Ukraine’s drone strike isn’t just an attack — it’s first-person warfare

Ukraine launched a surprise attack on Russia that targeted more than 40 of the country’s military aircraft on Sunday. The mission, called Operation Spiderweb, involved sending 117 drones over Russia’s borders and into several of its airfields. It was the Ukrainian military’s longest-ranged attack yet, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, but it also pulls back the curtain on an elaborate campaign to put raw footage of the strike in front of a global audience.

Within just hours, three videos of the strike spread from Ukraine’s federal security agency to a journalist based in the country, later spilling into social media and news outlets worldwide. The videos appear to be filmed from the perspective of a drone, complete with an overlay of information about the drone’s telemetry.

In one video, the drone flies over an airfield, passing clouds of dark gray smoke billowing from multiple warplanes. Another clip apparently captures the moment a plane explodes into a tower of flames. The third shows a drone descending toward an aircraft, with the video suddenly freezing and displaying the message “Warning no data” upon reaching the plane. The Ukrainian government would later report that 41 Russian aircraft were destroyed as a result of the strike, making up 34 percent of Russia’s strategic cruise-missile carriers, according to *The New York Times*. The strikes targeted multiple airfields across Russia.

On top of the damage to Russian forces, the dissemination of

the videos was a clear goal of the mission. This isn't the first time Ukraine has shared raw footage of its attacks to shine a spotlight on the war, but it's perhaps one of the most stunning and fast-spreading examples so far.

The video clips apparently came from sources inside Ukraine's national security agency, the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU). Ukrainian journalist Vitaly Glagola seemed to be one of the first to share them, writing in a post on Telegram (machine-translated by *The Verge*) that he had obtained footage of the drone strike from sources inside the SSU. Glagola later followed up with several images, including one showing several drones lined up in preparation for the attack.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukraine has kept the entire world updated through social media. Early on, Zelenskyy went viral for posting selfie videos of himself in Ukraine's capital city Kyiv following Russia's attacks. Those efforts escalated as the war progressed, with both Zelenskyy and Ukrainian commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrskyi amassing large followings on X, where they both frequently share information about the country's war efforts. The country's campaign has also helped Ukraine raise millions and even recruit a global "IT Army" to help defend the country against cyberattacks.

Ukraine has maintained support in Europe, but it's facing pressure from President Donald Trump to end the war — including during a hostile meeting with Zelenskyy that Trump deemed "great television." A first-person view of a fiery strike on Russia, though, is far more eye-catching.

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