



Ukraine to Produce Thousands of Drones Capable of Strikes Deep into Russia

Ukraine will produce thousands of long-range drones capable of strikes deep into Russia in 2024 and already has up to 10 firms making drones that can strike Moscow and St. Petersburg, Ukraine's digital minister said.

Mykhailo Fedorov spoke about the wartime drone industry he has promoted in an interview in Kyiv in which he unveiled new details about the sector, after a series of Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian oil facilities in recent weeks.

"The category of long-range kamikaze drones is growing, with a range of 300km, 500km, 700km, and 1,000km. Two years ago, this category did not exist ... at all," he told Reuters.

Fedorov, 33, has been at the core of Ukraine's effort to nurture private military start-ups to innovate and build up the drone industry as the conflict with Russia enters its third year and Ukraine seeks new ways to counter Russian forces.

The recent series of strikes on oil facilities, he said, mirrored the government's progress in rapidly deregulating the drone market and raising funding for it, with the state acting as a venture investor.

Some \$2.5 million in grants were allocated to military tech start-ups via the Brave1 initiative created by the government in 2023, an amount poised to be increased roughly tenfold in 2024, he said.

"We will fight to increase the financing even more," he added.

Besides, Fedorov said only one of the 10 companies whose drones could fly as far as the regions around Moscow or St. Petersburg was a state company.

Since the first year of the full-scale war, Russia has used thousands of Iranian "Shahed" drones that fly toward their target and detonate on impact for long-range strikes.

Ukraine's production levels and deliveries increased more than 120 times in 2023, as per Fedorov, part of a broader wartime push to develop and produce drones to narrow the gap with Russia's strike capabilities.

Furthermore, Fedorov said he agreed with an assessment by Ukraine's military spy chief Kyrylo Budanov that Kyiv had achieved a "certain kind of parity" with Moscow in the production of long-range drones.

"We need to act in an anti-bureaucratic way. This is the essence of a breakthrough in the war of technology. We are going to continue to put our bets on this, to work in this direction. Because



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Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on February 13, 2024

technology can really save us,” he said, noting the shortage of artillery rounds Ukrainian troops were facing.

Overall, over 300,000 drones of different types were contracted last year and over 100,000 were sent to the front, he said, adding that the figures did not cover volunteer supplies, which he said made a “significant contribution.”

“We removed taxes on UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] components, simplified the contracting procedure, and the procedure for decommissioning,” he said.

“In other words, we took all the blockages that private sector companies were facing and addressed them in six months by passing all the necessary laws and resolutions.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has set a target for Ukraine in 2024 to produce one million first-person view (FPV) drones, which are inexpensive to produce and have been weaponized in huge quantities by both sides on the war front.

Ukraine’s drone industry relies heavily on components from foreign countries, including China, widely seen as an ally of Russia. Fedorov said there was an effort to localize production of components.

“That’s why I think that if we continue this trend, by the end of this year we will have a lot of companies that have already made more than 50 per cent of their components locally.”

The recent increase in production put such a strain on logistics that changes had to be quickly made to prevent long delays in deliveries, he said.

“In December alone, drone deliveries were 50 times higher than in the entire 2022. Just imagine, the system was not prepared for that, and I think the logistics did not realize that such volumes were possible.”

The private sector was also held back by a state monopoly on making drone ammunition. Ukraine passed a resolution ending that state monopoly three months ago and later ceased a separate one on making artillery rounds and rockets, he said.

“Over the past three months, more than 20 companies have already undergone testing and can now hand over ammunition to the state,” he said.

Ukraine has trained 20,000 drone operators since it launched a program to offer grants for military training in private schools at the beginning of 2023, he said. There were 20 such schools, he added.

“We pay for every military person who comes to these schools. Now we have a plan to turn this into a larger state program and separately to modernize, update several training centers and make them work at a high level.”

In an interview published on February 13, Ukrainian General Oleksandr Syrsky told the German TV channel ZDF that Ukraine has “transitioned” from offensive operations to strategic defense.

The interview was recorded several days before Zelensky appointed Syrsky commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, in place of the purged General Valeriy Zaluzhny.

“The war is entering a new stage,” Syrsky told ZDF. “We have transitioned from offensive actions to conducting a defensive operation,” he added, in order to “exhaust the enemy and inflict maximum losses on them, using our fortifications, our technical advantages, unmanned aerial vehicles, electronic warfare systems, and prepared defense lines.”



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The Ukrainian armed forces have turned to aerial and even ground drones to preserve the lives of troops, Syrsky said.

“I’d rather leave a position, but I won’t allow the loss of personnel,” he told the German outlet. He claimed that Russia places “no value” on the lives of its troops, which is mirrored by its losses being seven to eight times higher than Ukraine’s, according to claims made by Kyiv. Other sources claim the figures are the reverse, with Ukraine losing seven to eight times as many soldiers as Russia.

Various Western outlets, from *The Washington Post* to *The New York Times*, have underscored Kyiv’s shortage of front-line infantry as well as ammunition in recent weeks. As per the *Times*, Kyiv is facing the very real prospect of “a cascading collapse along the front” unless the U.S. sends military aid very soon.

The need to mobilize another 500,000 Ukrainians to replace the battlefield losses has exposed a rift between Zelensky and Zaluzhny, which resulted in the general’s sacking last week. Syrsky, the former commander of Ukrainian ground forces, is reportedly disliked by Ukrainian troops, who deem him as a bull-headed “butcher.”

Based on Politico reports, the soldiers have given Syrsky the nickname “General 200” (a reference to the code for killed in action, i.e. “General KIA”) because he had sacrificed so many lives in failed attempts to hold and then recapture Artyomovsk (known as Bakhmut in Ukraine) last year.

Speaking to ZDF, Syrsky said Ukraine needs to build up domestic weapons and ammunition production to compensate for the possible loss of external support. Kyiv has become almost entirely dependent on the United States and NATO, who have poured over \$200 billion in weapons, equipment, and ammunition to Ukraine over the past two years.

The general also confirmed that Kyiv still considers reaching Ukraine’s 1991 borders as the main victory condition.

“Everything is based on the fact that we must end the war by reaching our borders. Other options are not considered because we simply have no other way out,” he said.

Moscow has repeatedly said that Ukraine acknowledging Crimea, Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhia, and Kherson as part of Russia is a prerequisite for any peace talks.



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