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Ukraine Destroys Pro-Russian Artillery in Its First Use of Turkish Drones

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The Bayraktar TB2. **armyinform.com.ua**

Ukraine has destroyed the artillery of pro-Russian separatists in the country's east in its first combat deployment of a Turkish drone, the Ukrainian military announced Tuesday.

Footage published on the Ukrainian armed forces' Facebook page showed the Bayraktar TB2k targeting and shooting a Soviet-era howitzer it identified as the pro-Russian forces' D-30.

The Ukrainian armed forces accused the separatists of wounding one soldier and killing another with the D-30 near the eastern town of Hranitne on the front line.

"Bayraktar was used in order to force the enemy to cease fire," the Ukrainian armed forces' general staff said in a statement. "After that, the shelling of Ukrainian positions stopped."

The drone strike did not inflict any military or civilian casualties, Russia's Interfax news agency quoted an unnamed source in the self-proclaimed, separatist-held Donetsk People's Republic as saying Wednesday.

The neighboring separatist-held Luhansk People's Republic accused Kiev of using the Bayraktar in violation of ceasefire agreements that ban the deployment of foreign drones on the front line.

Tuesday's drone strike is the first since Turkey delivered the first batch of Bayraktar TB2 to Ukraine in July.

The Turkish private company Baykar, which produces the armed drones, describes the TB2 model as a "medium altitude long endurance tactical unmanned aerial vehicle capable of conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and armed attack missions" with a range of up to 27 hours.

Media reports said Kiev plans to buy around 50 Bayraktar TB2 drones, a flagship model that has been used in conflicts against Russian proxies in Syria, Libya and the Nagorno-Karabakh region at the center of a decades-long dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Ukraine and Turkey signed a memorandum in late September to establish a joint training and maintenance center for the drones in Ukraine. This month, Ukraine's foreign minister said it plans to build a factory to produce Bayraktar drones in the country.

The sale of drones to Kiev places Ankara in a delicate position, as Turkey also cooperates in the defense sector with Russia, Ukraine's rival.

The Kremlin said Wednesday that Turkey's supply of drones to Ukraine risks destabilizing the eastern Ukraine conflict despite Moscow's "special" relations with Ankara.

The Ukrainian army has been locked in a long-running conflict with separatist fighters in Donetsk and Luhansk since 2014 after Moscow annexed the peninsula of Crimea from Kiev. The conflict has claimed more than 13,000 lives.

Ukraine and its Western allies accuse Russia of sending troops and arms to support the separatists, which Moscow denies.

AFP contributed reporting.

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