

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The Wall Street Journal – 24.06.2014

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—Anton Troianovski in Berlin and Carol E. Lee in Washington contributed to this article.

Violence Jeopardizes Ukraine Cease-Fire

Government Reports Nine Soldiers Killed When Separatists Downed Their Helicopter

*Насильство ставить під загрозу припинення вогню в Україні
Уряд повідомив про дев'ять солдатів, загиблих у збитому сепаратистами
вертольоті*

*Президент України Петро Порошенко оголосив про одностороннє припинення вогню в
п'ятницю, і в понеділок деякі лідери повстанців підписали те, що здавалося першим
кроком до мирних переговорів. Але інші сепаратисти заявили, що не погоджуються
припинити бойові дії. Урядовці повідомили про 11 солдатів, загиблих у вівторок, у тому
числі дев'ять у вертольоті збитому поруч з сепаратистським оплотом Слов'янськом.*

*Незважаючи на всі розмови про де-ескалацію, Росія як і раніше окупує Крим і немає
ніяких ознак, що має наміри коли-небудь віддавати. Москва також припинила
постачання природного газу на Україну і пригрозила ввести широкі торговельні
обмеження, коли Україна підпише угоду з ЄС.*

<http://online.wsj.com/articles/putin-drops-ukraine-military-option-1403608080?KEYWORDS=Ukraine>



A funeral Tuesday for a man killed two days earlier in shelling in Ukraine's Luhansk region.
Reuters

A day-old cease-fire in Ukraine was on the verge of collapse Tuesday after pro-Russia rebels shot down a military helicopter with a heat-seeking missile, killing nine soldiers.

The violence came despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's move to calm tensions by retracting his threat of military intervention—a step that was cautiously welcomed by the White House even as it demanded more be done.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko announced a unilateral cease-fire on Friday and on Monday, some rebel leaders signed on in what seemed like a first step toward peace talks.

But other separatists said they hadn't agreed to stop fighting. Government officials reported 11 soldiers killed Tuesday, including nine in the helicopter hit near the separatist stronghold of Slovyansk.

"So clearly—not surprisingly—the separatists all aren't on the same page," U.S. State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said in Washington. "And we have called on President Putin to use his influence with these separatists to get them to also accept a cease-fire."

Yet even the parties to the deal were expressing doubts, highlighting the tenuous nature of any progress in ending the two-month insurrection in Ukraine's eastern border regions.

Mr. Poroshenko warned in a meeting with his security chiefs late Tuesday that he could cancel the cease-fire "due to the continued violations of militants who are under external control," according to the presidential website.

Ukraine and the West have accused Russia of controlling the separatists and supplying them with weapons and fighters—a charge Moscow denies.

Alexander Borodai, one of the separatist leaders who had signed on, said there would be no further talks until all Ukrainian forces had withdrawn from the region.

"Yesterday, we held talks with the contact group of Ukrainian representatives on a cease-fire. But that all turned out to be a bluff. Kiev didn't stop the war," he told Russian state television from the rebel-held, regional capital of Donetsk.



Russian President Putin on Tuesday in Vienna. Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

Earlier in the day, Mr. Putin asked Russia's upper house of parliament to rescind the authorization to use military force in Ukraine. He told reporters later in Vienna that he did so because: "We want to create the conditions for this peace process."

The step also will likely blunt any effort to impose further sanctions on Russia at a meeting of European Union leaders later this week, where Ukraine is set to sign an agreement on closer economic ties with the bloc.

An EU official said Tuesday that the bloc's focus was likely now to be on cementing a peace deal. "Key to Russia's intentions is whether it stops the flow of fighters and weapons across border into Ukraine. That is the core EU demand now," Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt wrote on Twitter. TWTR +5.02%

Mr. Poroshenko said he hopes to hold four-way telephone talks with Mr. Putin, French President François Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday.

Mr. Putin called the fighting around Slovyansk sad, without mentioning the downed helicopter.

"We support the intention of the Ukrainian government and President Poroshenko to achieve a cease-fire not just in words but on the ground," he said at a news conference with the Austrian president.

Mr. Putin described Monday's meeting between representatives of the rebels and the government—as well as the Russian ambassador to Ukraine—as very positive, but he called for "substantive negotiations" to quickly follow. "Just to announce a cease-fire isn't sufficient," he said.

Mr. Poroshenko had earlier welcomed Mr. Putin's withdrawal of the intervention threat as the "first practical step" toward resolving the conflict. Rebel leader Andriy Purgin had said it would "reduce the degree of tension."

Hours later, Ukraine's Defense Ministry said that a helicopter delivering equipment and men to a government position near Slovyansk had been brought down by a shoulder-fired, heat-seeking missile. Rebel officials confirmed shooting down the helicopter, but accused government forces of attacking separatist positions, a claim officials in the capital Kiev denied.

Mr. Poroshenko said rebels had fired on Kiev troops 35 times since he called the cease-fire on Friday. He told the security chiefs that government forces should fire back "without hesitation" if they came under attack.

The White House said it would be watching Russia's actions over the next few days. "There are some additional concrete steps that we would like to see them take as it relates to pulling forces from the border, moving some of that heavy weaponry away so that it can't be transferred into the hands of separatists," press secretary Josh Earnest said.

U.S. President Barack Obama conveyed the same messages to Mr. Putin during their phone call on Monday, Mr. Earnest said. Taking such actions, U.S. officials said, would make additional sanctions against Russia less likely.

Mr. Putin also said his request to parliament didn't mean Russia was turning its attention away from eastern Ukraine.

"We will always defend ethnic Russians in Ukraine as well as that part of the people of Ukraine who...feel themselves part of the broad Russian world," he said. "We won't only be following attentively, but we will react appropriately. I hope we won't need the armed forces for this."

Though the decision marked a significant symbolic shift, Mr. Putin still has several levers to pressure Ukraine with, including money owed in a natural-gas pricing dispute.

Russia's upper house of parliament voted unanimously on March 1 to allow Mr. Putin to send the military into Ukraine if the rights of ethnic Russians living there were seen to be in danger. Russian forces had just seized control of key installations in the breakaway Ukrainian region of Crimea ahead of a referendum that resulted in that territory being annexed by Russia.

While Mr. Putin never formally acted on the authorization, Russia for a time moved tens of thousands of troops to positions along the border, contributing to several rounds of sanctions by the U.S. and Europe. Relations between the U.S. and Russia plunged to their lowest point since the Cold War.

For all the talk of de-escalation, Russia still holds Crimea and there is little sign it ever intends to give it back. Moscow has also cut off natural-gas supplies to Ukraine and has threatened sweeping trade restrictions when Ukraine signs the EU deal.

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