

Ukraine Crisis Update: July 9, 2015

1 July 2-8: On July 2, separatists began withdrawing from the contested village of Shyrokyne, a major flashpoint since February, amid continued reports of heavy weapons fire against Ukrainian positions in and around the village. The head of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR) revealed on July 8 that the separatists had withdrawn to a hillside in the eastern outskirts of the village and could “trap” Ukrainian forces in Shyrokyne if they decided to advance. The OSCE international monitoring mission reported that the situation in the village remains mostly calm, while Ukrainian military reports suggest that separatist forces increased their targeting of Ukrainian positions near the Pavlopilske reservoir north of Shyrokyne beginning on July 5.



2 July 2-9: Separatist forces continue to launch indirect fire attacks on Ukrainian positions east of the key Donetsk-Mariupol highway. Ukrainian forces repelled a small probing attack near the village Bohdanivka (north) on July 6. “Grad” multiple launch rocket system fire was reported in the village of Hranitne, a frequent target of separatist attacks south of Bohdanivka.



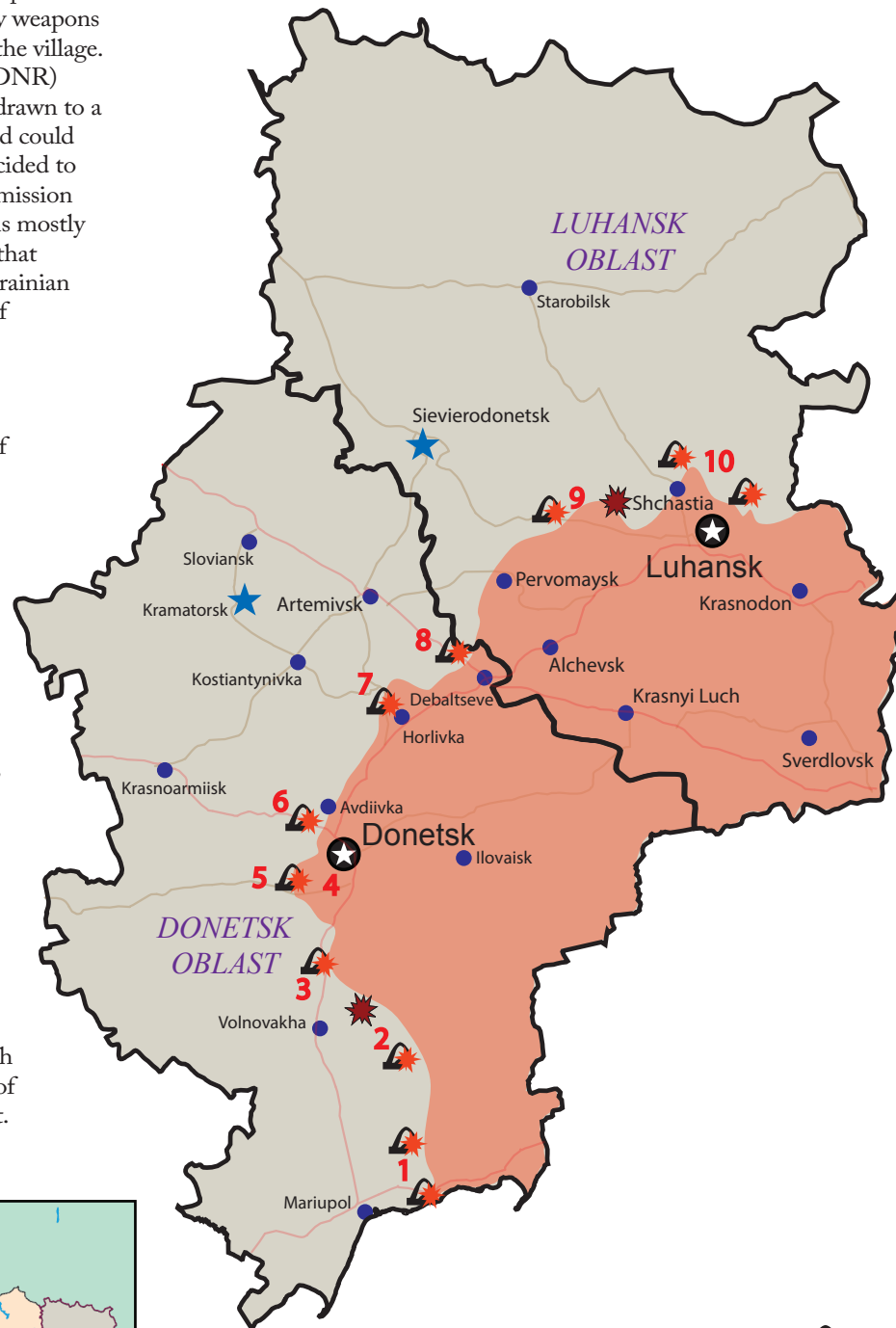
3 July 4-9: Separatist forces shelled Ukrainian positions along the key Donetsk-Mariupol highway, focusing on the village of Novotroitske, 30 kilometers south of Donetsk.



4 July 5, 8: Separatist sources reported that Ukrainian troops shelled the northern districts of Donetsk city on July 5 and a southwestern district on July 8.



5 July 2-9: Separatists forces continued to launch artillery strikes against Ukrainian positions west of Donetsk, the targets of a June 3 separatist assault.



6 July 2-9: Separatists forces continued daily shelling of Ukrainian positions north and northwest of Donetsk that surround the separatist-held Donetsk Airport.



7 July 2-9: Separatist forces continued to target Ukrainian positions north of the DNR stronghold of Horlivka.



8 July 4-9: Separatist forces shelled Ukrainian positions located near the highway between the city of Debaltseve, captured by separatists in February, and Artemivsk, the strategic gateway to government-held northern Donetsk Oblast.



9 July 4-9: Separatist forces continued to shell Ukrainian positions with artillery and small arms fire along the contested Bakhmutka highway in western Luhansk Oblast. One Ukrainian soldier was killed and three were injured when their vehicle came under separatist fire near the village of Lopaskyne north of the Bakhmutka highway on July 7.



10 July 2-9: Separatists shelled Ukrainian controlled towns in eastern Luhansk Oblast, concentrating their fire on the town of Stanytsia Luhanska and the city of Shchastia and targeting a power plant that controls the distribution of electricity to local Ukrainian-held areas.



11 July 4: An improvised explosive device (IED) detonated in the office of the “Fatherland” party in Sumy, northern Ukraine, inflicting no casualties. Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who leads the party, suggested that attack may have been staged in response to the party’s anti-corruption campaign in the region.

- 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



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Russian-backed separatists continued to launch indirect fire and small probing attacks along the front line in eastern Ukraine against the backdrop of a restart in ceasefire negotiations in Minsk, Belarus on July 7. Fighting quieted around Shyrokyne, a long-contested village east of the strategic port city of Mariupol. Separatists withdrew from Shyrokyne on July 2 to a hillside immediately outside the village and have called for the demilitarization of the village. The deputy commander of Ukraine’s Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) claimed that the separatists withdrew from the village to cast themselves as supporters of the ceasefire ahead of a resumption of peace talks. The head of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR) admitted that the withdrawal was a political decision related to the ceasefire talks and that separatist forces could still trap Ukrainian troops in Shyrokyne if Kyiv did not agree to demilitarize the village. Separatists appear to have redirected artillery fire on Ukrainian positions north of the village along the Pavlopilske reservoir, suggesting that the Russian-backed forces are maintaining an offensive posture east of Mariupol despite their withdrawal from Shyrokyne. Ukrainian activists and members of volunteer units gathered for a press conference in Mariupol to protest rumored plans of a Ukrainian withdrawal from the village to create a demilitarized zone, which they said would invite the separatists to attack the strategically important city of Mariupol. Separatist forces meanwhile continue to heavily target Ukrainian-held villages east of the Donetsk-Mariupol highway. The highway remains a priority target in the event that separatists launch a new phase of offensive maneuvers because it is necessary for any attempt to outflank Ukrainian forces around Mariupol. Taken in conjunction with continued attacks in areas east of Mariupol and the Donetsk-Mariupol highway, recent separatist calls for the demilitarization of Shyrokyne and other frontline areas appear to focus on bolstering their propaganda narrative that Kyiv is the principle instigator behind the collapse of the ceasefire rather than a concerted effort to abide by the ceasefire.