STUDENT HANDOUT

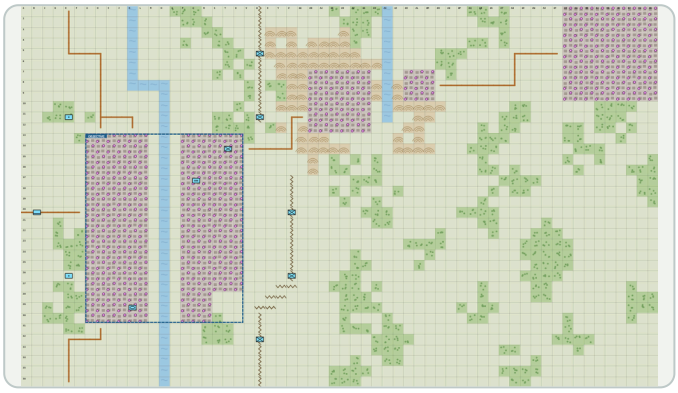
The Kill Zone

Kostiantynivka, Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine · August to October 2025

Information as of September 2026



Scenario illustration · AI generated



Student map · own side only · Simulation situation map · reconstructed terrain and estimated deployments; not verified historical positions.

Learning objectives

- Describe how continuous observation changes exposure and movement in the authored hold-zone run; distinguish its assumed observation area and automatic ground movement from real front-line measurements.
- Compare modeled jamming effects on radio-linked and fibre-optic drones, and how interception changes the enemy drones remaining overhead. Do not infer that every historical Lancet required a particular reconnaissance drone.
- Evaluate the choice between dispersed, standard and concentrated postures when holding a trench line under continuous drone attack.

Run time and a good result

Default run clock: 2 minutes 30 seconds at 1×, excluding pauses, briefing and discussion. Time controls change elapsed play time.

Objective: Hold Kostiantynivka until time runs out, from the trench line between the city and Chasiv Yar.

The Kill Zone: Hold Kostiantynivka until time runs out, from the trench line between the city and Chasiv Yar. Prevent an unopposed enemy occupation of the marked zone lasting 8 continuous simulation seconds; retain a fighting force until the episode ends. The authored limit is 150 simulation seconds across 1 stage. Compare objective progress, time, losses, drone expenditure and recorded civilian harm with a second run. A strong classroom result also explains the source evidence and reconstruction estimates; it does not verify a historical casualty count.

Atrocity notice

The UN Commission found war crimes by Russian authorities, including killings, torture and sexual violence, and a small number of violations by Ukrainian forces. Its March 2023 findings are context, including for later scenarios.

These reports describe the wider conflict. They do not establish that every crime occurred in this modeled battle.

Studying or commanding a side does not endorse its conduct. Drone Front never lets players target civilians, hospitals, schools or places of worship. Civilian harm from simulated strikes is counted and shown in the debrief, including nonzero harm. Civilian massacres are never playable operations. Designated terrorist forces and Wagner remain computer controlled; Gaza war events remain excluded from play.

▼ Dated reports and findings

- 2023-03-16 · UN Commission of Inquiry: war crimes in Ukraine

Learn more: the laws of war

- ICRC: Geneva Conventions and commentaries
- ICRC: Customary IHL database
- UN: Genocide Convention (9 December 1948)
- UN: Rome Statute (17 July 1998), articles 6–8

Historical source notes

On this front drones cause most losses. Anything that moves in the open is likely to be seen and hit, so both sides move in small groups and hide under trees, nets and rubble.

Jamming works until the enemy switches to fibre optic drones. Interceptors can thin out enemy recon drones, and without recon the enemy's artillery and Lancets struggle to find you.

Russian assault groups entered Kostiantynivka from the south east at the end of October 2025. Russia's defence ministry claimed the whole city on 3 July 2026. Ukraine rejected the claim, and ISW assessed control as still contested on 22 July (Wikipedia). On 25 September 2026 ISW reported that Russian forces kept attacking in the Kostiantynivka direction but did not advance.

About 4,800 residents remained in the city in early November 2025 and about 2,500 in April 2026 (estimates cited by Wikipedia). This page reflects information as of September 2026. The front line changes daily, so check current news before relying on any detail.

Evidence for learning objectives

By 2025 both sides near Kostiantynivka used jammers, so both also used fibre optic drones that jammers cannot stop.

By 2025 a strip several km deep was watched by drones day and night. RUSI estimated drones accounted for about two thirds of destroyed and damaged Russian targets (Forbes).

RUSI describes interception reducing UAV reconnaissance, while also describing Lancets hunting and confirming targets themselves. This is a bounded observation from its November 2024–January 2025 field study.

Timings

For 60 minutes, brief for 10, run it once with the three pauses for 25 and review for 25; for 90 minutes, add a run without drones and compare where losses came from; for 180 minutes, give syndicates different postures and rules of engagement, add a run with reports from units set to Realistic so observers inside enemy jamming go silent, and

compare time held and civilian harm across the class. These are classroom session budgets including pauses and discussion; the unpaused authored run is 150 seconds. No drones removes the selected player side's drones, not every enemy drone.

Session	Plan
45 minutes	Brief: 10 min; Run: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Review: 15 min
60 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run: 20 min; Collect: 5 min; Debrief and after questions: 15 min; Discussion: 5 min
90 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run 1: with drones: 20 min; Run 2: without drones: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Compare and discuss: 25 min; After questions: 10 min
180 minutes	Before questions: 10 min; Brief and staff roles: 15 min; Run 1: with drones: 25 min; Run 2: without drones: 20 min; Break: 10 min; Run 3: syndicates: 30 min; Collect: 10 min; Seminar replay and debrief: 40 min; After questions: 10 min; Close: 10 min

Staff roles

commander
Set the pre-run posture and during-run standing orders, and report the modeled hold zone, remaining units and time. Individual ground-unit movement is automatic; continued resistance beyond the run is not a measured result.

intelligence
Count enemy recon drones overhead and infantry groups crossing the open ground, and report which of your units the enemy has probably found.

fires
Watch what your two batteries engage and how many shells remain, report every Lancet that targets them, and flag any strike close to Kostiantynivka, where civilians still live.

droneOps
Balance the quadcopter, FPV, fibre optic, bomber, recon and interceptor drones across a long run, and report losses to jamming and how many of each type remain.

Opposing staff objective

Attack from Chasiv Yar, Bakhmut and the south east, break through the trench line and take Kostiantynivka before time runs out.

Decision points

- Before the first launch, compare using interceptor cards against airborne reconnaissance drones with retaining them for later aircraft. Allocate ground-attack drone types separately; interceptors cannot strike infantry.
- When the first fibre optic drones arrive: your jamming unit cannot stop them, so what do you change in target priority or in how you use your own fibre optic drones?

- When modeled Lancet attacks threaten your artillery, compare intercepting airborne enemy drones with ground-target priority and the high-value-only artillery standing order. The run does not establish that every Lancet attack depends on a particular reconnaissance drone.

Before and after questions

1. **The lesson describes drones retaining control despite radio-link jamming. Which control method explains that distinction?**

   A. Their altitude reduces exposure to the jammer
   B. Their flight timing avoids effective jammer coverage
   C. Their autonomy removes reliance on operator control
   D. A physical control cable carries signals past interference with the radio link

2. **Which Russian attack pattern did RUSI describe in its November 2024 to January 2025 field observations?**

   A. Small infantry groups attempted dispersed infiltration
   B. Large tank columns attempted concentrated road advances
   C. Airborne groups attempted landings behind defending lines
   D. Armoured formations attempted advances after prolonged barrages

3. **In this simulation, what can be reduced when an interceptor removes an opposing reconnaissance drone?**

   A. The local interference applied to opposing drone control links
   B. The artillery accuracy automatically assigned to the opposing force
   C. The reconnaissance information available about opposing ground unit positions
   D. The opposing aircraft inventory available for later scheduled launches

4. **An interceptor price is quoted per aircraft, while an Orlan estimate is quoted per system. What must come before a cost-exchange claim?**

   A. Compare both prices without changing their published accounting basis
   B. Compare equivalent unit costs before claiming a favourable exchange
   C. Treat the lower published figure as the complete defending cost
   D. Treat the higher published figure as the complete attacking cost

5. **What civilian-presence finding did the Donetsk Regional State Administration report for Kostiantynivka on 7 January 2026?**

   A. The estimate concerned residents already evacuated elsewhere
   B. The estimate concerned recently arrived displaced residents
   C. The estimate concerned residents across the province
   D. The estimates recorded thousands still resident

Discussion

- When did the review first record exposure or damage to your artillery? Compare another pre-run posture or drone allocation, and distinguish observed model changes from an unproven historical concealment claim.
- Compare a run with your drones enabled with one using the No drones variant, which removes your side's drones rather than the enemy's. Report losses and the modeled hold-zone result without inferring an independently verified historical counterfactual.
- Compare standard and strict rules of engagement near the model's populated area. Report blocked strikes and civilian harm separately from equipment losses and points; strict mode is a model restriction, not a guarantee of legal compliance or complete civilian safety.
- Which resupply and reinforcement processes does this short run represent, and which would require a different model or historical evidence? Do not extrapolate its minutes of ammunition use into a verified plan for weeks.

Debrief rubric

Strong
Meets the objective or explains why it was not met; uses the published sources and run evidence, separates known facts from assumptions, compares both sides' losses and cost exchange, and evaluates precautions against civilian harm.

Adequate
Describes the objective and main decisions, identifies at least one source and model limitation, reports losses and harm, and gives a reasoned change for a second run.

Weak
Reports only victory or points, treats teaching settings as real performance, gives unsupported historical claims, or omits uncertainty and civilian harm.

Published readings

1. Forbes: RUSI report, drones now destroying two thirds of Russian targets (Feb 2025)
2. NSDC of Ukraine (Ukrainian government figures, treat as claims): Defence industry results 2025, FPV drones
3. US Army: Historical armor losses

Complete source list

Forbes: RUSI report, drones now destroying two thirds of Russian targets (Feb 2025)
NSDC of Ukraine (Ukrainian government figures, treat as claims): Defence industry results 2025, FPV drones
US Army: Historical armor losses
Wikipedia: Battle of Kostiantynivka
Wikipedia: Kostiantynivka
Wikipedia: Battle of Chasiv Yar
ISW (via Critical Threats): Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 25 September 2026
ISW (via Critical Threats): Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 20 September 2026