

Fighting flares in eastern Ukraine despite ceasefire

Johannes Stern, Alex Lantier
8 September 2014

Fighting in the east Ukrainian cities of Mariupol and Donetsk continued Sunday despite Friday's cease-fire between the NATO-backed Ukrainian regime in Kiev and pro-Russian separatist forces. The cease-fire was negotiated by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

One woman was killed by artillery fire in the strategic port city of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov, the main base for the Kiev regime's fascist Azov Battalion, while three residents were wounded when opposition forces attacked a government-held checkpoint. Forces loyal to the Kiev regime and pro-Russian forces both blamed each other for breaking the truce. Kiev regime forces in Mariupol are reportedly receiving reinforcements to prepare for a longer conflict.

Around Donetsk, shelling continued near the airport and also hit the village of Spartak, as well as the Donetsk suburbs of Avdeevka and Makeevka.

Pro-Russian forces blamed the fighting in Donetsk on far-right Ukrainian militias who were not respecting the cease-fire negotiated by Poroshenko. They said that these forces had 47 tanks, 15 antiaircraft gun vehicles and several rocket and missile launchers.

Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Defense Minister Vladimir Kononov told RIA Novosti: "Ukrainian forces continue shelling our positions. It appears that Poroshenko does not control his troops in full. The aim of the cease-fire is for Kiev to regroup and launch an offensive. We're ready for this. If provocations continue, I'll be forced to issue an order to reciprocate with deadly force."

Poroshenko and Putin reportedly held a telephone call yesterday to try to prevent a complete breakdown of the truce they had negotiated. The UN estimates the death toll in the conflict at 2,593, with over 6,033 wounded and 260,000 internally displaced within Ukraine.

Another 814,000 people fled to find refuge in Russia.

Yesterday, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) revealed the 12-point agreement that underlay the truce signed on Friday in Minsk. It calls for early local elections and decentralized rule in both Donetsk and Luhansk.

It specifies an amnesty for antigovernment forces, including "a law prohibiting prosecution or punishment of people in relation to events that took place in individual areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine." It also calls for "illegal military formations, military equipment, as well as militants and mercenaries" to be withdrawn.

The document also ostensibly commits the NATO-backed regime in Kiev to oversee an "inclusive nationwide dialogue."

The situation on the ground is very fragile, and it is unclear whether the cease-fire will break down entirely. However, one thing is already clear: the Kiev regime and its NATO backers are not seeking to build an "inclusive" regime in Ukraine. To stave off an all-out defeat, Poroshenko and his NATO backers decided to back down for now and open negotiations with the pro-Russian forces. However, they are using the pause in military operations to restructure the Ukrainian army and deepen its integration into NATO to prepare for an even more aggressive policy against Russia.

After the NATO summit in Wales, which featured aggressive war planning against Russia, two more NATO warships—Canada's frigate Toronto and Spain's frigate Almirante Juan de Borbón—entered the Black Sea on Sunday. They are joining two other NATO warships, the French Navy's Commandant Birot and the US destroyer Ross, which entered the Black Sea on September 3.

The NATO ships will conduct the so-called Sea

Breeze exercises starting today. A military-diplomatic source told Russia's ITAR-TASS news agency that it is expected that warships from Turkey, Romania and Georgia will also participate. The Ukrainian army will reportedly also take part in the maneuver.

According to the Ukrainian Defense Ministry's web site, Ukraine will send five warships and support vessels, two border service boats, and planes and helicopters from Ukraine's naval aviation force. The maneuver will be monitored by observers from countries including Georgia, Norway, Sweden and France.

On Sunday Yuri Lutsenko, a Poroshenko adviser and leader of the Poroshenko Bloc Party, revealed that NATO will give military support to the Ukrainian army. "Agreements were reached at the NATO summit on Western military advisers and the delivery of modern weapons from the United States, France, Italy, Poland and Norway," he wrote on his Facebook page.

Poroshenko himself said on Friday that some countries would supply weapons to Ukraine but declined to specify which countries were offering the "newest types of weapons," for reasons of confidentiality.

Increasing NATO support for the Ukrainian army and its de facto integration into the military alliance means the implementation of one of the main goals of the imperialist powers: the transformation of Ukraine into an outpost of NATO to encircle and ultimately subjugate Russia. However, NATO is also responding to the internal crisis of the Poroshenko regime, which stands on the brink of defeat and is desperate for direct NATO support.

This weekend the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published an editorial, titled "Kiev's capitulation," writing: "So what else can Ukraine do for now? It has the entire Western world on its side. But the sanctions against Russia are not working. Or at least they are not working as fast as soldiers and civilians are dying in the Donbass... In this situation, the only thing the Ukrainian leadership can do is to surrender either now or after hundreds or thousands more fatalities. And with each death, the gulf between the east and Kiev becomes deeper."

The paper also warned, however, that Poroshenko's "backing down can cost him his head," as "Russia's war has strengthened those nationalist forces in Kiev

who are ready to defend the country at any price." In fact, some of the Ukrainian fascist militias that led the February coup in Kiev that toppled Ukraine's former pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich, and then spearheaded the civil war in east Ukraine are now threatening to attack the Poroshenko regime.

On Saturday, *Foreign Policy* magazine ran an article citing fighters in Ukrainian volunteer battalions that were encircled by pro-Russian forces outside the city of Ilovaisk in late August. They accused the Kiev regime of not supporting them and threaten to turn against it. "We asked for help in Ilovaisk, for the army to come and reinforce us," said a female volunteer fighter. "They didn't come and we were surrounded."

Another fighter announced, "We will close the border and then go to Kiev to change the regime."

The crisis facing Poroshenko refutes the NATO powers' cynical propaganda that the February putsch in Kiev was a democratic revolution. What it produced was a far-right regime, resting directly on fascistic elements and serving the designs of the major imperialist powers to impose a deeply unpopular agenda of an escalating military confrontation with Russia.

A recent poll found that 57 percent of the Ukrainian people oppose the so-called "antiterror operation" Kiev launched in east Ukraine, while only 34 percent support it.

The *Journal du dimanche* reported yesterday that the German Marshall Fund think-tank is preparing to release a poll showing that 81 percent of Frenchmen and 85 percent of Germans oppose arming the Ukrainian regime. The same poll found that in every European country except Poland, a majority of the population opposes the entry of Ukraine into either NATO or the European Union.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact