

# Ukraine's Deep-Strike Drone Attack in Russia Puts Cost-Effective Technologies in Spotlight

Kyiv's successful drone attack on Moscow's nuclear bomber fleet demonstrates the power of cheaper, commercial-first technologies in war.

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A truck said to have been used to release Ukrainian drones is seen burning in the Irkutsk region of Russia, more than 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles) from Ukraine, in a photo released by Governor of Irkutsk region Igor Kobzev telegram channel on June 1, 2025. Governor of Irkutsk region Igor Kobzev's Telegram channel via AP



By Andrew Thornebrooke and Ryan Morgan  
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*News Analysis*

A long-range Ukrainian attack on multiple strategic airbases throughout Russia could have profound significance for ongoing cease-fire negotiations and the trajectory of the war.

The Ukrainian drone [attack](#) on June 1 presents the most far-reaching assault on Russian territory to date and may have caused billions of dollars in damage to Russia's nuclear bomber fleet.

The operation by Ukraine's Security Service, codenamed "Spiderweb," was overseen by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who [suggested](#) on June 2 that Russia would not negotiate a cease-fire unless it took more losses on the home front.

"Russia must feel what its losses mean. That is what will push it toward diplomacy," Zelenskyy said.

## More Than a Year of Planning

The attack on Russia's strategic air fleets took a year and a half to plan and set in place, and involved smuggling more than a hundred first-person view drones into Russia across multiple time zones.

During that time, Ukrainian security services hid the drones and their high-explosive payloads in the roofs of wooden sheds, which were then carried by trucks throughout Russia.

On Sunday, the roofs of those sheds were lifted off by a remote mechanism, allowing the drones to fly out and strike at their targets simultaneously despite their distance from one another.

Zelenskyy said that 117 drones were used in the operation, which struck targets at four military airfields and caused significant damage to Russia's fleet of air missile carriers.

The attack, he added, was coordinated by Ukrainian intelligence agents working inside Russia, and included strikes against bombers stationed more than 2,500 miles from Ukraine.

Speaking at an event in Washington on Monday, Gen. Randy George, chief of staff of the U.S. Army, said that the attack demonstrated the ever-changing character of war and the outsized impact that widely available commercial technologies will have on future battlefields.

That was true both of the drones used in the attack, he said, and the methods used to spread video of the attack in near real-time.

"I think [the attack] was a really good example of just how quickly technology is changing the battlefield," George said.

“We all knew about that within a matter of minutes. Everything was out there in the open source.”

## **Russian Long-Range Bombers Targeted**

Notably, while Ukrainian forces leveraged dozens of cheap, commercial-first drones, their targets were highly expensive aircraft that are vital to Russia’s nuclear defense strategy.

Aircraft targeted included the Tupolev Tu-95, a four-engine turboprop aircraft designed in the 1950s to compete with the United States’ B-52 bomber; the Tupolev Tu-22M, a shorter-range bomber capable of reaching the United States with in-flight refueling; and the Beriev A-50, an early warning command and control plane used to coordinate Russian air attacks.

Ukrainian officials said the operation damaged or destroyed 41 strategic aircraft, valued at around \$7 billion, and accounting for roughly one-third of Moscow’s strategic bomber fleet.

Russia has contested those figures and said several planes were struck at the bases while some drones were successfully repelled.

The Epoch Times was unable to independently verify the claims of either Kyiv or Moscow.

What is certain is that Russia has been dealt a blow from which it could take years to fully recover.

That’s because the Tu-95 and Tu-22 have not been manufactured since the Cold War, and therefore cannot be replaced until the Russian military manufactures a new nuclear bomber.

There are efforts to do just that, including a Russian program to modernize and fly new versions of the Tu-95 bomber, but it is unclear how quickly Moscow will be able to produce those aircraft at scale.

## **Implications for Geopolitics and the Future of War**

George said that the attack demonstrated the profound impact of new technologies on the cost curve, that is the amount of money it takes for militaries to conduct research and development, acquisition, and then provide maintenance and carry out operations with any given weapons platform.

The commercial-first drones used by Ukraine in the attack likely only cost several thousand dollars to produce apiece. One of Russia's Tu-195 bombers, on the other hand, costs about \$270 million to manufacture.

"Look at how cheap those systems were compared to what they took out," George said.

The move is just the latest in Ukraine's bid to leverage swarms of cheap and readily available technologies to battle an apparently more advanced military.

Kyiv has long sought to inflict costly losses on Russian forces by prioritizing expensive, hard-to-replace targets.

In April 2022, for example, Ukrainian forces sank the Moskva, the flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Later that year and again in 2023, Ukrainian attacks damaged the Kerch Bridge, which links Russia to Crimea. In August 2024, Ukrainian forces launched a military incursion into Russia's Kursk region, coming close to threatening one of Russia's largest nuclear power plants.

Ukraine's continued application of such tactics has likely sent Russia's military-industrial apparatus into troubleshooting mode, as Moscow has relied on an older, much costlier method of war.

Also speaking in Washington on Monday, U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin said that leadership in Moscow was likely considering changes to their combat doctrine given the magnitude of losing strategic aircraft.

"Right now, I think that Russia is rethinking a lot of their approaches to defense because of this very cost-effective, asymmetric, but smartly done attack," Allvin said.

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