# Ukraine's Use of Drones and Robotic Boats Shifts Naval Warfare Dynamics in the Black Sea



Ukraine’s strategy of utilizing aerial drones and robotic boats is significantly impacting Russian naval operations in the Black Sea. The shift to uncrewed weapons arose from necessity after Ukraine lost its naval headquarters in Sevastopol in 2014 and subsequently much of its fleet to Russian annexation. Following Russia's invasion in February 2022, the Ukrainian Navy was largely incapacitated.

Ukraine adapted by incorporating missiles and drones. Uncrewed surface vessels (USVs) and uncrewed air vehicles (UAVs) have been employed to target Russian assets, often combining them with missiles to overwhelm defenses around Crimea. This approach was notably demonstrated in October 2022 when Ukraine attacked Russia’s primary naval base in Sevastopol with seven USVs and nine UAVs, damaging several vessels.

Highlights of Ukraine's tactics include the sinking of the Caesar Kunikov landing ship on February 14, 2023, and the destruction of the Sergey Kotov patrol boat weeks later. In January, Ukrainian USVs sank the corvette Ivanovets in an overnight attack, showcasing precision in targeting specific areas of the ship.

Ukrainian forces have also targeted infrastructure, using the Sea Baby USV in July 2023 to attack the Kerch Bridge, which connects Russia to occupied Crimea. Russia has responded with enhanced defenses, including measures around the Kerch Bridge.

Ukraine unveiled the Stalker 5.0, a new drone boat with a 372-mile range and speeds of up to 46 mph. It was first revealed at the Black Sea Security Forum and can carry explosive payloads or deliver supplies. The Stalker 5.0 embodies Ukraine's innovative approach to underfunded maritime capabilities.

Ukraine claims its efforts have impacted around a third of the Black Sea Fleet's vessels, a setback for Russia given its investment in the fleet post-2014. These actions have relieved some commercial shipping lanes critical for Ukrainian exports.

Global military strategists are observing these developments closely, with implications for maritime conflict zones worldwide. The evolution of Ukraine’s tactics has drawn particular interest from China's People's Liberation Army Navy, reflecting a broader recognition of the changing dynamics in naval warfare.

As Ukraine continues to innovate, the use of drones and robotic boats remains a defining characteristic of its maritime strategy against Russian forces in the Black Sea.