

Kyiv’s drone offensive shakes Moscow: the strategic response, the energy crisis and diplomatic scenarios

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The conflict in Ukraine has reached a new and dramatic escalation with what the Russian Ministry of Defense described as the largest drone offensive since the beginning of the invasion. Overnight, a massive swarm of Ukrainian unmanned aircraft flew over sixteen Russian regions, heading straight for the capital and striking vital infrastructure. Around six hundred drones were bound for Moscow, while the **Kerch Bridge**, the strategic viaduct linking Russia to occupied Crimea, once again came under attack.

The asymmetric response and the "war of bridges"

Kyiv's military pressure is not limited to holding the line on the ground, but employs a strategy of long-range strikes to hit Russia's logistics chain and energy system:

- **The raid on the Kerch Bridge:** Despite air defense barriers, several drones managed to strike the arches of the Kerch viaduct, causing damage that forced the temporary suspension of road traffic.
- **Oil facilities and refineries:** The raids sparked fires in the Rostov region and at the Ilsky refinery in Krasnodar.Zelensky spoke of more than half of Russia's refining capacity being compromised, while industry sources cited by Reuters estimate a 30% drop in operations.
- **Supply lines:** Ukrainian commands have intensified raids against road overpasses in Russian territory used to transport fuel and ammunition to the front, striking key routes between Rostov and Crimea.
- **Pressure on the front and targeted attacks:** During the same period, hundreds of direct clashes were reported at the front, particularly in Donetsk Oblast near Kostiantynivka, alongside targeted bomb attacks against figures linked to Russian intelligence, such as the wounding in Moscow of associate Sergej Zavorotnyj.

The energy emergency and winter vulnerability

As the front comes under relentless pressure, the Russian-Ukrainian winter is ushering in a critical phase for the civilian population and the country's critical infrastructure:

- **Power grid crisis:** Bombardments continue to leave thousands of families without electricity, especially in Odesa and six other regions, severely testing social resilience.
- **The nuclear warning:** Nuclear safety authorities from as many as 38 countries have issued a warning over the risks associated with prolonged blackouts, which could compromise the cooling systems of the reactors operating in the country, raising the prospect in an extreme scenario of the simultaneous involvement of all nine Ukrainian reactors currently in operation.
- **The plight of civilians:** Firsthand accounts, such as that of civilians evacuated from Oleshky after a year spent in extreme conditions on the occupied bank of the Dnipro, underscore the conflict's devastating human cost.

Diplomatic scenarios, Black Sea tensions, and Europe's position

On the political, diplomatic, and commercial fronts, the situation remains extremely fragmented:

- **Talks and public sentiment:** U.S.-mediated talks in Abu Dhabi have opened the possibility of future prisoner exchanges, while ruling out a ceasefire for now. Among Ukrainian citizens, as teachers from Odesa report, distrust of an imminent peace prevails, with the overwhelming majority of the population opposed to territorial concessions in exchange for Western guarantees.
- **European sanctions:** The European Union has adopted a new package of targeted sanctions against Russian banks, companies, and hackers, accompanied by €8 billion in new financial aid for Kyiv.
- **Security in the Black Sea and Baltic:** In the Black Sea, damage and attacks on merchant vessels and grain ships have been reported near the Romanian and Bulgarian coasts, while in the Baltic, Estonia is preparing to close road crossings with Russia following sabotage attempts that Tallinn intelligence attributes to Russia's GRU military intelligence service.