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Effectiveness of Ukraine's HIMARS Fuels Concern in Russia

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HIMARS in use by the Ukrainian army. **General Staff of Ukrainian Armed Forces**

Pro-Kremlin figures have expressed rare public concern after Western-supplied weapons allowed Ukraine to carry out a series of successful attacks on Russian targets far behind the frontlines.

The M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), which the United States started sending to Ukraine last month, appear to have been most effective at damaging Russian military positions.

Russia has suffered "large losses in both men and equipment" in less than a week, according to Igor Girkin, a former commander of separatist forces in eastern Ukraine.

"The Russian air defense systems... turned out to be ineffective against massive strikes by HIMARS missiles," Girkin, who also goes by the alias Strelkov, wrote on messaging app Telegram on Sunday.

Alexander Sladkov, a prominent war correspondent for state-run broadcaster Rossia 1, said Monday that Ukraine had successfully attacked Russian command centers.

“Ukrainian missiles and artillery have struck decision-making centers several times. With results. The centers are small but important,” Sladkov said on Telegram.

HIMARS can hit targets up to 70 kilometers away, meaning Ukrainian troops can deploy the wheeled, high-tech lightweight rocket launcher outside the range of most Russian artillery.

Reports from authorities in separatist- and Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine also indicate that attacks are becoming both more frequent, and more deadly.

Officials in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic said Monday that at least three people were killed and dozens injured in the village of Stepano-Krinka following a Ukrainian HIMARS attack.

Ukrainian forces also used HIMARS to hit the city of Alchevsk and the village of Irmino over the weekend, according to the separatist authorities.

Both Stepano-Krinka and Alchevsk are dozens of kilometers behind the frontline.

In a Telegram post accompanied by videos of large fires, Russian state television journalist Andrei Rudenko said Sunday that the Ukrainian side “most likely” used HIMARS to hit ammunition stores in the towns of Shakhtarsk and Torez.

“Strong fires and explosions... The situation is horrible,” Rudenko wrote.

The Ukrainian military carried out 14 strikes on Russian ammunition stores and military bases on Russian-occupied territory in the past two weeks, the BBC's Ukrainian service reported Monday. While it is unclear whether HIMARS were used in all cases, BBC Ukrainian said the strikes’ accuracy indicated they were responsible.

“Over the last 5-6 days, more than 10 large dumps for artillery and other ammunition, several oil depots, about 10 command centers and about the same number of troop gathering points were hit,” ex-rebel commander Girkin said.

Russia's Defense Ministry claimed Monday that it had used Kalibr cruise missiles to destroy Ukrainian ammunition depots in the Dnipropetrovsk region that included rockets for HIMARS, although the claim could not be independently verified.

Russia said last week that it had destroyed two HIMARS rocket systems and ammunition depots in eastern Ukraine, but both Ukrainian and U.S. officials rejected these claims.

Washington last week announced a new weapons package for Ukraine worth up to $400 million that includes four additional HIMARS.

The new deliveries will bring the Ukrainian Armed Forces’ HIMARS arsenal to 12.

Ex-rebel leader Strelkov said the Russian Armed Forces should be trying to destroy Ukrainian infrastructure so HIMARS systems and ammunition cannot reach the battlefield.

“When will Russia’s Armed Forces start fighting to their full capacity?” he wrote.

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