

Ukraine military launches air attacks on Russian-speaking cities in east

Christoph Dreier
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The Ukrainian army escalated its offensive against the eastern Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Luhansk over the weekend, employing fighter jets and rockets to attack heavily populated areas. Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko had threatened that the insurgents would “pay with dozens and hundreds of lives” for every dead Ukrainian soldier. He is now carrying out his threat.

According to the government, the Ukrainian Air Force flew five sorties in the Donbas region on Sunday. The city council of Luhansk reported three civilians killed and 14 others injured in shelling by the Ukrainian army.

On Monday, more injured civilians were admitted to hospitals in the city. Separatist leader Igor Strelkov reported that 70 Ukrainian battle tanks, as well as helicopters, were approaching the city.

Broad swathes of infrastructure have been destroyed, including houses. A school building and a kindergarten were damaged. Due to the fighting, at least 4,700 households in Luhansk are already without power. In the northern part of the city, the water supply has collapsed. Parts of the city are without gas.

A journalist for the British *Economist* reported from Donetsk on the “anti-terrorist operation” launched against the city. “So far, the fighting has been concentrated on the outskirts, with heavy (and inaccurate) long-range weaponry doing most of the damage. Exact figures are impossible to confirm, but dozens have died in recent days,” he wrote.

The reporter spoke with the miner Vladimir Piskunov, father of a 12-year-old daughter, whose house had been destroyed by three grad rockets that killed his wife, Tatiana. “The beleaguered miner sees only one way forward: ‘to take a gun and fight,’” he concluded.

The reports are reminiscent of the siege of the much

smaller city of Slavjansk from April to June this year, when the Ukrainian army sought to starve out the rebels by destroying the city’s gas, water and power supply, while carrying out heavy bombing and artillery attacks. The consequences for the civilian population were devastating.

With about 400,000 inhabitants, Luhansk is four times larger. About 1.1 million people live in Donetsk and its suburbs. The brutal tactics of the army will lead to a humanitarian catastrophe.

The rebels reported that the army had assembled outside Donetsk with tanks, artillery and helicopters. “Ukrainian military columns are rolling from the south in the direction of Donetsk,” said Strelkov.

According to the pro-Russian separatists, 30 civilians were killed in the Donetsk region following a single incidence of heavy artillery shelling by the army. The government in Kiev gave a significantly higher estimate of fatalities, speaking at the weekend of 1,000 dead insurgents.

The director of the DTEK mine company accused the Ukrainian army of disrupting the supply of coal to the largest power plant in the region. He said there are sufficient stocks for 20 days, after which there will be electricity shortages. Last week, workers at the mine were hit by artillery fire.

The city of Donetsk, a center of heavy industry, is one of the industrial centers of the country. It is the site of 17 large coal mines. The ten universities in the city are regarded as leaders in the field of engineering science.

The Ukrainian government is organizing nothing less than a massacre and the destruction of an entire region. Already, large parts of the population are on the run. According to reports, tickets for trains and buses to take the desperate population out of the city have been

booked well in advance.

The Russian official responsible for the protection of children's rights, Pavel Astakhov, said his country had already taken in 180,000 refugees, including 22,000 children, in the last two months. He lamented the lack of "humanitarian corridors" in the region. There have already been incidences of shelling of groups of refugees.

The brutality with which the Kiev regime is proceeding against the southeast of the country reveals its deeply reactionary character. From the start, the new regime, which came to power last February in a fascist-led coup backed by the US, Germany and other Western powers, set an agenda of attacking the entire Ukrainian working class. The war against the east of the country and the confrontation with Russia are bound up with savage social attacks.

The Association Agreement with the European Union and the loan agreements with the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) signed by the regime after the coup are resulting in soaring prices for basic commodities and the destruction of what had remained of the social welfare system. Poroshenko recently announced the most extensive privatization of state enterprises in the country's history.

To impose this policy on the population, the regime is cracking down on all opposition. Fascist gangs have been attacking journalists, political parties and trade unions and carrying out pogroms, such as the burning of the trade union headquarters in Odessa last May that killed 42 pro-Russian activists. Most recently, the Kiev editorial offices of the anti-government newspaper *Vesti* were ransacked by 50 masked thugs.

The bombing of the cities in the east is directed not only against the 5,000 to 10,000 armed separatists. It is aimed at terrorizing and intimidating the entire working class of the Donbas and Ukraine as a whole.

This is the only way for the Kiev regime and its international allies to establish Ukraine as a vast reservoir of cheap labor and create a bridgehead for a military confrontation with Russia. The extent to which these plans have progressed is demonstrated by the extremely provocative actions of the Ukrainian government against Russia, which are designed to escalate the conflict.

Over the weekend, a civilian was killed on Russian soil by artillery fire from Ukraine. On Monday, the

Russian daily *Kommersant* cited a "source close to the Kremlin" who said Moscow was considering "selective response strikes" against Ukrainian army positions. The spokesman for President Vladimir Putin immediately dismissed the report and insisted Russia was not considering any strikes against Ukraine.

Vladimir Markin, spokesman for the Russian-based Investigative Committee, said Monday that at least seven bullets were fired into Russian territory. The committee suspected those responsible were "soldiers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, members of the National Guard and of Right Sector." The Russian Foreign Ministry demanded the deployment of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observers on the Ukrainian-Russian border.

Ukraine President Poroshenko denied that the Ukraine military had fired into Russian territory and accused Moscow of sending officers to Ukraine to support the insurgents. On his web site on Monday, Poroshenko declared that a Russian missile system had been used against the Ukrainian army in recent days. The Ukrainian Defense Ministry accused the Kremlin of shooting down a Ukrainian military aircraft from Russian soil.

Poroshenko is in almost daily phone contact with the leaders of the United States, Germany and France. His highly provocative actions are carried out with the knowledge and approval of the imperialist powers.



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