

Fighting continues in east Ukraine, as Kiev regime moves on Luhansk

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The Ukrainian government announced a significant advance against pro-Russian separatists on Sunday as the army seized territory inside the rebel-controlled city of Luhansk. Kiev forces recaptured a police station in the Velyka Verhunka district after fierce fighting with the pro-Russia separatists on Saturday.

The Ukrainian military also reported that pro-Russian separatist shot down a MiG-29 fighter jet during the fighting in Luhansk on Sunday. Clashes between government forces and pro-Russian separatists were also reported in the cities of Horlivka, Pervomaisk, Ilovaik, and Krasnyi Luch.

Semen Semenchenko, commander of the right-wing paramilitary Donbass battalion, wrote on his blog that resistance from the separatists in the east was more fierce and determined than expected. He said, "Despite strange media reports in the last few days that 'rebels are in agony and running away,' the situation has, on the contrary, deteriorated. Fierce fighting is continuing for control of Saur-Mogila. We are being counter-attacked."

The residents of Luhansk and Donetsk continue to be subject to ruthless shelling, day and night, from Ukrainian armed forces which have besieged the cities for the last several weeks. Multiple homes have been reported destroyed in Donetsk, and multiple fires broke out in Luhansk as a result of heavy shelling over the weekend.

Luhansk has been without running water, electricity, or telephone service for more than two weeks; fuel reserves were reportedly exhausted at the end of last week and medical supplies are dangerously low. City authorities reported on Saturday that all banks in the city were closed and that wages and pensions were not being paid. Nearly 200,000 people have fled the city in the face of constant shelling and the decimation of vital

infrastructure.

Running water was restored to two districts in the city of Donetsk on Saturday, though 40,000 residents remained without electricity. City officials in Donetsk told Russian media that the banking system has collapsed, and that people were unable to withdraw money from credit cards. They also reported Sunday that ten civilians had been killed and further eight wounded over the previous 24 hours.

Political wrangling continued Sunday over a humanitarian aid convoy sent by Moscow which has been stalled at the Ukrainian border just outside the city of Izvaryne. The Ukrainian regime agreed to allow inspections go ahead, but had yet to guarantee the aid convoy's safety once across the Russian border.

A group of 16 trucks from the convoy were sent forward to the border on Sunday to be the first group inspected. The OSCE reported that a large x-ray machine had been deployed to the Russia-Ukraine border crossing to assist in the inspection of the trucks.

Moscow and Kiev have been engaged in negotiations over the passage of aid trucks into eastern Ukraine. An agreement has been reached that will allow the Russian aid to be distributed under the direct supervision of the International Committee for the Red Cross.

The Ukrainian government has held up the convoy of 280 trucks carrying food, water, medicine and other basic supplies for the last several days. The Kiev regime has insisted that every single truck must be thoroughly inspected before being allowed to cross the border.

The Ukrainians have held up the aid over fears that the Russian government intends to use the convoy as a Trojan horse to assist the separatists in the east, covertly slipping in soldiers and military equipment in to Ukraine. Russia has repeatedly denied that it is using

the humanitarian convoy as a cover for transporting military supplies.

As the shelling of Donetsk and Luhansk continued on Sunday the Foreign Ministers of Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France gathered for a meeting in Berlin to discuss the terms of a possible end to fighting in the east. Kiev began its vicious military campaign in the Donbass region in April as a means of stamping out a pro-Russian separatist movement that emerged as a response to the US backed, fascist led coup in February that overthrew Victor Yanukovich.

There was little hope of an agreement coming out of Sunday's meeting, with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier stating that there was no guarantee of reaching the Western power's "desired success." The meeting instead took on the character of a gang-up against Russia, placing more pressure on the Putin regime to force the separatists to capitulate.

In a statement published ahead of the Berlin meeting Steinmeier warned of the possibilities of a wider armed conflict if some sort of settlement could not be reached. "We urgently need new political impetus. Otherwise we run the risk of treading water, or of going backward and re-entering an intensified spiral of escalation."

With a hostile eye towards Russia, Steinmeier stated that the talks were aimed at "finding a roadmap towards a sustainable ceasefire and a framework for effective border controls." Aligning himself with the position of Steinmeier, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius tweeted that the priority for a cease fire agreement "must be respecting Ukraine's territorial integrity, an end to violence and the relaunching of the political process."

Meanwhile there are signs of growing tensions between the US-backed Kiev regime and the fascist forces that spearheaded the coup in February, and have since been deployed to fight the pro-Russian separatists in the east.

In a statement published on their website Saturday, the leaders of the fascist group Right Sector, Dimitry Yarosh and Andrey Stempitsky, threatened to recall their paramilitary battalion from the frontlines in the east and march on Kiev. They warned that President Petro Poroshenko had two days to remove Deputy Interior Minister General Vladimir Yevdokimov from his post, release all Right Sector prisoners, drop all criminal charges against members of Right Sector, and

return weapons that had been seized during raids by the police. Otherwise, they would face an armed march by fascist battalions on the Interior Ministry in Kiev.

Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov responded to Right Sector's threats as a publicity stunt, but indicated that he had already submitted the paperwork for the removal of Yevdokimov several weeks ago. Yevdokimov, accused by Right Sector of being a Russian stooge, had brought down a series of criminal charges against their membership in recent weeks.

Tensions have been longstanding between the fascists in Right Sector and the Interior Ministry, which has sought to bring the group under its control and closer to the agenda of the US and European backed government. After deputy leader Oleksandr Muzychko was killed execution style in a police raid in March, members of Right Sector besieged the Ukrainian parliament demanding Avakov's resignation.

In response, Kiev worked to whip Right Sector into line by threatening to disarm and outlaw the group. The group has since been permitted to participate in the formation, under the authority of the Interior Ministry, of paramilitary battalions which have been spearheading the fight against the pro-Russian separatists in the east since April.



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