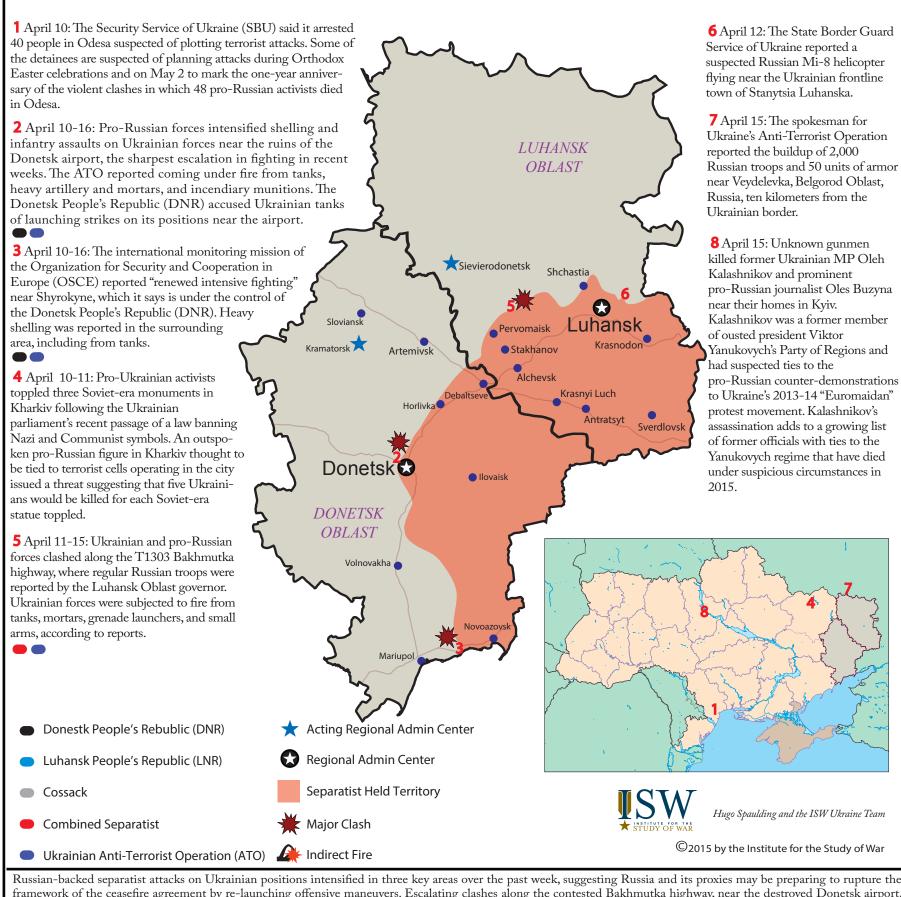
Ukraine Crisis Update: April 16, 2015



Russian-backed separatist attacks on Ukrainian positions intensified in three key areas over the past week, suggesting Russia and its proxies may be preparing to rupture the framework of the ceasefire agreement by re-launching offensive maneuvers. Escalating clashes along the contested Bakhmutka highway, near the destroyed Donetsk airport, and east of the Ukrainian-held port city of Mariupol may offer a launching point for a major Russian offensive in one or more of these areas. Reports this week from U.S. and Ukrainian officials of Russian troops and command and control elements operating in separatist-held areas of Donbas suggest that Russia is positioning itself to support an offensive despite continued lip service to the ceasefire agreement. The arrival of a 24th uninspected Russian aid convoy to the separatist-held regions may also support these preparations. Germany and France continued efforts to reinforce the ceasefire framework by releasing a joint statement with Ukraine and Russia calling for the withdrawal of tanks and heavy weapons from the front line. Such statements may have little impact on the deteriorating situation in Donbas, however, if Russian support for the ceasefire continues to be at odds with its activity on the ground.