

Russia resumes large-scale air strikes on Ukraine. Day 1189 of the war

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The situation on the frontline

Russian forces have continued their offensive along a broad front south of Kostiantynivka. Most Ukrainian defenders have withdrawn from the salient between the Toretsk agglomeration and the Pokrovsk–Kostiantynivka road, retreating towards the latter, although they still hold the village of Zoria. Meanwhile, Russian troops have deepened their breach in Ukrainian defences west of that road. They have also made further advances between Pokrovsk and Velyka Novosilka (they have reportedly reached the border of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast near the village of Horikhove, although Ukrainian officials have denied this), east of Siversk and north of Lyman. However, these developments have not yet resulted in any significant changes to the overall situation.

Russian troops are maintaining operations aimed at expanding the so-called buffer zone in the border areas of Sumy Oblast. For the first time, the Ukrainian side has acknowledged that part of the oblast is now under Russian control; official reports have mentioned four villages captured by Russian forces in recent weeks. Russian troops have also intensified their activity in the border area of Kharkiv Oblast, taking control of further sections of Vovchansk. According to some sources, a **Russian grouping of up to 50,000 soldiers has been redeployed from Kursk Oblast to the border area of Belgorod Oblast, north of Kharkiv.** This confirms earlier Ukrainian reports suggesting that Russia is preparing an offensive, with Kharkiv likely to be one of its targets.

Russian air attacks

Over the weekend of 24–26 May, Russia launched a series of large-scale strikes across Ukrainian territory, using more than one thousand drones and missiles. These attacks targeted industrial facilities, airfields and military logistics, but civilians were also affected. The most extensive and deadly strike occurred on 25 May: a total of 12 civilians were killed and 60 injured across 13 Ukrainian regions. According to Ukrainian sources, Russia deployed 298 drones on that day. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that 84 missiles were used; the Air Force Command had earlier put the number at 69. Fifty-three missiles and 139 drones were reportedly shot down, while 127 drones were locationally lost. Direct hits were recorded in 22 locations, while damage in another 15 was reportedly caused by falling

debris.

The large-scale strikes primarily targeted Kyiv and Odesa along with their surrounding areas. Missiles and/or drones struck these cities on 24, 25 and 26 May. In the capital, damage was reported at the Antonov plant, while in Odesa the port area was hit. Other major cities targeted included Kharkiv (25 and 26 May), Dnipro, Mykolaiv, Pavlohrad, Sumy and Ternopil (all on 25 May). On 25 and 26 May, Russian also struck Khmelnytskyi Oblast, primarily targeting Starokostiantyniv airbase, where four industrial facilities were reportedly damaged. Before and after the large-scale attacks, drones and missiles also struck various locations, including Kharkiv (20, 21 and 22 May), Kropyvnytskyi (22 May), Mykolaiv (22 May) and Odesa (23 May), where some reports claimed that Iskander-M ballistic missiles hit a container ship carrying military supplies. Further attacks were reported in Sumy (21 and 27 May) and Zaporizhzhia (23 May).

According to Ukrainian data, between the evening of 20 May and the morning of 27 May, Russia used a total of 1,342 strike drones and decoys as well as 112 missiles. A total of 722 drones were reportedly shot down, while 445 were locationally lost. Ukrainian forces also claimed to have downed 68 missiles.

The improved effectiveness of Russian attacks is the result of technical upgrades to weapons and changes in tactics, according to Colonel Yuriy Ihnat, spokesperson for Ukraine's Air Force Command. The attack on Kyiv on the night of 24 May demonstrated that Patriot systems are struggling to intercept the new version of the Iskander-M missile: only six out of the nine missiles used by Russia were reportedly shot down. Russian forces are also increasingly deploying decoy strike drones to mislead Ukrainian air defences. The current ratio of armed drones to decoys is estimated at 60 to 40. Additionally, the use of high-altitude strikes has significantly reduced the effectiveness of small arms fire against drones. These developments are forcing Ukraine to use its missile defence systems much more frequently, leading to a faster depletion of its stockpiles of interceptor missiles.

Ukrainian operations against Russia

Ukrainian forces have intensified drone strikes deep inside Russian territory, primarily targeting industrial facilities. According to Russian sources, between the evening of 20 May and the morning of 27 May, Ukraine deployed at least 1,052 drones (Russia claimed to have shot down this many), a figure close to Russian drone activity during the same period. Damage to infrastructure was reported at a semiconductor plant in Bolkhov, Oryol Oblast (21 May) and at the Splav factory in Tula (22 May), which manufactures multiple launch rocket systems. On 23 May, drones or their debris caused fires at the Energia battery and accumulator plant in Yelets, Lipetsk Oblast, and at the Rosneft refinery in Ryazan. The following day, a gas pipeline was damaged in Novomoskovsk, Tula Oblast. As a result of the attack on Tula on 26 May, power supplies were temporarily cut in several districts and nearby towns. In some regions, including Moscow Oblast, Ukrainian strikes led to the temporary suspension of airport operations.

Western support for Ukraine

On 26 May, the last of the 24 F-16 fighter jets promised by the Netherlands was delivered to Ukraine, as confirmed by the Dutch Ministry of Defence. This makes the Netherlands the first country to have fully honoured its commitment to supplying this type of aircraft. Denmark has so far transferred 12 of the 19 jets it pledged, while Norway has provided an unspecified number: it initially stated that it had delivered six such aircraft, though some sources have put the number at 12. Belgium is expected to begin deliveries this year, with its full contribution of 30 F-16s scheduled for completion by 2028. In addition, the United States has delivered an unspecified number of disassembled aircraft to be used as mock-ups or sources of spare parts. To date, Ukraine has confirmed the loss of three F-16s. Their primary role is to intercept Russian cruise missiles and drones, though some reports indicate they have also been used to support ground forces.

Ukrainian forces have most likely exhausted their missile stocks for the SAMP/T and Crotale air defence systems and donor countries are struggling to replenish them, *Le Monde* reported on 26 May. The most serious issues concern the two SAMP/T batteries provided by France and Italy, which, alongside the US-made Patriots, are the only medium-range systems in Ukraine's arsenal capable of intercepting ballistic missiles. According to the French newspaper, the two ageing Crotale short-range batteries delivered by France back in 2022 have not received any new missiles "for the past 18 months".

As part of its 19th support package, Sweden will allocate more than €440 million to broadly strengthen Ukraine's defence capabilities. The government approved the decision on 22 May. More than half of the funds will go towards purchasing air defence systems, drones and ammunition under the Czech and Estonian initiatives, as well as providing financial support for Ukraine's defence industry in line with the so-called Danish model.

Ukraine's military potential

On 20 May, **Defence Minister Rustem Umerov stated that the country's defence production had soared from \$1 billion in 2022 to \$35 billion in 2025**, attributing this rapid growth to cooperation with international partners and the utilisation of domestic industrial potential. He called for domestic arms procurement to be treated as a priority, particularly with regard to drones, 155 mm ammunition, artillery, air defence systems and electronic warfare equipment. For example, Ukraine did not produce any 155 mm shells in 2022, but now manufactures more than one million annually in cooperation with partners.

Also on 20 May, **Bihus Info, a website specialising in financial misconduct, published the findings of an investigation indicating that companies involved in the construction of fortifications in Kherson and Zhytomyr oblasts may have inflated prices and earned unjustified profits amounting to tens of millions of hryvnias.** Investigators have raised concerns about possible links between these companies and President Volodymyr Zelensky's inner circle. Since the beginning of 2024, the government has allocated around 40 billion hryvnias (nearly \$1 billion) for the construction of fortifications. Most of these funds have been channelled through oblast administrations, which signed contracts with local contractors.

On 21 May, Ukraine's State Border Guard Service reported that since the introduction of martial law, 49,000 men had been detained while attempting to leave the country illegally,

primarily to avoid mobilisation. Of these, 45,000 were apprehended either in border zones or at checkpoints deeper within the country. A further 4,000 were caught while trying to cross the border using forged documents. The statement noted that the government does not know how many individuals have successfully escaped; only the border services of neighbouring countries are in a position to estimate that figure.

The recruitment of prisoners into the Ukrainian Armed Forces is ongoing. On 22 May, Deputy Justice Minister Yevhen Pikalov announced that by May 2025, 8,500 inmates had been mobilised, with a further 1,500 applications under review. More than 50% of those enlisted had been convicted of property-related crimes such as theft, robbery and burglary, while around 10% had served sentences for drug-related offences.

Between 23 and 25 May, the two sides carried out the largest prisoner exchange since the beginning of the war in a '1,000 for 1,000' format. The swap was the result of the agreements reached during Ukrainian-Russian negotiations held in mid-May in Istanbul. The process was conducted in three stages and involved both military personnel and civilians. Since the start of the war, a total of 5,757 Ukrainian prisoners have been released. Commenting on the exchange, Denys Prokopenko (callsign Redis), commander of the 12th Brigade Azov of the National Guard, stated that not a single soldier from his unit was among those freed. He described this as “a disgrace for the state”, attributing it to what he called a lack of political will on the part of the Ukrainian government to negotiate their return, and not just Russia’s unwillingness to release them.

Russia's military potential

On 20 May, **the head of Russia’s Investigative Committee, Alexander Bastrykin, announced that 20,000 migrants who had obtained Russian passports had been sent to fight in Ukraine as part of compulsory military service.** Earlier, an operation conducted by the Interior Ministry and the National Guard had identified 80,000 new Russian citizens who had failed to register for military service. Some of them, mainly men from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, were mobilised and sent directly to the battlefield. In July 2024, the State Duma passed a law requiring all foreign nationals receiving Russian citizenship to register for military service at the same time. Failure to do so may result in the loss of citizenship.

On 25 May, **the head of Ukraine’s Foreign Intelligence Service, Oleh Ivashchenko, confirmed that China had been supplying machine tools, chemicals and gunpowder to more than 20 Russian military enterprises.** According to him, at least five transport flights with equipment, spare parts and technical documentation from the People’s Republic of China were recorded in 2024–25. In addition, six large shipments of specialised chemicals were confirmed. Ivashchenko’s statement prompted a response from China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs: on 27 May, it firmly denied supplying lethal weapons to any party involved in the war in Ukraine and rejected what it called “groundless accusations and political manipulation” concerning Chinese-Russian cooperation.

Russian operations against Ukraine

On 21 May, [the UK's National Cyber Security Centre](#) announced that **Western countries, including Poland, had confirmed reports regarding a Russian operation aimed at disrupting military supplies to Ukraine.** It has been conducted by GRU Unit 26165 since early 2022, with targets including both government and private organisations involved in the transport and logistics of aid to Ukraine as well as companies in the defence sector, IT systems, seaports and airports, air traffic control systems and border crossings. Russian hackers have exploited vulnerabilities in IT infrastructure to gain access to the internal networks of logistics departments and surveillance cameras at Ukraine's borders and near military facilities.

A day later, **Ukrainian police reported a rise in attempts by Russian intelligence services to recruit teenagers through messaging apps and social media platforms.** Using fake accounts, operatives have been approaching minors and offering payment in exchange for carrying out arson attacks on administrative, military and critical infrastructure buildings, gathering information on the location of military facilities and distributing leaflets aimed at discrediting the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

