

Rebel Leader Says Separatists to Go On Offensive in Ukraine

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Prime Minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic Alexander Borodai (standing) speaks as he takes part in talks between representatives of OSCE, Ukraine, Russia and self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics in Donetsk.

A separatist leader in eastern Ukraine has warned Kiev that pro-Russian rebels would take the offensive again after regrouping forces in the region's biggest industrial hub of Donetsk.

"We are not preparing ourselves for a siege, we are preparing ourselves for action," Alexander Borodai said in an interview in Moscow with Gazeta.ru.

Militants fled the rebel stronghold of Slovyansk over the weekend, following months of fighting, in a victory for Kiev that Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko called a "turning point" in its fight against the separatists.

But Borodai, who has been appointed by the rebels as prime minister of their self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, said the escape from Slovyansk by self-styled rebel defense minister Igor Strelkov, a Muscovite, had given the separatists a chance to concentrate their

fighting power.

They have at their disposal tanks, armored vehicles and rocket systems.

"Strelkov is the chief commanding officer. Now a strict vertical of command will be built through all armed units, which I coordinated with greater or less success. Igor and I will be able to build a very effective, clear vertical," he said.

Armed groups have flooded the city of Donetsk since Slovyansk's fall. Two bridges were destroyed on Monday after Ukraine's deputy security council chief said forces would blockade the capitals of the two separatist regions, Donetsk and Luhansk.

"Any blockade of these two cities by the Ukrainian army is impossible. The Ukrainian army and its resources are not in a state to carry out a real blockade on even one Donetsk, so I do not see a real threat in that in the future," he said.

Borodai said he was in consultations with Moscow on the conflict but said he had no insight into the Kremlin's plans and denied they had any direct funding from Moscow.

"Moscow is carrying out consultations with us regarding the regulation of the conflict, and that's why I have come here. But Moscow is not a side in the conflict, does not participate in it," he said.

"There are no direct tranches [of cash] ... But I definitely don't see in the Kremlin's plans a desire to preserve instability in so-called southeastern Ukraine."

See also:

Pushed From Slovyansk, Ukraine Rebels Barricade Donetsk

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