

Ukraine Situation Report: February 13, 2015

1 February 8: A major explosion occurred in Donetsk reportedly centered on the Donetsk State Chemical Production Factory. It is unclear what caused the explosion. The DNR claims that Ukrainian ATO forces launched an indirect fire attack on the chemical factory. Dmytro Yarosh, leader of Ukrainian nationalist paramilitary organization Pravy Sektor, reported that the ATO had conducted an artillery strike on a DNR stockpile of Grad rocket launchers and trucks carrying ammunition.

2 February 10: Hennadiy Moskal, the Kyiv-backed governor of Luhansk Oblast, reported that separatists had taken partial control of Chornukhyne and cut off the town from Debaltseve. Moskal said as many as 375 prisoners escaped Chornukhyne's high security prison, which was destroyed by artillery fire.

3 February 10: Separatist forces fired rockets into Kramatorsk, the provisional capital and Ukrainian ATO military headquarters in Donetsk Oblast. At least 15 were killed and 60 injured in the rocket strikes, which hit the military headquarters at the Kramatorsk airport and residential areas. Separatists reportedly used the "Smerch" Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) from Horlivka, 50 kilometers southeast of Kramatorsk.

4 February 9-11: An armored DNR Special Forces company, commanded by a Russian volunteer nick-named "Olkhon," seized the village of Lohvynove, Donetsk Oblast, cutting off the last supply route to the government-held transit hub of Debaltseve. In response, Ukraine launched a successful "special operation" driving the separatists east of the highway under heavy artillery fire.

5 February 10-11: Separatist forces attacked the village of Pisky (near the former Donetsk airport) with infantry and tanks but were repelled by the pro-Kyiv "Dnipro-1" volunteer battalion. Ukrainian military spokesman Vladyslav Seleznev said ATO forces had regained full control over the village, which is the closest Ukrainian position to the center of the rebel stronghold of Donetsk.

6 February 10-11: Two cars were destroyed by a landmine near Debaltseve, killing the commander of the Ukrainian "Lviv" volunteer Special Forces police battalion and injuring the police chief of Lviv Oblast in western Ukraine. Separatists killed 19 Ukrainian ATO soldiers and injured 78 in rocket, mortar, and tank shelling and at least two ground assaults on ATO positions near Debaltseve. An estimated 6,000-8,000 Ukrainian forces continue to occupy positions around the city. While areas around Debaltseve suffered regular indirect fire attacks since September 2014, separatists launched maneuvers to encircle the city in late January 2015. The city lies on a highway and railroad nexus connecting the separatist-controlled capitals of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

7 February 11: The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) subjected the largely evacuated government-held city of Popasna to intense artillery and "Grad" rocket fire, killing at least one civilian and injuring three. Separatists reportedly attempted to storm the city, which lies less than 10 kilometers from the LNR stronghold of Pervomaisk. The city represents a key separatist target due to its position north of Debaltseve, a transit hub the DNR and LNR have been attempting to encircle since late January 2015.

8 February 11: Shells hit a bus station and a metal works plant in the southern Leninskyi District of the separatist stronghold of Donetsk, killing at least 4 civilians and wounding at least 3. The ATO press center denied Ukrainian forces opened fire on the city while Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov accused the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) of launching the attack on territory under its own control.

9 On February 11, units from Ukraine's 72nd Mechanized Brigade reportedly launched a raid on the separatist-held villages of Novolaspa and Bila Kamianka east of the H20 Donetsk-Mariupol highway.

10 February 10-12: On February 10, the "Azov" Special Forces Regiment, a volunteer unit in the Ukrainian National Guard, launched an offensive against Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) separatist forces outside Mariupol, recapturing the villages of Shyrokyne, Kominternove, and Pavlopol. Separatist forces launched a counter-attack against Ukrainian Anti-Terror Operation (ATO) forces near Shyrokyne and Sakhanka, Donetsk Oblast [Province], east of Mariupol.

11 February 13: Separatists launched an indirect fire attack on Artemivsk, a key launching point for Ukrainian operations to defend the city of Debaltseve, which is nearly encircled. At least two civilians were killed.



- Donetsk People's Republic (DNR)
- Luhansk People's Republic (LNR)
- Rebel Held Territory
- Combined Separatist
- Ukrainian Anti-Terror Operation (ATO)



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Ukrainian and separatist forces launched surprise offensives to gain new terrain and optimize their negotiating positions ahead of peace talks in Minsk, Belarus on February 11. On the eve of the talks, the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) launched long-range strikes on a forward Ukrainian military headquarters in Kramatorsk in northern Donetsk demonstrating to Kyiv that the entire Donetsk Oblast lies in range of its "Smerch" multiple launch rocket launcher systems (MLRSs). The same day, the "Azov" Regiment of the Ukrainian National Guard launched offensive maneuvers in southern Donetsk Oblast, regaining territory that separatists might have used to launch attacks on the key port city of Mariupol. Both the DNR rocket barrage and the "Azov" Regiment's offensive exposed their respective weaknesses in areas under their control. Both sides may have timed the surprise operations to put their opponents in conciliatory negotiating positions ahead of peace talks.

The separatist maneuver to encircle Debaltseve likely played a major role in driving Kyiv to agree a new ceasefire deal in the early hours of February 12, possibly to avoid heavy casualties. As President Vladimir Putin pointed out, the separatists want the Ukrainian forces to surrender the surrounded city but Kyiv refuses to acknowledge the city's encirclement much less abandon it. While a successful Ukrainian operation drove separatists forces off the last standing supply route, fighting on the highway continues and neither side is likely to cede its strategic positions around the key city, which links the separatist-held capitals of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. The February 13 indirect fire attack on the city of Artemivsk, the launching point of Ukrainian operations to reinforce Debaltseve and evacuate civilians, demonstrates the separatists' intent to capture terrain even in the aftermath of the ceasefire agreement. Reports from the Ukrainian Anti-Terror Operation (ATO) headquarters that a column of around 100 Russian tanks and MLRSs crossed into Ukraine on the night of the ceasefire negotiations may indicate that Moscow wants to set the conditions for a Ukrainian surrender at Debaltseve. The fate of Debaltseve is unlikely to be decided by the ceasefire agreement but rather by force.