

Ukraine Crisis Update: July 2, 2015

1 June 26-July 2: Russian-backed separatists continue to engage Ukrainian forces around the Azov Sea villages of Berdianske and Shyrokyne, a daily flashpoint since the signing of the February 12 “Minsk II” ceasefire agreement. On July 1, “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR) top negotiator Denis Pushilin unilaterally announced a local demilitarized zone around Shyrokyne. The same day “Azov” regiment, a volunteer unit of the Ukrainian National Guard stationed in the area, reported constant shelling from separatist heavy weapons, including “Grad” multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS). The DNR accused Ukrainian forces of destroying seven civilian residences in the nearby separatist-held village of Sakhanka and claimed that all separatist forces had been withdrawn from Shyrokyne as of July 2, a report that the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense later confirmed.

2 June 29-July 2: Separatists launched indirect fire strikes on Ukrainian positions east of the strategic Donetsk-Mariupol highway. Attacks were concentrated around the government-held villages of Hranitne and Starohnativka. On June 30, the “Dnipro-1” Ukrainian volunteer regiment published drone footage of a new separatist forward operating base near the village of Sontseve, east of Starohnativka, suggesting the Russian-backed forces may be preparing to expand offensive operations east of the Donetsk-Mariupol highway. On July 2, the “Azov” Ukrainian volunteer regiment reported intense separatist bombardment of the villages of Starohnativka and Bohdanivka, to the north.

3 June 29, July 2: Separatists launched indirect fire strikes on Ukrainian positions south of Donetsk along the strategic H20 highway toward Mariupol. On June 29, separatist forces shelled the village of Novotroitske. On July 2, Ukrainian forces reported coming under mortar fire around the villages of Slavne and Taramchuk, just west of the H20 highway.

4 June 26-July 2: Separatists launched indirect fire strikes on Ukrainian positions west of DNR-held Donetsk. The government-held town of Marinka and city of Krasnohorivka, the targets of a June 3 separatist assault, came under fire on June 29. Shelling was also reported in Marinka on July 2.

5 June 26-July 2: Russian-backed separatists continue to shell Ukrainian military positions north and northwest of DNR-held Donetsk. A Ukrainian military analyst reported that 150 separatist reinforcements arrived in the area around the Donetsk airport, north of the city.

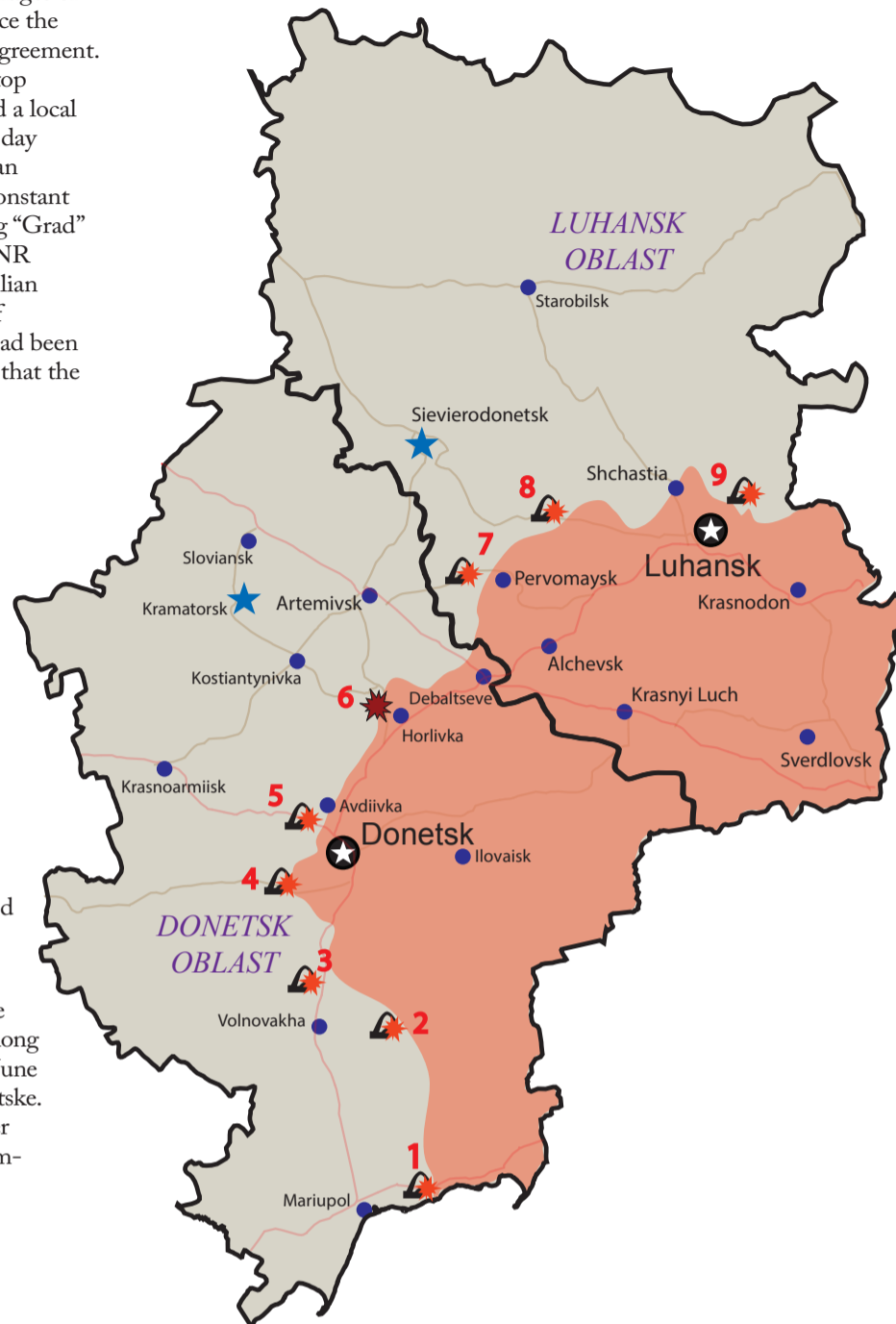
6 June 26-July 2: Separatists shelled Ukrainian positions north of the DNR-held city of Horlivka. On June 26, deputy commander of the Ukrainian Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) Serhiy Halushko reported that separatists were massing troops and weapons near Horlivka. The ATO spokesman reported heavy clashes around the city on July 2.

7 June 27-28: Separatist forces based in Pervomaysk launched heavy indirect fire strikes on the Ukrainian-held frontline city of Popasna.

8 June 26-July 2: Russian-backed separatists continue to shell Ukrainian positions in Luhansk Oblast around the T1303 “Bakhmutka” highway. On June 30, the Kyiv-backed governor of Luhansk Oblast reported that separatists launched “Grad” MLRS strikes into to the village of Vrubivka, west of the “Bakhmutka” highway and 10 kilometers into government-held territory. On the same day, a Ukrainian military spokesman reported MLRS strikes on the city of Zolote, along the highway, possibly from a higher caliber “Uragan” system.

9 June 26-July 2: Separatists continued to fire on Ukrainian frontline positions north and northeast of Luhansk, controlled by the “Luhansk People’s Republic” (LNR). Beginning on June 26, separatists launched intensive indirect fire strikes on the government-held frontline town of Stanytsia Luhanska, killing one civilian.

10 July 2: An IED was detonated in a café early in the morning in the Black Sea port city of Odesa. No casualties were reported.



- 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



Hugo Spaulding and ISW Ukraine Team
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The rapid deterioration of political negotiations between the separatist “republics” and Kyiv may trigger a military escalation by the Russian-backed forces, which continue to conduct heavy indirect fire strikes against frontline Ukrainian positions. On July 1, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko submitted a draft constitutional amendment to parliament that aims to devolve certain fiscal powers to the regional and local governments. Poroshenko put forward the legislation in an effort to demonstrate Kyiv’s compliance with the February “Minsk II” ceasefire agreement, which requires the Ukrainian government to reform the constitution around the principle of “decentralization” with special provisions for the autonomy of the separatist-held territories of Donbas. Both the Kremlin and the separatists have condemned the proposed amendment as a violation of the ceasefire terms because the legislation specifically avoids the issue of autonomy in Donbas and was not drafted in consultation with the separatist leadership. On July 2, “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR) head Aleksandr Zakharchenko accused Kyiv of abandoning the ceasefire agreement with this reform effort and announced that the separatists would hold local elections on October 18. He said that the DNR needs to begin unilaterally implementing ceasefire terms, such as the local elections, in order to “save” the “Minsk II” agreement. Zakharchenko’s announcement of elections without the consent of Kyiv suggests that the separatists are no longer attempting to negotiate political terms and instead are making efforts to cast Ukraine as the chief instigator behind the “Minsk II” ceasefire collapse.

Continued Ukrainian military reports of heavy shelling in Donbas suggest that the separatists are concentrating forces in key positions ahead of a possible offensive maneuver and simultaneously fostering a narrative that portrays Ukrainian forces as the principle violator of the ceasefire. Ukrainian military reports suggest that the separatists have been massing forces around the DNR stronghold of Horlivka and east of the strategic Donetsk-Mariupol, where a new separatist forward operating base was recorded on June 30. The intensification of fighting in these two areas corroborates reports of a separatist buildup and suggests that the Russian-backed forces may launch an offensive maneuver from one of these staging posts. On July 1, the DNR announced a local demilitarized zone around the long-contested village of Shyrokyne as an “act of good will and the peaceful intentions of the leadership” of the separatist group. Ukrainian volunteer forces continue to report heavy indirect fire despite this announcement and a July 2 DNR statement that all separatist forces had been withdrawn from the village. In tandem with their abandonment of political negotiations, the separatists appear to be accelerating their rhetorical line that they are the peacemakers and that Kyiv is unilaterally violating the ceasefire. As in January 2015, the separatists are likely to use a more aggressive propaganda narrative to justify the launch of offensive maneuvers.