Ukraine Says Gains on Southern Front Pave Way to Crimea

By [Emmanuel Peuchot for AFP](#)

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Rescuers work on the roof of a residential building that was damaged following a missile attack in Kyiv on August 30. **Roman Pilipey / AFP**

Ukraine said Wednesday that its recapture of Robotyne village this week was a strategic victory paving the way for its forces to push deeper into Russian positions in the south towards Crimea.

The foreign minister's comments published early Wednesday came as Kyiv announced two people had been killed in the "most powerful" aerial attack in weeks and Russia reported a drone strike on military aircraft in its northwest.

Kyiv launched a counteroffensive in June after stockpiling Western-supplied weapons and building up assault battalions.

Progress has been costly and staggered but Ukrainian forces announced they had pushed

through key Russian defensive lines with the capture of the hamlet in the Zaporizhzhia region this week.

"Having entrenched on the flanks of Robotyne, we are opening the way to Tokmak and, eventually, Melitopol and the administrative border with Crimea," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said during an earlier official visit to Paris.

The Kremlin has downplayed the offensive and Yevgeny Balitsky, its official in charge of the Zaporizhzhia region — which Russia claims as its own — warned territory beyond Robotyne would be a "mass grave for Ukraine's armed forces."

In Kyiv, an AFP reporter heard at least three explosions at around 5:00 a.m. (0200 GMT) as part of the country-wide barrage of 28 cruise missiles and 16 attack drones.

"We heard explosions, and we could see the flashes through the window," Oksana Soloviuk, who lives next to one building hit by debris told AFP.

Yevgen Ananenko and his father ran downstairs when they heard the blasts and metal fragments cut into the side of their building.

"If it had fallen straight into the house, I doubt we would have survived," he said.

Military officials described the attack as "the most powerful" to hit the city since the spring, and authorities said two employees of an infrastructure facility were killed by falling debris in the Shevchenkivsky district.

Russian forces launched groups of Iranian-made Shahed drones at the capital from different directions, and launched missiles from aircraft, the Kyiv city military administration said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said it had targeted Ukrainian operational and intelligence centers and that all the assigned targets had been hit.

Drone wave

Ukraine has meanwhile stepped up drone attacks inside Russia.

It launched a wave of strikes overnight, targeting an airport near the Estonian border and the Crimean peninsula on the Black Sea, Russian authorities said.

The attack on Pskov airport, roughly 700 kilometers (more than 400 miles) from the border with Ukraine, marks the latest strike far from Ukraine's borders since Kyiv vowed to "return" the conflict to Russia in July.

Governor Mikhail Vedernikov, who said he was at the scene of the attack, posted a video online of a massive fire, with the sounds of explosions and sirens in the background.

Authorities were assessing the damage but there were no casualties, he said.

State news agency TASS, citing emergency services, said that four Ilyushin Il-76 heavy transport planes were damaged in the attack in Pskov, but there was no immediate comment

from the Defense Ministry.

Black Sea tensions

The Pskov region was previously targeted by drones in May.

Authorities in the Bryansk region near the Ukraine border, southern Oryol region and Kaluga and Ryazan regions, southwest and southeast of Moscow, all reported drones had been destroyed or downed.

Air defenses also destroyed a drone "heading for Moscow," the city's mayor wrote on social media, adding there were no casualties or damage caused. TASS reported that Moscow's Domodedovo and Vnukovo airports had been temporarily closed.

Moscow and other Russian regions have been targeted by almost daily drone strikes since Kyiv vowed this summer to "return" the conflict to Russia.

The Kremlin said in response to Wednesday's attacks that military experts were studying routes used by Ukrainian drones with the aim of preventing future attacks.

Tensions have also been building on the Black Sea since Moscow exited a deal allowing maritime exports from Ukraine, and threatened to attack cargo ships using Ukrainian ports.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Wednesday its fighter jets had destroyed several high-speed military boats in the Black Sea around midnight Moscow time.

It said the vessels were carrying Ukrainian special forces and claimed several dozen personnel had been killed, without giving details on exactly where in the Black Sea the incident took place.

Early Wednesday, Russian defenses also repelled a "seaborne drone attack" near Sevastopol in Crimea, TASS cited the Moscow-installed Governor Mikhail Razvozhayev as saying.

Sevastopol is the base of Russia's Black Sea fleet.

Both Ukraine and Russia have ramped up activity around the strategic waterway after the United Nations-brokered deal to ensure safe navigation for grain ships collapsed last month.