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Ukraine Defense Brief

Key Strategic Takeaways

Ukrainian military specialists are being deployed to the Middle East to provide expertise on intercepting Shahed drones. Three groups of Ukrainian military specialists have been deployed to Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia to support air defense capabilities against Iranian Shaheds. A total of 11 countries, including the US, have requested Ukrainian assistance. This international recognition of Ukraine's military expertise could lead to greater partnership between the Ukrainian Armed Forces and militaries of countries seeking assistance, including the US.

The increased demand for Patriot missiles in the Middle East places greater strain on a limited global supply while creating an opportunity for Ukraine to export interceptor drones. Ukraine itself remains under-resourced by its international partners: approximately 80% of the country is unprotected from ballistic missiles. The growing demand for PAC-3 missiles, a key component of the Patriot air defense system, and their diversion to Middle Eastern states reduces the likelihood that Ukraine will receive sufficient supplies. However, this has opened an opportunity for Ukraine to supply interceptor drones to Gulf states in exchange for PAC-3 missiles

and to support US operations against Iran. Negotiations over the purchase of interceptor drones are currently underway.

Read more about Ukrainian air defense innovation in our report:

["Holding Back the Sky: Ukraine's Air Defense Campaign, 2022-2025"](#)

State of Play

Recent Ukrainian strikes demonstrate a growing capacity to disrupt Russian Shahed operations and underscore the importance of targeting UAV logistics. In early March, Ukraine struck a long-range communications center and a Podlyot-K1 radar system in occupied Crimea, while also targeting personnel from Russia's elite Rubikon drone unit in occupied areas of Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts. On March 7, ATACMS and SCALP missiles struck a Shahed drone storage and launch site in Donetsk, further degrading Russian drone capabilities. Frontline Ukrainian forces continue holding the line against Russian offensive pressure across multiple sectors. Strategically decisive breakthroughs remain unlikely for either side in the near term.

A large, coordinated strike on Russian naval assets in the Port of Novorossiysk demonstrates Ukraine's continued reach in the maritime domain. On the night of March 2, Ukraine launched a large-scale drone strike on Russian naval assets in the Port of Novorossiysk, damaging five warships and the Sheskhari oil-loading terminal. The operation involved up to 200 aerial and maritime drones. These strikes on Novorossiysk – now the primary base for Russia's Black Sea Fleet – demonstrate the continued reach and effectiveness of Ukraine's maritime capabilities.

Read more about Ukraine's Black Sea campaign in our report:

["The Black Sea's Asymmetric Blueprint"](#)

Operational Innovation

New international production and partnership initiatives are bolstering Ukrainian drone capabilities and creating long-term opportunities for the industry. The first overseas

Ukrainian drone production facility, Ukrspesystems in the United Kingdom, deepens defense-industrial ties with London, reduces vulnerability to Russian strikes, and accelerates battlefield-informed innovation. It also marks Ukraine's transition from drone consumer to co-producer and exporter, reinforcing NATO-adjacent manufacturing and signaling sustained Western support for Ukraine's asymmetric advantage. The Ukrainian military is also sharing operational insights on interceptor drones with the US, drawing on lessons from countering Iranian-made drones and missiles and underscoring Ukraine's value as a strategic partner in counter-drone operations.

Ukraine is also pioneering civilian-led air defense, allowing critical firms to build air defense systems using non-frontline equipment. The Air Force can temporarily transfer equipment and ammunition to these companies, strengthening protection of key infrastructure while reducing military strain. This civil-military integration offers global lessons for countering asymmetric aerial threats.

Lessons for Allied Militaries

Iran's strike campaigns have made Gulf states acutely aware of their strategic dependence on the US and UK, both of which provided inadequate protection, creating a compelling case for the Gulf to develop indigenous defense systems. Ukraine offers a clear model for building a sovereign defense industrial base. Between 2022 and 2025, Ukraine's defense sector grew from roughly a dozen firms to around 1,500, driven by targeted government programs such as BRAVE1 and financial reforms including VAT waivers on imported drone components.

Read more about Ukraine's rapidly growing defense tech ecosystem:

["Ukraine's Defense Tech Industry: By the Numbers"](#)

Drones are already a defining feature of modern and future warfare. Nations must prioritize developing resilient, multi-layered air defense and counter-UAV systems, including interceptor drones and electronic warfare. Sufficient investment in these areas could neutralize some of an adversary's most potent capabilities. Russia's energy terror attacks, Iran's horizontal escalation across the Middle East, and Western countermeasures all underscore the central role of drones on the battlefield. Modern drone attacks are frequently integrated with ballistic missiles to overwhelm air defenses, making multi-layered, sustained air defense capability essential.

Request a briefing on Ukraine

Prepared by the Snake Island Institute, a Ukrainian analytics and innovation center based in Kyiv.



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