



No End in Sight for Donbas Conflict

OE Watch Commentary: The conflict between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces in the Donbas region of Ukraine grinds on into its fifth year. While the front-line has become largely static, sporadic fighting continues with destruction and casualty counts mounting ever higher. The February 2015 Minsk II peace plan has long become moribund with none of the warring sides willing to compromise or constructively work toward a peaceful resolution. Moreover, as the accompanying excerpted articles indicate, there are increasing signs which suggest that the fighting could escalate.

The first excerpt from the independent Ukrainian news source, *Apostrof*, describes the recent decision by the Ukrainian government to rename the conflict, from calling it an anti-terrorist operation (ATO) to a Joint Forces Operation (JFO) where Russia has been specifically labeled as an aggressor. Under this new format, the Ukrainian “military body will control all law enforcers in the conflict zone: the National Police, the Interior Ministry, the Armed Forces and the Emergencies Ministry.” The article goes on to posit that this change of operational control may be predicated on the Ukrainian hope that it will help “to prepare the ground for the deployment of (international) peacekeeping forces” throughout the entire conflict region. The excerpt asserts however, that such a move is highly unlikely, since the Kremlin sees no point in giving “Poroshenko a victory in the form of some agreements on peacekeepers” prior to the next presidential election in Ukraine (June 2019).

The second excerpt comes from the popular pro-Kremlin Russian daily news source, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, where the author interviews one of the separatist commanders in the Donetsk region. According to this commander, even under the new Ukrainian format “nothing has changed” with regard to the conflict. Shelling “intensity remains the same” within the separatist regions and civilians continue to suffer. Similarly, this separatist commander claims that the recently delivered Javelin antitank system will “make virtually no difference.” He continues, however, by asserting that “based on intelligence information... the probability of escalation is high.” He concludes the interview by thanking his Russian audience “for not giving up, and for supporting us both morally and physically.”

Russia continues to strengthen its military presence near the Ukrainian border, while supplying the separatist regions with all forms of support. Ukraine has also solidified its military presence along the borders of the separatist regions. These articles suggest that this conflict is a long way from being resolved. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Deputy Defense Minister of the Donetsk People's Republic Eduard Basurin, 2015.

Source: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:Eduard_basurin.jpg CCA BY 3.0

“Why would the Kremlin give Poroshenko a victory in the form of some agreements on peacekeepers?”

Source: Artur Hor, “Украина начинает новую операцию на Донбассе: что изменится для людей (Ukraine is commencing a new operation in Donbas: what will change for people),” *Apostrof*, 30 April 2018. <https://apostrophe.ua/article/society/2018-04-30/ukraina-nachinaet-novuyu-operatsiyu-na-donbasse-cto-izmenitsya-dlya-lyudey/18150>

On the last day of April, the antiterrorist operation in the conflict zone in Donbas officially ends and Ukraine moves on to a new defense format - the Joint Forces Operation (JFO). Apostrof has found out what is actually going to change on the frontline as the ATO [antiterrorist operation] is replaced with the JFO. ...The law's central military element is the creation of the Joint Operation Headquarters of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to control all functions relating to the country's defense in the east of Ukraine. This military body will control all law enforcers in the conflict zone: the National Police, the Interior Ministry, the Armed Forces and the Emergencies Ministry.

...Apparently, the ultimate goal of recent steps to legalize the existing state of affairs in the zone of the Donbas military conflict is to prepare ground for the deployment of peacekeeping forces.

“I think that there was such a consideration,” Andrusiv agreed. “However, today, in my opinion, the issue of a peacekeeping mission is dead.... Apparently, Russia has simply decided to wait until the presidential election. There is no much sense for the Russian Federation in taking any steps before the presidential election. Why would the Kremlin give Poroshenko a victory in the form of some agreements on peacekeepers?” he wondered....



Continued: No End in Sight for Donbas Conflict

Source: Aleksandr Gamov, “Американских ‘Джавелин’ мы не боимся (We Are Not Afraid of American ‘Javelins’),” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 2 May 2018. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26825.7/3863586/>

This is what the “Deputy Commander” of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic [DPR] Eduard Basurin said on air to Komsomolskaya Pravda Radio.

- Colonel, 1 May was the first day that the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) tried to conduct operations in Donbass in a new format – that is, as they claim in Kyiv, no longer as “an antiterrorist operation” (ATO) as before, but, as they say, a tactical and a military one. What do you think, what has changed?

- Nothing has changed.

- Tell us, what about the shelling of Donetsk, DPR...

- It continues. Civilians suffer as well....

- How intensive is the shelling? Is it at the same level as it used to be when the so-called ATO was in place?

- No, the intensity remains the same....

- Ukrainian war dogs are boasting that they have new antitank weapons systems – US-made ones, and that they are already beginning to become familiar with them and to prepare them for practical application.

- These Javelins make virtually no difference....

- What are your predictions, Eduard Aleksandrovich [Basurin]? What prospects can there be?... How far can [Ukraine President Petro] Poroshenko go? Can he venture to escalate? ...

- Let us put it this way. The probability of escalation is high.

- And on what grounds do you determine this? Or is it based on intelligence reports?

- Yes, it is [based] on intelligence information. On the accumulation of manpower, technology; on what they do, what rotations take place. [Our determination is] based on this....

- What would you like to say to those who are cheering for you, who worry about Donbass and its people? There are very many people who believe in you.

- [We would like to express] words of gratitude to people for believing in us, for not giving up, and for supporting us both morally and physically.

- Hang in there! Good luck!



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