

# Ukraine Crisis Update: August 12, 2015

**1** August 7 - 12: Separatists targeted Ukrainian positions east of the strategic port city of Mariupol with indirect fire and small arms. Separatists also shelled Ukrainian positions around the nearby village of Shyrokyne between August 9 and 12; Shyrokyne has been a prominent flashpoint since the signing of the “Minsk II” ceasefire agreement in February.



**2** August 6 - 12: The Ukrainian military stated that approximately 400 separatist fighters backed by heavy artillery and roughly ten tanks assaulted Ukrainian frontline forces near the village of Starohnativka east of the strategic Donetsk-Mariupol highway on August 10. Official statements claimed that Ukrainian forces repelled the offensive and launched a counter-attack five kilometers east into the separatist-held village of Novolaspa before withdrawing to restore the territorial demarcations outlined in the February “Minsk II” ceasefire agreement. Separatist officials denied the Ukrainian account and instead blamed Ukrainian forces for provoking the battle. Ukrainian forces reported shelling from separatist multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) in the hours and days following the attack in a departure from a lull in MLRS attacks over recent weeks.



**3** August 7, 9, 12: Separatist sources reported that Ukrainian forces shelled several districts of Donetsk City on August 7. On August 9, several of the vehicles belonging to the OSCE monitoring mission were set on fire outside of the mission’s headquarters in Donetsk City. Separatist and Ukrainian sources traded blame for the damages. Officials from the “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR) also accused Ukrainian forces of shelling the separatist-held city of Makiivka east of Donetsk City on August 12.



**4** August 7 - 12: Ukrainian and separatist forces engaged in a two-hour firefight near Krasnohorivka west of Donetsk City on August 7. Krasnohorivka has previously been targeted by a major separatist assault on June 3. Separatists shelled the area with MLRS and other artillery systems throughout the week.



**5** August 6 - 12: Separatist forces continued to target Ukrainian positions north and northwest of Donetsk City with ‘Grad’ MLRS and other artillery systems.



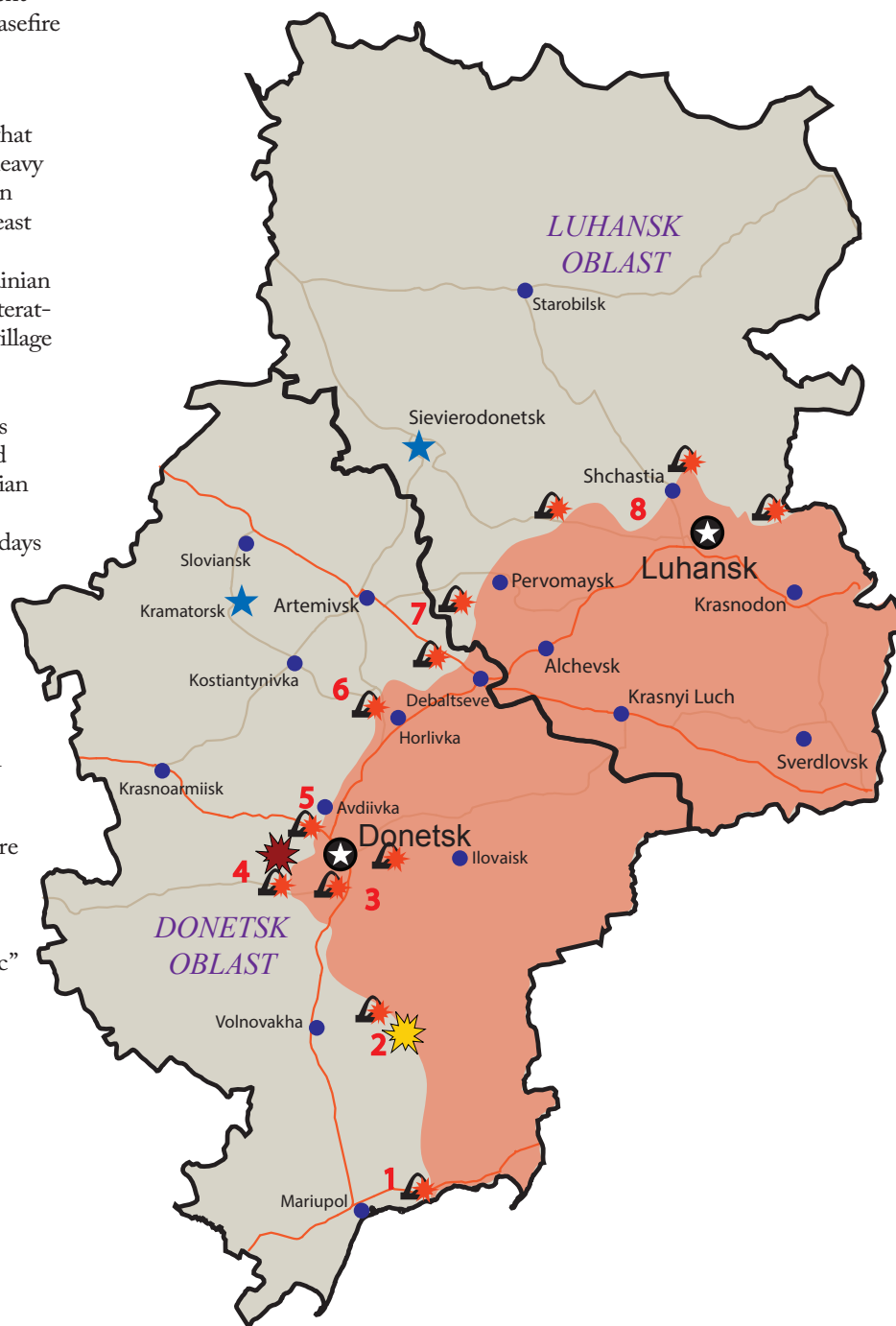
**6** August 7 - 12: Separatist forces targeted Ukrainian positions north of separatist-held Horlivka with indirect fire.



**7** August 6 - 12: Separatists launched indirect fire attacks including several ‘Grad’ MLRS barrages against Ukrainian positions near the highway between the town of Debaltseve, captured by Russian-backed forces in February, and the town of Artemivsk, which serves as a key gateway city to government-controlled portions of northern Donetsk Oblast.



**8** August 6 - 10: Separatists continued to engage Ukrainian forces across the front line in Luhansk Oblast, primarily through indirect fire attacks. Shelling incidents were concentrated around the persistent flashpoints of the contested “Bakhmutka” Highway in the west as well as the government-held towns of Shchastia and Stanytsia Luhanska located north and northeast of Luhansk city.



- 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



Content: Hugo Spaulding, Walter Keady, and ISW Ukraine Team  
 Graphics: Evan Sterling  
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On August 10, Russian-backed separatist forces launched their largest combined arms assault against Ukrainian forces in the past two months. Ukrainian forces repelled the offensive, which targeted military positions twenty kilometers east of the highway between separatist-held Donetsk City and the strategic government-controlled port city of Mariupol. The attack came one week after negotiations in Minsk stalled over the issue of bilateral withdrawals of heavy weapons from the front line in eastern Ukraine. Its timing suggests that Russia and its separatist proxies are again escalating offensive operations in an effort to extract strategic concessions from the Ukrainian government.

Over the past week, separatist officials condemned Ukrainian negotiators for freezing ceasefire negotiations. Separatist officials also called on the leaders of the other “Normandy Four” countries, France, Germany, and Russia, to pressure the Ukrainian government to accept an agreement that would force both sides to withdraw weapons from flashpoints all along the front line. Both separatist and Russian officials may view “Normandy Four” negotiations as most their effective point of leverage to pressure Kyiv. In the wake of the separatist attack on August 10, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko called for an urgent meeting of the foreign ministers of the “Normandy Four,” a call the separatists have since echoed, indicating that the talks serve their interests. Several Russian demands remain on the table for possible “Normandy Four” negotiations, most notably the granting of permanent autonomy to separatist-controlled regions of eastern Ukraine. Both German Chancellor Merkel and French President Hollande called upon the Ukrainian government to implement such an autonomy deal in July. Accordingly, Kyiv may face more significant international pressure to compromise with the separatists under this negotiating format.

Although talks among the “Normandy Four” have yet to be confirmed, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke to his Ukrainian counterpart on the day of the attack. Lavrov reiterated another long-standing Russian demand that Kyiv conduct direct negotiations with the separatist leadership in order to defuse the conflict. In light of this diplomatic posturing, the August 10 separatist assault and the accompanying uptick in separatist multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) attacks across the front line suggest that Russia and its proxies are poised to increase the tempo of offensive operations in an effort to apply pressure on Kyiv. It remains unclear whether or not this escalation will culminate in an offensive maneuver targeting the Donetsk-Mariupol highway. ISW has previously assessed this highway a necessary precondition for any eventual offensive on the strategic port city of Mariupol along the Azov Sea coast between Russia and the Russian-annexed Crimean Peninsula.