INVEST IN BRAVERY

INSIGHTS

Frontline briefing: what Ukrainian operators need from defensetech

Key takeaways from a panel with three active-duty Ukrainian commanders



At Invest in Bravery's 2026 summit in Kyiv, three active-duty Ukrainian commanders gave a room of international investors and founders a frontline briefing on what actually works on the battlefield. Mykyta Puz, who scouts technology and builds manufacturer partnerships for the 12th Special Forces Brigade “Azov”, moderated. On stage were Captain Markiian Yatsyniak, Deputy Commander of the 413th Unmanned Systems Regiment RAID; Andrei Kushniarou, Commander of the UGV Command Platoon of the 108 Battalion “Da Vinci Wolves”; and a platoon commander in the 12th Special Forces Brigade “Azov” with the callsign “Archean.” Some key insights:

1. Cheap, simple and constantly updated beats cutting-edge

Many operators came from civilian life only recently, so equipment has to work with very little training and be cheap enough to lose. The scale is large: Andrei said a single brigade needs 70-100 UGVs a month for logistics alone, and that number keeps rising. What separates good vendors is whether they keep listening to units and update monthly, weekly or even more often. Solutions that worked in 2022 don't work today.

> *“If you're thinking about investing in something in Ukraine, please invest in mass production of very simple solutions.”*
>
> **Andrei Kushniarou, Commander, UGV Command Platoon, 108 Battalion “Da Vinci Wolves”**

2. The bottleneck is communications, not drones

Markiian said the price of raw fiber-optic cable has risen roughly 5-10x, from about 3-5 to 35-45 per 100 kilometers, so vendors can't predict their costs. Starlink is now cheaper than fiber even for one-way attack missions, but units don't have enough whitelisted Starshield accounts. Mesh radios were a breakthrough last year, but supply hasn't kept up. Markiian linked months-long delivery delays to Motorola's acquisition of Silvus.

> *“Shelves of Ukrainian UAV manufacturers are full of drones but empty of radios, and we're waiting for months.”*
>
> **Markiian Yatsyniak, Deputy Commander, 413th Unmanned Systems Regiment RAID**

3. Electronic warfare has to be wideband, adaptive and integrated

Three years ago, EW was mostly about commercial drone frequencies like 915 MHz. Today, Archean expects jamming to cover at least 400 MHz to 8 GHz and detection roughly 200 MHz to 15 GHz. Systems also need to handle changing protocols and modulations. Plenty of products cover range and modulation. The real gap is one software ecosystem that detects a drone, tells friend from foe, and jams both its video and control links.

He also named three practical failures:

- Kit ordered six months ago arrives already out of date.
- Large systems that give off a lot of heat get spotted by thermal cameras on the first night.
- Power draw matters because fuel is hard to get into the gray zone.

4. The UGV market is crowded but missing basics

Andrei described a “terrible zoo” inside units, with 20-25 different UGV types and none of them working out of the box. Mykyta noted that the Brave1 marketplace lists around 200 Ukrainian UGV models. Even so, there is still no UGV built for medical evacuation, which many units treat as a priority. Andrei also pointed out that an infantryman's protection has barely improved since body armor, so personal anti-FPV interceptors and turrets are needed. [Update: there are now UGV and even now UAV medevacs since this panel took place in April 2026.]

5. AI helps with analysis, not autonomy (yet)

Each panelist named a real use for AI. Markiian pointed to post-mission analytics such as turning flight data into 3D maps. Andrei named coordination, statistics and help with mission planning. Archean described correlating video, telemetry and intelligence so one operator can handle five or six enemy drones at once. Full autonomy is still in the future. Operators make the final decisions, although Andrei sees promise in UGVs that drive simple routes on their own.

> *“Any advertisement by manufacturers that their drones flying fully autonomously is a lie.”*
>
> **Markiian Yatsyniak, Deputy Commander, 413th Unmanned Systems Regiment RAID**

6. Units want partners, not vendors

Many brigades have no analytics centers and can't say which UGV works best or what it costs them to deliver one kilogram of supplies over one kilometer. Some problems that look like hardware gaps are really training issues, such as operators using the same route for half a year. Each unit works with manufacturers differently:

- Markiian's regiment gives a vendor 4-5 months to prove itself and drops it if it doesn't.
- Andrei's platoon tests products in its workshop, invites developers on-site, battle-tests one or two units and writes an analytics report. If the product works, it buys more and helps find investors.
- Archean's brigade runs a hub that matches manufacturers with the right internal experts.

Units also often design a solution themselves and bring it to a manufacturer to produce.

What this means

For investors: Go to the units directly, as Andrei advised, and work with them instead of only listening, because each brigade has its own problems. Before you invest, ask how a company gets frontline feedback, how often it ships updates, and whether it will say plainly what its product can't do yet. Communications, EW ecosystems, medevac UGVs and brigade-level analytics are where the panelists saw clear demand without enough supply.

For founders: Being reliable, cheap and fast to iterate matters more than being novel. Markiian said he sees fewer truly new ideas each month, and most companies are trying to do the same thing faster or cheaper. Overpromising on autonomy costs you credibility with this audience, because operators can tell the difference and they say so publicly.

Watch the full panel

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5fMR_iSuVY&t=3420s

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