STUDENT HANDOUT

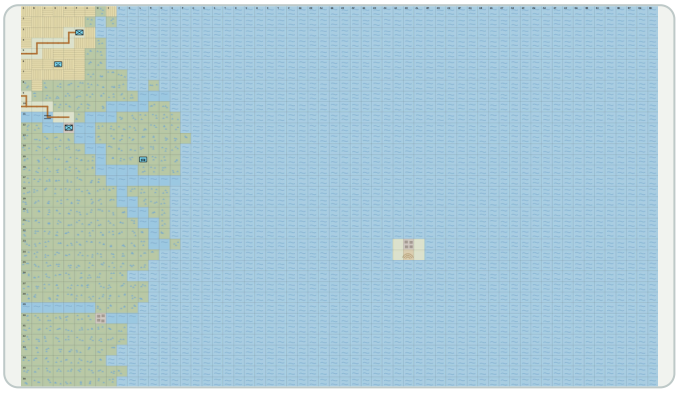
The Fight for Snake Island

Snake Island and the Danube delta coast, Odesa Oblast, Ukraine, Black Sea · 26 April to 30 June 2022

Information as of October 2026



Scenario illustration · AI generated



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

Learning objectives

- Compare attacks on modeled sea targets and island units using observation, aircraft losses and the attrition goal. Distinguish those results from evidence about the historical garrison's resupply and the relative effects of different strikes.
- Assess how the model's air-defence coverage affects drone exposure and losses, without assuming it reproduces every historical engagement or confirms the cause of each aircraft loss.
- Compare the Russian and Ukrainian accounts of the withdrawal on 30 June and explain how a commander should treat strike claims that were not independently confirmed.

Run time and a good result

Default run clock: 8 minutes 0 seconds at 1×, excluding pauses, briefing and discussion. Time controls change elapsed play time.

Objective: Over four stages from late April to the end of June, put at least 12 Russian units out of action on and around Snake Island: patrol boats, landing craft, supply ships, air defence systems and the garrison. Your Bayraktar TB2s fly from the coast 35 km away, and every air defence system on the island can shoot them down.

The Fight for Snake Island: Over four stages from late April to the end of June, put at least 12 Russian units out of action on and around Snake Island: patrol boats, landing craft, supply ships, air defence systems and the garrison. Your Bayraktar TB2s fly from the coast 35 km away, and every air defence system on the island can shoot them down. Put at least 12 represented opposing units out of action; decoys do not count. The authored limit is 480 simulation

seconds across 4 stages. 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

An island garrison 35 km from the enemy coast lives on its supply line. Ukraine struck the boats, landing craft and tugs that kept the island going, and UK Defence Intelligence assessed in May that Russia was trying to reinforce the garrison while Ukraine kept attacking its resupply vessels and air defences (Kyiv Independent).

Naval News described the Bayraktar TB2 as the ghost of Snake Island. Wikipedia sums up analysts' view that the drones succeeded because the garrison relied on isolated short range air defence systems without medium or long range backup or fighter cover, so drones could strike from outside their reach. Russia answered by sending a Tor and later Pantsir-S1 systems, and Ukraine said it destroyed them.

RFE/RL reports Russia calling the 30 June withdrawal a goodwill gesture and Ukraine crediting its forces. DOD News on 1 July records a senior Pentagon official attributing it to Ukrainian pressure on resupply. These are attributed explanations, not independently established motives.

Evidence for learning objectives

Ukraine struck the boats, landing craft and tugs that kept the island going, and UK Defence Intelligence assessed in May that Russia was trying to reinforce the garrison while Ukraine kept attacking its resupply vessels and air defences (Kyiv Independent).

Sutton's published reconstruction discusses air-defence vulnerability around Snake Island. It is an attributed analyst account, not proof of a universal cause of drone success or every historical aircraft loss.

Ukraine said anti ship missiles sank the cruiser Moskva on 14 April. Wikipedia, citing Al Jazeera, says the loss pushed Russian ships further from the coast and left the island garrison exposed.

Timings

For 60 minutes, brief for 10, run it once with a pause at each of the three decision points for 25 and review for 25; for 90 minutes, add a second run commanding Russia and compare how each side used the island's air defence; for 180 minutes, give syndicates different target orders for the first two stages, compare their losses and counts, and finish with a discussion of the two accounts of the withdrawal.

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 order of targets for each stage, decide when the island's air defence is weak enough to risk the TB2s over it, and report the running count against the goal of 12 units.

intelligence
Track which air defence systems on the island have revealed themselves, report every new vessel as it arrives, and note which claimed kills you have actually seen.

fires
In the final stage, observe the added artillery counter’s automatic fire and ammunition, and recommend the available artillery standing order. You cannot assign an individual gun target or move the gun.

droneOps
Plan the TB2 sorties for each stage, keep enough aircraft back to replace losses, and report every drone shot down and by which system.

Opposing staff objective

Hold Snake Island and keep its garrison supplied until 30 June. Lose fewer than 12 units to Ukrainian strikes, using the island's air defences to shoot down the TB2 drones that hunt your boats.

Decision points

- Late April, before the first strike: the island has two air defence systems and three patrol boats. Do you go for the air defence first, accepting losses, or for the boats at sea away from it?

- In the authored stage labelled7May, new landing-craft and air-defence counters appear. Compare drone-launch timing before and after the scripted arrival; unloading and individual cargo handling are not interactive mechanics.
- In the final authored stage, observe the added artillery counter's automatic engagements and ammunition. Compare the available artillery standing order with different TB2 launch choices; individual gun-target assignment is unavailable.

Before and after questions

1. **According to the Pentagon's 1 July 2022 assessment, why did attacks on resupply ships matter for Snake Island?**

   A. Vessel losses chiefly reduced the garrison's independent aerial reconnaissance capability
   B. Vessel attacks chiefly reduced uncertainty about the island's fixed targets
   C. Vessel attacks chiefly reduced civilian exposure during subsequent island strikes
   D. A Pentagon official linked attacks on resupply ships to difficulty sustaining the isolated island garrison

2. **Which sequence did H I Sutton describe in his 18 May 2022 analysis of Snake Island?**

   A. A reinforcement effort established the earlier defensive losses had been restored
   B. A Tor loss preceded further attacks and replacement efforts
   C. Aircraft attacks preceded the first reported losses among the defensive systems
   D. Moskva's loss established the remaining garrison had already abandoned the island

3. **How is the Russian withdrawal from the island on 30 June described?**

   A. Russia described goodwill; Ukraine credited pressure from strikes
   B. Both governments credited pressure from repeated Ukrainian strikes
   C. Both governments attributed withdrawal exclusively to grain negotiations
   D. Both governments declined to explain the garrison's withdrawal

4. **Ukraine said it destroyed Pantsir-S1 systems on the island in late June. What did Russia's Defence Ministry say?**

   A. It confirmed losses and identified the affected units
   B. It stated those systems were entirely absent before the attack
   C. It denied losses and claimed interception of aircraft and rockets
   D. It stated those systems had been withdrawn previously

5. **Why did the sinking of the cruiser Moskva matter for the Snake Island garrison?**

   A. Its loss established the broader port blockade had become ineffective
   B. It reportedly reduced nearby naval support and protection
   C. Its loss chiefly affected berthing rather than defensive naval support
   D. Its loss chiefly changed civilian traffic rather than garrison resources

Discussion

- Which target set did you attack first, and how many TB2s did you lose before the island's air defence was out of action? What would you change?
- Sutton’s Naval News reconstruction describes a reported sequence of air-defence losses, subsequent attacks and replacement efforts. Compare that attributed reconstruction with the exposure and losses in your model run; do not infer a universal cause of drone success.
- Where strike videos and opposing official accounts differ, what can each establish about identity, date, observed damage and unobserved losses? Explain the limits without assuming an unpublished or unfilmed event did not occur.
- Russia called the withdrawal a goodwill gesture and Ukraine called it a forced retreat. What evidence would you look for to judge between the two accounts?

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. Naval News: Watch Ukrainian TB2 striking two Russian Raptor assault boats (May 2022)
2. Naval News: Russian Serna class LCU becomes the new victim of TB2 drone (May 2022)
3. Naval News: Incredible success of Ukraine's Bayraktar TB2, the ghost of Snake Island (May 2022)

Complete source list

Wikipedia: Snake Island campaign
Wikipedia: Snake Island (Ukraine)
Wikipedia: Raptor-class patrol boat
Wikipedia: Serna-class landing craft
Wikipedia: Russian tug Spasatel Vasily Bekh
Wikipedia: Russian ship Vsevolod Bobrov
Wikipedia: 2S22 Bohdana
Wikipedia: Ukrainian fast assault craft Stanislav
Wikipedia: Baykar Bayraktar TB2
Wikipedia: Vylkove

Wikipedia: Prymorske, Izmail Raion, Odesa Oblast
Wikipedia: Sulina
Naval News: Watch Ukrainian TB2 striking two Russian Raptor assault boats (May 2022)
Naval News: Russian Serna class LCU becomes the new victim of TB2 drone (May 2022)
Naval News: Incredible success of Ukraine's Bayraktar TB2, the ghost of Snake Island (May 2022)
Ukrainska Pravda: Defence Ministry confirms strike near Snake Island hit Russian boat and Tor missile systems (7 May 2022)
RFE/RL: Ukrainian military says drone destroys Russian landing craft near Snake Island in Black Sea (May 2022)
The War Zone: Ukraine situation report, TB2s strike Russian SAM carrying landing craft at Snake Island (May 2022)
Forbes (David Axe): Ukraine's drones are peeling back Russian defenses on infamous Snake Island (3 May 2022)
Kyiv Independent: UK Intelligence, Russia tries to reinforce its garrison on Zmiinyi Island (May 2022)
Space.com: Satellite spies sunken Russian ship off Ukraine's wartorn Snake Island (May 2022)
The War Zone: Ukraine says it destroyed more Russian air defenses on Snake Island (June 2022)
Militarnyi: Snake Island liberation, journalists published details of Bohdana self propelled howitzer's first combat mission
RFE/RL: Ukraine says it has retaken infamous Snake Island; Russia says it withdrew for goodwill (30 June 2022)
Washington Post: Russian forces withdraw from Ukraine's Snake Island (30 June 2022)
TASS: Russian Aerospace Forces down 2 Ukrainian planes, 3 copters, 2 drones off Snake Island (May 2022)
DOD News: Russians Retreat From Snake Island, Says DOD Official (1 July 2022)
Alex Gatopoulos, Al Jazeera: The struggle for Snake Island (30 June 2022)