# Russia suffers another critical A-50 spy plane loss, halving its aerial surveillance fleet



The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has recently seen significant developments with the reported loss of Russian military aircraft. According to the wife of a Russian pilot, her husband’s Beriev A-50 spy plane was downed over the Sea of Azov. The incident occurred during a mission with an Il-22 command post aircraft, which was damaged but managed an emergency landing at Anapa airport. However, the A-50, a critical component of Russia's aerial surveillance and battlefield strategy, did not survive. The pilot's wife shared the grim news via the Telegram Channel VChK-OGPU, stating that the aircraft has been officially listed as missing, with the crew presumed dead.

The A-50 is valued at approximately USD 350 million (£259m) and plays a crucial role in Russian military operations, particularly in detecting Ukrainian missile launches and coordinating air support. It possesses a surveillance range of up to 640 kilometres and is essential for situational awareness on the battlefield. Prior to the full-scale invasion in 2022, Russia was believed to have eight A-50s at its disposal, making this loss particularly impactful as it signals a significant gap in their aerial capabilities.

This loss follows the downing of another A-50 on February 23, 2024, marking a notable achievement for Ukrainian forces as the war enters its third year. Ukrainian Air Force Chief General Mykola Oleshchuk credited military intelligence for the success, highlighting this incident in the context of ongoing fierce conflict, notably commemorated on Russia’s Defender of the Fatherland day. Local officials reported that the aircraft crashed in the Krasnodar region, with fragments found, adding to the narrative of active hostilities that continue to shape the region.

Moreover, following these incidents, the UK Defence Ministry indicated that Russia may have grounded its remaining A-50 fleet to assess their operational viability. Reports suggest that, as of early March 2024, Russia has lost potentially half of its A-50 aircraft in recent months. Current estimates imply only six of these vital planes remain operational, significantly limiting Russia's aerial reconnaissance capabilities and reorganising military strategy amidst sustained Ukrainian offensives.

Further compounding the situation, Ukrainian forces have launched effective operations targeting facilities in Russia, including a strike on an aviation repair plant in Taganrog, where A-50s are maintained. Such strikes contribute to Russia's diminishing aerial surveillance, limiting their ability to monitor and respond to Ukrainian advancements.

The ramifications of these aircraft losses are profound. They not only deplete the Russian military’s operational assets but also serve to bolster Ukrainian morale and enhance calls from Western allies for expedited military assistance to Ukraine. This dynamic could prove pivotal as the conflict escalates, with battlefield decisions increasingly driven by both hardware capabilities and the intelligence derived from them.

As both sides brace for continued engagement, the skies above Ukraine have become a battleground in their own right, where the strategic assets once considered definitive advantages may now be faltering.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/2063422/russia-army-beriev-a50-ukraine), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/24a159f04936f624fed6aba78ee30efa)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/2063422/russia-army-beriev-a50-ukraine), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-military-destroys-russian-surveillance-plane-air-force-commander-2024-02-23/), [[5]](https://www.newsweek.com/russia-only-has-six-50-spy-planes-left-kyiv-1873164)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://kyivindependent.com/uk-defense-ministry-russia-likely-grounds-its-a-50-aircraft-fleet/), [[5]](https://www.newsweek.com/russia-only-has-six-50-spy-planes-left-kyiv-1873164), [[6]](https://www.newsweek.com/russia-a50-spy-plane-ukraine-taganrog-1877813)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/2063422/russia-army-beriev-a50-ukraine> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/24a159f04936f624fed6aba78ee30efa> - Ukrainian forces downed a Russian A-50 early warning and control aircraft on February 23, 2024, marking a significant victory as the war entered its third year. Ukrainian Air Force Chief Gen. Mykola Oleshchuk credited military intelligence for the success, celebrating it sardonically on Russia’s Defender of the Fatherland day. Footage showed a massive fire from the crash in Russia's Krasnodar region. The Russian military did not comment, though local emergency officials reported a plane crash without specifying details. This loss follows the downing of a similar aircraft in January. The A-50, valued at $350 million, plays a crucial role in Russian battlefield operations. Its downing delivers a serious blow to Russia and is expected to boost Ukrainian morale and impress Western allies, who have been urged to expedite military aid to Ukraine. This incident comes amid a backdrop of persistent Russian attacks and a recently captured strategic city, Avdiivka, highlighting the ongoing intense warfare. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/24a159f04936f624fed6aba78ee30efa?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://kyivindependent.com/uk-defense-ministry-russia-likely-grounds-its-a-50-aircraft-fleet/> - Following the downing of two A-50 aircraft by Ukrainian forces in January and February 2024, the UK Defense Ministry reported on March 2, 2024, that Russia has likely grounded its A-50 early warning and control planes in support of operations in Ukraine. The Russian Air Force has recently lost two of its A-50 planes, one in January and another on February 23, reportedly due to Ukrainian attacks. One such aircraft costs around $330 million. The A-50 plane provides several critical functions for the ongoing war in Ukraine, such as detecting air defense systems, guided missiles, and coordinating targets for Russian fighter jets. Ukraine's Air Force spokesperson Yurii Ihnat said on February 27, 2024, that Ukrainian forces have not detected an A-50 aircraft for days since February 23. ([kyivindependent.com](https://kyivindependent.com/uk-defense-ministry-russia-likely-grounds-its-a-50-aircraft-fleet/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-military-destroys-russian-surveillance-plane-air-force-commander-2024-02-23/> - On February 23, 2024, Ukraine's military destroyed a Russian A-50 surveillance aircraft, according to Air Force Commander Mykola Oleshchuk. This marked the second reported instance of Ukraine downing the sophisticated plane in just over a month. The operation was carried out by the air force and the intelligence directorate. Russian news agencies quoted emergency services in southern Krasnodar region as saying that fragments of an aircraft were found in marshland in Kanevskoy district and firefighters extinguished a ... . The report made no reference to ... . Ukraine's military in January said ... . The A-50, which ... . Kyrylo Budanov ... . ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-military-destroys-russian-surveillance-plane-air-force-commander-2024-02-23/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-only-has-six-50-spy-planes-left-kyiv-1873164> - Ukrainian defense official Kyrylo Budanov stated that Russia has only a handful of its prized A-50 spy planes left after recent losses. The Beriev A-50 plane, also known by the NATO reporting name "Mainstay," is an airborne early warning and control jet used by Russia to help monitor Ukraine's air defenses. The aircraft typically fly with a crew of up to 15 personnel and are estimated to cost over $300 million to produce. ([newsweek.com](https://www.newsweek.com/russia-only-has-six-50-spy-planes-left-kyiv-1873164?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-a50-spy-plane-ukraine-taganrog-1877813> - Over the weekend, Ukraine reached over the border into Russia's Rostov region, and is thought to have struck an aviation facility in the city of Taganrog tasked with repairing A-50s. The governor of the Rostov region reported a "massive" drone strike, but said there had been "no damage to the city infrastructure." Ukrainian officials and Russian military bloggers said the aircraft facility close to the city was targeted. The Taganrog plant was "heavily damaged," and the A-50 aircraft close to the facility was either destroyed or sustained significant damage, Ukrainian MP Oleksiy Goncharenko told Newsweek on Sunday. It is not clear whether this aircraft was previously damaged or operational. Nevertheless, the bruising loss of at least two A-50s in 2024 limits Russia's eyes in the sky and its operations over Ukraine. At the most, Russia is believed to have just six A-50s left. ([newsweek.com](https://www.newsweek.com/russia-a50-spy-plane-ukraine-taganrog-1877813?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.newsweek.com/what-are-beriev-50s-rare-russian-300m-recon-jet-downed-azov-sea-1860638> - The AWACS aircraft can also coordinate up to 10 fighters in air-to-air interception or ground attack missions. It can stay in the air for extended periods, given its mid-air refueling capability. A-50s generally fly with a crew of 15 and the unit cost of the aircraft is reportedly more than $300 million. Russia's air force was believed to have 15 A-50s before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, per figures from the World Directory of Modern Military Aircraft database. One was reportedly badly damaged by a drone in February 2023, in an attack claimed by Belarusian anti-government partisans. Losing one or both planes could prove problematic for Russia's battlefield operations. ([newsweek.com](https://www.newsweek.com/what-are-beriev-50-bumblebee-russian-300m-recon-jet-downed-azov-sea-1860638?utm_source=openai))