

# Pro-Russia Rebels Attack Ukrainian Border Guards

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A pro-Russian rebel observes his target after firing a rocket-propelled grenade from an apartment building rooftop during clashes with Ukrainian troops near Luhansk on Monday. Hundreds of insurgents attacked a border guard base and at least five were killed, the guard service said.

LUHANSK, Ukraine — Hundreds of pro-Russian insurgents attacked a border guard base in eastern Ukraine on Monday, with some firing rocket-propelled grenades from the roof of a nearby residential building. At least five rebels were killed when the guards returned fire, a spokesman for the border guard service said.

Rebels in uniform near the Luhansk base promised safety for the officers if they surrendered and laid down their arms. The pro-Russian insurgents, who have seized government and police buildings across eastern Ukraine, have waged increasingly aggressive attacks on government-held checkpoints and garrisons in an attempt to seize weapons and ammunition from Ukrainian forces.

Serhiy Astakhov, the spokesman for the border guard service, told The Associated Press by telephone that a preliminary assessment indicated that five rebels were killed and eight

wounded in the attack on the walled compound on the western fringes of Luhansk, a major city not far from the Russian border. He also said seven servicemen were wounded, three seriously.

The initial attack by about 100 insurgents was met by gunfire from the border guards, and the number of attackers swelled to around 400 a few hours later. Astakhov said the Ukrainian armed forces had sent aircraft to the area, but had been unable to quell the attack. At least one fighter jet was seen flying overhead.

An AP reporter saw at least one dead rebel soldier about a kilometer away from the base. Fellow fighters approached and broke into tears as they viewed the body. One insurgent said the dead man was a leading rebel commander.

The fighting stopped about 1 p.m. but resumed a few hours later with heavy gunfire heard in the area. Rebels shot at least six rocket-propelled grenades at the compound from the rooftop of a residential building.

One insurgent fighter in uniform, who gave his name as Vlad Sevastopolsky, said pro-Russian militants have surrounded the base but offered Ukrainian troops a safe corridor out, as long as they surrender their weapons. Sevastopolsky is from a rebel group based in Antratsyt, another town in the Luhansk region.

Vladislav Seleznyov, press secretary for Ukraine's operation against the rebels in the east, described the base as an important coordinating node for the border guards, and said the attack may have been an attempt to disrupt communications.

Seleznyov also said there was another rebel attack Monday on a government checkpoint in Slovyansk, a city in the Donetsk region that has been an epicenter of the pro-Russian movement. He said rebels had set mines at a number of power plants in Slovyansk, which he claimed would be detonated if the government were to move on the city.

In the regional capital of Donetsk, gunmen from the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic on Monday entered the office of the local newspaper and took away its editor, Leonid Lapa, his deputy Valery Lapshin told AP. The gunmen said they were taking the Vecherny Donetsk editor in for questioning.

For weeks, Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine has been the scene of deadly clashes between government troops and pro-Russian insurgents.

Many in Ukraine's east are suspicious of the new pro-Western government in Kiev, which came to power when pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich fled the country in February after months of street protests in Kiev. Protests in the east demanding greater independence from the Ukrainian capital soon turned into a separatist movement as the Luhansk and Donetsk regions declared independence following hastily called referendums.

The conflict between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian insurgents escalated markedly in the past week, with rebels attempting to seize a major airport and the shooting down of a Ukrainian military helicopter.

In Moscow, the Defense Ministry announced Monday a military exercise involving the launch

of high-precision missiles. The ministry said the maneuvers of the western military district will continue through Thursday and will involve the deployment of Iskander surface-to-surface missiles.

Moscow did not specify the areas where the exercise will be held and made no mention of the situation in Ukraine.

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