Russian drones strike Ukraine’s data centers by exploiting air defense gaps

A surge in Russian jet-powered drone strikes on Ukrainian data centers has increasingly disrupted mobile phone and Internet services for thousands of people. Now Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other government officials are warning of the need for more air defense capabilities, as such telecommunication outages could threaten Ukraine’s digital economy and undermine the country’s ongoing resistance to Russia’s invasion.

The Russian attacks on Ukrainian telecommunication infrastructure have focused on Ukraine’s capital of Kyiv since September 23, according to the nonprofit Reporters Without Borders. Ukraine’s digital transformation ministry reported that 100,000 households in the Kyiv region were temporarily experiencing Internet outages from those initial strikes—and Russia has only intensified its strike campaign against major Ukrainian data centers and mobile phone networks in recent weeks.

“Russian attacks on Ukraine’s telecommunication infrastructure are not new, with strikes and shelling previously damaging fiber optic lines, cell towers, and facilities belonging to mobile network companies,” said Tetiana Gaviuk, analyst for Europe at ACLED, in a post on October 1. “However, the recent concentrated attacks on Kyiv’s data centers and telecom networks stand out because multiple providers and facilities were hit within days, indicating Russia’s increased pressure on Ukraine’s digital infrastructure.”

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