

Ukraine Crisis Update: December 14, 2015

1 December 10: Separatists attack near Mariupol.

Separatists launched intermittent indirect and direct fire attacks east of the strategic port city of Mariupol from December 1 to December 13, including the use of heavy artillery on December 10. Ukraine's military began repositioning a government checkpoint northeast of Mariupol on December 3, retaking control of two unclaimed villages within the demilitarized zone demarcated by the February ceasefire agreement. The separatists called the movement a "precondition" for the renewal of "combat operations" while Russia's envoy to the UN demanded the withdrawal of Ukraine's forces from the villages.



2 December 12: Separatists attack Mariupol-Donetsk highway.

Separatist forces launched intermittent attacks along the strategic highway linking Mariupol to separatist-held Donetsk city from December 1 to December 12. Separatists intensified offensive operations on the highway on December 12, concentrating fire from tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and mortars on a Ukrainian frontline position south of Donetsk city.



3 December 8-10: Separatists attack near Donetsk city.

Separatists conducted daily indirect and direct fire attacks on Ukrainian positions north and west of the "Donetsk People's Republic" (DNR) stronghold of Donetsk city from December 1 to December 14. Separatists intensified attacks west of the city beginning December 8, launching rare multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) strikes in addition to heavy mortar and tank fire.



4 December 4, 8: Separatists attack with ground forces at Horlivka.

Separatists launched daily indirect and direct fire attacks on Ukrainian positions outside the DNR frontline city of Horlivka from December 1 to December 14. Ukrainian forces reportedly repelled 100 separatists on the northern outskirts of the city in a clash on December 4. Separatist forces launched frequent attacks, including with infantry fighting vehicles, east of the city along the key highway connecting government-controlled Artemivsk to Debaltseve, captured by combined Russian-separatist forces in February 2015. Separatist forces frequently targeted frontline positions north of the DNR line of communication between Horlivka and Donetsk city, including indirect fire from tanks on December 8.



● Donetsk People's Republic (DNR)

● Luhansk People's Republic (LNR)

● Ukrainian Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO)

☀ Indirect Fire

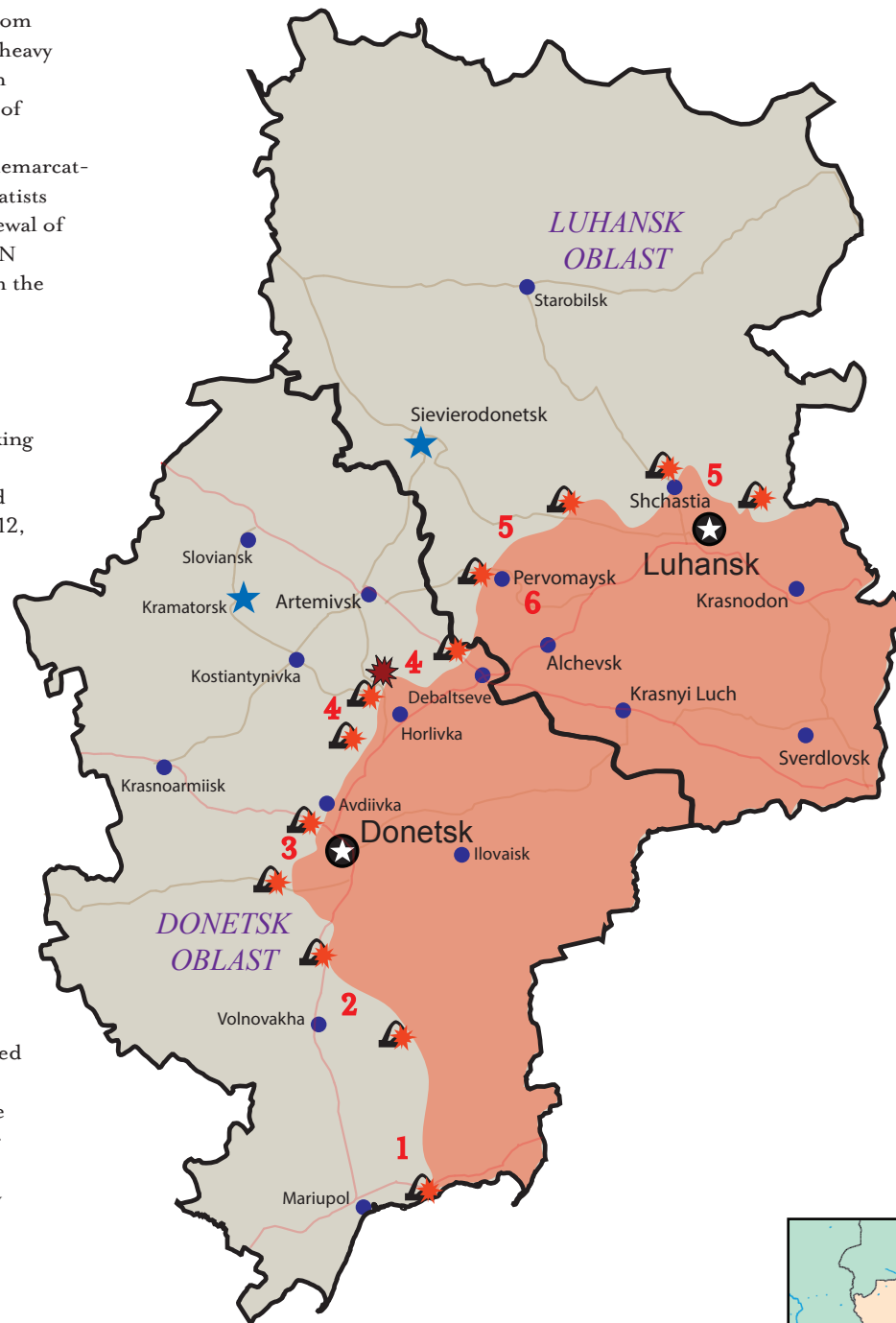
☄ Clash

☀ Battle

■ Separatist-held Territory

★ Regional Admin Center

★ Acting Regional Admin Center



5 December 1-December 14: Separatist launch low-level attacks in Luhansk Oblast. Separatists launched intermittent attacks along the frontline in Luhansk Oblast, which has been less active than the Donetsk Oblast frontline since the resumption of fighting in November.



6 December 12: Separatist commander assassinated near Stakhanov. Semi-autonomous separatist commander Pavel Dryomov was killed when an explosive device detonated in his car near the separatist-held city of Stakhanov. Dryomov is the fourth major Cossack commander to have been assassinated in occupied Luhansk Oblast in 2015, likely as the result of efforts by Moscow and its proxy "Luhansk People's Republic" (LNR) to consolidate control of separatist-held territory.



7 December 9-11: Ukrainian authorities target pro-Russian groups in Kyiv and Kharkiv. Ukrainian operatives launched raids in Kyiv and the northeastern city of Kharkiv, arresting seven suspected members of a pro-Russian sabotage group and seizing automatic weapons and explosives. The suspected group leader and one Ukrainian security service officer were killed in a shootout.

8 November 22, December 2, 8: Crimea energy crisis stokes tensions between Kyiv and Moscow.

Unknown individuals blew up electricity pylons in southern Ukraine on November 22, which left the Russian-occupied Crimea without electricity. Far-right activists, including those from the paramilitary group "Pravyi Sektor," and Crimean Tatar demonstrators prevented repairs until electricity supplies were partially restored on December 8. President Vladimir Putin launched new power lines linking Crimea to southwestern Russia in order to reduce the peninsula's electricity dependence on Ukraine on December 2.



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Russian-backed separatists intensified attacks along multiple frontline positions in Ukraine in early December 2015, demonstrating Moscow's intent to continue destabilizing Ukraine after a two-month operational pause that coincided with the launch of Russian operations in Syria. Russia's proxies in Ukraine increasingly launched attacks using heavy weapons on major flashpoints in Donetsk Oblast since fighting resumed in November while separatists in neighboring Luhansk Oblast remain less active. Separatist offensive operations have not reached the intensity or breadth witnessed in the summer of 2015, when heavy weapons attacks and clashes along the frontline occurred frequently, making a separatist maneuver to seize strategic terrain unlikely in the immediate term. Russia and the separatists condemned Ukraine's deployment into two unclaimed villages within a demilitarized zone near the strategic port city of Mariupol as an aggressive provocation, however, possibly signaling further intent to escalate. The Kremlin aims to neutralize the West's ability to use sanctions to deter Russian military aggression in Ukraine by presenting itself as a necessary partner against ISIS. The surprise postponement of the EU's decision to extend sanctions against Russia on December 9 marks an early dividend in the Kremlin's efforts to fracture transatlantic opposition to its continued operations in Ukraine. Tandem campaigns to partner with the West against ISIS and project aggression in Ukraine advance President Vladimir Putin's objective to set the rules of engagement for a multipolar international order wherein Russia has full freedom of action in its historical sphere of influence.