

# Ukraine Crisis Update: August 20, 2015

**1** August 12-19: On August 16, Russian-backed separatist forces launched a heavy artillery barrage on residential areas in Sartana, a village on the northeastern outskirts of Mariupol, killing three civilians. The attack marks an escalation in the Mariupol area. Sartana suffered previous heavy attacks during the conflict in Donbas but has not been a regular target for separatists since the signing of the “Minsk II” ceasefire in February. “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR) head Aleksandr Zakharchenko claimed that Sartana was out of range of separatist artillery and blamed Ukrainian forces for firing on the government-controlled village. The OSCE international monitoring mission reported, however, that the artillery rounds were “mostly fired from the east,” where the separatists are positioned. The separatists staged less severe indirect fire attacks on other villages east of the strategic port city of Mariupol throughout the week.



**2** August 12-19: Russian-backed separatist and Ukrainian forces exchanged heavy artillery fire, including fire from “Grad” multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), east of the key Donetsk-Mariupol highway. Frequently targeted Ukrainian positions on the northern end of the highway also came under fire. The separatists reported coming under heavy fire themselves further east near the DNR-held town of Telmanove, where they claimed one civilian was killed on August 16. The OSCE assessed that “Grad” rockets had been launched into Telmanove and another village in the area from the west, where Ukrainian forces are positioned.



**3** August 15-19: Separatists reported indirect fire attacks on the DNR stronghold of Donetsk as well as civilian casualties, possibly inflicted by Ukrainian artillery. The OSCE confirmed some of these reports and also reported that separatists claimed to have moved 11 “Grad” MRLS to Donetsk from a storage site away from the front line.



**4** August 12-18: Russian-backed separatists launched indirect fire strikes on Ukrainian positions and residential areas west and north of the DNR-held city of Donetsk with heavy weapons, including Grad MLRS. One civilian was reported killed in Krasnohorivka, a city west of Donetsk that was targeted in a June 3 separatist combined arms assault.



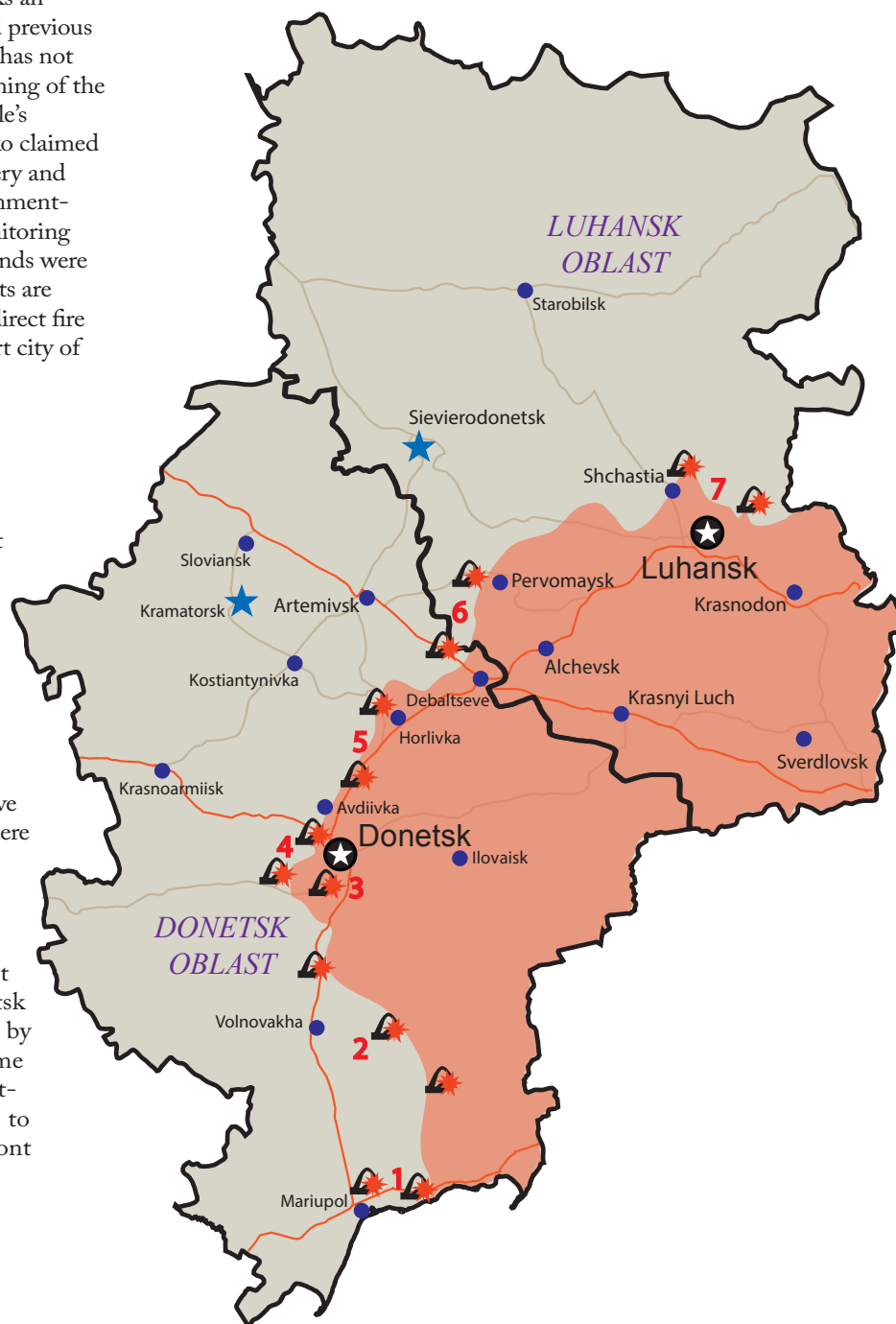
**5** August 13-19: Separatist and Ukrainian forces continued to engage in heavy artillery exchanges around the DNR-held city of Horlivka. On August 15, two civilians were reported killed in Dzerzhynsk, a government-held city northwest of Horlivka. Separatist officials reported heavy fire from Ukrainian forces into Horlivka and claimed that three civilians were killed on August 17. The OSCE assessed that “Grad” rockets were launched on the DNR-held village of Krasnyi Partyzan, on the highway to Donetsk city, on the night of August 16 from positions likely occupied by Ukrainian forces.



**6** Aug 13-19: Separatist forces continued to launch indirect fire attacks on Ukrainian positions along the contested “Bakhmutka” highway in western Luhansk Oblast. Two Ukrainian troops were killed on August 19 when they triggered a separatist landmine near the “Bakhmutka” highway. Ukrainian positions on the highway between separatist-held Debaltseve and the key government-controlled city Artemivsk also continued to come under indirect fire.



**7** Aug 13-19: Separatist forces continue to launch indirect fire and small arms attacks on the Ukrainian frontline towns of Shchastia and Stanytsia Luhanska, north and northeast of the separatist-held city of Luhansk.



- 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



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Russian-backed separatists launched a rare artillery barrage on the northeastern outskirts of the strategic government-held port city of Mariupol on August 16. This attack follows one of the largest separatist assaults to occur since February 2015, in which an armored separatist force attacked Ukrainian positions 20 kilometers east of the Donetsk-Mariupol highway on August 10 with tanks and heavy artillery. The uptick in heavy weapons attacks in the wake of this assault likely indicates a Russian and separatist effort to pressure Kyiv into concessions over the February “Minsk II” ceasefire agreement. The OSCE international monitoring mission recorded “Grad” multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) strikes along much of the frontline in Donetsk Oblast, marking a substantial intensification of indirect fire attacks compared to patterns witnessed in the weeks prior to the August 10 separatist assault. The OSCE recorded evidence of “Grad” rocket attacks in at least three separatist-held areas along the frontline and assessed them to have originated from positions likely occupied by Ukrainian forces. While separatist reports of Ukrainian indirect fire on their strongholds of Donetsk and Horlivka are common, these OSCE reports describe areas away from separatist-held areas and suggest Ukrainian forces have increased their own heavy weapons attacks in response to the separatist escalation. This development could signal Kyiv’s increased frustration with the unenforced February “Minsk II” ceasefire agreement. Reports of civilian casualties on both sides of the front line have increased in sync with the resumption of heavy weapons fire exchanges.

In mid-July, Ukrainian and separatist officials had reached a preliminary agreement to expand the heavy weapons withdrawal prescribed by the “Minsk II” ceasefire agreement to include previously exempt tanks and light artillery. On August 4, ceasefire negotiations in Minsk stalled with the separatists accusing Kyiv of blocking the broadened withdrawal agreement. The Russian-backed separatists will likely escalate offensive operations until the separatists’ core demands related to the agreement are met, most notably the granting of permanent autonomy to the separatist-held regions of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko will travel to Berlin on August 24 to meet with his German and French counterparts, both of whom called for him to grant the separatists autonomy within the Ukrainian constitution in July. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov suggested that France and Germany “should apply additional pressure on Kyiv” to convince Ukraine to fulfill its ceasefire commitments. While the results of the talks are difficult to predict, it is unlikely that they would be happening without Russia and the separatists ratcheting up tensions on the front line.