

Fighting Rages Between Army and Separatists in Eastern Ukraine Town

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A Ukrainian soldier patrolling an area outside of Slavyansk on Tuesday.

Fighting raged in eastern Ukraine for the second straight day on Tuesday as the Army rolled out an offensive against pro-Russia separatists holding the city of Slavyansk and claimed to have inflicted losses on the rebels.

Rebels in the town, a fierce separatist stronghold where a military helicopter was shot down last week killing 14 servicemen, said they had brought down a Su-25 attack aircraft and a helicopter, but this was denied by Ukrainian authorities.

The fighting in Slavyansk followed a day-long fire-fight on Monday in Luhansk, a town further east on the border with Russia, after an attack by separatists on a border guard camp.

At least two people were killed in the city center of Luhansk, which like Slavyansk is under separatist control, by a blast which rebels said came from a Ukrainian air strike but which the Ukrainians said was caused by a misfire of a heat-seeking missile by the rebels.

Reports of fresh fighting coincided with Ukraine announcing that 59 servicemen had been killed in clashes with rebels since hostilities broke out in the east in April.

"In Donetsk and Luhansk regions 181 people have been killed and 293 wounded by terrorist activity including 59 servicemen," general prosecutor Oleh Makhnitsky told a news conference.

Ukraine's Russian-speaking eastern regions which border on Russia have been riven with separatist armed rebellions for the past two months.

The Kiev government says the fighting is fomented by Russia, which opposes its pro-Western policies, and accuses Russia of allowing volunteer fighters to cross into Ukraine to fight alongside the rebels.

Active Phase

"At the present time the active phase of the "anti-terrorist operation" is going on near Slavyansk. The [separatist] fighters are being blocked. If they refuse to lay down their arms they will be destroyed," said Vladyslav Seleznyov, a spokesman for the military operation.

"Our job is to establish peace in the region and this we will do," he said.

He could not confirm reports of wounded on the Ukrainian side around Slavyansk, but he said there were preliminary reports of dead and wounded among the separatist fighters.

"Information that Ukrainian planes and helicopters have been shot down are not true. Yesterday one of the helicopters received holes from small arms fire," he said.

Defense analyst Dmytro Tymchuk, who is recognized as having good military sources, said separately that one person had been killed on the Ukrainian side and 13 others wounded when a Ukrainian military column was attacked on its way to Slavyansk from its base in Izyum, to the north-west.

See also:

[Ukraine Separatists Down Army Helicopter, 14 Killed](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/06/03/fighting-rages-between-army-and-separatists-in-eastern-ukraine-town-a36136)

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