

‘Silent death’

Robots reshape Ukraine war, forcing Russia onto the back foot

CNN ONLINE

There is a whirr, a burst of dust, a pause as the image stabilizes—and then a blast. Dozens of miles away, Ukrainian veterans of Avdiivka and Bakhmut direct a new kind of battle. Seated at computer stations, they command missions of drones and robots, striking Russian positions without a single soldier on the ground.

Ukraine, strained by manpower shortages and uncertain US support, has shifted much of its war effort to unmanned systems. Robots, drones, and remotely piloted tanks now give Kyiv a fragile but vital edge against Russia’s larger forces. In April, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced the first capture of a Russian position using only robots and drones. Since January, unmanned machines carried out 22,000 missions.



Survival drives innovation. Ukrainian units report that Russian prisoners call these four-wheeled, bomb-laden robots “silent death.” They are almost undetectable until within 10 metres—already inside their blast radius. In one mission, the first robot struggles over debris before detonating, its explosion captured as a white flare on drone footage. A second follows, distracting Russians while 4 more robots manoeuvre behind enemy lines.

The calculations are stark. Over 164 assaults, the NC13 unit of the Third Assault Brigade estimates it would have needed 2,300 troops to achieve the same effect. Half would likely have been killed or wounded. Instead, the robots have saved an estimated thousand Ukrainian lives.

From livestreams, commanders now wage battles they cannot touch, but whose impact is devastating. Ukraine’s embrace of unmanned warfare underscores both its desperation and ingenuity, reshaping conflict into a struggle where machines fight in place of men.



This picture taken from the Marjayoun area in southern Lebanon shows smoke rising after an Israeli airstrike on the village of Arnoun in Lebanon yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

LEBANON GROUND OPERATION

Israel seizes strategic Beaufort castle

Issues more displacement orders in south; Netanyahu orders deeper incursion to hit Hezbollah

AGENCIES

Israel’s flag flew over the medieval fortress on Beaufort in Lebanon yesterday as it warned Lebanese civilians to evacuate a large area of the south of the country ahead of stepped up ground operations.

Shelling was audible and smoke rose from the surrounding area as the invading army’s banner was seen by AFP above the castle, which Israeli forces famously used as a base during their previous two-decade long occupation.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had



» Israel pursuing ‘scorched earth’ policy: Lebanon PM

» Hezbollah claims more attacks on northern Israel

ordered troops to move further into Lebanon in the battle against the Iran-backed Hezbollah group.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said troops had captured the historic stronghold, which commands sweeping views of south Lebanon, as they expanded their ground operations, which Lebanon’s prime minister has condemned as a “scorched earth” policy.

France has requested an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council after the Israeli forces seized the castle, the French foreign minister said.

“Anyone present near Hezbollah elements, facilities, or combat means endangers their life. Any building used by Hezbollah for military purposes may become subject to targeting!” Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee said, in a social media post.

Lebanon’s Prime Minister Nawaf Salam had accused Israel on Saturday of pursuing a “scorched-earth policy and collective punishment” in the south, urging a halt to the fighting and warning it was “destroying towns and villages, and forcing their inhabitants into exile”.

LAOS CAVE

Survivors aid search for missing pair

AFP, Vientiane

From their shared hospital room, several survivors freed from a semi-submerged cave in Laos after more than a week underground are advising rescuers on how to find the last two missing men believed to be trapped even deeper inside.

Rescuers, including foreign cave divers, said yesterday they were devising a risky search for the two men and gaining insights about the narrow, flooded passageways from the survivors – one of whom spoke of “waiting to die” in the depths of the cave.

A Laotian rescue group said the information on the cave system from the hospitalised men was “considered substantial” and “being used to prepare the search plan for the remaining two people”.

“The hope is that today’s mission will locate both remaining victims,” the group wrote yesterday on social media. Five men were found alive on Wednesday, huddling in a tight shaft around 300 metres from the mouth of the cave in a remote mountainous area of central Xaysomboun province.

They were among seven stranded in the cave by flash floods nearly two weeks ago as they searched for gold.

Japan rejects ‘new militarism’

Accuses China of rapidly arming with little transparency

REUTERS, Singapore

Japan’s Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi yesterday rejected accusations of “new militarism” by Tokyo and criticised China for rapidly expanding its military with little transparency, underscoring mounting tensions between the two countries.

China continues to increase its defence spending at a high level, Koizumi said at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, adding: “China’s external approach and military activities are matters of serious concern for Japan and the international community at the same time.”

Rebutting criticism that Japan was embracing new militarism, he said: “Think about it. There’s a country that has a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons and strategic bombers. Japan has neither of such weapons, and yet Japan is labelled ‘new militarism’?”

Koizumi said Japan’s record since World War Two “speaks for itself”, citing its adherence to international law and commitment to the United Nations Charter, alongside efforts to uphold a “free and open international order.”

In May, China’s foreign ministry called on Asia-Pacific countries to be vigilant and “jointly resist the reckless actions of Japan’s neo-militarism”.

At the Singapore forum, Chinese delegate Major General Meng Xiangqing also criticised Japan.

AMENDED DEFENCE DEAL

US to send only used nuclear subs to Australia

AFP, Singapore

Australia will only receive used nuclear-powered submarines from the United States as part of an agreement to “streamline” the AUKUS deal, with the move branded yesterday as a “cost-effective” measure by Defence Minister Richard Marles.

The two nations – together with the third partner in their security pact, Britain – met at Singapore’s Shangri-La Dialogue, which brings together top defence officials and experts from about 45 countries.

Under the 2021 AUKUS deal, Australia is expected to receive at least three so-called “Virginia-class” nuclear-powered submarines from the United States within 15 years.

Australia had been expecting to receive two used submarines and one new one, but the countries announced Saturday that all three will now be in-service vessels from the US Navy stock. When asked why Canberra was now receiving only used equipment, Marles, who is also deputy prime minister, told reporters yesterday it would be more cost-effective.

“In the context of a very complicated endeavour, we need to place a premium on simplicity,” said Marles, who added that the submarines will also be the same model.

“I cannot overstate the significance of that, both in terms of the submariners who are operating them, but also the people who are working on them to sustain those submarines,” Marles said.

“It is definitely cost-effective. And to be clear, this is a very expensive programme... and so we are trying to find every cost-effective option as we walk down this path.”



GREEN CARD

Trump admin walks back recent announcement: NYT

AFP, Washington

The Trump administration has walked back its announcement that non-citizens seeking permanent US residency, commonly called a Green Card, would need to return to their home country to apply, The New York Times reported.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) told the newspaper on Friday that its policy announcement last week was not a requirement for all applicants, but would rather be implemented “on a case-by-case basis.”

A Trump administration spokesman, Zach Kähler, said on May 22 that “from now on, an alien who is in the US temporarily and wants a Green Card must return to their home country to apply, except in extraordinary circumstances.”

The announcement was viewed as a major shift in US policy and sparked major concern among the millions of immigrants seeking to become permanent US residents.

President Donald Trump campaigned for the White House on a pledge to expel millions of undocumented migrants, but his administration has also closed several legal pathways to US residency since he took office.

The United States grants more than one million Green Cards each year and, up until now, more than half of the applicants were already in the United States, according to the American Immigration Council.

A US official told AFP on Saturday that the policy “restates longstanding law and policy – which was disregarded by the Biden Administration.”



Police hold a barricade as protestors push outside Delaney Hall, which is being used as an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centre, in Newark, New Jersey, US on Saturday evening.

PHOTO: AFP

Meteor explodes over US with huge blast

AFP, Washington

A meteor crashing toward Earth exploded over the northeastern United States on Saturday, NASA said, setting off booms that echoed over the region with a blast equivalent to 300 tonnes of TNT.

The fireball broke up over northeastern Massachusetts and southeastern New Hampshire at 2:06 pm, the US space agency’s deputy news chief Jennifer Dooren told AFP. “This fireball was not associated with any currently active meteor shower, but it was a natural object and not a re-entry of space debris or a satellite,” she said.

“The energy released at breakup is estimated to be equivalent to about 300 tonnes of TNT, which accounts for the loud booms.” The meteor was traveling at 75,000 mph at an altitude of 40 miles when it broke apart.