

ADVANTAGE IN OPERATIONAL AND TACTICAL INTELLIGENCE: A FORCE AMPLIFIER FOR UKRAINE

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Abstract. *The article analyses the core problems of intelligence superiority as a premise for prevailing in modern warfare. Addressing the problem in a situational context, related to the high-intensity war in Ukraine, the study defines the intangible non-material prerequisites Ukraine needs to pursue to achieve it. The article then highlights the key elements of intelligence advantage on a tactical and operational level and suggests avenues to further enhance and uphold it as a force amplifier for Ukraine. Moreover, these elements are identified as a set of interrelated and interdependent factors, stemming directly from the unified objectives of the overall battlefield engagement. The article argues that battlefield intelligence should be directed at countering the efforts of the adversary to gain tactical and operational surprise, disrupting their capacity to execute their tactical doctrine, thus denying them their preferred and prepared style of warfare. It goes on to explore the tools that intelligence structure may use to further empower the drone warfare. Furthermore, the article reveals specific avenues to transform the advantage in tactical and operational intelligence into decisive superiority through combining different, but interlinked intelligence priorities that trace a distinctive course of action ultimately leading to a breakthrough in the war. Finally, the study highlights several key requirements that would enable the Ukrainian intelligence system to unfold its potential as a force amplifier, including an upper hand in frontline intelligence technology, all-source data integration, enhancing the interlink between the net-centric approach and drone warfare, and elevating tactical and operational intelligence to the status of a strategic instrument.*

Keywords: intelligence; tactics; advantage; drones; Ukraine; war.

1. INTRODUCTION

Intelligence superiority has long been known as one of the decisive factors in armed conflict, because it exploits the battlefield and overcomes capability gaps. As a force amplifier, intelligence dominance is not merely a function of assets and data; rather, its true importance lies in the ability to influence the intent and decisions of the commanders on the ground. Its value to the warfighter derives from the capacity to disrupt enemy objectives, thus systematically denying them victory.

This concept shifts the analytical focus toward several essential problems. First, it requires defining the intangible non-material elements of intelligence superiority and establishing how they vary depending on the specific operational environment. Second, what tactical and operational boundaries must a warring party cross to achieve and confidently exploit it? Finally, it raises the question about the comprehensive approach towards its assessment, considering the diversity of intelligence requirements across different campaigns, from the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict to the recent war against Iran.

This article addresses these questions in a purely situational context, related to the high-intensity war in Ukraine.

There are indications suggesting that Ukraine has achieved a certain operational and tactical intelligence superiority at this point of the war. Although Russia possesses greater numbers of intelligence

assets and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities, Ukraine has pursued technological edge through domestic First-Person View (FPV) drone production and Western support, most importantly in satellite reconnaissance. Ukraine plans to produce approximately 7 million drones of various types in 2026, compared to 4 million produced in 2025 (Ryan, 2026). Moreover, the effective employment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) as tactical reconnaissance and air strike platforms compels both sides to continuously maneuver their forces along the Forward Edge of the Battle Area (FEBA). This significant change objectively reduces the number of stationary targets, severely limiting the impact of field artillery compared to the opening stages of the war. Therefore, further development of tactical intelligence in this direction is going to substantially erode Russia's quantitative superiority in artillery and mortars.

These signs clearly indicate that Kyiv is successfully implementing a plan to turn the asymmetry of forces and means to its advantage. However, to set a permanent trend powerful enough to reach a strategic tipping point, this advantage must be methodically maintained until it becomes the decisive factor shaping the outcome of all major battlefield engagements in the Ukrainian theatre.

In an attempt to point out a clear way of achieving this, the article analyzes the key elements of intelligence advantage on a tactical and operational level and suggests avenues to further enhance and uphold it as a force amplifier for Ukraine. To this end, a number of Ukrainian, Russian, and Western media and analytical sources were researched and cross-referenced to explore the general problem of the study. Consequently, the need for thorough, structured, and comprehensive studies and explorations of the problem became evident.

The methodology of the article includes analysis of the key requirements of tactical and operational intelligence as dictated by the imperatives of the events unfolding on the ground and their impact on the overall situation across the frontline. The results outlined a model of achieving advantage, comprising a set of non-material elements, deduced through a careful survey of the factors shaping the balance of forces in the war. Afterwards, the prerequisites to transform the advantage into superiority were defined following a structured analysis of the current tactical and operational dynamics in the Ukrainian theatre.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Key elements of intelligence advantage

Although for political reasons Russia avoids mass mobilization to replenish rising battlefield losses, it still maintains superiority in manpower, armament, and resources. This disparity compels Ukrainian commanders to swiftly maneuver ground troops, assets, and reserves along the frontline to repel continuing assaults. Such operational agility strongly requires advance intelligence on Russian intentions and movements, supported by robust tactical collection, as well as rapid processing, analysis, and dissemination. For Ukraine, field intelligence at this point is not just a combat support activity, but a crucial factor in the balance of forces, capable of determining the outcome of the war. Therefore, pursuing a policy of gaining advantage in tactical and operational intelligence may produce a strategic result by turning the tides of the entire campaign.

Let us examine the main qualitative elements of such an advantage given the combat environment in the Ukrainian theatre. Interrelated and interdependent, these elements stem directly from the unified objectives of the overall battlefield engagement.

First, an essential element is the ability to deny the adversary both tactical and operational surprise.

To achieve this, the intelligence must be organized and conducted according to the prevailing method of tactical warfare, implemented by both sides, which comprises operating small assault teams against dispersed enemy troops that avoid amassing in large numbers to steer clear of aerial and missile strikes. Typically, the teams have a common objective, which demands coordination to reach a larger end-result by combining a number of small-scale actions. This requires detailed intelligence information tailored to the needs of both the individual teams and the overall mission.

To counter efforts aiming at tactical surprise, intelligence activities must focus on thwarting Russia's small assault group tactics, which at present is broadly divided into two types of actions: Spetsnaz-like assaults and “thousand cuts” tactics.

The Spetsnaz-like assaults are carried out by both Special forces and regular infantry. Relying on stealth, speed, self-sufficient communications and logistics, these highly mobile units carry out rapid advances along a pre-selected route to mount surprise attacks. They are deployed for capturing strongpoints, territory, and settlements, conducting reconnaissance, ambushes, and maneuver defense by exploiting camouflage, darkness, and poor visibility for maximum surprise effect.

The “thousand cuts” tactics is another way to gain the element of surprise, which the Russians introduced in 2025. To counter Ukraine’s extensive drone coverage, they deploy ultra-small assault teams of just two to four soldiers. Equipped with portable electronic warfare (EW) devices, these dispersed units aim to quickly infiltrate and breach the Ukrainian drone defense line. This approach relies on speed, which deprives the opponent of a timely reaction. These teams aim to maintain absolute stealth under Ukrainian drone surveillance. To evade thermal imaging sensors, soldiers use special blankets or camouflage cloaks, keeping the fabric away from their bodies to reduce heat signatures.

The Russian Defense Minister Andrey Belousov declared that over 38,000 motorcycles, ATVs, and buggies were delivered to front-line troops in 2025, which comprised a tenfold increase compared to the previous year. He noted that the Russian Armed Forces are intended to achieve near-full complement for these light tactical vehicles in the near future (NVO, 2025). These vehicles are used primarily to launch surprise attacks across the drone engagement zone, where much depends on high mobility.

Maintaining intelligence advantage, capable of denying the opponent the element of tactical and operational surprise demands compressing the intelligence cycle even further by deeply integrating reconnaissance with precision strike systems, as well as employing an effective network of stationary and mobile ground observation posts, night-vision equipment, and thermal imaging systems, all operating in unison with the overhead reconnaissance platforms.

Second, the intelligence advantage must disrupt the enemy's capacity to execute their tactical doctrine.

The traditional Russian pre-war doctrine relied on holding the initiative across the entire theater and establishing overwhelming superiority in troop numbers and firepower at the main points of effort. Despite assessments that Ukrainian forces have seized the initiative for the first time in three years (Pokotylo, 2026), the recent advance by Russian Army Group “North” in the Sumy region, where the frontline has been static for a while now, demonstrates that Moscow retains the ability to gain operational surprise.

However, with casualties reaching 35,000 per month, Russia is losing soldiers faster than it can replace them. Notably, FPV drones loaded with explosive inflict up to 80% of these casualties. They hunt individual soldiers and disrupt medical evacuations, substantially increasing the death toll on the battlefield (Kapital, 2026). In a war of attrition, the loss of life on the battlefield causes loss of initiative in the war.

The war has demonstrated that wide-ranging field intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) deny the opponent the ability to accumulate forces to reach superiority, thus severely curbing the scope and depth of offensive actions. Moreover, all-encompassing satellite and drone reconnaissance prevents the concentration of troops deep within strike range, making dangerous any troop build-up in the rear echelon. Hence, the operational employment of full-sized Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs) as a primary combat formation for airborne, motorized rifle, tank, and marine units has been completely abandoned. In this way, enhanced reconnaissance coverage of the combat zone prevents the opponent from utilizing the battlefield, deploying forces, and achieving far-reaching operational objectives.

To fully grasp the scale of this transition, we must consider the importance of the BTG concept within the Russian ground forces doctrine.

A BTG is a combat formation possessing all the forces and means to independently carry out a mission, both offensive and defensive, having the capability to defend itself from any possible threat. Therefore, the main characteristics of BTGs are independence, self-sufficiency, and operational flexibility. The order of battle varies depending on the specific mission, but generally it would comprise three motorized rifle companies; a tank company; one or two artillery batteries; a mortar battery; an air defense platoon; grenade launcher and anti-tank units; communications, reconnaissance, and engineering platoons; electronic warfare and UAV units; repair and evacuation and rear support units. Total personnel strength amounts to 700-800 troops.

In August 2021, the former Defense Minister Shoigu announced, that there were as many as 168 BTGs in the Russian Armed Forces (UK Ministry of Defence, 2022).

According to expert assessments, as of January 2022, a month prior to the invasion approximately 60 of them were deployed close to the border with Ukraine (Centre for Eastern Studies, 2022).

To better understand why the employment of these formations was abandoned, let us envision a hypothetical scenario where a BTG operates in strict accordance with Russian Ground Forces doctrine, but within the drone-infested environment of the present Ukrainian theater.

The Ground Forces Field Manual stipulates the marching order of a BTG to include a field security detachment, support detachment, main forces column, and a column of technical, logistical, and medical support units. A Forward March Outpost (FMO) is assigned to protect the marching troops, comprising a motorized rifle (tank) company, reinforced by tanks (a motorized rifle unit), artillery, and air defense and NBC units. To the flanks and the rear, if needed, other march outposts are assigned, consisting of motorized-rifle platoons with tanks. The FMO is 5-10 km ahead of the main forces, while the flank and rear elements keep a distance of 3-5 km. The main forces column may include a motorized rifle (tank) battalion, an artillery battalion, and other units. Distances between battalions are 2-3 km, between companies – up to 1 km, between vehicles – 25-50 meters. When moving across open terrain under the threat of enemy precision-guided weapons, vehicles maintain 100-to-150-meter intervals, while companies and battalions are separated by 500 meters and 1 kilometer, respectively (Bstudy.net, n.d).

Obviously, this is entirely flawed and irrelevant in an environment with an extremely high drone density, where the airspace is so proliferated with reconnaissance-attack UAVs, that it absolutely prohibits this type of troop movements.

In the reality of the combat zone, troop movements from the rear areas to the forward edge are conducted in dispersed groups rather than in organized columns. Persistent aerial reconnaissance-strike operations force the adversary to rely heavily on dismounted infantry, thus significantly increasing their vulnerability and diminishing their offensive potential. The Ukrainian edge in tactical intelligence has effectively compelled Russian forces to abandon almost completely the use of tanks and other armored vehicles during direct assaults against frontline defenses.

Therefore, the intelligence advantage becomes a primary deterring factor, denying the adversary the opportunity to conduct their preferred and prepared style of warfare. By minimizing their superiority in material assets, it forces them outside their doctrinal and operational boundaries and compels them to continuously adapt to the changing environment. Consequently, ultimate advantage belongs not to the stronger side, but to the one that adapts faster (Ryan, 2026).

Tactical intelligence transforms the battlespace, reshaping the tools of ground warfare and the rationale of small-unit combat. Secure communications, concealment, and rapid decision-making have become more important than raw firepower. Furthermore, interoperability between infantry, drone operators, artillery, and electronic warfare units is now essential. Victory no longer depends on manpower advantages, but on technical solutions that guarantee battlefield visibility, resilient drone command-and-control, and real-time data sharing across units (Liang, 2025). Adversely, lack of detailed and reliable battlefield information can significantly restrict situational awareness and coordination. Ukrainian intelligence sources report that Russian commanders of the Army Group “South” were using inaccurate

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maps, while large groups of Russian soldiers were deployed to forward areas without proper communication, and were therefore highly vulnerable to Ukrainian counterattacks (Sedlak, 2026).

Simultaneously, frontline intelligence analysts must look with great attention into the evolution of tactical and operational methods, specifically examining the impacts and shortcomings of the small-unit assault tactics currently implemented by Russian forces. Some observers analyze it as an adaptation of Soviet-era covert penetration methods from World War II. In any case, while this approach does not always yield territorial gains, it reflects a fundamental shift in perceiving and employing the assault tactics – moving away from the pursuit of a decisive, large-scale blow in favor of high-persistence attrition. It is worth exploring whether Russian high command resorted to this approach due to an acknowledged inability to achieve a genuine strategic breakthrough (RUSI, 2025).

Operationally, maintaining simultaneous pressure across multiple avenues appears to be the only possible alternative given Russia's reluctance to declare general mobilization, continuing manpower shortages, and a deficit in the tactical proficiency required to breach layered defenses and hold captured areas. An obvious disadvantage is the fact that the small-group tactics render the Russian Armed Forces deeply fragmented and unable to rapidly exploit local successes. Furthermore, if a defensive sector begins to collapse, the Ukrainian Armed Forces (AFU) remain capable to rapidly redeploy reserves.

At this stage Moscow's operational logic outlines an obvious preference for enemy attrition over territorial acquisition. Notably, this attrition targets human resources rather than military hardware, promptly replenished by western allies. Most probably, the aim is to exhaust Ukraine's core cadre of experienced, capable, high-quality soldiers and mid-level commanders—the critical personnel meant to keep the morale of frontline troops by mentoring newly mobilized recruits. Arguably, Moscow's long-term rationale may include the assumption that degrading the AFU's human potential will inevitably trigger a broader collapse of entire sections of the front, ultimately forcing the surrender of Ukraine's remaining contested regions without the need for high-casualty advances (France 24, 2026).

Third, advantage in tactical reconnaissance translates into advantage in drone warfare.

No other armed conflict has emphasized the interdependence between ISR and drone warfare as heavily as the war in Ukraine. An effective drone capability has become a decisive factor in the balance of forces, carrying important operational and strategic implications for the entire campaign.

Field reconnaissance drones are increasingly implemented as loitering munitions, turning the multi-role UAVs as the most widely used weapon in the theatre. FPVs, including small Mavic quadcopters, are operated as both reconnaissance and strike platforms to drop munitions like grenades, mortar shells, and bottles of petrol (Liang, 2025) upon enemy trenches, shelters, vehicles, and personnel. The integration between intelligence collection and precision strikes establishes so-called lethal surveillance tactics (Mai, 2021). This approach severely restricts the maneuver room of enemy units and degrades the effectiveness of their fire destruction system. For example, Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), conventional artillery, and tanks primarily fire from concealed positions, abandoning them rapidly to evade counter-battery response.

Moreover, drones have the ability to disrupt enemy counter-attacks against important tactical areas, which define the situation on specific operational avenues, thus preventing them from seizing the initiative.

Ukrainian naval drones inflicted severe damage on Russia's Black Sea Fleet, demonstrating how tactical reconnaissance can yield strategic results. It becomes increasingly clear that remotely controlled naval systems present a formidable asymmetric threat to surface ships, sea lines of communication (SLOCs), and maritime port infrastructure (Liang, 2025).

2.2. Turning the advantage into superiority

Turning the advantages into true intelligence and overall combat superiority depends on implementing and developing the intangible factors to meet the changing imperatives of the war. In practice, this requires maintaining the upper-hand in field-applied intelligence technology; integrating all-source data to achieve comprehensive battlefield visibility; accepting the drone-centric aspect as the essence of the network-centric approach to field intelligence, and further strengthening the connection of tactical and operational intelligence with strategic planning. Meeting these requirements would help the intelligence system unfold its true potential as a force amplifier.

First, advanced field-applied technology is vital to enhancing both reconnaissance-strike and counter-drone capability.

Further development of drone warfare requires a comprehensive use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to empower the swarm technology, where hives of remotely controlled drones carry out missions semi-independently under limited human control. Artificial intelligence and robotic devices should no longer be considered supplementary, but essential for routine tactical operations. Advanced drones with software-driven target recognition and AI-assisted control systems should no longer be experimental, but standard-issue weaponry. They should be deployed, utilized, lost, produced, and redeployed in rapidly repeating cycles (Digital State UA, 2026). We have to bear in mind, however, that a number of ethical issues would arise if humans were completely excluded from the targeting (SWJ Staff, 2026) and decision-making process within the reconnaissance-strike missions, especially when it comes to assessing the risk of collateral damage.

Technological advantage invariably carries operational and strategic implications. According to Russian drone manufacturers, Moscow has lost its leadership in drone production and warfare over the past six months. This severely hampered troop movements to and alongside the FEBA due to heavy losses and logistical issues. As a result, Russia was forced to restrict supply convoys in Donetsk to a maximum of two trucks to avoid detection (Kapital, 2026). These operational constraints fundamentally prevent them from maneuvering forces, bringing in reserves, or carrying out routine frontline rotations.

Following indications that the Ukrainian Armed Forces had launched a new offensive in early 2026, the US company SpaceX severed the Russian military's unauthorized access to its Starlink satellite network. Days later, Ukrainian forces successfully breached the defenses of Army Group South, recapturing critical territory in the Zaporizhzhia region (Sedlak, 2026). Actually, this was probably related to another development, which might precede the powering down of all Starlink terminals now illicitly used by the Russian military. In late September 2025, Starlink, together with the Ukrainian telecom Kyivstar, started testing the Direct to Cell (DTC) technology, designed to allow regular 4G smartphones to connect directly to the Starlink satellites. This technology greatly facilitates battlefield communications and bypasses the ground terminals, significantly reducing the frontline infrastructure, now frequently targeted by Russian electronic warfare assets and strike drones. Moreover, DTC is a vital capability, greatly contributing to mobile communications, command-and-control, data transmission, and drone operations. A smartphone will be enough to a frontline soldier to always stay connected and updated. As early as 2024 this technology provided transfer speed of 17 Mbps via a smartphone, which is considered sufficient for the Ukrainian military, but is expected to rise as the number of satellites increases (Kyiv Post, 2025).

Portable anti-drone equipment is another field-applied technology that needs to be developed further. Since FPV drones and reconnaissance UAVs are a primary threat to the frontline troops, effective field-applied countermeasures are vital to detect and destroy them before they reach their targets. To this end, Ukrainian engineers developed Chuyka 3.0—a three-band portable drone detector designed to intercept video signals from drones in real time. In fact, this electronic warfare (EW) trench equipment is what the troops actually need as an early warning tool against FPV strikes. Traditional large-size equipment can no longer be adequate to the realities of the highly agile frontline defense, along with the rapidly evolving radio-electronic environment across the modern battlefield. Consequently, there will be

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a transition from cumbersome centralized EW infrastructure to individual portable devices (Fakty.ua, 2026).

Second, close integration of aerial reconnaissance and satellite imagery with tactical level Electronic Intelligence (ELINT), Human Intelligence (HUMINT) and Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) is instrumental in creating a comprehensive picture of the battlefield. Such an integration has the potential to bring about an operational breakthrough in the entire theatre.

In an environment, where UAVs provide live footage, military satellites deliver continuous, detailed, and high-resolution imagery, and citizens crowdsource situational updates, raw data can only be converted into actionable information through an integration framework operating within the intelligence cycle. Without integration and fusion, valuable information will be used only intermittently, when it is already too late, and on a limited scale.

Battlefield OSINT suffers significant shortcomings (Rasak, 2021), but is not obsolete and can still be adapted to the tactical requirements of the Ukrainian theatre. As a publicly available collection method, crowdsourcing allows citizens the opportunity to send via internet relevant open-source information about events they witness. It remains a viable tool to gather battlefield intelligence to support friendly forces, as well as detect enemy infiltrations and other suspicious activities in the rear areas. Ukrainian intelligence has required public support to track Russian formations. Citizens report Russian unit positions and movements through government chatbot networks, transmitting photos and videos containing geospatial metadata.

However, field OSINT and crowdsourcing in particular have several critical vulnerabilities, which need to be addressed:

- Vulnerability to “Event Barraging”: The adversary can execute organized disinformation operations, either by creating plausible false data or by ‘flooding’ social media with contradictory and deceptive information to obscure the reality on the ground (Rasak, 2021).

- Vulnerability to cyber warfare: The government chatbot networks can be susceptible to Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks. In February 2022, the diia.gov.ua portal was targeted by a massive attack designed to overwhelm the servers (van Beek & Rietjens, 2024).

- Vulnerability to Risks, related to the International Humanitarian Law: Under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, active civilian participation blurs the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. This allows the adversary to argue that civilians gathering intelligence lose their protected status.

Third, the drone-centric aspect needs to become the essence of the network-centric approach to field intelligence, placing the emphasis on the drone warfare according to the imperatives of the war.

The tactical and operational intelligence process will be largely subordinate to drones as the main reconnaissance-strike platforms. This grants UAV units independent organizational status as separate combat formations. Drones modify force structure by transforming ISR from an auxiliary support function into a distinct service branch under direct military command. The Armed Forces of Ukraine led this transformation, becoming the first to integrate special UAV strike companies and separate combat groups directly into the combat brigades (Samus, M, 2026).

Drone-centric framework will facilitate intelligence advantage by abandoning rigid hierarchy and adopting a resilient combat-oriented structure, which channels operational and tactical intelligence directly to the warfighters on the ground. This structure will ensure a smooth and rapid workflow within the system, integrating the collection assets (aerial platforms, satellites, human sources, open sources) along with the processing, analysis and dissemination, into a single unified sequence taking place in the combat units themselves. This approach further blurs the distinction between tactical and operational levels, often merging reconnaissance with actual combat, and planning with decision-making.

Theoretically and in practice, the drone-centric approach is easily accommodated within the broader network-centric concept, which involves more than just the integrated use of intelligence assets to ensure

all-encompassing exchange of tactical information between the participants in a given operation. It demands evolving the *modus operandi* of the combat formations from a concentrated to a dispersed deployment model, optimizing reconnaissance, enabling coordination and targeting, and establishing a balanced distribution of assets across command levels. This directly corresponds to the imperatives of the war in Ukraine.

Fourth, tactical and operational intelligence should be intertwined with strategic planning.

The advancement in tactical and operational intelligence invariably enhances strategic targeting, based on establishing the opponent's key vulnerabilities and defining their strategic centers of gravity. Thus, the drone-centric warfare aims at strategic objectives. In fact, the evolution of tactical and operational intelligence produced a leap in strategic capabilities, allowing the long-range drone operations deep within Russian territory to transform into an impactful strategy aimed at forcing Russia to stop the war. Instead of attritional frontline operations, which proved costly in every way, Ukraine begins to conduct an asymmetric warfare intended for degrading the Russian economy, disrupting military production, and undermining public morale (Nesterova, 2026).

Ukraine's strategic campaign, targeting key military capabilities and critical energy infrastructure, has penetrated deep into the Russian rear, reaching as far as the Ural Mountains. In late April, a drone strike on the Shagol military airfield in Chelyabinsk, situated about 1700 km from the Russian-Ukrainian border, damaged three jets, including two Su-57 fighters and one Su-34 fighter-bomber. Days later, in early May, an oil refinery and pumping station in Perm were destroyed as part of a coordinated wave of drone attacks on energy plants and export terminals. Media reports reveal that April's strikes reduced the daily production volume by 400,000 barrels. According to Ukrainian assessments, major export terminals in Novorossiysk and Ust-Luga operate at less than half capacity.

It is noteworthy that the Su-34 serves as the primary strike platform and is capable of carrying a wide range of guided bombs and missiles, striking critical infrastructure, military installations, and civilian targets at ranges of up to 1,000 kilometers. The Su-34 is the main carrier of Russia's makeshift glide bombs, which continue to inflict great damage across the FEBA and the close rear areas. These bombs represent regular unguided bomb bodies, equipped with a conversion kit, called the Universal Gliding and Correction Module (UMPK). The Su-57, in turn, is Russia's most advanced stealth fighter and poses a particular threat to aviation and air defense systems. The estimated cost of a single Su-34 is between \$35 and \$50 million, while the Su-57 costs between \$100 and \$120 million (Kyiv Independent, 2026). Moreover, Ukraine launched a massive drone strike on the Russian capital in mid-May, the largest in more than a year, hitting a military-industrial complex enterprise and key oil facilities in the Moscow region: the Moscow Oil Refinery and two oil pumping stations.

Naturally, this strategy is closely linked to the tactical and operational dynamics within the combat zone. It remains to be seen whether it would prevent Russia from seizing Donbas and force it to negotiate on terms more favorable to Ukraine. It certainly has the potential to deter Russian offensive operations, thus reducing the overall pressure along the frontline. Moreover, it really affects the attitudes of the Russian public. Although polls show that 73% of Russians still approve of Putin as president, this is the lowest level of support since February 2022 (Novaya Gazeta Europe, 2026).

The behavior of the Russian high military command can be considered an indication that the current Ukrainian strategy is working. The Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov once again demonstrated a very inaccurate assessment of the situation on the battlefield, claiming that Russian troops were advancing west of Kupiansk in the Kharkiv region, whereas the city still remained under Ukrainian control.

This reluctance to acknowledge the realities on the ground indicates that the tides may be really turning in Ukraine's favor, largely due to the advantage in operational and tactical intelligence achieved during the last months of the war.

3. CONCLUSION

Ukraine has the opportunity to gain a lasting advantage in the war by upholding the intangible elements of intelligence superiority, defined by the tactical and operational imperatives of the theatre. The intelligence effort must aim at denying the adversary both tactical and operational surprise, disrupting their capacity to execute their tactical doctrine and facilitating the drone warfare.

This advantage is poised to yield strategic superiority through maintaining the upper-hand in advanced field-applied reconnaissance-strike and counter-drone capability, integrating all-source intelligence to make the battlefield visible to the frontline warfighters, regarding the UAVs as the main component of the net-centric approach to modern warfare, and empowering tactical and operational intelligence to serve the needs of strategic planning.

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