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## Kiev escalates war in eastern Ukraine

By Christoph Dreier

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This past weekend saw the fiercest fighting in the eastern Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Luhansk since the signing of a ceasefire agreement at the beginning of September. The military offensive by the Kiev regime is being accompanied by stepped-up threats against Russia by NATO countries.

Eyewitnesses reported heavy artillery fire from areas controlled by Kiev forces as well as separatist positions. Donetsk Airport was the scene of bloody battles. The Minsk Agreement had ceded the airport to the separatists. However, soldiers loyal to Kiev refused to withdraw and are daily engaged in heavy fighting with the rebels.

According to the separatists, Ukrainian army tanks are advancing towards Donetsk. Two tanks were reportedly destroyed by rebels in an attack on the village of Nikichino.

Separatist forces accused the Ukrainian army of bombing residential areas and using incendiary devices. In a report Tuesday, Human Rights Watch confirmed the use of such bombs in previous fighting in the Donetsk region.

Many civilians have fallen victim to the attacks. In the last week, two teenagers were killed in the shelling of a school. According to the rebels, at least twelve civilians were killed in an attack on the village of Frunze near Luhansk.

The Kiev regime and its supporters in Washington accuse Russia of sending tanks and other military equipment across the border to strengthen the separatist organizations. Various correspondents have reported troop movements in the Donetsk area.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has a team of observers in the region, reported that two convoys of 40 trucks and nine tanks had moved eastward in the Donbass region. The origin of the vehicles and the contents of the trucks are unknown. The vice-commander of the rebels, Eduard Basurin, said the convoy involved units of the people's militia that had been established to defend Donetsk against Ukrainian government attacks.

The official spokesperson for the US State Department, Jen Psaki, said Monday that "Russia and the people's militia it supported" had "constantly" broken the Minsk Agreement. Secretary of State John Kerry had threatened Russia with new sanctions on Saturday following talks with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov.

The European Union foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, called the troop movements a "very worrying development." She urged Russia to show restraint and deescalate the situation. She demanded that Moscow block soldiers, weapons and fighters from entering Ukraine from Russian territory.

Next weekend, the 28 EU foreign ministers are meeting to decide on new sanctions against Russia. "The debate will revolve around not only the tightening of sanctions, but especially around how we can assist Ukraine in these difficult times," said Mogherini.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced a possible expansion of the list of people who will be subject to sanctions.

British Prime Minister David Cameron accused Russia of not abiding by international rules. If Russia "continues on its current path, we will keep upping the pressure and Russia's relationship with the rest of the world will be radically different in the future," Cameron said.

On Tuesday, US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, met briefly on the periphery of the Asia-Pacific Economic Summit (APEC) in Beijing. In addition to Ukraine, they discussed Iran's nuclear program. No official report on their discussion has been released. It is expected that the two leaders will meet again next weekend at the G20 summit in Australia.

On Monday, a report was released listing 40 recent military confrontations between Russia and NATO that could have sparked a war. Last week, German NATO General Hans-Lothar Domröse announced that the alliance would proceed more aggressively against Russia.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed the Minsk ceasefire agreement after Ukrainian government forces fighting separatists in the east had suffered major defeats. The Kiev regime hopes to use the truce to buy time to stabilize its rule and reorganize its army.

But the regime has violated the agreement at least as often as the rebels. Its forces have refused to vacate other positions besides the Donetsk airport as stipulated in the Minsk deal. They have, moreover, repeatedly shelled Donetsk and Luhansk.

Autonomy rights have also been withheld from eastern Ukraine. Although the Ukrainian parliament passed the relevant law, Parliamentary Speaker Alexander Turchinov refused to sign it or pass it on to the president. After the separatists held their own elections a week ago in eastern Ukraine, Turchinov declared the autonomy law to be void.

A law purging the public sector and civil service that was passed before parliamentary elections held by the Kiev regime in October is being used to bring the state apparatus into line. Numerous posts that were previously occupied by people critical of the government are being handed over to the extreme right-wing forces that played a critical role in the coup that overthrew pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych last February.

Juri Michaltschisin, who founded the Joseph Goebbels Institute in 2005, is reported to be the new head of the department of “propaganda and analysis” of the Ukrainian secret service, the SBU. Neo-Nazi Vadim Troyan was appointed Kiev police chief by the Interior Ministry.

Right-wing battalions of the National Guard, which are funded by various oligarchs and play a crucial role in the civil war, sought to intervene more directly into politics by running representatives in the parliamentary elections. Although the openly fascist parties received relatively few votes, the major parties co-opted numerous right-wing extremists onto their slates. One prominent representative is Yuri Bereza, leader of the notorious Dnepr Battalion, which is responsible for numerous human rights violations.

Bereza was elected to parliament on the slate of the current prime minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk. As a new member of the largest parliamentary group, he announced shortly after the election that his battalion would be prepared to carry out terrorist attacks in Russia. Based on such forces, and with the backing of Washington, Berlin and NATO, Kiev is preparing to renew its military offensive in the east.