

Ukraine Crisis Update: September 23, 2015

1 September 15, 18: Separatist forces launched mortar attacks near the village of Shyrokyne and the Pavlopil'ske reservoir, east and northeast of the strategic port city of Mariupol.



2 September 9, 19: Separatist forces fired on Ukrainian positions near the city of Avdiivka with anti-aircraft guns and grenade launchers on September 19.



3 September 12, 14, 22: Separatist forces launched primarily grenade launcher and small arms attacks on Ukrainian positions north of the "Donetsk People's Republic" (DNR) stronghold of Horlivka.



4 September 10, 13-14, 18, 20, 22: Separatist forces launched attacks with grenade launchers and small arms attacks on Ukrainian forces around the highway between the separatist-controlled transit hub of Debaltseve and government-held Artemivsk. Two Ukrainian soldiers were killed and four were injured in a land mine explosion near the village of Troitske, north of Debaltseve, on September 10



5 September 10, 12-14, 20, 22 Separatist forces launched mortar strikes near the contested "Bakhmutka" highway in western Luhansk Oblast on September 14 and 20 in addition to intermittent attacks with grenade launchers and small arms.

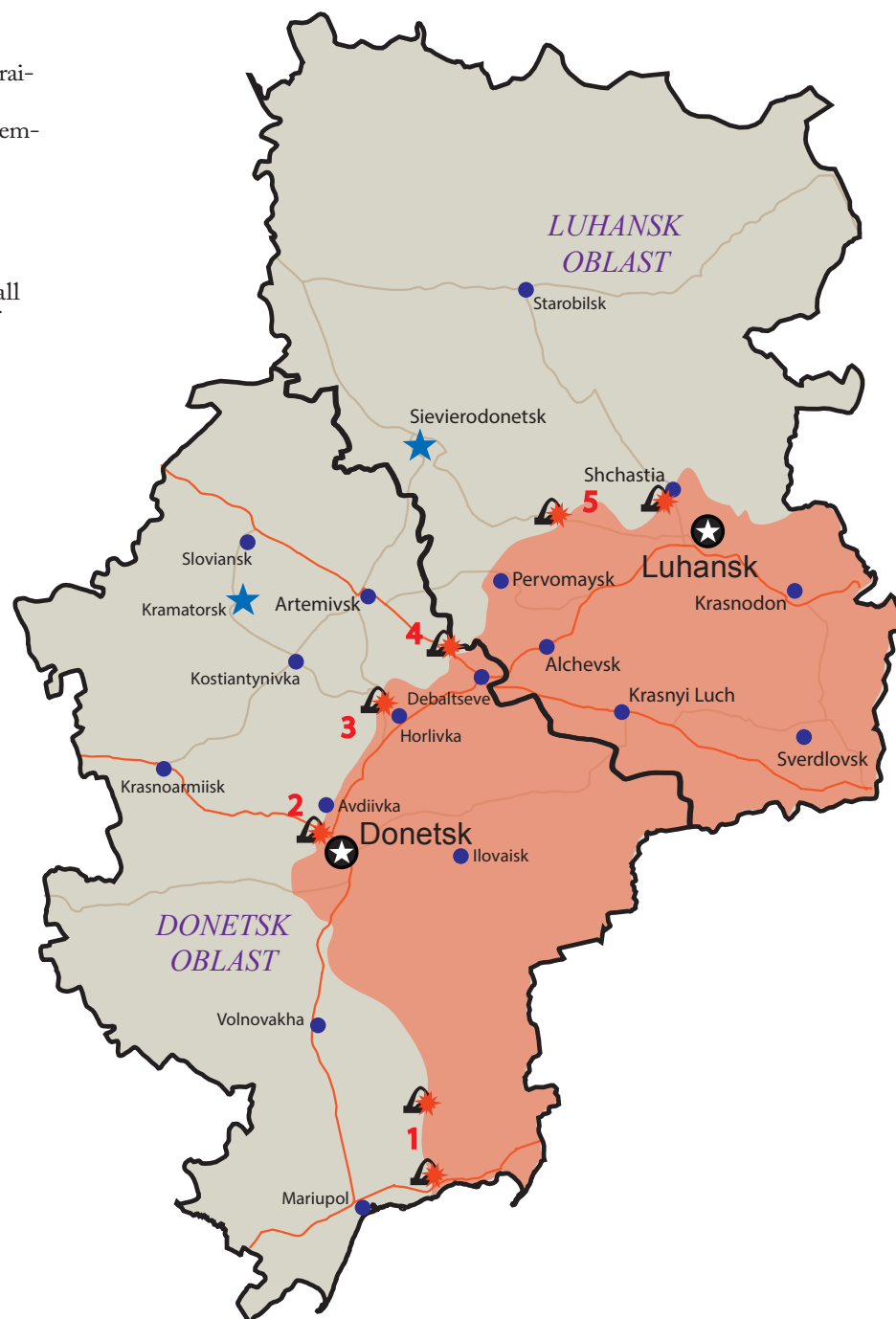


6 September 11, 23: The Security Service of Ukraine arrested Andriy Yanholenko, a Ukrainian volunteer special police battalion commander with ties to the far-right, on September 11 over an alleged plot to assassinate the Minister of Internal Affairs. On September 23, around 100 masked demonstrators apparently affiliated with the ultranationalist "Azov" Ukrainian National Guard regiment picketed outside the Kharkiv home of the pro-Russian MP and former Kharkiv Oblast governor Mykhailo Dobkin on September 23. Shortly after the demonstration, several dozen masked demonstrators attempted to storm the Kharkiv City Council building where they clashed with a group police officers. The demonstrations may have been triggered by Kharkiv mayor and former Viktor Yanukovich ally Hennadiy Kernes' September 22 announcement that he will run for re-election in Ukraine's October 25 local elections. This is the second time in two months that far-right demonstrators have targeted Mykhailo Dobkin, whose pro-Russian party is still attempting to register for the elections after being barred by the local government in August.

7 September 17: Ukraine's parliament voted to arrest far-right MP and former deputy commander of the "Azov" volunteer unit Ihor Mosiychuk on allegations that he threatened and used violence against state officials. The arrest prompted Mosiychuk's party leader Oleh Lyashko to call for the impeachment of President Petro Poroshenko, who he accused of building a "dictatorship" by intimidating and bribing his opponents. Lyashko's "Radical Party" defected from Ukraine's coalition government after its involvement in a lethal far-right riot outside parliament on August 31 protesting the recognition of the special status of separatist-held Donbas. Lyashko's call for impeachment, which came three days after another party leader Yuliya Tymoshenko called for the resignation of Ukraine's coalition government, signals the increasing isolation of President Poroshenko and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk in Kyiv.

8 September 20-23: Hundreds of Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian protesters have taken part in an ongoing demonstration against Russia's continued occupation of the peninsula. The protesters established checkpoints along the major roads leading from Ukraine's southern Kherson Oblast into Crimea in order to prevent Ukrainian goods from entering. While the blockade was headed by the Crimean Tatars, thousands of whom have been displaced from Crimea since the Russian annexation, Ukrainian ultranationalist groups also supported the demonstration. The paramilitary commander of far-right group "Pravyi Sektor" participated in the Crimean blockade while activists affiliated with the ultranationalist "Azov" volunteer regiment led a separate blockade out of solidarity at a border crossing between Odesa Oblast and Moldova's Russian-backed breakaway state of Transnistria on September 21. The leader of the Crimean Tatars has suggested that electricity into Crimea could be cut off in October as part of the blockade.

9 September 2015: Social media analysis by Russian blogger Ruslan Leviev posted on September 5 suggested that Russia recently deployed marines from the elite 810th Naval Infantry Brigade based in Sevastopol, Crimea to Syria. Over the past month, AllSource Analysis has identified multiple instances, when Russian landing ships (LSTs) were seen loading military equipment and cargo in Sevastopol as well as the southwestern Russian port city of Novorossiysk. As recently as September 20, an Alligator LST (possibly the Saratov) was seen in the midst of loading operations in Sevastopol. The timing and chronology of the observed naval activity, coupled with photos of the LSTs transiting through the Bosphorus and reportedly heading for the Syrian port city of Tartus, is consistent with the type of military equipment that has been identified at al-Assad International Airport near Latakia, where Russia is thought to be establishing an airbase. Sevastopol's strategic position as the closest Russian-controlled port to the Bosphorus and the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet makes it the ideal launching point for naval deployments to Syria. Russia's rapid deployment of attack aircraft and buildup at the airfield in Latakia signals that Russia could soon begin an air campaign in Syria. The likely deployment of the 810th brigade, which was involved in the capture of Crimea in March 2014, may also signal Russia's intent to participate in a ground offensive with the Syrian regime and its allies.



- Donetsk People's Republic (DNR)
- Luhansk People's Republic (LNR)
- Ukrainian Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO)
- Indirect Fire
- Clash
- Battle
- Separatist-held Territory
- Regional Admin Center
- Acting Regional Admin Center



Content: Hugo Spaulding and ISW Ukraine Team
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Russia and the separatists continued their operational pause in eastern Ukraine as Russia turned its attention toward its creation of a forward operating base in Syria ahead of President Vladimir Putin's speech at the UN General Assembly on September 28. Russia's rapid military buildup in Syria suggests it is temporarily prioritizing its grand strategic objectives vis-à-vis the West over its objectives in Ukraine by establishing an airbase in the Middle East on the Mediterranean. Despite the operational pause in Ukraine, Russia and the separatists continue to pursue their political objectives by ignoring calls by Ukraine, Germany and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to cancel sham elections planned for October 18 and November 1. When ceasefire talks resumed in Minsk, Belarus on September 22, the separatists reportedly suggested they would consider postponing the elections if Kyiv granted special legal status to the occupied regions of eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk have faced mounting political backlash in recent weeks due to their decision to take even a preliminary step toward conceding special status to the separatists. Two party leaders from the ruling five-party parliamentary coalition, one of whom defected to the opposition on September 1 and both of whom oppose special status for the separatist regions, have called for ousting of the coalition government and president. Far-right volunteer units active in Ukraine's "Anti-Terrorist Operation" (ATO) remain a likely catalyst for further escalation as new confrontations between the government and affiliates of these units suggested. By setting the conditions for prolonged instability, Russia and the separatists continue to undermine the Ukrainian government even without launching major attacks on Ukrainian forces. Russia and the separatists retain the capacity to escalate if the Ukrainian government does not make concessions. Meanwhile, the concessions they are demanding, which are largely written into the February ceasefire agreement, have the potential to trigger political upheaval in Ukraine.