US-backed regime retakes Slavyansk, threatens bloodbath in eastern Ukraine

Alex Lantier
7 July 2014

Over the weekend, after indiscriminate artillery bombardments, forces of the US-backed Ukrainian regime retook the cities of Slavyansk and Kramatorsk, which had been strongholds of armed opposition to the government that emerged from February's fascist-led putsch in Kiev.

Amid a virtual blackout in the American media, Ukrainian regime forces are now threatening a bloodbath as they march on the major cities of southeastern Ukraine, Donetsk and Lugansk. "The main strategic plan of the Ukrainian army is to besiege Lugansk and Donetsk," Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Deputy Secretary Mikhail Koval said, adding that the goal was to force anti-regime troops to surrender.

On Saturday, there was heavy shelling of both Slavyansk and Kramatorsk, which occupy strategic positions along roads from western Ukraine to Donetsk, and Ukrainian tanks entered the center of Kramatorsk. There were also reports of shelling in Lugansk and Donetsk, where pro-Kiev forces apparently tried to seize the Karlovka district and march on the Donetsk airport.

Pro-Russian "Donetsk People's Republic" (DPR) forces in Slavyansk announced a retreat Saturday, leaving only a skeleton force of local militiamen to face Ukrainian troops. DPR official Aleksandr Borodai said: "Due to the overwhelming numerical superiority of the enemy, our men were forced to abandon their positions."

Yesterday, heavy fire was reported in both Slavyansk and Kramatorsk, as Kiev's troops crushed remaining resistance. Videos of Slavyansk that had emerged in Russian media in recent weeks prior to the seizure of the town by Kiev already showed heavy damage from artillery bombardments.

In a sinister remark, Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council spokesman Andrei Lysenko made clear that Kiev does not intend to take any prisoners among opposition fighters. Dismissing any possibility of creating a corridor allowing DPR forces to leave the region, he absurdly claimed that opposition fighters were being killed by their own commanders: "Rebel leaders are keeping a close watch on the situation and killing those wishing to surrender to Ukrainian law enforcers."

In the ruins of Slavyansk, units of the National Guard, a force set up by the Kiev regime together with fascist militias that had led the February putsch, are overseeing a reign of terror. There are reports of National Guard reprisals against Slavyansk inhabitants who stayed in the city, and that all remaining Slavyansk police and male residents between the ages of 25 and 35 are being rounded up.

Deputy Interior Minister Sergei Yarovoy announced an investigation into the Slavyansk police, which largely sided with DPR forces. "An internal investigation of each member of the local police force will be launched," Yarovoy said. "During these official investigations, we will determine if police officers in Slavyansk collaborated with the separatists or remained faithful to the oath to the Ukrainian people."

Yesterday, regime forces attacked Lugansk, a city of a half million people, shelling targets in the center of the city and launching missile strikes from warplanes overflying the suburb of Aleksandrovka. Health authorities reported that 80 wounded, including 56 civilians, had been treated on Saturday. An initial tally of victims in yesterday's attacks was one dead and four injured. Lugansk local authorities have told the city's inhabitants not to leave their homes.

As the fighting escalates, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians are now fleeing the Kiev regime's offensive. According to UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) figures, as of June 27, 110,000 people had fled to Russia and 54,000 had been internally displaced within Ukraine. It is believed that these figures are well below the current reality. Since June 27, the Kiev regime's offensive has intensified and shifted towards attacks on

© World Socialist Web Site

major cities.

In Donetsk, a city of one million people before the February putsch, tens of thousands of residents have fled as surviving DPR forces regrouped for a stand inside the city. “We will fight to the end because we have nowhere left to retreat. I don’t want to fall into the hands of the Ukrainian authorities, those fascists,” a 32-year-old former miner said in Donetsk, identifying himself only as Artyom. He said the anti-regime rebels were awaiting aid from Russia, “but the hope grows weaker with every day.”

Donetsk resident Nina Yakovleva, a 45-year-old accountant, said, “We are afraid that Donetsk will be left in ruins like Slavyansk.”

The war being waged against the people of southeastern Ukraine by the Kiev regime is an indictment of the politically criminal policy of Washington, Berlin and their European allies, who encouraged a far-right putsch to topple a pro-Russian government and install a pro-Western government. Now, in a major European country with a population of nearly 50 million, the government is employing heavy weaponry to destroy cities in an attempt to annihilate popular opposition.

Having publicly backed the February putsch and funded the Ukrainian opposition to the tune of $5 billion over a period of decades, according to US State Department official Victoria Nuland, Washington, along with its European allies, is now working closely with its puppet regime in Kiev.

On Friday, the day before the final assaults on Slavyansk, multibillionaire chocolate oligarch and now Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, discussed the situation in east Ukraine in a telephone call with US Vice President Joseph Biden.

There have been repeated reports that Ukrainian armed forces and fascist militias such as the Right Sector work closely with mercenaries from Greystone, a division of the US military contracting firm formerly known as Blackwater that carried out massacres during the US occupation of Iraq.

The hypocrisy of the imperialist powers in backing the Kiev regime’s war against the Ukrainian people is monumental. In 2011, Washington, London and Paris insisted that the risk that the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya might suppress protests in Benghazi justified a NATO war to destroy the Gaddafi regime, in the name of a “responsibility to protect” civilians. But when, as in Ukraine, the Western powers want to preserve a regime, they endorse the military repression of entire cities and regions.

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the United States and Germany encouraged separatist movements in the Yugoslav republics of Slovenia and Croatia. The Yugoslav army in these regions found itself denounced and internationally branded as a criminal force when it tried to stop the breakup of the country—culminating in a 1999 US-NATO war in Yugoslavia and the bombing of Belgrade. Today, however, Washington, Berlin and their allies champion the army of the Ukrainian government and support its attacks on separatist forces, denouncing entire populations that oppose the far-right regime in Kiev as “terrorists.”

The ruthlessness of the policies the imperialist powers are pursuing in Ukraine was highlighted by the leak of a document purporting to be a report of the US intelligence-linked RAND Corporation offering policy proposals to the Kiev regime. The document calls for a “swift crackdown,” based on the view that “anyone who has stayed behind [in eastern Ukraine] should be regarded as complicit in the unrest, or supportive of it.”

In Hitlerian fashion, the document proposes to impose martial law in eastern Ukraine until at least the beginning of 2015, and to relocate fighting-age males “into internment camps.” It states, “Anyone who attempts to resist shall be executed on the spot.”

Russia’s state-owned *Russia Today* broadcaster subsequently took down its article after the RAND Corporation denied it had prepared such a document and alleged that the report that it had was a fraud.

While it is currently impossible to tell whether this particular document is a forgery, such a proposal is entirely plausible and consistent with the criminal and homicidal methods being employed by the imperialist puppet regime in Kiev against its internal opponents.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site