



## Canada Pledges Hundreds of Drones to Ukraine

Canada will donate more than 800 SkyRanger R70 drones to Ukraine, Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair announced on February 19. Kyiv depends hugely on commercial and military UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) in its conflict with Russia, which will enter its third year on February 24.

“These drones are going to help Ukraine’s front-line troops assess targets and threats quickly with accuracy and effectiveness,” Blair declared at a press conference in Toronto. The R70s can be used for reconnaissance missions and can carry payloads of up to 3.5 kilograms.

On February 6, Ukraine established a separate military branch — the Unmanned Systems Forces — tasked with operating ground, aerial, and seaborne drones.

Ukraine’s former commander-in-chief, General Valery Zaluzhny, wrote an op-ed for CNN earlier this month in which he stated the vital role of UAVs. Drones “provide the best way for Ukraine to avoid being drawn into a positional war, where we do not possess the advantage,” the general underscored.

The UAVs form part of a \$370 million aid package pledged to Kyiv by the Canadian government in June 2023. Overall, Ottawa has supplied \$1.78 billion worth of assistance since February 2022, including tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery.

Moscow has repeatedly mentioned that foreign military aid will lead to more escalation but will eventually not alter the course of the conflict.

Meanwhile, the Canadian government has rejected a Russian request for the extradition of SS veteran Yaroslav Hunka, citing the lack of a relevant treaty between the two countries, Moscow’s ambassador in Ottawa recently confirmed.

Moscow had submitted an extradition request to Ottawa in December, according to charges against Hunka levied by the Russian Prosecutor-General’s Office. The 98-year-old Ukrainian-Canadian has publicly acknowledged volunteering to join the Waffen-SS Galicia Division during the Second World War, after he was honored with a standing ovation in the Canadian Parliament during last year’s visit by Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky.



Public Domain  
SkyRanger drone



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“It is unlikely that the absence of an extradition treaty can serve as a reason for refusal,” Ambassador Oleg Stepanov said in February, calling it “an obvious politically motivated excuse.”

Stepanov noted that Canada could have charged Hunka with war crimes for his activity in the SS, but appears to have chosen not to. If Hunka lied about being a member of the SS on his citizenship application — as he seems to have — then Ottawa could at very least deprive him of citizenship, he added.

“Here is the litmus test for Canada’s covering up of Nazism. Will the criminal be punished or will he continue to live out his comfortable retirement years in a country that is so proud of its legal standards?” Stepanov said. Either way, Russia plans to “continue to seek justice” in the matter, said the ambassador.

Hunka was a guest of honor at the Canadian Parliament last September, and was introduced as “a Canadian hero” who “fought for Ukrainian independence against the Russians” to thunderous applause. The incident was slammed by Russia, Poland, and the UN, while the Canadian opposition accused Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of lying about his role in the affair. House Speaker Anthony Rota took responsibility for the incident and resigned.

In October 2023, Russia charged Hunka with genocide and issued a warrant for his arrest. Russian diplomats have pointed to the incident as proof of Nazi influence in Canada. Russian President Vladimir Putin also broached the topic in his recent interview with American broadcaster Tucker Carlson.

Meanwhile, Washington and Kyiv have breached articles of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as Ukrainian forces have used illegal munitions on the battlefield, Russian Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov recently claimed.

The head of Russia’s Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Protection Forces provided several examples of Kyiv’s alleged use of banned chemical weapons and non-lethal chemical agents that he said were procured from the United States.

Kirillov alleged that Ukraine used drones to drop U.S.-made gas grenades on December 28, 2023 containing “CS” compound (2-chlorobenzylidene malononitrile) — a chemical classified as a riot-control tool that irritates the eyes and upper respiratory tract, and can cause skin burns, respiratory paralysis, and cardiac arrest when used in high concentrations.

He added that the delivery of such munitions by the United States to Ukraine was a direct violation of the rules of the OPCW, which states that a country must “never, under any circumstances, transfer chemical weapons directly or indirectly to anyone.”

Kirillov further reported that, on June 15, 2023, Moscow’s forces were attacked by a drone harboring a container filled with chloropicrin, which is classified as a Schedule 3 compound under the Chemical Weapons Convention and is strictly prohibited — even for law enforcement purposes. Moreover, Kyiv used the same chemical on August 3 and 11, 2023, near the village of Rabotino, he said.

The general also illustrated various instances when Kyiv used toxic substances against Russian military personnel, as well as poisoning high-ranking officials such as the head of Russia’s Kherson Region, Vladimir Saldo, in August 2022.

Kirillov said Russian intelligence thinks that Ukraine’s forces, under the tutelage of their Western backers, are developing a new military tactic that would use a “chemical belt.” This would entail blowing up containers with hydrocyanic acid and ammonia to stop Russian forces from advancing.



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He elaborated that plans for such a large-scale use of toxic chemicals were evidenced by the fact that Kyiv had asked the EU to supply it with hundreds of thousands of antidotes, gas masks, and other personal protective equipment in 2024. That's in addition to 600,000 ampules of organophosphorus antidotes, and 750,000 bottles of drugs for the detoxification of mustard gas, lewisite, and hydrocyanic acid derivatives that were supplied by NATO countries in 2023. "It is obvious that the volumes requested by Ukraine are excessive for a country that does not have chemical weapons," he stated.

There has been no response from the OPCW despite all of this evidence being presented to the organization four months ago, the general said, accusing it of being run by Washington as a tool to target its political opponents.

In November, Russia lost its seat on the OPCW Executive Council after failing to get enough votes from other members of the organization. Kirillov said Moscow was effectively "pushed out" of its seat and replaced by Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania, who he claimed were pursuing an obvious anti-Russia policy.



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