

Ukrainian Rebels Parade Prisoners of War Through Streets of Donetsk

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Armed pro-Russian separatists escort a column of Ukrainian prisoners of war (L) as they walk across central Donetsk August 24.

As Ukraine marked its Independence Day on Sunday with a military march in Kiev, pro-Moscow rebels countered by parading captured Ukrainian troops through the streets in Donetsk's central Lenin Square.

They looked dirty and unshaven, and bowed their heads as they passed. Some had bandaged arms and heads. They were guarded by rebel fighters with guns, their bayonets fixed.

People in the crowd who came to watch the parade shouted "Fascists!" and "Killers!" Some people threw bottles at the prisoners. Two street-cleaning machines followed the column, spraying water onto the street in a theatrical gesture to indicate that the men were unclean.

Earlier on Sunday, artillery shells rained down on central Donetsk, hitting the grounds of one

of the city's biggest hospitals. Authorities in Kiev deny targeting civilian areas.

Once the sound of shelling receded from the city center, Donetsk residents strolled through Lenin Square looking at a display of captured Ukrainian military hardware.

Rebel fighters armed with Kalashnikovs milled around the event, nervously eyeing the distance where artillery fire was audible.

"This is no Independence Day, this is a plague on our land, the fascists who have taken control of Kiev who are now shooting at hospitals and morgues," said Grigory, 71, a pensioner who left the nearby city of Torez during fighting.

Alexander Zakharchenko, prime minister of the self-proclaimed rebel entity, said his forces had launched a counter-attack.

He told the parade they were fighting to take the town on Olenivka, about 20 kilometers south of Donetsk, and hoped to capture it by the end of the day.

One rebel, who did not give his name, said: "Today the Ukrainians have got more active, it is their Independence Day. But we are having a day of independence from them. They're attacking, and we're defending."

The Ukrainian military authorities said they had been making more advances on the battlefield, though the rebel collapse some in Kiev had predicted has not materialized.

A spokesman for the Ukrainian border guard service said there had been several rounds of shelling into Ukraine from Russian artillery units stationed there, echoing similar allegations made by NATO officials.

Russia denies its military is playing any part in the conflict, or that it is giving material help to the rebellion.

The United Nations says more than 2,000 people have been killed since the conflict erupted in April in Ukraine's mainly Russian-speaking east following Russia's annexation of Crimea. The death toll increased sharply in the past few weeks, as Ukrainian forces went on the offensive.

See also:

[Terror in Their Eyes: Captivity in War-Torn Donetsk](#)

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