

War on Donbass Resumes, Western Media Remains Silent

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The recent shelling of Donetsk and surrounding areas, carried out by Kiev's military forces, has effectively ended the ceasefire and whatever illusions still remained of the Minsk 2 agreements. While there had been instances of violence before that of recent days, the level of intensity and bloodshed has undoubtedly escalated.

Although the Ukrainian military and Nazi paramilitary units have been targeting civilians – a flagrant war crime by any measure – there is a near total media blackout in the West. Meanwhile, the United States continues to argue that the “overwhelming majority of ceasefire violations” are as a result of anti-Kiev rebel activity, despite providing no evidence to substantiate these utterly false claims. Indeed, in the midst of an ongoing bloody war waged by Kiev against the people of Donbass, Washington continues to hold up President Poroshenko and his government of oligarchs and fascists as a force for peace.

Kiev Ratchets up the War, Rebels Respond

Despite droning propaganda to the contrary, the reality is that Kiev's forces have ended the ceasefire and resumed shelling of civilian and military targets. As of June 9, 2015, there have been dozens of accounts of Kiev attacking the city of Donetsk and smaller towns at or near the contact line (the separation zone agreed to during the Minsk negotiations.) The important point is that these attacks have been ongoing, and are not merely the resumption of hostilities in the last week.

Despite its unwillingness to publicly acknowledge and condemn the actions, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has in fact documented a staggering number of ceasefire violations by Kiev's forces. According to OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) [summary table of ceasefire operations](#) on April 23, 2015 for instance, the observers documented that a majority of the uses of heavy artillery came from Kiev-controlled territory, and that any uses outgoing from rebel-controlled territory were, according to the timeline, retaliatory strikes. In fact, a close examination of the timeline reveals that nearly all of the early morning shelling was outgoing from Kiev-controlled territory, suggesting that Ukrainian military forces initiated shelling and then came under fire later in the day.

Of course, one should be careful to draw too many conclusions from the incomplete OSCE data as the scope is limited, and the SMM has been reticent to assign blame or responsibility to Kiev's forces, even in instances where their aggression is blatant. Earlier in April, Ukrainian military and/or paramilitary forces [shelled](#) Donetsk City Clinical Hospital No. 21 where, luckily, no patients were injured as the building hit was not in use. As journalist

Roger Annis [reported](#) after returning from Donetsk in April, *“Due to the escalation of shelling in the past several weeks, adults and children are once again spending nights underground in dank and cramped basement shelters. We toured one neighbourhood near the shattered Donetsk airport as shells were falling a few kilometers away. The resumption of daytime shelling is new.”*

But of course, despite the repeated violations of the ceasefire agreement, the last several days have seen a significant escalation, one that has effectively ended the ceasefire and renewed the active engagement phase of the war.

There are scattered reports of significant casualties throughout the Donetsk region as the Ukrainian military and Nazi paramilitaries commence both renewed shelling and advances beyond the contact line. Last week there were numerous instances of shelling in Donetsk, including on [June 3](#) when at least five civilians were killed, and 24 others wounded. In the aftermath of the shelling, the Chief Doctor at the Petrovskiy District Hospital, Igor Rutchenko, said that patients had to be evacuated due to persistent shelling from Ukrainian military forces as the injured were rushed to the facility.

On the morning of June 5th, according to [eyewitness accounts](#) in the town of Maryinka, *“a 52-year-old man was at home...when a group of Ukrainian troopers entered the yard – about eight men...The troopers started to inspect the [passport] documents, and then the [man] emerged out of the cellar. The Ukies pointed at him their machine guns at once and opened fire...He died from the injuries on the spot.”* Such flagrant war crimes – summary executions in wartime – go entirely unreported in the western media.

Emotionally powerful [video](#) has emerged from Donetsk in recent days showing the results of shelling of residential homes and businesses. [According to Eduard Basurin](#), spokesman for the Donetsk People’s Republic, *“The Ukrainian forces’ most intensive attack was against the village of Shirokino. More than 150 82 mm and 120 mm shells were fired.”* That such a level of shelling was initiated and sustained indicates the increased level of aggression by Kiev’s military.

But here, there must be an important point noted. While the anti-Kiev side continues to report civilians being killed by shelling and other means, there are no such equivalent reports from Ukraine’s military. In fact, as noted by [Reuters](#), Kiev’s military spokesman Andriy Lysenko stated that, *“Three Ukrainian servicemen have been killed and four others wounded in attacks by pro-Russian separatists in the east over the past 24 hours.”*

Note the difference here. While in Donetsk, it is civilians being killed by Ukrainian military, Kiev can report no such equivalent carnage on its side. Indeed, it seems that all casualties on the Kiev-controlled side of the contact line have been military casualties, while on the rebel side it is both militia and civilian casualties. This simple fact, entirely omitted from the western narrative, is indicative of the nature of the conflict. Moreover, the false equivalence presented by that same media is disingenuous to say the least.

Framing the Narrative of War and “Peace”

The coverage of the conflict in eastern Ukraine has been bad from the beginning. However, the omission of facts, and the clearly distorted coverage, has taken on a new level of insidiousness and dishonesty in recent days. Even in the scant attention that Kiev’s

escalation does get in western media, it is not called what it is: aggression by Ukraine's military.

Take for example the June 8, 2015 article from US government propaganda mouthpiece Voice of America, entitled [*In Donetsk, Frequent Shelling Fuels Distrust*](#). Already from the title, one is struck by a clear obfuscation, namely that "distrust" is engendered by shelling, but no mention of whose shelling or whose distrust. Indeed, throughout the entire article, there is not a single mention of shelling committed by Kiev's forces. Rather, one encounters phrases such as "many tend to blame authorities in Kyiv" – a clear evasion of the far more direct, far simpler, and far more accurate statement "Kiev is to blame" or "shelling by Kiev forces." But of course, the purpose here is not to inform, but rather to absolve the Ukrainian military of direct responsibility for war crimes, and instead paint Russia as the aggressor, despite the facts.

Reading carefully this article, one is struck by the multiple images of women and children taking shelter in basements, pleading with media to tell their stories, pleading with the Ukrainian government to stop the shelling. The piece highlights multiple women with families who have been displaced and victimized by Ukrainian military attacks, and yet, conspicuously no mention of the phrase "attacks by Ukrainian military" or any variation on that. One could be forgiven for thinking that the bombardment of these women's homes was a mere act of God, rather than a deliberate shelling of civilians.

Even when the victims are quoted blaming the authorities in Kiev, the article frames this as merely their "opinions." However, VoA goes to great lengths to devote the entire last section of the article to one resident of Kramatorsk who claims to have seen "a couple Russian troops here when it all began," as if to suggest that an unverifiable alleged eyewitness account from more than a year ago somehow justifies the aggression against the women highlighted in the previous section. This is a deliberate propaganda ploy used by VoA as an indirect legitimization and justification of the aggression as being defensive in the face of "Russian troops."

Just a small sampling of other media outlets, ones not directly tied to the US Government in the way that Voice of America is, reveals the explicit and implicit bias in the reporting. Take for instance the headline from the International Business Times, [*Ukraine Military Fires 150 Mortar Shells At Donetsk Rebels, Russian News Media Claims*](#), which is embedded with a clear bias. The phrase "Russian News Media Claims" is designed to discredit the very fact that is being reported as it relies on a deeply rooted mistrust of any information reported by Russian media, a mistrust skillfully cultivated and promoted by western media.

What is conveniently left out is the fact that it is *only Russian media* that is reporting on the shelling by Kiev. Therefore, any reportage at all would, by definition, have to be "claimed by Russian media." The idea is to both report what is happening, and to discredit it at the same time. Such dishonesty is par for the course when it comes to media coverage of this war.

The narrative of the war is replete with such dishonest reporting. Sadly, however, the dishonesty and utter callousness goes much deeper than that, to the very language employed and public relations campaign utilized to whitewash the egregious crimes of Kiev.

In September 2014, in the midst of ongoing aggression against Donetsk and Lugansk by Ukrainian military forces, President Poroshenko was in Washington addressing the US Congress and receiving praise from President Obama. As Obama [*stated*](#):

I want to commend President Poroshenko for having helped to not only broker a cease-fire, but also to push through some very difficult legislation that can improve the perception in eastern Ukraine that they are fully represented and that they are able to determine many of their local affairs in a way that gives them confidence. And those were not easy laws that President Poroshenko passed, but I think they indicated his commitment to an inclusive Ukraine — his commitment to a Ukraine that has decentralization and empowers local communities...I have great confidence that President Poroshenko is balancing a lot of different variables here in a very difficult situation. But he's the right man for the job...And so, President Poroshenko, congratulations on the excellent work that you've done. You have a strong friend not only in me personally, but I think, as you saw in Congress today, you have strong bipartisan support here in the United States.

There is, of course, no mention of any of Poroshenko's egregious war crimes, including the [admission](#) by his very own Colonel-General of the Ukrainian Officer Corps Vladimir Ruban, who admitted just two weeks earlier not only the deliberate shelling of civilians in Donetsk by Ukrainian military, but attempted to justify it by suggesting that *"Maybe they fully deserved it...They understand that they're being shelled. And it's one thing when some operative, mobile mortar groups drive around and shell the city, you can say there that it's some third provocative party. But when regions of the airfield, the airport are being hit by artillery systems, nobody will say here that it's the separatists shelling themselves."* So, President Obama praises Poroshenko as "the right man for the job" while commanders who report to him directly openly admit committing horrific war crimes.

In this light, the recent [rumors](#) circulating online that the United States would like to use its influence to pressure the Nobel Peace Prize Committee to award the 2015 prize to Poroshenko are indeed troubling, if not laughable. While the reports, including the [letter](#) purporting to be from Volodymyr Groysman, Chairman of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada (parliament), cannot be verified as being authentic, they are certainly believable given both the praise that Poroshenko has received from Washington, and the complete disregard for actual peace shown by the Nobel committee in the past.

It should be remembered that Obama himself is a Nobel Peace Prize winner, despite having a record of having initiated or expanded a number of separate wars (Libya, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, etc.), utilizing a [kill list](#) to select targets for assassination by drone in places like Pakistan and Somalia, and having supported tacitly or overtly many other wars (Yemen, Gaza, etc.). So while there is no confirmation as to the veracity of the letter, it is not out of the realm of possibility that the US, with its complete disregard for actual and objective notions of peace, would perhaps push the Peace Prize to a war criminal.

To paraphrase the great political economist and philosopher Karl Marx, "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce." While undoubtedly true, the war on Donbass is, in fact, both tragedy and farce simultaneously. While there is an unfolding human tragedy in Donetsk, Maryinka, and other cities and towns, the media coverage remains farcical.

Perhaps this is the greatest tragedy of all from the region. For while men, women, and children suffer, and families are torn apart, the western media continues to openly distort reality, transforming it into a farce. Sadly, no one with a shred of humanity could possibly be laughing.

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