

Ukraine Crisis Update: March 26, 2015

1 March 19, 22: On March 19, oligarch and Dnipropetrovsk Oblast governor Ihor Kolomoyskyi and a security detail seized the headquarters of UkrTransNafta, the state pipeline operator, after his ally was dismissed as head of the company. On March 22, armed men reportedly from the Kolomoyskyi-financed “Dnipro-1” special police regiment blockaded the headquarters of Ukrnafta, Ukraine’s biggest oil and gas producer, of which Kolomoyskyi owns a major share. These events led President Petro Poroshenko to remove Kolomoyskyi from his position as governor.

2 March 20-25: Separatists, likely affiliated with the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR), launched indirect fire strikes on Ukrainian positions north and west of the destroyed Donetsk airport. Ukrainian Anti-Terror Operation (ATO) forces continue to return fire. The ATO press center reported coming under tank and heavy mortar fire, suggesting a violation of the heavy weapons withdrawal mandated by the February 12 ceasefire agreement.

3 March 20-25: Russian-backed separatists continued to clash with Ukrainian forces near the village of Shyrokyne, one of the most heavily-contested areas since the separatist capture of Debaltseve on February 18. Despite the heavy weapon withdrawal mandated by the February 12 ceasefire agreement, tanks and heavy mortars continue to be used in the battle for Shyrokyne. The “Donbas” battalion, a Ukrainian volunteer unit incorporated into the National Guard, alleged its troops killed 29 Russian Special Forces soldiers with the help of far-right paramilitary group “Pravyi Sektor,” a claim which the “Azov” volunteer regiment, a separate Ukrainian force, denied.

4 March 24: An explosive planted under a Ukrainian military truck detonated, damaging a mobile radar station belonging to air defense forces in the border town of Milove, Luhansk Oblast. Luhansk Oblast governor Hennadiy Moskal initially reported the incident as a rocket-propelled grenade attack against the radar station, but retracted the statement.

5 March 24-25: Pro-Russian Cossack militants clashed with Ukrainian forces near the Ukrainian-held village of Krymske (east). Separatist forces fired mortars on the Ukrainian frontline village of Troitske (west) from the pro-Russian Cossack controlled-city of Stakhanov.

6 March 25: Separatists fired grenade launchers at Ukrainian positions near the village of Trokhizbenka, Luhansk Oblast. The village and other Ukrainian-held areas on the northern bank of the Seversky Donets River were the site of increased fighting in the week prior.

7 March 25: An explosive device was detonated on a railroad between Demuryne and Prosiانا, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast damaging the tracks.

8 March 25: A mine detonated under a passenger bus near the Ukrainian-held frontline settlement of Mayorsk, outside the separatist-controlled city of Horlivka. At least four passengers were killed in the blast and 20 were injured



- Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR)
- Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR)
- Cossack
- Combined Separatist
- Ukrainian Anti-Terror Operation (ATO)
- ★ Acting Regional Admin Center
- ★ Regional Admin Center
- Separatist Held Territory
- ★ Major Clash
- ★ Indirect Fire



Hugo Spaulding and ISW Ukraine Team

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Against the backdrop of continued fighting outside Mariupol and Donetsk, Ukrainian oligarch and volunteer battalion financier Ihor Kolomoyskyi stole the headlines this week by seizing the offices of two majority state-owned gas enterprises in Kyiv after the Ukrainian government took steps to reduce his influence over the companies. The seizures of the companies resulted in his dismissal from his position as the governor of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Given Kolomoyskyi’s widely publicized financial support for several Ukrainian volunteer units, conflicts with authorities in Kyiv raise the concern that the oligarch could utilize force against the central government. The occupation of Ukraine’s biggest oil and gas producer by members of the Kolomoyskyi-backed “Dnipro-1” police regiment reinforced this concern. Despite attempts by President Petro Poroshenko to publically mend relations with Kolomoyskyi, an upcoming anti-Poroshenko rally in Dnipropetrovsk organized by Kolomoyskyi’s allies could bring forces loyal to the oligarch into confrontation with other Ukrainian forces. Growing tensions between Kyiv and one of the biggest private stakeholders in Ukraine’s Anti-Terror Operation (ATO) present a key vulnerability which may be exploited by separatist or Russian forces. In military terms, pro-Russian forces may accelerate offensive operations in Donbas or increase covert attacks in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, where a railroad was blown up this week. Politically, Russia and the separatists may increase calls for the federalization of Ukraine, utilizing dissent from Kolomoyskyi’s camp to put a Ukrainian face behind the movement.