

UK Defence Intelligence Reveals Reason for New Domed Aircraft Shelters at Key Russian Airbases

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UK Defence Intelligence has revealed that Russia is constructing domed aircraft shelters at several airbases, including in Crimea and western Russia, apparently to protect its aircraft from increasingly effective Ukrainian long-range drone and missile strikes. Shelters are being constructed at sites including Belbek in Crimea and Engels in Saratov

Oblast, aimed at shielding high-value aircraft such as strategic bombers and airborne radar planes.

According to satellite imagery and open-source intelligence, at least 14 Russian airfields are currently undergoing upgrades. These include reinforced structures designed to protect against fragmentation, shrapnel, and blast pressure, especially from precision-guided munitions launched by Ukraine.

The construction effort follows Ukraine's "Spiderweb" drone offensive in June 2025, which reportedly targeted strategic aviation assets including Tu-95 and Tu-160 bombers, as well as A-50 radar aircraft. These aircraft, some valued at hundreds of millions of dollars, are central to Russia's long-range strike capability and its ability to monitor airspace over Ukraine and bordering NATO territory.

UK analysts believe the shelters also serve a secondary role, concealing aircraft movements from Western surveillance. With these domed structures in place, it becomes far more difficult to determine whether aircraft are present on the ground, complicating strike planning for Ukraine and its allies.

While some of the shelters are being built with reinforced concrete and steel, others appear to be lightweight constructions offering only limited protection. Experts note that full hardened aircraft shelters, capable of withstanding direct or near-miss hits, are expensive and slow to build. The estimated cost of each reinforced shelter may exceed \$1.5 million, raising questions about Russia's ability to sustain these upgrades while continuing its broader military operations.

The urgency of the construction suggests a reactive strategy from Moscow. Russian defence officials have previously described shelter construction as routine, though the acceleration in pace and scale began after Ukraine demonstrated its ability to strike deep into Russian-held areas, including Crimea and airbases far from the front line.

Defence sources point out that Russia's reliance on static airbases has left it vulnerable to modern threats. The shift towards hardened infrastructure marks a recognition that mobility, concealment, and passive defence are now essential components of aerial warfare.

While these new shelters may not make Russian airbases invulnerable, they signal a significant shift in operational planning, driven by battlefield losses and a growing awareness that air superiority in modern conflict depends as much on survivability as on firepower.