

Ukraine's Energy War: The Case for Winter-Energy Action

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Russia is again attacking Ukraine's heat and power as winter begins. This briefing sets out the documented facts, the legal position, and three specific asks within the UK's power to act. It accompanies the full investigation, *Freezing a Nation*, at brandonmyers.net/writing/freezing-a-nation.

The situation

- Over the first four years of the full-scale war, Russia launched roughly **12,700 drones and 2,900 missiles** at Ukraine's energy infrastructure — a sustained campaign, not collateral damage.
- On **30 September 2026**, Russia launched its heaviest combined assault on the grid in months (~190 drones and missiles), killing seven and forcing emergency power cuts in Kyiv and three regions — the first in the capital since spring, at the start of the heating season.
- Last winter, UN monitors recorded near-daily strikes damaging the grid across 17+ regions; millions had power only a few hours a day. Strikes on Kyiv's combined heat-and-power plants cut central heating to nearly **6,000 apartment blocks at a time**.
- Targeting has widened from large plants to the civilian distribution system — municipal boiler stations and mid-voltage substations, the last links before heat reaches a home.

The legal position

- The ICRC holds that energy systems serving civilians are, in principle, **civilian objects**, protected from direct attack and incidental harm.
- **Article 54(2) of Additional Protocol I** bars attacks on objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population — in a Ukrainian winter, district heating is exactly that.
- The **International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants** over these grid strikes: Kobylash and Sokolov (5 March 2024), and Shoigu and Gerasimov (25 June 2024), for directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects. These are judicial findings of reasonable grounds.
- Russia rejects this, calling the grid a legitimate military target. Ukraine's own Security Service goes further, documenting 256 energy attacks in one heating season and calling it crimes against humanity — that characterisation is Ukraine's assessment, not yet a court finding.

Three asks within the UK's power

1. **Sustained air-defence supply.** The deepest protection is stopping the missiles before they land. Press for continued and expanded UK air-defence provision to Ukraine through the coming winter.

2. **Winter-energy equipment, named specifically.** A grid can be repaired between strikes if the parts are on hand. Support the supply of **transformers, mobile substations, high-voltage equipment and generators** — the specific items Ukraine's grid operator needs to keep heat and water running.
3. **Keep accountability visible.** Support efforts to document the campaign and to back the ICC process, so the targeting of civilian heat is recorded as a crime and not normalised as weather.

Suggested parliamentary questions

- What assessment has the Government made of the humanitarian impact of Russia's attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure ahead of winter 2026–27, and what additional winter-energy assistance is planned?
- What steps is the Government taking to expedite the supply of air-defence systems and grid-repair equipment (transformers, mobile substations, high-voltage components) to Ukraine before the coldest months?
- What support is the Government providing to international efforts to document and prosecute attacks on Ukraine's civilian energy infrastructure, including cooperation with the ICC?

Sources: UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine; UN News; the International Criminal Court (warrants of 5 March and 25 June 2024); Human Rights Watch; the ICRC; Amnesty International; FIDH; Ukrenergo and Ukrainian government statements; and reporting by Al Jazeera, France 24, CNBC and the Christian Science Monitor, 2026. Legal characterisations attributed to Ukraine's Security Service are that government's own assessment. Full investigation and source links: brandonmyers.net/writing/freezing-a-nation. Free to republish and circulate.