



Defending the New Kerch Strait Bridge

OE Watch Commentary: With the opening of a new bridge linking Crimea to mainland Russia, the Kremlin continues to solidify its claim to this territory. As the excerpted article from the official Russian news agency TASS points out, on 15 May President Putin, after “opening the automobile part of the Crimean Bridge,” congratulated workers and said that “the Kerch Strait Bridge opening was ‘an historic event.’” He went on to call “the construction of the Crimean Bridge ‘a remarkable result that makes Crimea and legendary Sevastopol even stronger and all of us closer to each other.’”

While the construction of this bridge will allow for greater transport and trade, it has yet to sway the international community’s assertion that Russia’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 was legitimate. To date, only a handful of countries have recognized Russia’s claim. Russia’s disputed ownership has raised security concerns with defense officials over how to best protect this new bridge. As reported earlier, Russian National Guard units will be responsible for protecting the bridge from maritime threats (See *OE Watch*, Dec 2017, Russia’s National Guard Expanding Mission). The second excerpted article from a specialized Russian military journal dealing with air-space defense (*Воздушно-космическая оборона*), provides a detailed plan on how to protect the bridge from aerial (particularly UAV) attacks.

The author suggests that the most likely form of Ukrainian attack will be armed UAVs, and therefore, recommends that Russia counter this threat by using “the Buk-M2 short-range ZRS and Tor-M2 medium-range ZRK as traditional air-missile defense weapons in the system of active protection of the Crimean bridge.” He also points out that these new air defense assets “must support coordination with missile-air defense systems and weapons deployed in Crimea and Krasnodarskiy Kray.” He concludes by asserting that “the expenditures (for these new AD assets) will be considerably less than the possible averted damage.”

The construction of a 19km bridge from mainland Russia, across the Kerch Strait to Crimea is a significant engineering accomplishment. The bridge symbolizes the Kremlin’s firm intention to maintain the Crimean Peninsula under Russian ownership. Even before this bridge is fully operational, protecting this vital transport link has become a top Kremlin priority.

End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)

Source: “Putin lauds Kerch Strait Bridge’s ‘historic’ opening as ‘a miracle come true,’” TASS, 15 May 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1004392>

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday that the Kerch Strait Bridge opening was ‘an historic event.’ ...Putin called the construction of the Crimean Bridge ‘a remarkable result that makes Crimea and legendary Sevastopol even stronger and all of us closer to each other.’

Source: “Lieutenant General (Retired) Aleksandr Grigoryevich Luzan, Система активной защиты Крымского моста (Active Protection System of the Crimean Bridge),” *Воздушно-космическая оборона*, 2 April 2018 No 1 (94), pp 32-40.

...The Crimean bridge unquestionably is a colossal economic event, the country’s grandiose infrastructure project. It represents a strategic artery by which Russia will ensure Crimea’s economic growth as well as the supply of its own military grouping on the peninsula. But at the same time the Crimean bridge is a strategically important facility, and from a military standpoint it is a potential target of strikes by offensive aerospace weapons (SVKN)....

...The delivery of strikes against the Crimean bridge from Ukrainian territory using Grom-2 operational-tactical ballistic missiles or KRs [cruise missiles] such as the Korshun is possible, however, essentially only in a period of large-scale combat operations unfolding against the Russian Federation, i.e., war, which in itself is unlikely.

The delivery of strikes against the Crimean bridge using unmanned aerial vehicles (BLAs [UAVs]) -- combat drones -- is more likely. The Ukrainian leadership can easily attribute such strikes to “illegal” terrorist groupings or pseudo-patriots allegedly not subordinate to central authorities, as was the case, for example, with Crimea being disconnected from power or with the railroad blockade....

...In connection with what has been stated above, it is the attack UAVs, including in the form of swarms, that should be considered the main potential means of delivering strikes against the Crimean bridge from Ukrainian territory.

...Construction of the Crimean bridge is indeed an event, the importance of which is difficult to overestimate. Ukraine understands that with the placement in operation of a bridge across the Kerch’ Strait, the economic connection of Crimea with Russia’s other regions will be reinforced by many times, only [Ukraine] cannot be reconciled with this and threats from radical nationalist groupings and even Ukrainian officials are only growing.

...It is proposed to use the Buk-M2 short-range ZRS and Tor-M2 medium-range ZRK as traditional air-missile defense weapons in the system of active protection of the Crimean bridge. In this connection it is advisable to consider the question of expanding the series production of these weapons.

...Being autonomous and self-sufficient, the system of active protection of the Crimean bridge must support coordination with missile-air defense systems and weapons deployed in Crimea and Krasnodarskiy Kray, and it is one element of the overall VKS [Aerospace forces] missile-air defense system.

...The proposed system of active protection of the Crimean bridge is oriented toward the use of series-produced armament and its creation does not require great outlays. Most likely the expenditures will be considerably less than the possible averted damage....

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