Even in Ukraine, Anti-Tank Missiles Shoot Down Helicopters (Lessons from Somalia and Afghanistan)

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Defence Blog has shared a short video attributed to an official Ukrainian source, showing a helicopter hit by a guided missile and quickly catching fire until its destruction.

"ATGM" stands for *anti-tank guided missile*: it is designed to hit ground vehicles but can be devastating against a **stationary**, **hovering**, **taking off/landing** helicopter or one parked in a predictable spot. In these conditions, the target is slow, large, and often poorly protected against a guided strike.

This dynamic (hitting the rotor wing when it is most vulnerable) is not new at all: it reappears consistently in very different theaters, including Somalia and Afghanistan.

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Somalia: when a “simple” weapon and a favorable context are enough

In the Battle of Mogadishu (October 3, 1993), U.S. helicopters were shot down (or severely damaged) by light weapons and RPGs, turning a mission into a long urban combat and a complex recovery and rescue effort.

The most enduring lesson is not “the RPG is anti-aircraft,” but that in dense and hostile cities, helicopters become predictable in their routes and altitudes, and thus engageable.

In 2007, during heavy clashes in Mogadishu, journalistic sources reported a helicopter hit by a missile during combat operations.

Here too, the recurring theme is exposure during missions that require “hovering over” the target or operating at low altitude.

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Afghanistan: from the Stinger turning point to RPG shootdowns in the NATO conflict

The introduction of MANPADS (man-portable air-defense systems), particularly the **FIM-92 Stinger**, is often described as a game-changer for low-altitude aerial warfare: historical sources and analyses recall how the Stingers provided to Afghan insurgents proved an effective defense against Soviet helicopters and aircraft, forcing changes in tactics and flight profiles.
Declassified CIA documents place the first insurgent successes with the Stinger on **September 25, 1986** in the Jalalabad area (helicopters shot down/damaged).

Important detail: the **strategic** impact of the Stingers (i.e., how much they alone determined the Soviet withdrawal) is a subject of debate among scholars; part of the literature considers them a “silver bullet,” while others emphasize a primarily tactical/moral effect rather than a decisive political one.

In the post-2001 Afghan conflict, despite countermeasures and technological superiority, helicopter vulnerability reappears in “classic” forms, often linked to **RPGs** and ambushes on mandatory routes.

The symbolic case is the downing of the CH-47 “**Extortion 17**” (August 6, 2011), attributed to an RPG hit on the rotor, causing the total loss of the aircraft and all occupants.
More recently, official U.S. channels have reiterated the investigative conclusion on the primary cause (RPG) for that event.

Even earlier, discussions and leaks (such as those emerging in contexts related to “war logs”) have fueled attention on the risk of missiles/anti-aircraft weapons in certain areas, indicating that the perceived threat could be more complex than publicly communicated at times.

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Red thread between Ukraine, Somalia, and Afghanistan: the “window of vulnerability”

Bringing together the three theaters, three constants emerge:

1. **Predictability**: airports, LZ (landing zones), and mandatory corridors create patterns that the adversary can study.
2. **Critical phases**: takeoff/landing, hovering, refueling/rearming, and ground stops are moments when even weapons not designed for anti-aircraft (ATGM/RPG) can become decisive.
3. **Chain effect**: a single helicopter hit can generate recovery missions, further exposure, and loss of initiative (a very clear lesson in Mogadishu 1993).

In this sense, the Ukrainian video (if correctly contextualized) is not “an isolated episode,” but a piece of a recurring operational rule: **the rotor wing is very powerful, but pays dearly when forced to be slow, visible, and predictable**.

News link: https://defence-blog.com/ukrainian-soldiers-blows-up-russian-helicopter-with-anti-tank-missile/