

Ukrainian military kills Russian journalists in assault on rebel-held town

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Two Russian journalists were killed Tuesday after being hit by mortar shells fired directly at them by Ukrainian government forces attacking the rebel-held town of Metallist, in the Luhansk region. Eye-witness reports indicate that the reporters were deliberately targeted, suggesting that their deaths were the latest in a series of anti-Russian provocations carried out by the Western-backed regime in Kiev.

Last Saturday, hundreds of right-wing demonstrators attacked the Russian embassy in Kiev after pro-Russian separatists in Luhansk, the easternmost region of Ukraine bordering Russia, shot down a government military transport, killing all 40 soldiers and 9 crew members aboard. The acting foreign minister of the Kiev government, installed in a US- and German-backed coup last February, joined the mob and denounced Russian President Vladimir Putin as a “khuilo” (fucker).

Washington and its allies blocked a statement submitted by Moscow to the United Nations Security Council condemning the embassy attack.

On Monday, the Russian state-controlled energy firm Gazprom cut off natural gas supplies to Ukraine after the Kiev regime, at the urging of Washington and the European Union, refused to pay back debts and rejected an offer from the Russian company to pay the same price paid by the rest of Europe for future supplies.

The two journalists killed in the government assault on Metallist worked for Russian television channel Rossiya. Reporter Igor Kornelyuk died on the operating table at a local hospital from wounds sustained in the shelling. Kornelyuk was 37. He left behind a wife and a seven-year-old daughter.

Sound engineer Anton Voloshin died immediately at the scene of the attack. A third member of the news crew, cameraman Viktor Denisov, had moved away

from the other two and survived.

Denisov said that one of the shells “flew straight into” his colleagues. The Russian news outlet RT reported that a taxi driver who had driven the journalists said a shell landed directly where they were standing.

“Three journalists and 10-15 militias came under fire,” the driver said. “We were standing at a traffic police post at the entrance of the town of Metallist. Journalists got out of the car to observe the fighting and shoot video of the smoke. Literally a minute later, several shells hit them right at the spot where they were standing.”

RT cited a local doctor as saying, “Our hospital is receiving many wounded as the shelling continues.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement Tuesday declaring: “The death of the Russian journalists near Luhansk has shown in its entirety the criminal nature of the forces that launched the military operation in the country’s east.

“We are proud of all journalists who, coming under machine gun fire, shelling, artillery or aircraft bombs, courageously deliver the truth about what’s really happening in Ukraine. It is the very truth authorities in Kiev and various militant groups are afraid of, who have organized real terror towards journalists from Russia.”

The Rossiya journalists were not the first reporters to have been killed by Ukrainian military forces attacking anti-regime rebels. Italian photojournalist Andrea Rocchelli was killed by mortar fire in eastern Ukraine last month.

Newly elected Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko, a billionaire oligarch, has promised to submit a plan for a cease-fire and peace talks later this week. That, however, appears to be based on an ultimatum to the

anti-regime protesters in the Russian-speaking east to unilaterally disarm.

Meanwhile, the Kiev regime is escalating its violent attack on rebel strongholds in the east, employing tanks, planes, artillery and troops. It has also thrown against the insurgents fascist forces such as the Right Sector, which played the leading role in the February putsch that overthrew the elected, pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich.

Having seized the large port city of Mariupol on Friday, government forces advanced toward the outskirts of Luhansk. An army spokesman said its forces had killed or wounded some 30 rebels in the Luhansk region on Monday.

Last week, the Ministry of Health in Kiev reported that 257 people have died in the country's southeast in the two months since the government launched its offensive against pro-Russian separatists.

The government offensive, carried out with the full support of Washington and Berlin, is creating a humanitarian crisis. Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin said Monday that towns are being targeted daily and "hundreds of people, including children, were killed in and around the cities of Luhansk and Slavyansk."

He added that many towns have no drinking water because government forces have targeted energy and water supplies. Churkin claimed that 60,000 Ukrainian refugees are presently in Russia.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said as many as 4 million people in the Donetsk region risk losing access to water because the pumping station and pipeline have been damaged in the fighting.

Gazprom's shutoff of natural gas supplies to Ukraine on Monday followed weeks of negotiations in which Moscow has considerably softened its position on back debts owed by Ukraine and prices for future supplies. Gazprom acted after Kiev missed a deadline to pay a nearly \$2 billion installment on \$4.5 billion owed for past deliveries.

Russia wants Ukraine to pay \$385 per thousand cubic meters, the rate paid by the rest of Europe. This is a sharp reduction from the \$485 it was demanding after the overthrow of Yanukovich and installation of a rabidly anti-Russian government. Kiev is demanding that it be allowed to pay the rate of \$268 that was being paid under Yanukovich.

Gazprom is not seeking to block the transit of natural gas through Ukraine to the rest of Europe, but only that portion going to Ukraine itself. About 20 percent of the European Union's supply flows through Ukraine, but some eastern European countries rely on Russian sources for 80 percent of their natural gas.

Ukraine itself imported from Russia 63 percent of the natural gas it used in 2012, producing the remaining 37 percent internally.

The cutoff will have no immediate impact on either Ukraine or the European Union. Both have stockpiles of natural gas that will last through the summer and into the autumn. However, the issue will become more critical at the end of July, when Ukraine and the rest of Europe will want to top off their storage tanks in advance of winter.

The United States, in particular, is stoking up the natural gas dispute to keep tensions in the region high as part of its strategy of using the Ukraine crisis to inflict a major defeat on Russia and sideline it as an obstacle to its ambitions to dominate the entire Eurasian continent. Washington continues to push for harsher sanctions against Moscow, including measures targeting its vital economic sectors.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Tuesday raised the threat of broader sanctions against Russia at a meeting with his Baltic counterparts in Estonia. He said European Union leaders might consider additional sanctions when they meet in Brussels late next week.



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