

Ukraine's defence AI chief says AI could automate parts of the kill chain

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Source: <https://wtop.com/russia-ukraine-war-news/2026/04/the-ap-interview-ukraine-bets-on-battlefield-ai-as-the-race-for-weapons-autonomy-intensifies/>

Text saved 18 Oct 2026 (the page as published).

SHA-256 of the saved text: 561958185099c89e7eec1ae51612a9cdf7d1191c359d5f60cdabdbcc694182f26

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Rapid military adoption of artificial intelligence is becoming essential to Ukraine's survival, even as full integration across the battlefield may still be several years away, according to a senior AI official.

Danylo Tsvok said AI is already helping Ukraine hold territory, while reducing risks to its soldiers as it faces a larger, better-resourced adversary.

"We need to be faster than the enemy in decision-making," he told The Associated Press, adding that AI is "not only a competitive advantage. It's about our survival."

Tsvok, 35, leads the Defense Artificial Intelligence Center, which was established last month by the Defense Ministry. He previously served in the government's top civilian AI role.

Ukraine and Russia are locked in an intensifying race to deploy increasingly automated systems — from aerial drones to ground and maritime platforms. At the center of that race is the ability to maintain operations under heavy electronic warfare.

Many newer systems are designed to shift toward autonomous functionality, maintaining target focus even under hostile jamming.

Ukraine's rapidly expanding domestic arms sector now includes more than 2,000 manufacturers and military technology firms. Developers are testing tools that enable coordinated drone swarms, aiming to boost efficiency while easing the burden on human operators.

"We need to understand that the future belongs to autonomous systems," Tsvok said. "AI makes it possible to automate parts of the kill chain."

In its more mature form, he said, AI could underpin a networked battlefield in which smart weapons operate in coordination under a unified assessment platform.

"That could happen within three to five years," he said. "Within that time frame, front lines could be secured by tightly integrated hardware and software systems."

In the nearer term, he pointed to wider deployment of autonomous interceptors, expanded use of ground-based robotic systems, and an escalation in electronic warfare capabilities.

Some elements are already in place. Unmanned ground platforms are increasingly used in logistics, evacuation and combat roles.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy recently said land drones supported more than 20,000 battlefield missions — including medical evacuations, supply runs and direct combat — over a three-month period this year. Among them, he said, was a successful attack carried out without any human soldiers.

Tsvok insisted the objective is not fully autonomous 'killer robots,' but a more coordinated system that accelerates decision-making and integrates more closely with Western partners.

"It's not about reaching 100% autonomy, it's about being efficient on the battlefield," he said.

Ukraine is deepening partnerships with Western allies and Gulf states to secure funding, scale production and embed itself in security alliances, while also opening access to its extensive battlefield data.

Tsvok's department receives financial support from the U.K. Ministry of Defence — the type of relationship he described as both militarily and politically significant.

“Democracies must develop strong defensive capabilities,” he said. “Without AI, they cannot effectively protect peace. This is not only about Ukraine. It’s about global security.”

Volodymyr Yurchuk and Vasilisa Stepanenko in Kyiv, Ukraine contributed.