



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

Ukraine after Minsk II IN FOCUS

The military situation on the ground

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Roland
Freudenstein

Viktor
Artemenko

The ceasefire negotiated in Minsk last week by the leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine (with delegates from the separatists) is supposed to end the fighting, it fixes the 'line of contact' along the old one of the Minsk I agreement of September 2014, postulates the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line, assures administrative decentralisation and Ukrainian government control of the border with Russia, and calls for the withdrawal of all foreign troops. But we can safely predict that a sizeable part of these conditions will not be met, above all by Russia and the separatists. That is because it is obviously in the interest of the Russian government to destabilise Ukraine and try to prevent a successful transformation of Ukraine into a free and prosperous country with the rule of law. Hence, the confrontation with Russia will continue, and last week has shown that the United States is an indispensable strategic partner for Europe when our most vital interests are concerned.

During the entire weekend, in the Donbas fierce fighting continued. In order to be able to assess the prospects of Minsk II, let's take a look at the military situation.

The Front Before Minsk

After the separatists' rejection of negotiations in Minsk in the end of January (see the remarkably clear OSCE report), the situation escalated. Despite the loss of positions at Donetsk airport, Ukrainian troops effectively counteract separatists across the entire front.



The most active region is the area of Vuhlehirsk and Debaltseve. Separatists are trying to surround Ukrainian troops. On 3 to 5 February, separatist forces lost eighteen tanks in combat, one “Buratino” flamethrower system, six artillery guns, eighteen armored combat vehicles, two hundred and fifty men and a drone.

Separatists prepare the ground for Minsk negotiations. 2001 onward.

“Grad” artillery rocket attacks on Shchastia and Stanytsia Luhanska, in the Luhansk region, have become routine. Despite the constant shelling, authorities cannot convince civilians to evacuate fully.

After the tragedy in Mariupol, the eastern neighborhood of the city was



emptied of civilians. Intelligence and law enforcement began to operate more efficiently - in the past ten days they arrested nine fire spotters and several Russian agents.

Ukraine Minsk protocol

○ Separatist line of control ○ Ukrainian line of control ● Buffer zone
Separatist controlled area: ● 9 February 2015 ● 8 September 2014



GUARDIAN GRAPHIC

SOURCE: NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE COUNCIL OF UKRAINE

After Minsk

The number of Ukrainian troops has decreased from 780.000 in 1991 to On Monday, February 16th, the beginning of the “ceasefire”, militants attacked Ukrainian forces 112 times, 88 times out within Debaltseve and surrounding villages.

Debaltseve, a strategically important location for both the “DPR” and “LPR”, passes through the railway line, and could facilitate transport and communication between the two “republics”.



For this reason, the militants have persisted in their attempts to gain control over the city. The Ukrainian military, in turn, has made every effort to keep the area under its control.

On Tuesday, February 17th, after two days of formal “cease-fire” regime, fighting for Debaltseve continued. The Ukrainian military were shelled in their positions in and around the city. “Above Debaltseve black smoke. Repel the attacks of the Russian military and the militants. GRAD just shelled us. The battle continues,” - says one of the fighters on the phone. The situation in the hot spot areas are changing every hour. (Source Ukrainska Pravda).

Now, all battalions of the Interior Ministry have evacuated from Debaltseve.

Was there an encirclement? In my estimation, probably not. This gave the Ukrainian forces the opportunity to hold their positions and fortify Debaltseve.

The Russian-backed separatists decided that it would be easier to knock the Ukrainian army out of the city if they destroyed infrastructure and railway junction.

For them, Debaltseve is a political trophy that is needed, notably for the conduct of its propaganda campaign on how “new cities to be conquered.” Most likely, they will be engaged in repair and restoration of the site. But in the condition it is in now, it cannot be used. The city is in ruins.

The result is that Ukrainian forces removed the “appendix” and now the front line is runs straight.



The Armed Forces of Ukraine

The number of Ukrainian troops has decreased from 780.000 in 1991 to 125.000 by 2014. The plan for 2015 is to raise this figure to 150.000 and conduct an additional mobilisation besides the regular call-up. From 20th January to 18 April, the mobilisation of an additional 50.000 is scheduled. According to the Ministry of Defense figures, this can be increased to 104.000 if needed. As for mobilisation, the head of the Parliamentary Committee on Security and Defense explained these numbers outlining capabilities providing equipment and training. Stability in defence policy has been hard to come by with Ukraine having had five different Defence Ministers in 2014.

In general, the Ukrainian front in the Donbas of about fifty thousand troops are holding strong. These include the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine, State Border Service, the National Guard, Ministry of Interior and more than 30 volunteer battalions. During the confrontation, the Ukrainian parties to the conflict have lost over 1,200 killed and 3,000 wounded.

Ukraine conducts a mobilisation, although war has not been officially announced. The main goal of the training is to prepare for the worst case scenario.

Thus, Ukrainian leaders have a certain understanding of the situation and expectations.

Statements by the Russian leadership and publications in Russian and pro-Russian media in Ukraine indicate the development of a broad campaign to disrupt mobilisation. Putin has said that Russia is ready to accept draft dodgers. Anti-Ukrainian mass media talk about evading conscription and desertion.

It is no secret that the combat capability of the Ukrainian army has corroded from the inside through not only corruption but also Russian

Stability in defence policy has been hard to come by with Ukraine having had five different Defence Ministers in 2014 and having to contend with the legacy of 23 years of corruption within the Ministry.



agents. On that backdrop, it is remarkable that the Ukrainian forces still successfully confront Russian soldiers and “separatists” trained and equipped by them.

According to the latest reports, organised volunteer projects and individual initiatives have raised over 40 million EUR in 2014 to meet military necessities. Compared to the defence budget for 2014 (2 billion) and the current euro exchange rate, it is a small amount. But it went directly to the front in the form of uniforms, boots, flak jackets, infrared visors, medicine, medical equipment, etc.

Help From the West

Deputy Defense Minister Leonid Holopatyuk said that Ukraine is awaiting help from the West in the form of military exercises “to improve the effective capacity in financial, human and intellectual resources”. The most effective forms of support from the Alliance would be measures of individual and collective professional training and logistical support. He also expressed an interest in exchanging intelligence.

The adviser to the President and head of the volunteer movement “Wings of the Phoenix”, Yuri Biryukov, said that technical assistance is very necessary, especially regarding armored vehicles. Ukrainian manufacturers produce enough high-quality products but it is cheaper to buy technology abroad.

Military support will help Ukrainian forces in the fight but on the other hand it might provide Mr. Putin with an argument to present the conflict as a war against the West.

This month, aid from Canada arrived in Ukraine. Seventy thousand military boots and thirty thousand sets of uniforms were provided by the Canadian government.

A sharp change in discourse, compared with the end of last year, has taken place in the United States. Not only in the media but in diplomatic circles, increasing calls for the provision of technical and military assistance to Ukraine are being heard. It is recommended that to strengthen the defensive capabilities of Ukraine, it needs special radar systems



to locate enemy long-range rocket launch and artillery sites ; drones; drone countermeasures; the means of confidential communication; armored vehicles and medical equipment.

In addition and most importantly, support should include lethal and defensive capabilities, including light anti-tank missiles.

A [report](#) to this effect was made by several US senators and former Pentagon officials. They urged the Obama administration and NATO governments to act quickly and supply Ukraine as suggested above.

If the equipment is provided, done should not forget that Ukrainians will have to be taught how to use it but time is needed for that and there is not much left. Military support will help Ukrainian forces in the fight but on the other hand it might only provide Mr. Putin with an argument to present the conflict as a war against the West.

NATO

Calls for helping Ukraine with a membership perspective have been heard ever since the Wales NATO summit in September 2014. Of course, it is obvious that NATO cannot accept a country involved in an armed conflict as a member or even assist them in any way. Despite claims from Vladimir Putin of a NATO Legion fighting in Ukraine, NATO cannot directly support a non-member country in a conflict. The only thing NATO can help with is training and education.

NATO's individual member states have more room for manoeuvre. On a bilateral level, they have access to a full toolkit from trainings to arms. So far, the Ukrainian government is negotiating with "friendly states" to get assistance.



Pros and Cons of Arming Ukraine

Against

The only way to solve the Ukraine crisis through diplomacy, not through military action

Sending weapons to Ukraine will not rescue its army and will instead lead to an escalation in the fighting. Russia has thousands of nuclear weapons and is seeking to defend a vital strategic interest. The balance of power decisively favors Moscow: It possesses 'escalatory dominance'.

Not only would the fighting in eastern Ukraine intensify but it could also spread beyond Ukraine. The consequences for Ukraine, which already faces profound economic and social problems, would be disastrous - both militarily and in terms of civilian victims.

Before any materiel is delivered to the regular armed forces, operators will need to be trained. There is no guarantee that weapons and hardware will not fall into enemy hands by accident, or through corrupt Ukrainian army personnel. Besides, it will be difficult to ensure the arms do not go to Ukraine's volunteer or private militias.

The provision of arms will not knock the Kremlin off its course in Ukraine and instead will bring the U.S. one step closer to a direct military confrontation with Russia. What does the U.S. do if Russia escalates in response? Is it willing to enter a direct military confrontation with Moscow? Short of launching a NATO-style campaign like in the Balkans, the U.S. won't gain an upper hand over Russia in east Ukraine.

Putin would use the appearance of Western weapons on the battlefields as proof that this is now an overt war by the West against Russia. This would mobilise Russian public opinion to such a degree that an overt, massive Russian intervention in Ukraine by regular forces would



become acceptable to the majority of Russians.

As long as the Kremlin is determined, Ukraine cannot win the conflict, so it must be frozen and Ukraine's leaders should be told as much – as bitter as this truth might be.

It will take years to shore up Ukraine's beleaguered military, making it uncertain that a delivery of arms would establish parity immediately. The West should accept Russian military superiority in Ukraine as it once accepted the building of the Berlin Wall. Eventually, that Wall came down.

In Favour

The question is not whether there is a military solution, because there is no solution in the sense of a peace deal that satisfies everybody, at least in the short run. Instead, the question is whether there can be any improvement in Ukraine's military position. The answer is a clear: Yes.

Unfortunately, sanctions alone are unlikely to deter Putin. Ukraine needs an immediate infusion of effective defensive military equipment and financial aid to thwart Putin's naked aggression. The aid should include anti-tank weapons, counter-battery radars, armored Humvees and increased training for Ukraine's military. The key to success, they maintain, is not to defeat Russia militarily but to raise the costs of fighting to the point where Mr. Putin will stop escalating. Thus far Mr. Putin has not budged in the face of sanctions and is unlikely to make meaningful concessions if the costs of the fighting in Ukraine remain the same.

While Ukraine is not a NATO member and therefore the West is under no alliance obligation to intervene, there is nevertheless a legal obligation to defend Ukraine, resulting from the Budapest memorandum of 1994 in which Ukraine abandoned its nuclear weapons in return for clear guarantees as to its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The argument that Putin will use Western arms deliveries as an instrument to paint this as a war by the West against Ukraine, is beside the



point: Putin is already doing that. Russian media are full of stories about US soldiers or mercenaries fighting in Ukraine, and Putin has already used the rhetoric about Ukraine's army as a NATO legion.

Putin's escalation dominance reaches only so far. He cannot seriously plan all-out war against Ukraine because that would end up in a guerilla war and in a military disaster worse than Afghanistan. He will also go for some kind of stalemate and to make that stalemate as favourable as possible would be the purpose of arms deliveries. Giving Ukraine weapons is essential to achieving a peaceful, political solution because the Kremlin will know the cost of further military action is high, paving the way for a stalemate and peace.

If the U.S. and NATO don't support Ukraine, Moscow will read the inaction as carte blanche for similar aggression elsewhere, including the Baltic

The aid won't allow Ukraine to reconquer the Donbas but it would allow Kiev to inflict significant costs in the event of such an attack, making Moscow reconsider such an option.