

Ukraine is launching strike-drones from everything - including Black Sea robo-boats

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Ukraine is launching strike-drones from everything – including Black Sea robo-boats

The Sea Baby's new aerial-strike role is the latest front in an arms race Ukraine is exporting to the United States and NATO.

By [Katie Livingstone](/author/katie-livingstone)

Wednesday, Jul 1, 2026

Ukrainian SBU operatives unveil an upgraded SeaBaby naval drone at an unspecified location in Ukraine, Oct. 17, 2025. (Vitalii Nosach/Global Images Ukraine via Getty Images)

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine has turned its signature naval drone – the little boat that drove Russia's fleet out of the western Black Sea – into a launch platform for first-person-view attack drones, putting Kyiv's strike reach beyond the coast.

The Sea Baby, a strike boat built and operated by Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, can now carry six to eight FPV drones in side compartments that open during an attack, alongside thermobaric Shmel rockets, according to Russian accounts of the boats operating around the Kinburn Spit, roughly 40 miles east of Odesa, shared by [Forbes](https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidkirichenko/2026/05/26/ukraines-drone-boats-are-now-launching-fpvs-and-thermobaric-rockets/).

Ukrainian officials count on the autonomous vessels' ability to move closer toward Russian military positions than land-based launchers could, with the [SBU assuming a range](https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/10/22/ukraine-unveils-upgraded-sea-drone-for-black-sea-strike-missions/) of 930 miles (1,500 kilometers) on a 4,400-pound (2,000-kilogram) payload.

Some of the drones in the cargo hold are guided by fiber-optic cable, leaving them immune to the radio jamming that downs ordinary FPVs, according to [Forbes](<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidkirichenko/2025/10/06/ukraines-sea-drones-are-now-launching-unjammable-fiber-optic-drones/>).

Ukraine has turned nearly everything it fields into an FPV launcher. Sea drones carrying fiber-optic FPVs struck the Russian ports of Tuapse and Novorossiysk in September. Several companies have rigged ground robots to fire the same drones, and both sides have [flown balloons carrying them](<https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2026/06/25/ukraines-newest-strike-weapon-drifts-into-russia-on-the-wind/>).

“The SBU became the first in the world to pioneer this new kind of naval warfare,” Brig. Gen. Ivan Lukashevych said at an unveiling of the Sea Baby’s latest generation in October 2025, “and we continue to advance it.”

Ukraine fields two distinct naval drone families.

The Sea Baby is developed and operated by the SBU, Ukraine’s domestic security service. The Magura – built by Uforce for the GUR, Ukraine’s military intelligence directorate – is a separate system with its own lineage and export path.

The Sea Baby is primarily remote-piloted from a mobile ground station but carries AI-assisted targeting and navigation systems that allow it to operate autonomously when communications are jammed or degraded – a design imperative born from Russia’s intense electronic warfare environment over the Black Sea.

American forces have begun using the boats themselves.

U.S. special forces sank a target ship with a Ukrainian Magura at the Balikatan 2026 exercise off the Philippines on June 24, the first use of the technology in the Indo-Pacific.

The interest is not one-off. A cheap, expendable boat that can carry a cluster of attack drones to within striking range is exactly the kind of weapon the United States is looking for as it prepares for a possible war with China across the Pacific’s vast distances.

“Magura’s successes on the Ukrainian-Russian front confirm their value for use in the Indo-Pacific region,” Oleg Roginsky, chief executive of Uforce, the London-based startup that makes the Magura, told [Bloomberg](<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-06-24/sea-drones-emerge-as-crucial-weapon-to-counter-china-s-power>) last week.

Uforce is in talks with Indo-Pacific buyers and weighing at least two production sites in the region, Roginsky said. Ukraine barred weapons exports in 2022 to keep its arms at the front, and only began opening that market in 2025.

Ukrainian naval drones have sunk or damaged roughly a dozen Russian warships since 2022 and forced the Black Sea Fleet to pull its main operations back to Novorossiysk, the [U.S. Naval Institute](<https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2025/september/ukraines-magura-naval-drones-black-sea-equalizers>) reported in September.

Each boat costs a few hundred thousand dollars, below the price of a single modern torpedo.

The Pentagon is studying the lesson as it shifts focus toward a possible conflict with China.

The U.S. Navy expects to field thousands of small uncrewed surface vessels across the Indo-Pacific by

2030, Capt. Garrett Miller, who leads its Surface Development Group One, said at a Navy symposium on April 20, as reported by [USNI News](https://news.usni.org/2026/04/21/navy-to-deploy-thousands-of-unmanned-surface-vessels-to-the-indo-pacific-by-2030).

In a report last July, the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](https://www.csis.org/analysis/unleashing-us-military-drone-dominance-what-united-states-can-learn-ukraine) urged the U.S. military to copy Kyiv's acquisition methods, arguing that "unlike theoretical models or peacetime pilots, Ukraine's innovations in defense acquisition are battlefield tested."

And Ukraine has continued to innovate. Its Sub Sea Baby underwater drone struck an Improved Kilo-class submarine at its pier in Novorossiysk on Dec. 15, the [first time an unmanned underwater vehicle](https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/12/16/ukraines-first-underwater-drone-strike-caught-on-hacked-cameras/) has hit a submarine in port, the SBU said.

Russia denied any damage, but satellite imagery taken the following day showed a 9-meter crater in the pier, the submarine visibly lower in the water, and the vessel, later identified as the B-271 Kolpino, unmoved at its berth more than a month later. Ukrainian and independent analysts assessed it as a mission kill.

NATO is already training with Kyiv's tactics, too.

Ukraine's navy led a NATO red team and beat the alliance's blue force in all five scenarios at the [REPMUS naval-drone exercise](https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/09/25/ukraine-navy-a-battle-tested-force-plays-enemy-in-nato-drone-drill/) in Portugal in September, the first time it had run the opposing force.

About [Katie Livingstone](/author/katie-livingstone)

Katie Livingstone is the Ukraine correspondent for Defense News and Military Times. Based in Kyiv, she has covered Russia's full-scale invasion since its first days. She is a former Fulbright fellow whose award-winning work has appeared in outlets across Europe and the U.S.

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Simulations and exercises will be key to boosting trust between operators and CCAs, according to former U.S. Air Force secretary Frank Kendall.

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In a training first, an Army National Guardsman used a tablet to control Sikorsky's optionally piloted Black Hawk and plan its task during an exercise.

[Recap: Highlights from the US Army's 2025 conference in Washington](/recap/ausa/2025/10/16/recap-highlights-from-the-us-armys-2025-conference-in-washington/)

The Army continues to transform, with efforts focused on next-gen weaponry, long-range artillery, unmanned systems and much more.

[Pentagon stages first 'Top Drone' school for operators to hone skills](/unmanned/2025/09/11/pentagon-stages-first-top-drone-school-for-operators-to-hone-skills/)

Industry and military drone operators flew tethered and untethered first-person drones through a course designed to test endurance and maneuverability.

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