



Ukraine Strikes Russian P-18 Terek Radar in Occupied Donetsk

Operational relevance of VHF surveillance-radar attrition
in Russia's air-defence network

DATE

27 September 2026

GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Ukraine / Occupied Donetsk

INTELLIGENCE DOMAIN

Air Defence / Radar Networks

Executive Summary

The reported 25-26 September strike on a Russian P-18 Terek radar near Semenivske in occupied Donetsk is best assessed as an effort to degrade one layer of local early warning and air-defence cueing. Ukraine confirmed the strike, but no independent imagery or battle-damage assessment has established whether the radar was destroyed, temporarily disabled or rapidly replaceable. The strongest confirmed fact is that the radar was targeted; the degree of damage remains unknown.

A P-18 loss could reduce local track continuity, shorten warning for adjacent units or force Russia to reposition another radar. A single loss is unlikely to create a durable air-defence gap in a network with overlapping sensors. The operational effect would become more consequential if the strike formed part of a sequence against additional radars, command nodes or surface-to-air missile systems.

The P-18 is a mobile, two-dimensional VHF surveillance radar. Its principal value is wide-area detection and cueing, not precision fire control. Public reporting gives a maximum detection range of about 250 km and altitude of up to 35 km; actual coverage depends on target altitude, siting, environment and configuration.

The Situation

On 25 September and during the night of 25-26 September, Ukrainian Defence Forces reported strikes against a Russian ammunition depot in occupied Sievierodonetsk and a P-18 Terek radar near Semenivske in Donetsk Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff described the radar as one of the support assets of the Russian air-defence system and said operations against key Russian military targets were continuing.

Secondary Ukrainian reporting corroborated the announcement but largely traced back to the same primary source. No geolocated post-strike imagery, technical exploitation or independently confirmed loss of radar emissions had been published by the assessment cut-off. Claims that the strike had 'blinded' Russian air defence therefore exceed the available evidence.

System Profile and Operational Role

The P-18 'Terek' is a legacy but mobile surveillance system operating in the metre/VHF band. It detects aerial targets, establishes range and azimuth, and provides radar data for air-defence elements. It supports early warning, cueing and the generation of a common air picture; it is not a dedicated precision fire-control radar.

The system's reported detection range is up to approximately 250 km and reported detection altitude up to approximately 35 km. These figures describe reported parameters, not assured coverage in a specific location. Terrain, target altitude, radar siting and configuration affect performance. Mobility allows displacement, concealment and replacement after a threat or attack.

The report did not identify independent battle-damage evidence. Strike occurrence was confirmed by the Ukrainian General Staff; the radar identity was reported consistently across Ukrainian primary and secondary reporting. Exact damage and operational outage remain unverified. A targeted radar cannot be assessed as destroyed solely on the basis of the strike announcement.

Operational Significance

The P-18 is not decisive by itself, but its contribution matters within a layered air-defence architecture. Removing one node can increase workload on adjacent radars and create a local surveillance discontinuity, particularly where coverage is already thin or other systems are displaced, suppressed or under attack.

If disabled, the radar could reduce local wide-area detection or shorten warning time. A temporary gap could interrupt track continuity, especially for low-confidence or intermittent tracks. Fewer initial detections could require downstream radars to search more actively, increasing workload and emissions. Track and coverage reallocation could raise coordination demands, while the movement or activation of reserve radars could create additional signatures for follow-on targeting.

The effect is likely to be temporary if Russia can substitute another sensor, reposition a reserve radar or rely on overlapping coverage. The strike becomes more consequential if it is part of a sequenced campaign against nearby surveillance radars, command posts, communications links or SAM batteries. In that case, cumulative degradation, rather than the loss of one radar, becomes the relevant measure.

Indicators and Warnings

The following developments would clarify whether the strike produced a physical loss or an operationally relevant gap:

- Commercial or military imagery showing a destroyed antenna, cabin or support vehicles would strengthen the case that the radar was physically disabled rather than merely targeted.

- An absence of expected radar emissions or coverage in the sector would support an operational-outage assessment, although emissions data may be incomplete.
- Deployment of another P-18 or an alternative surveillance radar nearby would indicate an effort to restore coverage and suggest that the gap had operational relevance.
- Follow-on Ukrainian strikes against SAM, radar or command-and-control nodes in the same area would point to a wider suppression or degradation campaign.
- Changes in Ukrainian UAV or missile routing through the sector could indicate exploitation of a temporary surveillance weakness.
- Increased Russian camouflage, mobility or decoy activity around radar sites would indicate adaptation to a perceived radar-targeting threat.

Courses of Action and Risk

The most likely course of action is rapid local reconstitution: Russia restores coverage through overlapping sensors, relocation or a replacement radar, leaving any gap temporary. The source report assigns this scenario medium-high confidence.

An operational opportunity would be a short exploitation window in which Ukraine attempts follow-on UAV or missile strikes before the local surveillance picture is fully restored; the source assigns medium confidence. The most dangerous outcome for Russia is cumulative network degradation, with further attacks on radar, command-and-control and SAM nodes producing a wider, more persistent gap; the report assesses this as medium-low probability but high impact. An alternative is limited effect if the radar was lightly damaged or one of several redundant sensors; this is assessed at medium confidence.

Local early-warning degradation is assessed as a medium risk because the effect depends on sensor overlap and replacement. A persistent air-defence gap is low to medium risk: a single radar loss is unlikely to produce durable effects in a redundant network. Follow-on strike opportunity is medium risk during any temporary reconfiguration. Russian replacement and adaptation are medium-high, given mobility, reserve systems and overlapping sensors.

Overall Assessment

The 25-26 September strike is best assessed as a potentially useful but unproven degradation of one component of Russia's local air-surveillance network. If the radar was disabled, the immediate consequence would most likely be a temporary reduction in early warning and cueing rather than a collapse of air defence.

The decisive indicators are whether Ukraine follows with attacks against additional sensors, command-and-control or SAM nodes, and whether Russia deploys replacement radar assets to restore coverage. The event is significant less as an isolated radar loss than as a possible indicator of a continuing effort to erode the sensor layer supporting Russian air-defence operations in occupied eastern Ukraine.

Sources and Methodological Note

Source basis: Ukrainian General Staff, 26 September 2026, reporting the strikes near Semenivske and Sievierodonetsk and giving the radar's role and reported detection parameters. Secondary Ukrainian coverage largely traces back to this statement; no independent post-strike battle-damage assessment was publicly identified. Assessment cut-off: 27 September 2026. Strike effects and reported performance remain subject to verification.