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Ukraine Will Hit Russian Refineries in Response to Moscow's ‘New Doctrine’ of Airstrikes

By Reuters

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AFP

Ukraine will double down on attacking Russian oil refineries in response to a new policy of airstrikes by Moscow designed to force people to abandon Kyiv and other cities, but will not target civilians, President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

Ukrainian intelligence has obtained documents showing that Russian leader Vladimir Putin had issued a “new doctrine” of military attacks on a much broader range of civilian targets ahead of winter, Zelensky said.

“We saw documents and we know that they allow them to attack infrastructure ... logistics ... roads, schools, hospitals, to pressure people to leave the capital, leave different cities,” Zelensky said. “This is the goal of the operation.”

Driving the shift in policy, Zelensky said, was Putin's desire to appear strong at a time when his military was losing ground in a key frontline region and sustaining higher levels of casualties.

The Kremlin was not available to comment on Saturday. But in a statement urging foreign nationals to leave Kyiv, the Russian Foreign Ministry said Moscow would continue to systematically hit targets in what it said were retaliatory strikes for Ukrainian attacks on Russia in recent months.

Both sides deny deliberately targeting civilians.

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Counteroffensive in Donbas

Zelensky said an ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive, code-named "Vivaldi," had recaptured around 140 sq km (54 sq miles) of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, which Russia has said it must control in its entirety as a condition for any peace deal.

In recent weeks, U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has sought to revive talks to end the four-year-old conflict — Europe's bloodiest since World War Two.

The U.S. leader last month urged Ukraine to refrain from hitting Russian oil installations, saying that was sending global diesel prices surging.

But Zelensky, speaking as air raid sirens blared outside the gilded halls of the presidential offices, said he had received no indications from Russia that Putin was interested in peace talks or discussing a ceasefire on energy infrastructure.

Over the past week, the Ukrainian capital has come under persistent attack by Russian drones and missiles targeting energy and telecoms assets, road and rail infrastructure. For the first time, Russia has targeted the bridges across the Dnipro River connecting east and west Kyiv.

Zelensky said Ukraine would respond to the change in tactics by Moscow, but would not respond in kind by targeting civilian infrastructure indiscriminately.

"We have to respond in any way (we can). With their attacks on our energy, we have to respond on their energy. First of all, oil refiners: what gives money to them for this war," Zelensky said in English. "But we will not respond, of course, just like them, on any civilian objects."

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Support from Europe

After the Trump administration invited Putin to attend a G20 summit in Miami in December

and discussed business deals with Russian envoys, Zelensky urged Washington not to normalise relations with Russia before ensuring a return to peace.

Zelensky said he would be happy to meet Putin for peace talks at the G20, but he warned the U.S. not to believe in "illusions" that Russia would end hostilities if it gained control of Donbas.

"It's not fair just to normalize," said Zelensky, dressed in his trademark black T-shirt and military-style jacket. Any resumption of economic and diplomatic ties with the West had to be in return for peace, he said: "Because peace is more important than any kind of economy."

While the U.S. has proposed resuming trilateral talks in the coming weeks in the UAE, Zelensky noted that an exact date and location for the technical-level conversations had not been set.

Ukrainian officials warn that Russia has stockpiled hundreds of ballistic missiles ahead of an expected winter onslaught against electricity and water infrastructure. Last winter, the worst of the war, Russian strikes left swathes of the country without electricity and heating for days at a time.

Since the summer, Moscow has also begun launching dozens of fast and relatively cheap jet-powered Shahed drones a day at Ukraine, whose air defenses have struggled as its previous generation of interceptor drones are too slow to catch them.

Zelensky said Ukraine had been forced to rely heavily on its fighter aircraft — F-16s and MiGs — to down around 60% of the Russian jet-powered drones, but supplies of 20 mm ammunition for the planes were running low.

Kyiv was urgently working on other solutions — including boosting its jamming capabilities, he said. In the second half of October, it should receive its first shipment of small, cheap air defense missiles capable of hitting the new Shaheds.

Last week, Zelensky said Ukraine was developing five models of new interceptor drones capable of downing the jet Shaheds. Fresh from a meeting with his defense chiefs, he said tests on two of those models showed a modest success rate of around 30%.

"We'll have to scale it," he said. "I hope that with all these things, with all these elements, we'll find a way."

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Ballistic threat

Ukraine announced the first combat use this week of its own domestically made ballistic missile — the FP-7, which has a range of around 250 km (155 miles).

Zelensky said he had called the manufacturer Fire Point to pressure executives to quickly finish a longer-range model, the FP-9, which the company has said could hit Moscow.

“I said to them, ‘Where is my FP-9?’” said Zelensky, with a grin. “We need the FP-9. And the FP-9 will be (ready) this autumn, I'm sure.”

Zelensky said a recent spate of Russian drone incursions and hybrid attacks in Europe were an effort to intimidate European populations and to divide support for Ukraine.

Some European leaders were starting to understand this, he said, and toughen their position.

Russia says such accusations are baseless and the result of anti-Russian hysteria.

After talks with European officials in Brussels this week, Ukraine found funding to proceed with orders for drones that it needs to keep fighting at the start of 2027, Zelensky said.

Ukrainian officials had worked on a plan with European partners to plug a $27 billion hole in Kyiv's defense budget this year.

The plans involve a combination of the reallocation of Ukraine's own budget resources, bilateral assistance, and using “money credits” from next year's portion of a €90 billion EU loan, Zelensky said.

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