

Ukraine Crisis Update: April 16, 2015

1 April 10: The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said it arrested 40 people in Odesa suspected of plotting terrorist attacks. Some of the detainees are suspected of planning attacks during Orthodox Easter celebrations and on May 2 to mark the one-year anniversary of the violent clashes in which 48 pro-Russian activists died in Odesa.

2 April 10-16: Pro-Russian forces intensified shelling and infantry assaults on Ukrainian forces near the ruins of the Donetsk airport, the sharpest escalation in fighting in recent weeks. The ATO reported coming under fire from tanks, heavy artillery and mortars, and incendiary munitions. The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian tanks of launching strikes on its positions near the airport.

3 April 10-16: The international monitoring mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported "renewed intensive fighting" near Shyrokyne, which it says is under the control of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR). Heavy shelling was reported in the surrounding area, including from tanks.

4 April 10-11: Pro-Ukrainian activists toppled three Soviet-era monuments in Kharkiv following the Ukrainian parliament's recent passage of a law banning Nazi and Communist symbols. An outspoken pro-Russian figure in Kharkiv thought to be tied to terrorist cells operating in the city issued a threat suggesting that five Ukrainians would be killed for each Soviet-era statue toppled.

5 April 11-15: Ukrainian and pro-Russian forces clashed along the T1303 Bakhmutka highway, where regular Russian troops were reported by the Luhansk Oblast governor. Ukrainian forces were subjected to fire from tanks, mortars, grenade launchers, and small arms, according to reports.

6 April 12: The State Border Guard Service of Ukraine reported a suspected Russian Mi-8 helicopter flying near the Ukrainian frontline town of Stanytsia Luhanska.

7 April 15: The spokesman for Ukraine's Anti-Terrorist Operation reported the buildup of 2,000 Russian troops and 50 units of armor near Veydelevka, Belgorod Oblast, Russia, ten kilometers from the Ukrainian border.

8 April 15: Unknown gunmen killed former Ukrainian MP Oleh Kalashnikov and prominent pro-Russian journalist Oles Buzyna near their homes in Kyiv. Kalashnikov was a former member of ousted president Viktor Yanukovich's Party of Regions and had suspected ties to the pro-Russian counter-demonstrations to Ukraine's 2013-14 "Euromaidan" protest movement. Kalashnikov's assassination adds to a growing list of former officials with ties to the Yanukovich regime that have died under suspicious circumstances in 2015.



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



Hugo Spaulding and the ISW Ukraine Team

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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.