

**DEFENCE
FORCES OF
UKRAINE**



STRATEGY FOR LIBERATING CRIMEA: IMPLEMENTATION ASPECTS, CHALLENGES, AND PROSPECTS

Analytical Note

Stepan YAKYMIAK

Captain (Navy), ret.,
participant of the russian-ukrainian war,
PhD (Military Sciences), expert of the Centre
for Defence Strategies,
expert of the Crimea Platform Expert Network



Stepan Yakymiak

R Captain, a Russian – Ukrainian war veteran, PhD (Military Science), Assistant Professor, Center for Defence Strategies expert.

Research area: national, international, military and maritime security, naval operations, robotic systems. .

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
PREAMBLE	2
1. LIBERATION OF CRIMEA:UPDATING OF STRATEGIC GOAL	2
2. SECURITY CONTEXT IN BLACK SEA REGION	7
3. ACTIONS OF DEFENCE FORCES OF UKRAINE TO LIBERATE CRIMEA: OUTCOMES AND EFFECTS	9
4. CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS	13
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	15

ABSTRACT

Crimea is the focus of the Russian Federation's ongoing war against Ukraine. The struggle for Crimea determines not only regional but also global geopolitical and security issues. Having launched its armed aggression against Ukraine with the seizure of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol in 2014, Russia has been attempting for twelve years to regain control over the Ukrainian state. However, for Ukraine to be an independent and prosperous country, there is no other option but to defend itself against the enemy by force of arms and regain all territories seized by the enemy. The liberation of Crimea from Russian occupation being carried out by the Defence Forces of Ukraine is a cornerstone in restoring Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as ensuring national security and international security in the Black Sea region.

This analytical document was produced based upon the findings of research carried out by the author on an ongoing basis from the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine to the present in the context of studies dedicated to Ukraine's national security at sea issues as well as international security challenges in the Black Sea region.

The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war in the spring and early June of 2026 demonstrated an increased scale of strikes targeting important military and other enemy facilities within the Crimean Peninsula and in adjacent maritime areas. The attacks, particularly on infrastructure facilities linking Crimea in different ways to Russia's Taman Peninsula and the temporarily occupied part of the Kherson region, have become significantly more frequent and effective. These actions indicate Ukraine's systematic efforts to isolate the Crimean Peninsula, disrupt the logistics of Russian troops, and weaken the enemy forces deployed to defend Crimea. Is this the case, and what stage of Crimea's liberation is being currently implemented by the Defence Forces of Ukraine? Furthermore, what are the main challenges and prospects for the liberation of Ukrainian Crimea? The answers to these and related questions are offered in this publication.

PREAMBLE

Relevance of the Study. Preserving Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is a vital interest of the Ukrainian people in the context of the Russian Federation's ongoing war against Ukraine. None of the parts of Ukraine's territory temporarily occupied by Russia since 2014 can be left unprotected by the Defence Forces of Ukraine (DFU). However, since the temporary occupation of Crimea in 2014 and up to the present, representatives of Russia and certain other foreign states have been attempting to exclude the issue of Crimea's liberation from the agenda during official and shadow negotiations aimed at stopping Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine and ending the war.

Through its dialogue with partner countries, their alliances, and coalitions, Ukraine has been firmly defending its right to independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Ukraine keeps fighting to liberate the territories temporarily occupied by Russia and to ensure that the Russian Federation be held fully accountable under international law for its act of aggression and the crimes it has committed. As the ongoing war can't be stopped and ended by political and diplomatic instruments, Ukraine has been employing its DFU to combat the aggressor and liberate its territories. To succeed in the fight against the enemy, Ukraine must strengthen cooperation with its partners and select and implement the most appropriate strategies. Therefore, this study is highly relevant and will help assess the current state of efforts to liberate Crimea and develop measures to enhance their effectiveness.

This study addresses the **overall but dual problem**: on the one hand, a strategy Ukraine must develop and implement in the ongoing war should ensure the liberation of Crimea, be consistent with other measures aimed at ensuring national security and defence during the war, and be effective in terms of time and resources; and on the other hand, given the Russian Federation's significant military and economic potential, and Ukraine's limited capabilities to counter the enemy, Ukraine should choose operation modes that maximize the use of partner support, the advances achieved, and its advantage over the enemy in securing strategic intellectual leadership and in implementing innovative military technologies.

GOAL of the Study. To develop, based on assessing existing visions, concepts, strategies for fighting against the Russian Federation, including the de-occupation of Crimea, and reviewing factors impacting their shaping and implementation, recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of security actions and DFU operations for the sake of the Crimea liberation.

Methodology of the Study. Within the scope of this study, the Strategy for Liberating Crimea is considered not as a stand-alone document, but as an integral part of the State's strategic documents on ensuring national security and DFU deployment in the context of the ongoing war. The content analysis method is used to examine concepts, strategies, and the security environment. Quantitative assessment and comparative analysis methods are used to evaluate the results of DFU attacks. Decomposition, synthesis, and generalization methods are used to identify problems, prospects, and recommendations.

1. LIBERATION OF CRIMEA: UPDATING OF STRATEGIC GOAL

Context for Defining the Strategic GOAL. To succeed in implementing security actions and liberating territories occupied by the enemy, Ukraine must first develop an effective strategy that would contain clearly defined strategic goals, objectives, methods for achieving them, and the necessary resources. Therefore, when considering the issue of liberating Crimea, it is essential to begin by assessing the status of setting and updating the relevant goals. To start with, it should be noted that the relevance of issues related to the de-occupation of the Crimean Peninsula has been rated differently at different stages of the ongoing war.

Throughout the entire period, starting with the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and up to now, the Crimea liberation has, on the one hand, been considered one of the utmost priorities in restoring Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, despite the UN resolution supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders that was adopted as early as in

March 2014¹, the relevance and priority status of Crimea liberation depended on actual security conditions and Ukraine's ability to resist and use its own military force to defend and liberate territories occupied by the enemy.

Moreover, given Russia's significant and overwhelming military and economic potential, support for Ukraine from partner countries has been and remains a crucial factor in countering the aggressor. However, the level of interaction with partners and dependence on their goodwill has made Ukraine somewhat dependent and has often required taking partners' views into account on various issues when responding to the aggressor. This situation did not help to maintain a consistent and clear focus on activities aimed at the unconditional liberation of the Crimean Peninsula within a specific timeframe.

🚩 Crimea is the focal point of Russia's war against Ukraine, with its liberation being both a prerequisite for and one of significant outcomes of Ukraine's future victory.

Importance of Crimea to Ukraine's Security and Development. Crimea is of paramount importance to Ukraine. Apart from its millennia-old multicultural historical heritage, the historical birthplace of Christianity for Kyiv Rus, and the glory days of Crimea as the historical homeland of the Crimean Tatar people, Crimea, in the modern context, is an integral part of the sovereign territory of the Ukrainian people and home for many generations of Ukrainians, dating back to the times of the Russian and Soviet empires. Crimea is of great geopolitical importance for expanding Ukraine's development potential in the Black Sea region and extending its interests beyond this region. The Crimean Peninsula's exceptionally favourable (central) location in the Black Sea region, with adjoining the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait, creates huge economic opportunities for developing the maritime sector, trade, gas extraction, agricultural production, etc. In addition to its geopolitical, cultural, political, and economic significance, it plays a crucial role in security, especially given the traditionally aggressive policies of a neighbour such as Russia. It is important to emphasize that, in a military-strategic context, Crimea as a peninsula is largely dependent on the reliable functioning of the isthmus and bridges connecting it to neighbouring regions (see Fig. 1). However, the Russian Federation as an aggressor state, ignoring intergovernmental agreements, the UN Charter, and other international law norms and pursuing a chauvinistic and imperial-expansionist policy, strives to seize Crimea, reestablishing it, first and foremost, as a "military hub" to counter the activities of the United States, NATO, and Turkey in this region, and to project power into the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa. It is important



Figure. 1. Location of the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea, the Perekop Isthmus, and bridges connecting it with other coastal areas. Source: designed by the author using Google Maps.

¹ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262 on 27 March 2014. Territorial Integrity of Ukraine. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/68/262>

to highlight that the attempt to seize Crimea is part of a broader strategy to bring Ukraine back under Moscow's full control. Therefore, in the context of ensuring Ukraine's security and defence, Crimea is of exceptional strategic importance. Crimea is the focal point of Russia's war against Ukraine; thus, its liberation is both a prerequisite for and one of the significative outcomes of Ukraine's future victory.

Updating the Crimea Liberation Goal during the War. Given the abovementioned, it is important to review how the relevance and implementation of Crimea Liberation as a strategic GOAL of Ukrainian actions during the war has been changed.

Given the lack of favourable conditions for the de-occupation of Crimea between 2014 and 2022, Ukraine took comprehensive actions to address this issue, primarily through political and diplomatic channels. The so-called Minsk Agreements partially halted active hostilities in eastern Ukraine but naturally did not provide for intensified efforts to liberate Crimea. The same approach to the de-occupation of Crimea was set out in Ukraine's National Security Strategy, adopted in 2019².

With the outbreak of the Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the priority for the Ukrainian leadership, the Defence Forces of Ukraine and the entire Ukrainian society was, first and foremost, to hold out, stop the enemy and push back its troops wherever possible.

Views and concepts of Foreign State Leaders regarding Crimea Liberation. Since the start of negotiations on a ceasefire and the end of the war, the Russian Federation's position on Crimea, from March 2022 onwards, has remained unchanged: the aggressor state's position is that the de-occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol should not be on the agenda for discussions with Ukraine.

The views and statements of representatives of Ukraine's partner countries regarding the liberation of Crimea ranged widely, depending on the stage of the war and the global and regional security situation conditions as well as external and internal (in these countries) political climate, and the military-political and military-strategic context. The range of positions taken by partner states, their coalitions and alliances on this issue has spanned from complete disregard of the issue (its exclusion from the agenda), and sometimes even tacit recognition of the Russian Federation's claim to Crimea, — to declarations that only Ukraine "has the right to decide", and expressions of full support to Ukraine on liberating Crimea.

In statements by US President Donald Trump regarding the cessation (completion) of the Russian-Ukrainian war or the draft agreements drawn up from January 2025 onwards, the issue of Crimea was either completely ignored, or it was stated that Crimea would de facto remain Russian³. Statements by NATO top officials, primarily the organisation's Secretary General, also contained varied wording; however, in 2026, support of Ukraine and its own decisions regarding the occupied territories was emphasised⁴.

At the same time, while supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, EU leaders have repeatedly stated that the matters concerning Ukrainian territories must be resolved by Ukraine⁵. Only a few states have, almost from the outbreak of the war, consistently advocated the de-occupation of Crimea and its return to Ukraine's full control⁶. The positions of Ukraine's international partners regarding the liberation of Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied by Russia have a significant impact on shaping the conditions for negotiations to cease and end the war as well as on the content of any potential agreements. Demands for the de-occupation of Ukrainian territories seized by the Russian Federation, if enshrined in the proposed draft agreements, not only meet the need to ensure a just end to the war but also lay the foundation for establishing lasting peace in the region. Thus, setting forth conditions for the aggressor

² National Security Strategy of Ukraine approved by Decree of President of Ukraine no 392/2020 dd. 14 September 2020 (as amended) <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/392/2020#Text>

³ Trump's full 28-point Ukraine-Russia peace plan (Nov 20, 2025). <https://www.axios.com/2025/11/20/trump-ukraine-peace-plan-28-points-russia>

⁴ Rutte also acknowledged there were "very sensitive" issues to be resolved around Russian demands regarding Ukraine's territory (26 Jan 2026). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2026/jan/26/ukraine-russia-us-greenland-europe-trade-deal-nato-latest-news-updates>.

⁵ European Union Leaders' Statement on Ukraine (12 August 2025). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/08/12/statement-by-european-union-leaders-on-ukraine>.

⁶ Ukraine, Lithuania strongly condemn occupation of Crimea and Russian aggression in Donbas (12.12.2016). <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/2137983-ukraine-lithuania-strongly-condemn-occupation-of-crimea-and-russian-aggression-in-donbas.html>

to withdraw the troops from the occupied territories is a fundamental requirement for ensuring effective international security arrangements in Eastern Europe and across the continent as a whole. Consequently, the liberation of Crimea and other occupied Ukrainian territories is a prerequisite for any negotiations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, with the involvement of the US and European states, aimed at ceasing and ending the war.

 **Liberation of Crimea** from its temporary occupation by the Russian Federation and its return to Ukraine is a **mandatory prerequisite** for any negotiations on ceasing and ending the war.

It is with this format of negotiations that Ukraine's partner countries will be able to make their contribution to restoring international security and guaranteeing secure conditions for development in the post-war period. At the same time, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of Ukraine's objectives in the war by its foreign partners, particularly regarding the liberation of Crimea as well as to secure targeted support for the Ukrainian state, it is crucial for Ukraine to adaptively refine its own legislative and regulatory acts and to clearly declare its intentions and approaches (methods) for liberating the Russia occupied territories, including the Crimean Peninsula.

Legislating Provisions regarding the Crimea Liberation and Implementing Them Systematically.

A successful defence of Ukraine in the war, in particular the liberation of Crimea, is impossible without ensuring the proper effectiveness of the national government as well as governance of national security and defence forces. However, the governance is based on decisions and the system for a prompt decision-making and in-full implementation. Such decisions are stated in the relevant strategic documents, primarily in the National Security Strategy of Ukraine. Furthermore, it is worth emphasising that, as the Russian-Ukrainian war has become protracted and the State has been forced to adapt its actions to the conditions of war permanently affecting the situation, there is an urgent need to resume efforts to keep all principal strategic documents up to date, particularly those relating to defence and national security.

The relevance of this need, *inter alia*, stems from the fact that the current version of Ukraine's National Security Strategy, adopted in 2020, includes a number of provisions that contradict the actual security situation and the operations of the Defence Forces of Ukraine. For instance, Article 6, which sets out the security priority areas, merely states: *"...the implementation of international legal, political and diplomatic, security, humanitarian and economic actions aimed at ending the Russian Federation's illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol"*. When analysed, it becomes clear that this provision does not suggest any "forceful" option for returning the peninsula to Ukrainian control. The same Strategy article imposes constraints on defence operation objectives: *"...the continued implementation of defence and deterrence measures ... as a guarantee against the escalation of the conflict by Russia, the reduction of tension and the cessation of armed aggression by the Russian Federation"*. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that this version of the Strategy remains in force and there are no legal acts suspending its application.

That said, a separate focus of the study is to examine the feasibility of amending the current strategic documents in the context of the ongoing war. Recognising that the priority is to defend Ukraine *de facto* round-the-clock and make situational decisions responding to emerging changes on the battlefield and within the country, neglecting the systematic review of priorities for national security and defence seems to be absolutely unreasonable. Indeed, without regular meetings of the General Headquarters of the Armed Forces of Ukraine during this ongoing war, and without refining the planning documents for the strategic deployment of the Defence Forces of Ukraine, the Defence Forces of Ukraine can't be effectively commanded 24/7 and the national defence capability can't be ensured. But should it be right then, especially in the context of a protracted war of attrition, to ignore the need for long-term forecasting and medium-term planning, including the updating of strategic documents such as Ukraine's National Security Strategy? Another argument in favour of revising the Strategy is the need to make the State leadership's activities transparent to the society and to ensure public understanding of the priorities it has set for the war. It is publicly available strategic documents that enable the society to understand the leadership's intentions and to act in a more focused and coordinated manner within the national system of activities, in the interests of security and defence during wartime.

Furthermore, it should be noted that, in the time of the war, there have already been precedents for amending Ukraine's National Security Strategy. For example, by Presidential Decree No. 16/2025⁷ of 6 January 2025, the Strategy had already been modified and amended, i.e., one of paragraphs was supplemented, and the wording of several other paragraphs was amended in terms of the "development of Ukraine's State Border integrated governance". Whilst in no way questioning the importance of making such additions and amendments to the Strategy, it is reasonable to consider the relevance of updating the Strategy provisions regarding the liberation of Crimea and, in a broader context, all current issues relating to Ukraine's defence in the war.

However, the key point to bear in mind is that there are no clearly stated provisions in publicly available documents setting out the State's objectives regarding defence against the enemy, including the use of armed force to liberate Crimea. It is also important to emphasise that, in accordance with paragraphs 67 and 69 of the Strategy, its provisions shall be used by the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine when organising and implementing measures to defend Ukraine and ensure the security of Ukraine. This function of the Strategy, surely, has a direct impact on the quality of these governmental bodies' activity. As a partial conclusion, it should be noted that updating the Strategy provisions will enhance the systematic approach of governmental bodies in planning and maintaining defence of Ukraine against the enemy, including the issue of the Crimea liberation.

At the same time, the analysis of the provisions of the Strategy for the De-occupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, approved by Decree of President of Ukraine No. 117/2021 of 24 March 2021⁸, proves that this document clearly and explicitly states the possibility of various scenarios for de-occupation, including the use of military force. Thus, Article 9 of the Strategy stipulates that *"... Ukraine reserves the right to use all mechanisms provided for by international law and national legislation to protect human rights and freedoms, national interests, restore Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised state borders, and ensure state sovereignty"*. Given that the national security sphere includes a specific military component and that there are strategic documents detailing matters of Ukraine's military security and defence, there is no need within the scope of this Strategy to provide further detail on the liberation of Crimea by military means and methods.

Moreover, the analysis carried out has highlighted the need to revise and update the document titled the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine, approved by Decree of President of Ukraine No. 121/2021 of 25 March 2021⁹. According to the final provisions of this document, the Strategy shall be *"...the basis for developing a defence plan for Ukraine..."*. However, the Strategy's provisions, including *"likely scenarios that will require the deployment of Ukraine's security and defence forces to carry out tasks of defending Ukraine"*, do not set out the principles for conducting operations to liberate the occupied territories, including Crimea, or for carrying out offensives and deep strikes on the enemy's territory. Other provisions of this Strategy should also be carefully revised, particularly in terms of the function of robotic systems in carrying out tasks by the Defence Forces of Ukraine.

This being said, it should be added that, while repelling the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian Federation armed forces, the National Defence Plan¹⁰ was put into effect; this document is classified, and, presumably, the strategic objectives for using the Defence Forces of Ukraine, including the liberation of Crimea, have been set out in it. In July 2024, the Maritime Security Strategy of Ukraine¹¹ was also finalised and brought into force, establishing the following objectives among maritime security activities: *"... 2) the de-occupation of the temporarily occupied coastline, areas of internal waters, territorial sea, exclusive (maritime) economic zone and continental shelf of Ukraine; 3) the safeguarding of state sovereignty,*

⁷ On Amending the National Security Strategy of Ukraine. Decree of President of Ukraine No. 16/2025 of 6 January 2025. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/16/2025#Text>.

⁸ Strategy for the De-occupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, approved by Decree of President of Ukraine No. 117/2021 of 24 March 2021. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/117/2021#Text>.

⁹ Military Security Strategy of Ukraine, approved by Decree of President of Ukraine No. 121/2021 of 25 March 2021. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/121/2021#Text>.

¹⁰ Decree of President of Ukraine No. 70/2022 of 24 February 2022 "On Decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of 24 February 2022 "On Putting into Effect the Defence Plan of Ukraine and the Consolidated Plan for Territorial Defence of Ukraine" <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/70/2022#Text>.

¹¹ Maritime Security Strategy of Ukraine, approved by Decree of President of Ukraine No. 468/2024 of 17 July 2024. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/468/2024#Text>.

sovereign and other rights in Ukraine's maritime space...". In other words, this Strategy clearly stipulated the need to de-occupy the Crimean coastline occupied by the enemy and to restore Ukraine's sovereignty over the adjacent Ukrainian waters. Relevant tasks and areas of activity were defined in the Strategy to achieve the determined objectives, and in November 2024 the Action Plan for Implementing the Maritime Security Strategy of Ukraine¹², establishing actions and performance indicators, was brought into force. Undoubtedly, this has made it possible to focus activities much more effectively on achieving the strategic objective of liberating the Crimean Peninsula. At the same time, the combat changes that occurred at sea, on land and in the air between July 2024 and June 2026 necessitate a revision and update of these documents, taking into account the identified needs and priorities.

Despite the challenges of presenting promptly and comprehensively the Ukraine's strategic objectives regarding the liberation of its temporarily occupied territories by the military force, including Crimea, in the above-mentioned national legislative and regulatory acts, Ukraine's military and political leadership, together with Ukraine's defenders, have made every necessary effort and taken all necessary actions to defend Ukraine against the enemy and regain Ukrainian territory in the context of a full-scale military invasion.

The gradual shift in the overall military-political and military-strategic situation in the Russian-Ukrainian war, driven by the success of the Defence Forces of Ukraine's operations in the Black Sea and in Crimea, has brought the issue of Crimea's liberation to the fore. Ukraine has switched from declaring political and diplomatic approaches to the de-occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol to conducting active military operations aimed at isolating Crimea and compelling the Russian Federation to withdraw its troops from the peninsula.

2. SECURITY CONTEXT IN BLACK SEA REGION

Implications of the Russian Federation's War against Ukraine for Regional Security. Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, which began in 2014, has created far-reaching threats in the Black Sea region, primarily around Crimea and in the neighbouring areas. Russia's hybrid actions between 2014 and 2021 adversely affected freedom of navigation, trade and other maritime activities in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The safety of civilian vessel crews was directly jeopardised due to the significant escalation of Russian military activity at sea, involving the actual use of various types of weapons and electronic warfare equipment, that resulted into a substantial decline of the international security level in the region.

With the outbreak of the Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Black Sea region has become a zone of active hostilities, reducing international security to a minimum. The escalation of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine caused blocking dozens of merchant vessels flying the flags of third countries in the Black Sea ports, attacking the ships, striking naval mines, and killing crew members.

At present, military operations in the Black Sea region, including the liberation of Crimea, are directly and mutually linked to regional security. For instance, the review of naval operations between 2022 and 2025 has brought to the following partial conclusion: "... By reducing the Russian Federation's potential in the Black Sea, Ukraine has contributed to enhancing international security and the security of NATO and the EU in the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions, particularly in Syria, as well as the national security of the Black Sea states, including NATO member states Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey"¹³. One of the factors behind this success is, certainly, the support Ukraine has received from foreign countries.

Moreover, if summarising this mutual impact, it should be noted that, on the one hand, Ukraine's success in its fight against Russia in the Black Sea has been contributing to bring the war closer to an end and restore the necessary level of security in the region; while on the other hand, the military and other forms of support provided to Ukraine by partner states as well as the strengthening of the capabilities of the Black Sea states and the growing influence of leading world powers, international security coalitions and alliances

¹² Ordinance of Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1162-r of 22 November 2024, "On Approving Action Plan for Implementing Maritime Security Strategy of Ukraine

¹³ Yakymiak, Stepan. Maritime security of Ukraine: Problems and Prospects. Black Sea Security, 2026, №1(44). P.7–28. <https://geostrategy.org.ua/en/black-sea-security/chornomorska-bezpeka-1-44-2026/black-sea-security-eng-version>.

on the situation in the region will help create the conditions for accelerating the end of the war and, consequently, the restoration of international security in the Black Sea region. It is worth mentioning that the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine has compelled the Black Sea states, the US, the EU and NATO to respond to changes in the security situation in the region, to update their own concepts, doctrines and strategies, and to take specific actions to strengthen their security and defence capabilities.

Amendments to Security Strategies for the Region and Their Implementation Effects. In the context of the Russian Federation's ongoing war against Ukraine, almost every Black Sea littoral state has built up its defence capabilities to a certain extent and updated its security approaches to respond to existing and anticipated threats. The US, the EU and NATO have also responded to changes in the security situation in the region.

The US strategy for security and development in the Black Sea, or the Black Sea Security Act, introduced in 2023, focused primarily on enhancing regional stability, deepening the economic integration of Black Sea countries with Western powers, and "countering the PRC¹⁴'s coercive economic pursuits" in the region¹⁵.

The EU's Strategic Approach to the Black Sea Region¹⁶, published in May 2025 and elaborating on elements of the previously adopted EU Maritime Security Strategy, recognised a significant escalation of threats in the region due to the Russian Federation's actions and identified three main priorities: focusing efforts on the protection of critical infrastructure, deepening operational interoperability with NATO in the Black Sea, and further integrating Ukraine into the EU's security architecture. Among other measures, this strategic document provided for the establishment of a Black Sea Maritime Security Hub to facilitate monitoring and the exchange of information. However, despite the EU's considerable experience in conducting maritime operations, particularly anti-piracy ones, this document does not provide for the establishment or deployment of any maritime security missions (operations) in the Black Sea region, which certainly limits the EU's ability to exert any real influence on the situation in the region.

This shortcoming is exacerbated by the fact that the EU relies exclusively on NATO's capabilities in the region, yet the Alliance has also limited its own ability to exert influence there. For instance, the updated version of NATO's Maritime Strategy¹⁷, published in October 2025, does not highlight the escalating threats in the region resulting from the Russian Federation's aggressive actions. Referring to the Black Sea in its strategy only once, in the context of more general challenges, NATO has in no way elaborated on even the objectives and tasks regarding the maintenance (restoration) of security in the Black Sea in the context of significant changes in the security environment.

Turkey, as a NATO member state and a country recognised as one of the regional military leaders in the context of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine, has, whilst stepping up the development of its own defence capabilities, maintained a dual-vector approach: recognising Ukraine's territorial integrity, it does not develop or implement any effective strategy to deter the Russian Federation nor establish and deploy multinational forces to ensure freedom of navigation and maritime security in the region. The establishment of the Mine Countermeasures Black Sea (MCM Black Sea) joint operation¹⁸ by the three littoral states in 2024 was driven by the urgent need to counter the mine threat in these countries' territorial waters; however, during 2025–2026, no activity has been observed towards transforming this task force to undertake a broader maritime security mission (operation)¹⁹.

The review of the measures developed and implemented by leading world powers, international security organisations and Black Sea states between 2014 and 2026 shows that they contributed little to deterring the Russian Federation's armed aggression in the region as well as preventing it from escalating the use of military force. Though the leading foreign think tanks and independent top experts have developed more

¹⁴ PRC — People's Republic of China

¹⁵ Black Sea Security Act of 2023 (S.804), The Senate of the United States, March 15, 2023. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/804/text?s=1&r=57>.

¹⁶ The European Union's Strategic Approach to the Black Sea Region. European Commission (May 28, 2025). https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/170d9b3a-d45f-4169-80fa-9adb753c0921_en.

¹⁷ Alliance Maritime Strategy (October 29, 2025). <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/10/29/alliance-maritime-strategy>.

¹⁸ Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria Agreed on De-Mining the Black Sea (11.01.2024). <https://forbes.ua/news/turechchina-rumuniya-ta-bolgariya-domovilis-pro-rozminuvannya-chornogo-morya-11012024-18455>.

¹⁹ Ilie, Luiza. Romania Seeks to Expand Black Sea Task Force with Turkey, Bulgaria. Reuters (August 14, 2025). <https://www.reuters.com/en/romania-seeks-expand-black-sea-task-force-with-turkey-bulgaria-2025-08-14>.

comprehensive security strategies and effective measures for the Black Sea region in the face of Russia's aggressive actions, these have not been incorporated into the strategic documents listed above nor actually implemented in the activities of the states concerned. Repeated emphasises on the exceptional role of Crimea in ensuring regional security and the need to substantially strengthen US and NATO capabilities have been ignored²⁰.

The partial conclusion to be drawn from assessing the evolution of the security situation in the region is as follows: global leading powers, international security organisations and the Black Sea littoral states have remained substantially inactive in terms of establishing and implementing effective security mechanisms to restore security in the Black Sea region during the ongoing war. The measures taken to date by foreign powers in the Black Sea region have been primarily of a local, defensive nature and have not been on a scale sufficient to fully ensure the protection of key national interests at sea and the necessary level of international security in the context of their maritime activities. This, in turn, highlights the value of Ukraine's contribution to neutralising the Russian aggressor's influence in the region, in particular the importance of the strikes and operations carried out by the Defence Forces of Ukraine aimed at liberating Crimea.

The most likely scenario for improving the security situation in the region would be the successful completion of the Defence Forces of Ukraine's mission to liberate Crimea, which, in turn, would lay the foundation for restoring international security in the Black Sea region

 Liberation of Crimea and Ukraine's victory in the war are **a crucial prerequisite for international security restoration** in the Black Sea region and its sustainable development.

Furthermore, once hostilities have ceased and the war has ended, there will be a need for special security mechanisms to maintain stability in the region, monitor the activities of the parties' armed forces, prevent the resumption of hostilities, and uphold the established international security arrangements in the region²¹. Actions on creating such mechanisms must begin in good time and ensure adaptability of the framework depending on the situation and the agreements reached.

3. ACTIONS OF DEFENCE FORCES OF UKRAINE TO LIBERATE CRIMEA: OUTCOMES AND EFFECTS

Achievement of the Strategic Goal and the Sequence of Tasks. The first real opportunity to create the conditions for liberating Crimea after the outbreak of the Russian Federation's large-scale military invasion, arose in April 2022. This was achieved thanks to the Defence Forces of Ukraine's actions to halt the enemy's advance around Mykolaiv towards Odesa and to disrupt the enemy's naval dominance. Following strikes on Russian ships and the destruction of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's flagship, the missile cruiser "Moscow" on 13 April 2022, the enemy withdrew all its attack and amphibious forces to the Crimean coast. And after a comprehensive strike by Ukrainian unmanned surface vehicles and unmanned aerial vehicles against Russian forces in Sevastopol on 29 October 2022, the Russian Federation lost control over the protection of its own forces in Crimea²². In light of these Ukraine's achievements, leading international experts began to predict the liberation of Crimea²³.

²⁰ Ben Hodges: Crimea is essential for Ukraine's sovereignty and future prosperity (2025). URL: <https://english.nv.ua/nation/hodges-crimea-is-key-to-ukraine-s-survival-and-sovereignty-50517522.html>.

²¹ Alina Frolova, Stepan Yakymiak. The Changing Military Balance in the Black Sea: A Ukrainian Perspective (02.04.2026). The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2026/04/the-changing-military-balance-in-the-black-sea-a-ukrainian-perspective>.

²² Yakymiak, S. War at sea in 2022–2023: lessons learned, perspectives and features of maritime unmanned vehicles employment (2023). Science and Defence, №3, 2023. P.49–55. (<https://doi.org/10.33099/2618-1614-2023-22-3-49-55>) <https://nio.nuou.org.ua/article/view/292156/335888>

²³ US General Hodges predicted when Ukraine would liberate all occupied territories (01.11.2022). <https://espresso.tv/general-ssha-khodzhesh-sprognozuvav-koli-ukraina-zvilnit-usi-okupovani-teritorii>

The next stage in implementing the objective of liberating Crimea began after the Defence Forces of Ukraine, in the second half of 2023 and early 2024, had launched a series of successful strikes against enemy ships, other forces and command posts. These attacks forced Russia to withdraw its main attack and amphibious forces from Crimea to Novorossiysk. In fact, the initial conditions were created for further actions to liberate Crimea and conduct proper military operations²⁴.

Throughout 2024–2025, the Defence Forces of Ukraine continued to rigorously destroy air defence systems and other key military infrastructure of the Russian Federation's forces in Crimea and neighbouring areas, paving the way for subsequent operations to liberate Crimea²⁵. In September 2024, responding to journalists' questions regarding the Ukrainian forces' systematic strikes on targets in Crimea, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, announced a specific operation aimed at isolating Crimea²⁶. At the same time, while predicting future scenarios, military experts emphasised the challenges and specific nature of operations to liberate islands (peninsulas), considering the experience of such actions in military conflicts of the 20th and early 21st centuries.

For success in such operations, a sequence of key tasks must be carried out: launching pre-emptive strikes to weaken the defence forces of insular (peninsular) territories and undertaking other actions to create favourable conditions for the commencement of the active phase of the operation; destroying the enemy's air defence forces and assets, or reducing their capabilities to the required level, which allows for the successful accomplishment of subsequent missions on insular (peninsular) territories; conducting operations to isolate insular (peninsular) territories, preventing the enemy from reinforcing its troops or replenishing its weapons, ammunition and other material supplies, and preventing the evacuation of important facilities and material assets; conducting operations to strike critical enemy defence targets and wear down the enemy in isolated insular (peninsular) territories, maintaining isolation, and compelling the enemy to withdraw from occupied territories or remove its troops and administrative structures therefrom; should the enemy refuse to withdraw from insular (peninsular) territories — conducting operations to defeat enemy forces and take them prisoner; and after the completion of operations to liberate insular (peninsular) territories — conducting operations to stabilise the situation and prevent their re-occupation by the enemy.

While assessing the enemy's actions to organise the defence of the peninsula, it was emphasised that as early as 2014, the enemy had established a layered defence system for Crimea, which was continuously expanded in the following years. At the same time, it was noted that the repeated raids from the sea carried out in 2022–2024 by units of the Special Operations Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Defence Intelligence of the Ministry for Defence of Ukraine in several areas of the Crimean Peninsula demonstrated the vulnerabilities in the defence system established by the enemy²⁷.

The conclusion drawn from the assessment of military-strategic and operational situation as well as possible scenarios for its development was: *"...unless the defence of Crimea is destroyed by comprehensive strikes against the enemy's critical military targets and the peninsula is liberated, the conditions cannot be created for Ukraine to regain the initiative in the war and achieve victory over the enemy"*²⁸.

Furthermore, based on studying Ukraine's experience in deploying the modern robotic maritime systems (unmanned surface vehicles, unmanned underwater vehicles and unmanned aerial vehicles) in 2022 - 2025, the trend towards robotic warfare and the need to prepare for and conduct joint (multi-domain) maritime robotic operations as a combination of actions by robotic systems (complexes) at sea, above the sea and from the sea against the enemy on land was highlighted²⁹.

²⁴ Yakymiak, Stepan. How to Win at Sea. The Expert Described a New Maritime Security Strategy (2024). <https://armyinform.com.ua/2024/12/17/yak-peremogty-voroga-na-mori-ekspert-rozpoviv-pro-novu-strategiyu-morskoyi-bezpeky/>

²⁵ Yakymiak, Stepan. Maritime security of Ukraine: Problems and Prospects. Black Sea Security, 2026, №1(44). P.7–28. <https://geostrategy.org.ua/en/black-sea-security/chornomorska-bezpeka-1-44-2026/black-sea-security-eng-version>.

²⁶ President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy Declared an Operation to Isolate Crimea (21.09.2024). <https://suspilne.media/crimea/841325-zelenskij-zaaviv-pro-operaciu-stosovno-izolacii-krimu>

²⁷ What to Expect from the Enemy in 2025: an Expert on Russia's Capabilities in the Black Sea and in Crimea. Interview with Stepan Yakymiak. <https://armyinform.com.ua/2025/01/27/chogo-ochikuvaty-vid-voroga-u-2025-roczi-ekspert-pro-spromozhnosti-rf-u-chornomu-mori-ta-v-krymu>.

²⁸ Naval Forces of Ukraine: 10 Facts about Unique Combat Success in the War at Sea. <https://armyinform.com.ua/2025/07/06/vijskovo-morski-syly-zs-ukrayiny-10-faktiv-pro-unikalni-bojovi-uspihy-u-vijni-na-mori/>

²⁹ More than Half of the Targets are Struck by Drones: how Ukraine has Robotised the War at Sea. Interview with Stepan Yakymiak. <https://armyinform.com.ua/2025/07/26/ponad-polovyna-czilej-urazhayetsya-dronamy-yak-ukrayina-robotyzovala-vijnu-na-mori>.

In the spring and early June 2026, the Unmanned Systems Forces (hereinafter referred to as USF), jointly with units of the Special Operations Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Defence Intelligence of the Ministry for Defence of Ukraine, and the Security Service of Ukraine, intensified their operations in Crimea. By striking bridges, ferriages, the isthmus, railways and fuel and energy infrastructure, Ukrainian troops have launched a mission to isolate, as announced in early June 2026 by Robert Brovdi, Commander of the AFU USS³⁰. Thus, having successfully completed their previous tasks — in particular, the destruction of the enemy's air defence system — the Defence Forces of Ukraine have shifted to the task of isolating the Crimean Peninsula and wearing down its forces.

 Defence Forces of Ukraine have been carrying out a mission to isolate Crimea and are shifting to the next stage of operation on its complete liberation.

Outcomes and Effects of DFU Attacks in Crimea. The Defence Forces of Ukraine started attacking targets in Crimea as early as in 2022^{31 32 33}, with keeping on strikes for all following years. It is worth noting that success of DFU operations at sea that first had disrupted the enemy's dominance in the north-western part of the Black Sea and forced it to withdraw its main attack and amphibious forces to the Crimean coast and then to eastern part of the Black Sea, was a precondition for launching operations and attacks in Crimea³⁴. The assessment of the total number and scale of DFU attacks on Crimea targets shows their substantial increase, nearly doubling, since the second half of 2025 (Fig. 2).

There were likely several reasons for this. However, the most significant factor must have been the change in leadership and the expansion of the AFU USF staff in June 2025, the substantial increase in the number of unmanned systems deployed as well as, possibly, the more targeted involvement of other DFU units in carrying out missions to combat the enemy in Crimea. Moreover, since the second half of 2025, the enemy has noted a UAV massing in each of the strikes carried out against targets in Crimea and adjacent waters.

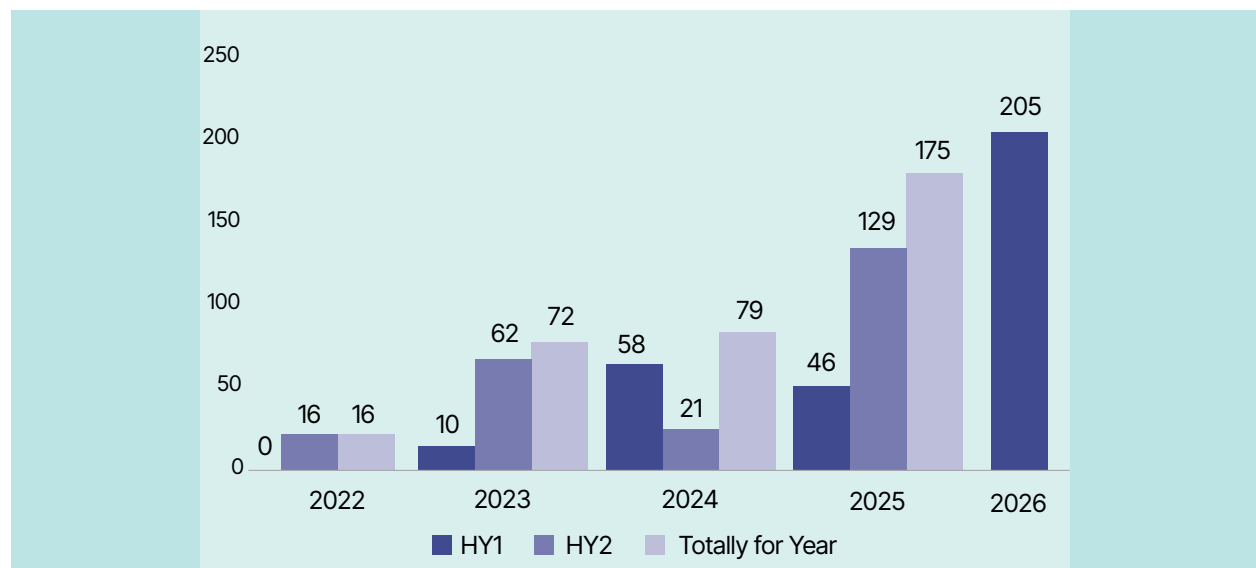


Figure. 2. Total number of DFU attacks on all targets in Crimea (2022–2026). Source: consolidated by the author upon open-source data, references in the document.

³⁰ "Madyar": Crimea will be Isolated in the Near Future (11 June 2026). <https://www.dw.com/uk/madar-krim-bude-izolovano-u-najblizcomu-majbutnomu/a-77511816>

³¹ Russian Black Sea Fleet HQ in Sevastopol Were Attacked by Drone (31.07.2022). <https://military.com/uk/news/shtab-rosijskogo-chornomorskogo-flotu-v-sevastopoli-atakuvaly-bezpilotnykom>

³² New Footage from the Ground at the Russian Airbase in Novofedorivka (09.08.2022). <https://x.com/PolymarketIntel/status/1557080196011941889>

³³ A Kamikaze Drone Attacked Russian Black Sea Fleet HQ in Sevastopol (20.08.2022). <https://web.archive.org/web/20230722181908/https://mil.in.ua/uk/news/dron-kamikadze-atakuvav-shtab-rosijskogo-flotu-u-sevastopoli>

³⁴ Crimea attacks (2022–present). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimea_attacks_\(2022%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimea_attacks_(2022%E2%80%93present)); (records of attacks on the territory of Crimea during the Russian — Ukrainian War. https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Перелік_атак_на_території_Криму_в_ході_російсько-української_війни).

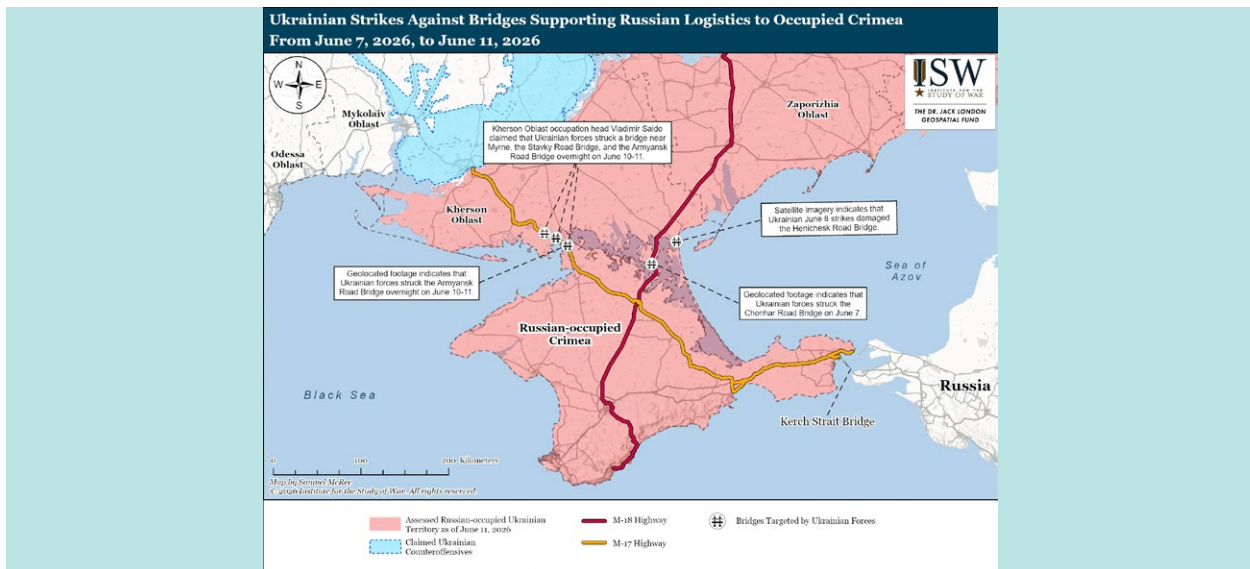


Figure 3. Attacks of June 7 – 11, 2026 on bridges at logistic routes to Crimea. Source: <https://understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-11-2026>

While analysing the DFU's attacks in Crimea during the first half of 2026, certain changes in distributing strikes across different types of targets may be noted. Following a significant increase in the number of units hit — including anti-aircraft missile and electronic warfare units of the air defence forces, coastal radar stations monitoring the surface and air situation, electronic intelligence systems, fighter airfields and the aircraft stationed there — between March and May 2026, in the first half of June 2026, the DFU carried out a series of strikes on road and railway bridges, convoys and trains within Crimea and at the entrances to the peninsula from the Kherson Region and the Taman Peninsula. In the days that followed, attacks on key enemy's targets in Crimea continued. For instance, on 17 June 2026, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported that Ukrainian forces had struck a road bridge across the North Crimean Canal and a road bridge near the occupied town of Voinka³⁵ (see Fig. 3³⁶)

KRYMSKIY MOST (Crimean Bridge) Telegram Channel also announced a temporary closure of the Crimean (Kerch) Bridge between Crimea and Krasnodar Krai (province) to traffic³⁷.

These actions analysed have demonstrated a trend of continued attacks on air defence facilities (probably, with a certain decrease in the total number) and simultaneous effective strikes, substantially increased in number, on bridges, railways, and other assets used for transporting important freight to and from Crimea (Fig. 4).

This trend shows the increasing scale of DFU actions aimed at isolating Crimea, which could pose a threat to the enemy's ability to ensure the proper functioning of its forces, government and military command bodies, and critical infrastructure within Crimea. Should such threats intensify, the capabilities of the enemy's military formations to defend Crimea against the actions of the Defence Forces of Ukraine aimed at its liberation may be reduced.

The presence of this trend, provided that it persists and intensifies in the coming period, indicates that the DFU are actively shifting to the next missions, which may be describing Ukraine's strategy for the military liberation of Crimea. It is important to emphasise that, in such a situation, to prevent the enemy from restoring its air defence forces and assets as well as coastal radar stations monitoring the surface and air situation, its radio-technical reconnaissance and electronic warfare assets in Crimea, and the forces and assets for the comprehensive defence of areas along the Crimean coast vulnerable to amphibious landings must be a necessary condition for success of DFU's operations. In other words, the DFU should limit the enemy's ability to carry out such actions and the timeframe for them.

³⁵ <https://t.me/GeneralStaffZSU/40069>.

³⁶ <https://understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-11-2026>.

³⁷ https://t.me/most_official/24917.

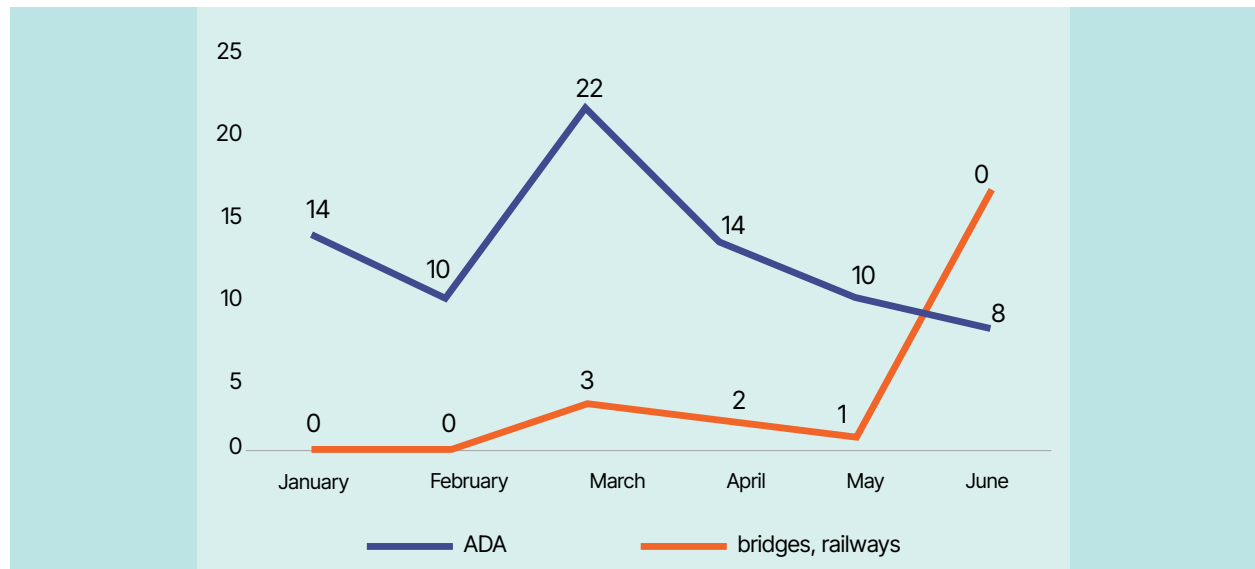


Figure 4. Comparison of number of attacks on air defence asset (ADA) systems and bridges/ railways in 2026. Source: consolidated by the author upon open-source data, references in the document.

4. CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Challenges

The key challenges that could adversely affect the DFU's operations to liberate Crimea are:

- 🔊 the insufficient capabilities of the DFU in conventional forces and assets required to carry out air and sea amphibious operations (this challenge makes it virtually impossible to conduct a Crimea liberation mission in a conventional manner);
- 🔊 the insufficient pace of studying the country's own experience in carrying out modern operations, particularly robotic ones (involving the large-scale and integrated use of unmanned aerial, unmanned maritime and ground-based robotic systems), and making the necessary changes to doctrines (standards) for conducting and planning such operations;
- 🔊 delays in building up and replenishing stocks of key types and models of weaponry required for the Crimea liberation mission, due to potential disruptions in the delivery of foreign states' aid;
- 🔊 significantly increased operational pauses between previous and subsequent tasks during the Crimea liberation mission, giving the enemy time to regain and build up its defence in Crimea;
- 🔊 loss of the advantage over the enemy in developing and deploying the cutting-edge military technologies and constantly improving them.

Ways to address these challenges are outlined below in the section on recommendations.

Prospects

The key factors in achieving success in future operations will be the timely learning of lessons and gaining an advantage over the enemy in the implementation of military-technological innovations. With this in mind, to ensure the success of Ukraine's defence — in particular, the fulfilment of the Crimea liberation tasks — it is necessary to continuously review the status and effectiveness of actions taken to ensure the country's national security and defence. Success is based on promptly developing and implementing existing strategies and doctrines as well as adaptively revising strategic situation-based, short-term, medium-term and long-term decisions already adopted for implementation, considering their current implementation effects.

As regards securing a technological advantage over the enemy, it is essential not only to possess the most advanced high-tech military equipment, but also to have trained personnel and the appropriate tools for

planning cutting-edge missions. This, in turn, requires an analysis of the accumulated experience of operations carried out by the DFU, particularly with robotic systems used, as well as the scientific synthesis and development of a new robotic mission theory.

Crimea Liberation Robotic Operation: Developing a Theory and Practical Recommendations. The successful USF operations in 2025 - 2026 provide significant insights into finding new ways of carrying out state-of-the-art defensive and offensive operations, particularly in forcing the enemy to retreat and withdraw from the occupied territories. However, a review of recent publications by national and international experts on this subject reveals considerable passivity in academic research and approaches to understanding the role of robotic systems in amphibious (assault landing) operations.

Unfortunately, present-day research by international and national experts still demonstrates 20th c. naval mission stereotypes and classical approaches to the amphibious warfare theory (joint amphibious operations, JLO) when the primary role is assigned to different service military units and only a supporting role to unmanned (drone, crewless, robotic) systems. For instance, when reviewing a foreign publication³⁸, which presents the views of US Marine Corps experts on the global role of expeditionary forces and amphibious operations³⁹, the author highlighted the relevance of studying such publications for Ukrainian experts but stuck to the statement that *"...amphibious operations (primarily in the form of raids) will remain an important factor in combat operations in southern Ukraine"*. The simplification of approaches to analysing amphibious operations ("primarily in the form of raids") adopted by the review author does not contribute to studying this topical subject systematically and comprehensively in the context of the liberation of Crimea.

This being said, a recent paper by several researchers from a renowned educational institution and a dedicated research centre of the Ministry for Defence of Ukraine has attempted to summarise the potential role of "unmanned systems" in the JLO to de-occupy territories seized by the Russian Federation⁴⁰. The authors of the article, on the one hand, note that *"...unmanned systems will play a key role in achieving the JLO objectives: UAVs, optionally piloted aircraft, ground-based robotic systems, and maritime (water-based) unmanned systems"* and *"Unmanned systems are set to become a decisive factor in the JLO success for the Crimea de-occupation"*. On the other hand, the authors of this article contradict themselves when, in the following paragraphs, they refer to the JLO as an operation *"...involving unmanned systems"*. In other words, this is not a robotic mission with the possible partial involvement of personnel in specific tasks, but rather a classic amphibious operation with extensive troop deployment. Such authors' conclusions are explained, inter alia, by the fact that they base their arguments on outdated sources from the 1960s to the early 2000s, with only two sources in the reference list published after February 2022, including one journalistic piece.

However, it is important to highlight the statement made by the above-mentioned paper authors that *"...no JLO is envisaged in accordance with the new approaches to the system of defence force employment, as set out in the 2025 Interim Doctrine on Employing Defence Forces 2025"*. Based on the competence of the authors working within the Ministry for Defence institutional system, it could be concluded that the command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the staff of leading military educational and research institutions are lagging behind the rapid pace of the warfare robotisation, particularly in terms of improving standards for the training and employment of forces. This gives rise to the question: on what new theoretical principles and on analysis of which specific wartime experience is the DFU personnel being trained in the context of an ongoing war, and will we fall behind the enemy in implementing military technologies?

Based on reviewing the above-mentioned publications, other known sources, and experience in deploying robotic systems during 2022–2026, to address the challenge of liberating the occupied territories while facing a shortage of personnel, it seems reasonable to develop and implement a robotic mission theory, including offensive and amphibious operations.

³⁸ Palamarchuk M. (2023). Marine Landing Operations — a Global View of the Force Projection Tool. <https://doi.org/10.53679/2616-9460.2.2023.06>.

³⁹ On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare (2024). Edited by Timothy Heck, B.A. Friedman, and Walker D. Mills. Vol. 2. Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps University Press, 2024. 382 p.

⁴⁰ Volotivskiy P.B., Hlushchenko P.A., Zhevtiuk O.A. et al. (2026). Air-sea Amphibious Operation. Historical Examples of Preparation and Conduct. Role of Unmanned Aerial Systems in Present-Day Operation Context. <https://doi.org/10.33099/2618-1614-2026-32-1-19-29>

The state-of-art robotic offensive and similar operations should utilize the experience gained in establishing kill zones along the line of battle contact (up to 25 km) and zones for destroying enemy's logistics to an operational depth (up to 200 km). The effect of the offensive is achieved by deploying USF units to create an "offensive zone" extending to a depth of 250–300 km from the front line, within which the enemy's defensive (offensive, counter-offensive) force group is eliminated. Thereafter, a "cover zone" is formed around it, similar to current kill zones, which prevents the penetration of enemy's units and allows the zone to be taken over by our own forces, primarily robotic units, and, if necessary, human-manned ones.

To address the challenge of scaling up the USF capabilities in utilizing unmanned surface vehicles and expanding the impact on the enemy at sea, it is proposed to scale up units of maritime robotic systems (surface, underwater, aerial and combined) within the USF as well as to develop and implement appropriate concepts for the operational use of such systems and to equip the USF with them. The experience of successful USF strikes on the enemy at sea confirms the need to develop this USF component.

 Prospects for military liberation of Crimea are defined by a technological advantage of Ukraine and a need to carry out **a robotic joint amphibious operation**.

At the same time, plans to develop the DFU's capabilities to carry out the Crimea liberation mission should include the development of missile and other types of weaponry, the widespread integration of AI into operation planning, data exchange and command as well as detection and destruction of enemy forces.

In the present-day context, in order to strike the enemy at operational and strategic depths — including across the entire depth of Crimean territory — Ukraine continues to develop new weapons systems and improve existing ones, primarily unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and missile systems. Therefore, in June 2026, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine announced the approval of a new Concept for the Development of the Missile Forces and Artillery of the Armed Forces of Ukraine up to 2030⁴¹.

According to the concept, to deliver the necessary firepower against enemy's targets at both operational and strategic depths, the missile systems shall be developed, including the design and mass production of new Ukrainian ballistic and cruise missiles. The Concept states that the combined use of unmanned aerial systems and missile weapons "*...will create a balanced long-range firepower system and ensure the destruction of targets at ranges of up to 2,000 kilometres*". In addition to unmanned aerial systems, the development of maritime and land-based robotic systems (complexes) shall be prioritised.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Conclusions:

1. In the ongoing war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, Crimea plays an extremely important role, due to geopolitical, economic, military and other factors. The liberation of Crimea by the Defence Forces of Ukraine will disrupt the operations of enemy's troops in southern Ukraine and weaken enemy's resistance on other fronts, creating favourable conditions for a victorious end to the war.
2. Views regarding the possible military solution to the liberation of Crimea have changed in line with the overall situation in the war, and the strengthening or weakening of one or the other party. The steadfast and uncompromising position of Ukraine's leading patriotic forces, including representatives of the Crimean Tatar people, and the corresponding stance of the political leadership of the State have ensured that the Crimea liberation has remained a key issue throughout all phases of the war, including in 2026.

⁴¹ Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine: Concept for the Development of the Missile Forces and Artillery of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Is Approved (9 June 2026). t.me/osirskiy/1651.

3. Developments in the security environment in the Black Sea region between 2014 and 2026 have demonstrated the inadequacy of efforts by foreign powers, their alliances and coalitions to ensure international security and to deter and halt the Russian Federation's aggressive actions in the Black Sea. Restoring a sufficient level of security in the region requires Ukraine to successfully liberate Crimea and secure victory in the war as well as regional countries and leading world powers to actively support establishing appropriate security arrangements in the region once the war has ended.
4. At present, the Defence Forces of Ukraine, having increased the number of strikes on Crimea during the second half of 2025 and the first half of 2026, are completing the destruction of the enemy's air defence forces and assets in Crimea and fulfilling the task of isolating the enemy in Crimea. The ultimate outcome of the Crimea liberation mission can be achieved through successful actions by the Defence Forces of Ukraine — primarily through robotic operations — aimed at wearing down the enemy isolated in Crimea, or through the subsequent destruction of its troops and the withdrawal of their remnants from Crimea.

Key Recommendations:

1. To ensure the success of the DFU's operations, particularly in liberating Crimea, it is essential to develop a system for studying and implementing lessons learnt from warfare, by devising new methodologies and widely using AI at all levels of force employment and the national defence capability build-up.
2. In the context of transitioning to robotic warfare technologies and taking advantage of Ukraine's lead in implementing innovative military technologies, the tasks of liberating Crimea should be achieved through planning and carrying out the cutting-edge robotic air, land and maritime operations. To this end, it is necessary to ensure the rapid development of the theory underpinning such operations, and the scaling up of employing various types and systems of robotic forces and assets.
3. To make robotic operations successful, it is necessary to ensure the proactive build-up and replenishment of stocks of key types and models of weaponry, particularly robotic systems, taking into account possible disruptions to the pace and volume of their delivery and enemy's countermeasures.
4. When planning and implementing Crimea liberation operation tasks, the enemy should be continuously pressed, and the transition from previous to subsequent tasks should be achieved uninterrupted, avoiding operational pauses during which the enemy could regain and build up its own capabilities.
5. To ensure a permanent advantage over the enemy in deploying the latest military technologies, the comprehensive development of ecosystems to create, equip, maintain and improve robotic systems (unmanned aerial vehicles, unmanned maritime vessels and ground-based robotic systems), along with the development of doctrines and the training and deployment of personnel, should be accelerated.