

Mutual attacks on fuel infrastructure. Day 1273 of the war

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The situation on the frontline

Ukrainian forces have partially stabilised the situation around the breakthrough north of Pokrovsk. They regained control of the village of Zoloty Kolodiaz and occupied the neighbouring villages of Vesele and Hruzhke, thus blocking the further movement of Russian subunits to the north. They have also strengthened their defences in the key town of Dobropillia, pushing Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups out of its outskirts. Most of the breakout area to the east of Dobropillia is not currently controlled by either side, but Russian forces have greater freedom of movement there.

In order to prevent Russia from entering the operational space, which threatened to outflank Kramatorsk from the west, the Ukrainian command brought in significant forces, largely from other sections of the front (according to DeepState, subunits from ten brigades and regiments were involved). Russia was not ready to capitalise on its success and used relatively small forces to break through the enemy's defence line. It was further hampered in its advance by the logistical situation – the local transport hub of Shakhove, which is currently the main target of enemy attacks in the area, remains under Ukrainian control.

Russian diversionary and reconnaissance activities reached the eastern borders of Kostiantynivka. According to some sources, Russia has occupied the neighbouring village of Predtechyne, south-west of Chasiv Yar. It has also made further advances south of Kostiantynivka, south and west of Pokrovsk, and on the border between the Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts. Under Ukrainian supervision, only one border town on the side of Donetsk Oblast remains undisputed – Komyshevukha. There were also minor changes in the terrain in Russia's favour to the north-east of Siversk, north of Lyman and north-west of Kupiansk.

North of Sumy, the Ukrainians regained further positions and pushed Russia towards Kursk Oblast. As a result of shelling Russian rear areas in the second of these districts on the night of 16-17 August, the deputy commander of the Sever group, General Esedulla Abachev, who was also the deputy commander of the Leningrad Military District, was seriously wounded near Rylsk.

Russian air attacks

On 19 August, Russia carried out a massive attack on fuel and energy infrastructure in the Poltava region. NASA FIRMS images confirmed large fires across virtually the entire territory of the refinery in Kremenchuk. Facilities in Lubny were also set on fire, and part of the Lubny region was cut off from electricity supplies. The damage to ground infrastructure was confirmed by the Ukrainian Ministry of Energy. According to the Ukrainian Air Force Command, the invaders used ten ballistic and cruise missiles and 270 strike drones and their imitators that night, mainly in the Poltava region. Ukraine declared it had shot down six missiles and neutralised 230 unmanned aerial vehicles. Outside Poltava Oblast, enemy drones struck, among others, Chernihiv Oblast, where energy infrastructure was damaged and electricity supplies were cut off.

On the evening of 17 August, Russian unmanned aerial vehicles completely destroyed the fuel base of the Azerbaijani company SOCAR in Odesa Oblast. This was confirmed by sources in Baku (Ukraine only provided vague information about the fuel and energy infrastructure facility). The drones had already damaged it on 8 August. The destruction of the base, as well as the earlier attack on the SOCAR petrol station, can be linked to the deterioration of relations between Russia and Azerbaijan in recent months.

In the run-up to the meeting between the US and Russian leaders in Alaska (see '[Alaska summit: a victory for Putin, concessions from Trump](#)'), Russia suspended strikes on Ukrainian cities. The first missile belonging to Russia is thought to have hit Pavlohrad on the evening of 15 August, but its target was most likely military. The city also suffered from hostile ballistic missiles two days later. On 17 and 18 August, Russian missiles and drones struck the industrial area of Kharkiv. In the second attack, one of the drones hit a residential building, killing seven people and injuring 24 (including two children and six infants). On 18 August, Iskander missiles targeted critical infrastructure in Zaporizhzhia. As a result of this attack, three people were killed and 33 civilians were injured. Ballistic missiles also struck Sloviansk (16 and 18 August) and Sumy (17 and 18 August). In total, from the evening of 12 August to the morning of 19 August, the Russians reportedly used 746 strike drones and their imitators, as well as 30 missiles, mostly Iskander-M ballistic missiles. Ukraine announced that it had neutralised 538 unmanned aerial vehicles and shot down eight missiles.

Ukrainian operations against Russia

Ukrainian drones struck oil pumping stations belonging to the Russian company Transneft, resulting in the suspension of fuel pumped through the Druzhba pipeline. On the evening of 12 August, the key distribution station in Unecha in Bryansk Oblast was damaged, and on the night of 18 August, the Nikolskoye pumping station in Tambov Oblast was hit. As a result, Russian oil stopped flowing to Slovakia and Hungary (the only EU countries still importing oil via this route). Budapest criticised the attacks, held talks with Moscow on restoring supplies and threatened Kyiv that electricity supplies could be cut off.

As a result of the Ukrainian attacks on the night of 13–14 August, production at the Lukoil refinery in Volgograd was interrupted. According to Reuters, three oil distillation units were damaged, and work is not expected to resume until mid-September at the earliest. This makes both attacks some of the most effective since those targeting enemy fuel

infrastructure in the summer of 2024. Another strike on the Volgograd refinery took place on 19 August, but it most likely failed to cause significant damage. Ukrainian drones also attacked refineries in Syzran in Samara Oblast (15 August), where a fire broke out, and in Slavyansk on the Kuban River in Krasnodar Krai (13 August, probably without results).

As a result of a massive attack on Belgorod on 14 August, the local regional government building was among the targets hit. On the same day, a Ukrainian drone exploded in the centre of Rostov-on-Don (Russian sources reported 13 residents injured). According to the Ukrainian General Staff, the next day, in the port of Olya in Astrakhan Oblast, unmanned aerial vehicles hit a ship carrying ammunition and components for Shahed drones from Iran. So far, this has not been confirmed by other sources.

Russian operations against Ukraine

On 12 August, **Vasyl Malyuk, head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), reported that Russia's operation, codenamed 'Sabotage Noise', was being effectively neutralised by local services.** The plan is thought to have been approved by Putin at the end of 2023 and involved attacks across Ukraine, ranging from arson attacks on ordinary vehicles to the use of improvised explosive devices. According to Malyuk, 80% of sabotage attempts and terrorist attacks were prevented. Double agents play a key role in combating them; this refers to "agents" controlled by the SBU, whom Russia considers as its own agents. The head of the SBU recalled that since the beginning of the full-scale aggression, counterintelligence has dismantled 118 Russian agent networks, 3,500 people have been charged with treason, and over 1,000 convictions have been handed down for long prison sentences ranging from 12 years to life imprisonment.

Western support for Ukraine

As part of the Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) mechanism, **Germany will spend \$500 million on American weapons and military equipment for Ukraine**, NATO announced on 13 August. Latvia will also join the initiative, announcing that it will allocate €2 million for purchases in the US. On 14 August, President Volodymyr Zelensky summarised that European countries had already raised USD 1.5 billion under the PURL (the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Sweden had previously announced their contributions). During talks in Washington on 18 August, the Ukrainian leader expressed his readiness to purchase US weapons worth USD 90 billion at the expense of European countries. This would be part of a security guarantee for Kyiv.

Ukraine's military potential

The Assault Forces Command has been established within the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), headed by Colonel Valentin Manko, former commander of the 33rd Separate Assault Regiment (SAR). The event was announced on 18 August in a press interview by the commander-in-chief of the army, General Oleksandr Syrskyi, who did not specify the tasks of

the new structure. He treated Manko's appointment as a step towards motivating service and inspiring new volunteers. He also pointed to two other regimental commanders as examples to follow – Oleh Shyriaiev of the 225th SAR and Yuriy Harkaviy of the 425th SAR "Skelya" ("Cliff") – as well as the commander of the Unmanned Systems Forces, Robert Brovdi, pseudonym Madyar, who were previously civilian businessmen.

Syrskyi emphasised that in view of the significant demographic disparity in mobilisation between Ukraine and Russia (2–5 million compared to 20–25 million people), the army is focusing on compensating for personnel shortages by using modern battlefield technologies that do not require the direct involvement of soldiers and by improving the quality of military training. He also added that the duration of basic training has been extended from 30 to 51 days, and adaptation training prior to assignment to a unit lasts 15 days.

On 14 August, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence announced that, **as part of a state programme launched in December last year to provide preferential loans to manufacturers in the defence and industrial complex, 50 companies had received support totalling 2.7 billion hryvnia (over \$65 million).** These loans are mainly sought by manufacturers of unmanned aerial vehicles and their components. Private sector companies that lack working capital to improve and increase their production capacity can receive up to 100 million hryvnia (approximately USD 2.5 million) for a period of up to three years and up to 500 million hryvnia (approximately USD 12 million) for a period of up to five years for investment projects.

On 18 August, **an action programme was published, setting out the key directions of government policy for 2025–2026.** The section on security and defence announced an increase in domestic arms production and emphasised the continuation of international partnerships to support arms production financially, including through the expansion of the so-called Danish model (see '[A trusted ally? Denmark's involvement in helping Ukraine](#)'), and the creation of joint ventures with companies such as Rheinmetall, BAE Systems and Thales. It was announced that the full transition to a corps system would take place by the end of 2026, and that new contract terms for soldiers would be developed by the end of this year, including additional financial and motivational incentives for military personnel.

Defence Minister Denys Shmyhal declared that after the possible end of the war, the size of the Ukrainian army would not be radically reduced. This process will be gradual, "planned and calculated" due to the continuing threat from Russia. He stated that even after the hypothetical end of the ongoing conflict, Russia will remain an existential threat to Ukraine. He revealed that talks are underway with international partners on the post-war shape of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The plan is to maintain the professional and contract-based nature of the army without the sudden demobilisation of large forces. Consideration is being given to maintaining its strength at between 800,000 and 1 million personnel.

Russia's military potential

According to information provided on 13 August by Ukrainian military intelligence (HUR), **the Russian army maintains high levels of manning in its military units, with 98% of officer**

positions filled. It is recruiting approximately 30,000–35,000 people per month, which is sufficient to replenish losses. Approximately 25% of new soldiers are people released from prison or under criminal investigation. By the beginning of August 2025, Russia had already conscripted over 290,000 of the planned 343,000 people. At the same time, HUR reports that due to the growing deficit of the Russian federal budget and financial problems in the regions, payments for new recruits have been reduced in many parts of the country. For example, in Bashkortostan, the “bonus” has fallen from 1.6 million roubles (approx. USD 20,000) to 1 million (approx. USD 12,500).

HUR emphasises that Russia’s arms industry continues to intensively develop the production of unmanned aerial vehicles, including Shahed attack drones, with 79,000 of them to be built by the end of the year. To this end, Russia has launched additional production lines, including at plants in Izhevsk and Yelabuga. At the same time, it is striving to become completely independent of imports of components – airframes, engines and navigation systems (with the exception of microelectronics) are already being produced locally. According to HUR, self-sufficiency in this area poses a serious challenge for Ukraine, which plans to counteract it with missile strikes and sabotage.

According to the head of HUR, **North Korea intends to send another 6,000 soldiers and 50 to 100 pieces of military equipment to Russia, including M-2010 (Cheonma-D) tanks and BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers.** Some of them will be used for engineering work. According to Kyrylo Budanov, there are already about 11,000 North Korean soldiers stationed in Russia, and this number is expected to rise to 17,000. Some of the soldiers may be involved in mine clearance or the construction of fortifications, but it is not certain whether their tasks will be limited to engineering activities.

