

# Ukraine recap: Drone warfare brings new phase to battlefield

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Credit: Алесь Усцінаў from Pexels

Like many people, I first encountered drones when they looked like toys, something fun to play with and be entertained by. Not long afterward, I

was waiting for a boat on my commute to work, and a drone hovered overhead, not far above me, and with no sign of an operator. I remember thinking this was a bit more ominous.

What if drones started following us, a sort of unbolted [security camera](#) without restrictions, that could record whatever we did? A few years ago many of us were unaware of drones, now they are a regular sight. And they are far more threatening than we first thought.

Drone technology has been developing fast and furiously during the Ukraine war, as Marcel Plichta from the University of St Andrews explains.

Russian and Ukrainian military forces have stepped up drone attacks over the past few weeks, causing significant damage and loss of life. And the technology is updating constantly. Both sides have been using one-way drones, also called kamikaze drones, because they are designed to fly to a target and not come back.

This type of drone is an escalating threat not just in the Ukraine war, but in other skirmishes. They can be developed relatively cheaply in bulk, and can be used with precision to aim at targets hundreds of miles away. Armed forces around the world are now being forced to rethink their strategies because of how fast and accurate these drones are, and what they are seeing of the destruction they have caused in the Ukraine war so far.

Volodymyr Zelensky is looking at how he can use the resources he has to greatest effect, and drones have been a big part of that plan. Ukraine has been able to construct its own [drones](#), enabling it to use them to target Russian territory, in a way it is not allowed to do with military hardware supplied by its allies. Allies, including the US, restrict Kyiv from using any arms it supplied to use on Russian-occupied Ukraine, rather than in

Russia itself.

## **Questionable allies**

These restrictions on use continue to be a major headache for Zelensky, as does the question of who will take over the US presidency after the election in November, as professor of international politics David Dunn of the University of Birmingham details. If Donald Trump wins, US support for Ukraine is likely to be severely reduced, as the Republican candidate has made clear. Trump has stated that he will be looking for a peace treaty with Russia, which is not likely to include Russia returning currently occupied sections of Ukrainian territory.

Consequently, Zelensky has moved his military over the Russian border into Kursk, in a bid to hold on to some Russian territory. This enables Zelensky to have something to trade if Trump is elected and forces a sit-down negotiation with Russia.

Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee, has started to outline her foreign policy plans, and they would include continuing to support Ukraine, and sticking with Biden's internationalist approach. To some extent, Vladimir Putin may have been betting on a Trump victory, and a US withdrawal of good will for Kyiv. A Harris victory is good news for Zelenksy, and may force Putin closer to the negotiating table.

## **Walking the line**

Zelensky is looking to extend his alliances all the time. And the recent visit of India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, may have given him hope that India may be leaning in his direction. Modi was the first Indian head of state to visit Ukraine since it became independent 30 years ago.

But, according to Stefan Wolff, professor of international security at the University of Birmingham, this visit shows that Modi is trying to keep both Moscow and Kyiv onside. India is currently Russia's biggest oil buyer, but is also an active member of the security group the Quad, made up of Japan, the US, Australia and India, which is intent on offsetting China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Modi therefore wants a strong relationship with Putin, while not upsetting western allies which support Ukraine. He is walking the line.

History buffs often point to parallels between a current event and something that has happened in the past. I am often glued to BBC's Radio 4 The Long View, hosted by Jonathan Freeland, which brilliantly spotlights a moment from the past, be it a credit crunch or an anti-vax protest, that feels uncannily similar to something that is just unrolling on the news.

Historian Patrick Doyle, a lecturer at Royal Holloway University of London, sets out how the Confederate states ran their conscription policy during the US civil war, and the pitfalls of setting up exemptions that allow the rich or influential to avoid being drafted (which the Confederacy did).

His point being that Ukraine's leadership could risk losing public support for the war effort if the conscription policy is considered unequal or unfair. Ukraine has recently reduced the age when people can be drafted from 27 to 25, and officials are now being sent out to look for those avoiding military service.

With historic parallels in mind, Olivera Simic, associate professor in law at Griffith University, has reviewed a new book, Repeat: A Warning from History, which suggests we are at risk of creating the same problems, and wars, again and again.

The book reminds us that in wars "millions more were left behind, haunted by the memories and ghosts of those they once loved," and that any war casts a shadow over the generations that follow, leaving them dealing with its physical and mental trauma.

However, the article suggests that if readers could imagine the horror of war happening to them they would do more to act with full force to stop it. History suggests ignoring wars has never made them go away.

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