

Dozens killed in renewed fighting in eastern Ukraine

Patrick Martin
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The armed forces of the right-wing government in Kiev began a new offensive Monday against cities in eastern Ukraine, having killed dozens of people in the course of several days of intense shelling, bombing and ground combat.

The US-and European-backed forces are advancing along two main fronts: from the north towards Luhansk, a city of 400,000 close to the border with Russia, and from the west and south towards Donetsk, a city of 1 million that is the capital of the Donetsk Peoples Republic (DNR), the regime set up by the pro-Russian rebel forces.

On Tuesday, officials in Kiev claimed to have taken the cities of Severodonetsk and Popasna in the Luhansk region, while saying there was heavy fighting in the city of Gorlivka in the same general area. At least 16 people were killed in Luhansk Saturday and more have died each day since.

Government forces were said to have nearly surrounded Luhansk, following the same tactics they employed in taking Slavyansk, the smaller city to the west that was a major rebel strongpoint. The rebel fighters withdrew from Slavyansk in the face of a similar campaign of encirclement, accompanied by heavy shelling and mortar fire on the city's residential neighborhoods.

Some government troops were said to have entered the outskirts of Donetsk Tuesday, as the rebel forces retreated towards the city center, where they were digging trenches. Residents said there was night-time shelling of the city that set a local chemical plant on fire.

There were artillery strikes against residential areas near the Donetsk railway station and airport, according to local eyewitnesses. The Kiev regime blandly denied that it was aiming at civilian facilities, using virtually

the same language as Israeli military spokesmen justifying the incineration of Gaza. "Aviation and artillery are not aiming at civilian residences," a Ukrainian military briefer, Vladislav Seleznev, said. "Their only aim is to block the terrorists and fighters."

One key target was the city's electrical power, which was virtually knocked out on Monday when artillery and airstrikes destroyed or damaged 28 transformers and substations.

The *New York Times* described several civilian deaths in Donetsk from shells fired by government forces, including a woman walking near a children's playground. A 17-year-old resident, Yevgeny Zhitnikov, told the *Times*, "They are trying to push the DNR back but they end up hitting us. Victory is more important to them than human life."

The boy's father summed up the popular attitude towards the Kiev regime, describing its forces as "animals."

Health officials in Donetsk said that 432 people have been killed and 1,015 wounded in the course of several months of fighting in the region. This means that the casualties from Kiev's efforts to regain control in the east are considerably larger than the death toll from the shooting down of the Malaysian jetliner over eastern Ukraine on July 17.

Outside of the ongoing civil war in Syria, and the Israeli onslaught in Gaza, the Ukrainian government's slaughter of its own citizens in the east is one of the largest military conflicts taking place in the world—but the Western media pays little attention to those killed by the US-backed right-wing regime.

There are no outraged statements from the US State Department or the European Union deploring the hundreds of civilians killed by forces dispatched by Kiev, many of them gunmen recruited from fascistic

movements like Right Sector and Svoboda.

While Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said he had ordered his troops to observe a ceasefire covering 40 kilometers around the site of the Malaysian jetliner crash, to avoid interfering in the recovery effort, local residents reported continued bombing and shelling, and civilian deaths, including among those helping in the search for bodies and body parts of passengers onboard the doomed plane.

According to an analysis by Stratfor, a US think tank with ties to intelligence agencies, some 30,000 Ukrainian government troops now outnumber the rebels about 3-1. This margin grossly understates the disproportion, since 90 percent of the estimated 10,000 rebels are civilians recruited in the past few months, including many coal miners and other factory workers in the heavily industrialized Donbas region.

While the government forces have a decided advantage in open country, however, they have had difficulty making headway in the urban centers, where the population overwhelmingly opposes the Kiev regime and provides material and moral support to the rebels.

On Wednesday, two Ukrainian Air Force Su-25 fighter jets were shot down by rebel fighters near the village of Dmytrivka. The site of the crash was about 20 kilometers from Torez, where the Malaysian Airlines jet was shot down last week.

It is not clear what weapons system brought down the jets. Rebel fighters have shot down a dozen Ukrainian jets and transport planes over the past month using shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles that are simply pointed at the target and fired.

At least one of the pilots of the Sukhoi Su-25 jets survived the destruction of his plane, ejecting and parachuting to earth. An eyewitness saw him land and then flee the scene to avoid capture by the pro-Russian separatist forces he was likely engaged in attacking.



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