

Press Release

Russia's Widespread Use of Guided Aerial Bombs in Ukraine: Evidence of War Crimes

The Truth Hounds team has conducted an investigation revealing Russia's extensive and systematic use of guided aerial bombs to strike civilians and infrastructure in Ukraine. Since the beginning of 2023, over 2,000 such attacks have been documented, resulting in the deaths of hundreds and injuries to thousands of civilians. These strikes have targeted not only combat zones but also rear areas far from the front lines. The investigation, titled "[Guided Chaos: How Russian Aerial Bombs Destroy Civilians and Infrastructure](#)," is a definitive analysis of the circumstances of these attacks and legally assessing their compliance with international humanitarian law. The study presents facts and includes detailed conclusions that demonstrate how Russia's actions violate the principles of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law.

In addition to data collected during field missions, Truth Hounds investigators relied on open-source intelligence to analyse the tactical and technical characteristics of the guided aerial bombs used by the Russian Armed Forces. The investigators also examined the movement of aviation units and processed satellite imagery from platforms such as Planet, Maxar, and Google Earth to track the attacks and gather crucial evidence.

A Criminal Military Scenario

As of September 2024, the Russian military uses up to 100 guided aerial bombs on a daily basis, a significant portion of which are directed at civilian objects that are protected under international humanitarian law.

Due to the large radius of circular error, these bombs cause widespread damage to the civilians and objects. Residential buildings, civilian infrastructure, and other objects with no military significance have become the main targets of attacks. The consequences of such strikes include civilian casualties, destruction of housing and infrastructure, and severe psychological trauma for residents of affected communities. These facts point to a deliberate policy of terror, as the use of low-precision weapons causes a high number of casualties.

Analysis of Cases in Kharkiv and Kherson

The investigation team has conducted a thorough examination of six attacks that occurred in Kharkiv and Kherson, revealing the following key facts:

- The air strikes were carried out from airfields situated within Russian territory.
- The attacks were carried out by specific aviation units and their commanders.
- All documented cases exhibit characteristics of war crimes, as the strikes targeted civilian objects, which constitutes a clear violation of the principle of distinction between military and civilian targets.
- The use of inaccurate guided aerial bombs in densely populated areas is indicative of an intentional infliction of harm on the civilian population.

To illustrate the findings, Truth Hounds investigators have created two comparative tables containing key details about the incidents in Kharkiv and Kherson. These tables assist in determining the legality or illegality of the attacks.

For example, on March 8, 2024, a FAB-500 with UMPK struck a residential building in Kherson, resulting in injuries to a child and extensive damage to the building. On May 15, 2024, three D-30SNs hit the central area of Kherson, damaging several schools and houses, and injuring 19 civilians. In all cases, no military targets were identified in the vicinity, which raises serious concerns about the legality of these attacks.

In particular, the tactics employed by the Russian Aerospace Forces in Kharkiv highlight Russia's preference to utilise inexpensive, inaccurate munitions rather than relying on precise, costly options such as ballistic missiles. In the course of four attacks on Kharkiv, Russia failed to adhere to the norms of international humanitarian law, carrying out strikes on civilian objects, which resulted in the deaths of at least 23 people and injuries to at least 154 people.

Truth Hounds conducted a comprehensive analysis of 30 satellite images, which enabled them to identify the aircraft involved in the bombings and determine their bases. The research revealed that the Russian Aerospace Forces have deployed approximately 70 Su-34 aircraft for attacks on Ukraine. These aircraft are based at airfields in Russia and are actively used to strike Kharkiv, Kherson, and other major cities in Ukraine, which have suffered extensive damage as a result of these attacks.

"A comprehensive examination of multiple guided aerial bomb attacks on large cities, coupled with tracking the methods, scale, and dynamics of their use by the Russian army, reveals that Russia is deliberately using inaccurate weapons in

densely populated areas. Aviation has become a weapon of choice for those seeking to inflict terror upon the civilian population. There is currently no reason to believe that this trend will decrease, and therefore the number of civilian casualties will continue to rise," said **Maryna Slobodianyik**, coordinator of training and strategic projects at Truth Hounds.

Accountability of Russian Pilots and Commanders

Since the beginning of 2023, the Russian Federation has been actively using guided aerial bombs to target Ukrainian cities both at the frontline and in rear areas. Investigators have identified 11 airfields from which Su-34 aircraft are deployed to carry out attacks on Ukraine. The primary bases for these aircraft are the "Baltimor" (Voronezh), "Lipetsk", "Morozovsk", "Marinovka" airfields, and others, where approximately 70 Su-34 aircraft are stationed.

The Truth Hounds investigation places particular emphasis on the personal accountability of Russian pilots and their commanders who are responsible for carrying attacks on civilian objects in Ukraine using guided aerial bombs. The analysis of satellite imagery, military reports, and other evidence has enabled the identification of Russian Aerospace Forces units involved in these military operations. Once it is established that specific attacks on civilian infrastructure constitute war crimes, Ukrainian law enforcement agencies and international institutions, within the framework of universal jurisdiction, will be able to issue official suspicions against commanders of aviation units, as well as their pilots.

Specific Weapons

Russia uses various types of guided aerial bombs, including the bombs with UMPK (250 kg, 500 kg, 1500 kg, 3000 kg), UMPB D-30SN munition (250 kg), and the "Grom-E" munition (from 315 kg to 480 kg depending on the modification).

Russian aviation primarily uses modified munitions with increased range, equipped with a universal planning and correction module (UMPK kit). It allows bombs to fly longer distances and provides better accuracy, enabling safer navigation and reducing the risk of the aircraft being hit by Ukrainian air defence systems.

It is important to distinguish between different types of weapons for an accurate analysis of war crimes from a legal perspective.

Research as a Basis for Further Investigations

This comprehensive analysis of Russia's use of guided aerial bombs in Ukraine, conducted by Truth Hounds, will prove invaluable as a resource for future legal research. The collected evidence, testimonies, and other materials can form the basis for investigations into alleged war crimes related to the use of guided aerial bombs and aircraft against civilian infrastructure in Ukraine. These materials prove invaluable to law enforcement agencies, international organizations, and civil society groups in their ongoing and more detailed investigations.

[Links for infographics](#)

Reference

[Truth Hounds](#) (TH) is a Ukrainian NGO founded in 2014. It is a team of human rights experts dedicated to documenting and investigating international crimes and serious human rights violations committed in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine and other conflict-affected regions of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

Full text of the study "Guided Chaos: How Russian Aerial Bombs Destroy Civilians and Infrastructure": <https://truth-hounds.org/en/cases/guided-chaos/>

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