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Ukraine deals blow to Russian strategic aviation. Day 1196 of the war

Andrzej Wilk, Piotr Żochowski

Ukrainian operations against Russia

On 1 June, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) carried out a special operation on Russian territory, with the largest attack to date and the most serious in terms of its impact on Russia's strategic aviation bases. According to the SBU's communiqué, the air bases hit were Belaya in the Irkutsk Oblast, Dyagilevo in the Ryazan Oblast, and Ivanovo Severny and Olenya in the Murmansk Oblast. Forty-one machines were to be hit, including Tu-95MS and Tu-22M3 medium-range strategic bombers and an A-50 early warning aircraft. A day later, SBU head Vasyl Malyuk expanded the list to include Russia's newest Tu-160 strategic bombers. According to him, 34% of strategic cruise missile carriers were eliminated. The attack was carried out by drones with an artificial intelligence-based guidance system, taking off autonomously from container trucks parked near the air bases. This was the first mass deployment of weapons of this type.

On the basis of footage and satellite imagery, the destruction or damage to 12 bombers – eight Tu-95MS and four Tu-22M3 – can be confirmed, representing nearly 10% of the strike potential of Russia's strategic aviation (in the nomenclature of the Russian Federation: long-range aviation), as well as an An-12 transport aircraft. The most serious damage was caused by the attack on Olenya airfield, where fully operational aircraft involved in the attacks on Ukraine were based. Four Tu-95MS bombers and a transport aircraft were eliminated there. The remaining machines, of varying technical efficiency, were destroyed at Belaya airfield. The strike against the base in Irkutsk Oblast was also the first carried out by the Ukrainians against a target in the Asian part of Russia. According to some sources, one of the A-50 aircraft at Ivanovo Severny airfield was also damaged or destroyed.

The attack on strategic aviation bases represents a severe blow to Russia's prestige, but will not have a significant impact on the use of bombers in attacks on Ukraine. In these, Russia uses between a few and a dozen aircraft (occasionally more than 20) out of the dozens that remain in full operational readiness (they lost four such aircraft at Olenya airfield). The Tu-95MS and Tu-22M3 bombers are no longer in production (some of which have undergone modernisation in recent years, mainly of the avionics). The former model is gradually being replaced by the newer Tu-160M2, production of which has been resumed due to the lack of progress in the development of the new generation strategic bomber (PAK DA). In turn, the functions of the second have been partly taken over by the new Su-34

frontline bombers and the hypersonic missile-capable MiG-31BM interceptor fighters.

The attacks revealed a number of weaknesses in Russia's internal security system. They showed that the protection and anti-drone defence of bases located in the deep hinterland is inadequate, and confirmed that the Russians do not care about securing facilities of this type that remain, from their perspective, beyond the reach of their adversary. The ease with which the Ukrainian services infiltrated the area of military facilities shows that the FSB and other security actors were unable to detect the preparations for this complex special operation. **This is due to an underestimation of Ukraine's offensive capabilities and an underestimation of the potential threats deep inside Russia – the strike on Belaya airfield near the Mongolian border demonstrated that the Russians must expect an attack on any point of their territory.** The Russian Defence Ministry has downplayed the significance and effects of the attacks – it has only conceded that there was the use of drones sent by the 'Kyiv regime' and damage to several aircraft.

On the morning of 3 June, the SBU carried out a diversionary operation against the Crimean Bridge. According to Malyuk, after several months of preparation, an explosive device placed underwater, near the support of the structure, was detonated. The damage caused a temporary restriction of traffic.

A Ukrainian drone attack on 28 May resulted in a fire at a technology park in Zelenograd in Moscow Oblast. One of the buildings there was damaged. On the same day, the Angstrem plant in that city and the Kronstadt and Raduga plants in the Dubna, outside Moscow, were also targeted. However, there is no information that hits occurred there.

Two explosions took place in Vladivostok on 30 May **in the area where the 47th independent landing and assault battalion of** the Russian Federation's 155th Marine Infantry Brigade **was stationed**. According to Ukrainian media reports, the Main Directorate of Intelligence (HUR) was responsible for the operation. Despite the apparent effects of the attack, local authorities claimed only that "two gas cylinders exploded" and reported that no one was injured. An anti-terrorist operation regime was declared in the area and the area around the unit was completely blocked off. The brigade in question is one of the units particularly active in military operations against Ukraine. Its participation has been documented, among others, in the battles for Mariupol, Vuhledar and in Kursk Oblast.

On the night of 31 May to 1 June, there were two acts of sabotage on Russian railway lines. In Bryansk Oblast, a road overpass collapsed due to an explosive charge on a passing passenger train. Seven people were killed and 69 injured. A similar incident occurred on a railway route in Kursk Oblast, where an explosion destroyed a bridge as a goods train passed over it. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation considered these incidents to be terrorist acts. Russian media suggest they were the work of Ukrainian saboteurs. Kyiv has not claimed responsibility for the attacks.

The situation on the frontline

The Russians cleared the salient south of Kostiantynivka and made further advances towards it on the wings from Pokrovsk and Toretsk. Shifts in Russia's favour occurred west of the Pokrovsk–Kostiantynivka road, between Pokrovsk and Velyka Novosilka towards the

border with Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and north of Lyman towards the border with the Donetsk and Kharkiv oblasts. According to the Ukrainian monitoring group DeepState, in May the pace of hostile incursions doubled compared to April and reached a level comparable to that observed in autumn 2024. In the last month, Russia is thought to have occupied 449 km ^{2} of Ukrainian territory.

As a result of increasingly intense Russian attacks in the border area of Sumy Oblast, Ukraine had to withdraw from more settlements. Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces General Oleksandr Syrskyi considered the Sumy direction to be the most threatening – next to the main striking directions in Donbas. Ukraine's Kharkiv Operational and Tactical Command denied earlier reports that the enemy grouping had shifted from Kursk to Belgorod Oblast with the intention of attacking the capital of Kharkiv Oblast. However, it admitted that Russian pressure north of the city had intensified.

On 1 June, the commander of the Ukrainian Land Forces and also of the operational-strategic group 'Khortytsia', General Mykhailo Drapatyi, resigned. He cited a failure to ensure the safety of trainees at the 239th training ground in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast as the reason for his decision. According to official Ukrainian data, 12 soldiers were killed and 60 wounded as a result of that day's rocket attack. The resignation of Drapatyi, one of Ukraine's top operational commanders, has not yet been accepted (or made public).

Russian air attacks

Russia intensified their strikes on the frontline regions, where one of their main targets was industrial facilities and enterprises. Drones or missiles hit Kharkiv (28, 29, 30 and 31 May and 2 June), Kramatorsk (29 May), Sloviansk (30 May), Zaporizhzhia (30 May and 1 June), where critical infrastructure was attacked (there were periodic power cuts), Chernihiv (27 May) and Kirovohrad oblasts (28 May), and – on 3 June – Chernihiv, Mykolaiv (a Kinzhal hypersonic missile is thought to have been used), Odesa, Sumy and Poltava oblasts. Three people were killed and 16 wounded (including four children) in the centre of Sumy. On 1 June, the Russians struck Kyiv and Kyiv Oblast and Zhytomyr Oblast with rockets and drones, in terms of which this was one of the most severe attacks since the beginning of the war.

On 1 June, Russia is thought to have used 472 strike drones, another recently set record since the attacks began (there were 355 on 26 May). According to Ukrainian sources, 90 drones may have hit targets – also the best daily result. According to HUR, the enemy is using 'shaheds' with much more powerful warheads than before (the weight of the explosive charge has been increased from 50 kg to 90 kg), which intensifies the destructive effect. According to Ukrainian data, from the evening of 27 May to the morning of 3 June, the invaders used a total of 1,041 strike drones and their imitators and 33 missiles. 397 drones were to be downed and 367 locationally lost, while the defenders also declared that six missiles had been shot down.

Western support for Ukraine

During President Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to Berlin **on 28 May, Germany announced a new military aid package for Ukraine. It amounts to €5 billion**, the main part of which is a contract with the German company Diehl Defence for the delivery of further IRIS-T air defence systems and missiles for them, worth €2.2 billion (the number of kits and missiles in the contract and the delivery date were not disclosed). Part of the funds are to be used to invest in the production of so-called long-range armaments in Ukraine (a letter of intent was signed in this regard). A day later, the daily newspaper *Die Welt* reported that the funding in question was for the development of Ukrainian Bars (missile-powered) and Liutyi strike drones and VB140 Flamingo interceptors, for which €400 million is to be spent.

Russia's military potential

In 2024 the Russian Federation received around 9 million artillery and rocket ammunition and at least 100 ballistic missiles from North Korea, according to *a report by the Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Group (MSMT)*, formed by 11 UN member states, published on 29 May. According to the document, the munitions – including 122 mm and 152 mm calibres – were transported by rail from ports in the Russian Far East to military depots in the south-west of the country, from where they were sent to the Ukrainian front. It was also reported that Pyongyang supplied Moscow with armaments: ballistic missiles Hwasong-11A and 11B, 170 mm self-propelled artillery guns, 240 mm rocket launchers and more than 200 pieces of military equipment, including specialised vehicles.

Ukraine's military potential

On 28 May, **President Zelensky called on Ukraine's Western partners to provide around $30 billion for domestic arms production by the end of the year.** He stressed that these funds could come from frozen Russian assets (around $300 billion). A few days later, on 3 June, he stated that Ukraine was able to cover up to 40% of its armament needs through internal production, provided that stable financing was secured. However, he stressed that the army urgently needs air defence systems, in particular Patriot kits and missiles for them.

By the end of May, the Defence Procurement Agency (AOZ) had concluded contracts covering 83% of the arms and ammunition supply requirements for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Since the beginning of the year, the AOZ has delivered 593,000 drones to the frontline and introduced an updated procurement model for unmanned aerial vehicles. The new approach aims to develop the domestic market, create clear rules of play for manufacturers and ensure predictable and fast deliveries to the Armed Forces. It will also include the conclusion of direct contracts with mandatory supplier verification (including no ties to Russia, Iran, Belarus and adequate manufacturing and financial capabilities), the conclusion of framework contracts on the basis of competitive tenders for different tactical-technical categories (e.g. FPV), and the introduction of the DOT-Chain Defence system – a digital drone marketplace in which military units will self-select equipment, which is expected to significantly reduce delivery times (possibly even to a few weeks). In 2025, the state budget has allocated more than 128 billion hryvnia (more than $3 billion) for the purchase of drones.

On 28 May, **the Ministry of Finance reported that, by the end of April, Ukraine had already spent 765 billion hryvnias (about $18.5 billion) on the security and defence sector, accounting for 64.5% of budget expenditure.** Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal had earlier admitted that the military spending plan had already been exceeded at the beginning of the year, in part due to a drop in the volume of foreign military aid. As a result, the government may have to find additional funds for the Defence Forces in the second half of the year. According to forecasts, the budget deficit for the army's needs could reach 500 billion hryvnias (about $12 billion) this year.

