark, eight), Marder infantry fighting vehicles (20), PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzers (six) and 24,000 155-mm calibre artillery shells.

On the same day, the Netherlands announced the allocation of €271 million for the purchase of artillery munitions in cooperation with the Czech Republic and Denmark. It is expected to be in Ukraine in 2025. The Dutch also announced the acquisition of a further six DITA wheeled chassis gun-howitzers (of Czech manufacture) and revealed that they have previously supplied Kyiv with nine vehicles of this type. According to French broadcaster BFM, the purchase of a further 12 CAESAR howitzers is to be financed by interest on frozen Russian assets – as is **a £2.26 billion** ($3 billion) **British loan to Ukraine for the purchase, development and production of armaments**, as announced by the government in London on 21 October.

On 18 October, a €321.8 million support package for Kyiv was announced by Copenhagen. It includes equipment from the Danish army's depots, funding for the purchase of air defence systems in cooperation with Germany and a contribution to the UK-coordinated International Fund for Ukraine (IFU).

A day earlier, **Ukraine and Greece concluded *an agreement on security cooperation***. Athens is ready to meet Kyiv's most urgent defence needs in the future and to provide additional resources to accelerate the training of Ukrainian pilots and technical personnel in the operation of F-16s. According to the Greek government, the agreement guarantees its participation in the reconstruction of Ukraine, especially Odesa. The text of the agreement, unlike previous ones, has not been published. Ukraine has so far signed 27 similar agreements.

Ukraine's military potential

From the beginning of 2022 to 6 October this year. The General Prosecutor's Office of Ukraine recorded almost 60,000 criminal proceedings for arbitrary departure from a military unit (for 3-30 days) and about 30,000 for desertion. It was emphasised that this procedure is taking on a massive scale, with three times as many cases of arbitrary abandonment of military service and almost four times as many desertions registered between January and September this year as in the same period of 2023. At the same time, it was reported that there were ten times fewer court convictions than crimes registered. The data presented by the prosecution confirms the deterioration of discipline in the armed forces and the inefficiency of the judiciary.

On 16 October, **the Ukrainian defence ministry for the first time certified a private centre for training drone operators**, the *Global Drone Academy* in Kyiv. Its graduates will be sent to military units. The aim is to increase the number of specialists and support the inefficient state training system. The centre has been in operation since 2022 and during this time has adopted more than 3,700 UAV operators serving in the army, military intelligence and SBU.

To streamline the recruitment of drone operators, an application form has been launched as part of the Diia electronic citizen service portal. Individual applications will be sent directly to military units, without having to go through registration procedures at military commissions. A medical certificate confirming fitness for service is required.

The State Statistics Service of Ukraine has reported that the country's drone manufacturing capacity has increased significantly. The value of investments in 2024 amounted to approximately $50 mn (in 2023 – $5 mn), allowing four million drones of various types to be assembled (last year it was 300,000).

On 19 October, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of Ukraine Yevhen Mezhevikin announced that, **in order to improve the quality of training of military personnel, the duration of basic combat training had been extended from one to one and a half months.** He stressed that this was a pilot project, which, by the decision of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Oleksandr Syrskyi, is being implemented in four centres, with about 500 soldiers taking part. Furthermore, the training programme has been updated – it now includes learning the basics of using drones, conducting electronic warfare and reconnaissance, reconnaissance and sabotage activities and improving frontline survival skills.

There are more than 20,000 mobilised individuals in the Armed Forces training centres. It costs about 100,000 hryvnias (about $2,500) to prepare one of them.

On 18 October, due to further mediation by the United Arab Emirates, **a 95-for-95 exchange of prisoners of war took place between Ukraine and Russia**. This was the 58th such exercise. The Russian soldiers were transferred to the territory of Belarus. Since the beginning of the aggression against Ukraine, a total of 3,767 people have returned from Russian captivity.

Russia's military potential

Kyiv has consistently publicised the possible involvement of North Korean soldiers in clashes on the Ukrainian front. In this way, the authorities want to highlight the risk of internationalising the conflict and put pressure on Western partners to increase military aid. On 18 October, based on intelligence data revealed by Seoul, Ukraine's military intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov indicated that some 11,000 North Korean army soldiers would be ready to fight at the front from 1 November. He confirmed that they are being trained at training grounds in eastern Russia using equipment and armaments there. The first detachment of 2,600 troops is to be sent to the Kursk Oblast. A day earlier, President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Moscow intends to commit around 10,000 North Korean troops to the war against Ukraine.


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