

BUSINESS INSIDER

Ukrainian Sergeant: 'This Is Now A War With Russia'

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Sergei Karpukhin/Reuters

An armed pro-Russian separatist stands in front of damaged buildings following what locals say was shelling by Ukrainian forces in Donetsk.

Ukraine and Western officials on Wednesday warned that Russian forces are opening up another, major front in the war, [according to The New York Times](#).

"This is what happened: they crossed the border, took up positions, and started shooting," Sgt. Aleksei Panko said after telling The Times that about 60 armored vehicles crossed the border near the town of Novoazovsk. "This is now a war with Russia."

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Wednesday that Russia's "incursions" in Ukraine "indicate a Russian-directed counter-offensive is likely underway" in Luhansk and Donetsk, which she said was of "deep concern" to the U.S.

She accused Russia of "sending its young men into Ukraine, but not telling them or their parents where they are going or what they are doing."

"These are not steps you take when you are operating in a transparent manner," Psaki said. "We are also concerned about the Russian government's unwillingness to tell the truth even as its soldiers are found 30 miles inside Ukraine."



REUTERS/Maks Levin

An Ukrainian serviceman shoots during fighting with pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Ukrainian town of Ilovaysk, Aug. 26, 2014.

and pro-Russian separatists has raged for months.

The Times reports that the counteroffensive "pushed the Ukrainian army off a 75 mile-long highway from Donetsk south to the Azov Sea."

A key new front is [on the road linking Russia](#) to the Ukrainian port of Mariupol and onto Crimea, Associated Press reports. The excursion raises the fear that the separatists, with the help of Russian forces, are trying to create a land link between Russia and Russian-occupied Crimea.

U.S. officials added that there is proof Russia has provided advanced air defenses not known to be in the Ukrainian arsenal — and thus could not be "looted" by separatists — and routinely flies drones over head to gather intelligence for the separatists.

Geoffrey Pyatt, the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, [wrote](#) on Twitter Tuesday that Russia's recent moves in Ukraine "may indicate that a Russian counteroffensive is underway" in southeastern Ukraine, where fighting between the Ukrainian army

Ukraine crisis

State of control in eastern Ukraine.



AREA CONTROLLED BY PRO-RUSSIAN SEPARATISTS

- as of August 26
- as of June 18
- Recent flashpoints
- Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 crash site

BORDER CONTROL

- Rebels
- Ukraine

Source: National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine



Staff, 26/08/2014

REUTERS
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"The Russian military's use of artillery from locations within Ukraine is of special concern to Western military officials, who say Russian artillery has already been used to shell Ukrainian forces near Luhansk," Andrew Kramer and Michael Gordon of The Time report. "And along with the anti-aircraft systems operated by separatists or Russian forces inside Ukraine, the artillery has the potential to alter the balance of power in the struggle for control of eastern Ukraine."

An administration official told the Times that they believe "that self-propelled artillery is operated by Russians rather than separatists since no separatist training on this artillery has occurred to date."

[Interpreter Magazine](#) has translated a report from an online Russian publication that claims, with photos, that the Ukrainian army attacked a Russian military convoy between the rebel stronghold of Donetsk and the Russian border. It surely sounds like war (via The Interpreter):

Last night, 26 August 2014, Ukrainian artillery destroyed a convoy of Russian paratroopers who advanced on BMDs. The Russian Federation soldiers were moving toward Ilovaisk with the purpose of destroying the position of the Ukrainian army. As soon as the column was noted, strikes were delivered.

Photographs of the destroyed vehicles were given by soldiers to Dorozhny Kontrol

journalists who are on the scene of events. As can be seen from the photos, the paratroopers were dressed in the RF military uniform and had Vintorez rifles with them, which are not in the arsenals of Ukraine. Most of the paratroopers were destroyed, but some were taken captive.

Interppter Mag notes that the photos show a "blue beret of the paratroopers, the label from a Kevlar vest manufactured in the Russian city of Kazan, a Ukrainian soldier holding up a [VSS Vintorez](#) (a rifle only used by Russian [Spetsnaz](#)), and the dead bodies of soldiers."

Mini Invasions

Twice in the past three days, Ukraine has [accused Russian soldiers](#) of crossing the border and fighting alongside pro-Russian rebels in southeastern Ukraine. Ukraine's state security service said Monday it detained 10 Russian paratroopers who crossed into Ukrainian territory.



REUTERS/Valentyn Ogirenko

A group of Russian servicemen, who are detained by Ukrainian authorities, attend a news conference in Kiev, Aug. 27, 2014.

On Tuesday, dozens of heavily armed strangers with Russian accents and military gear without insignias [appeared](#) in an eastern Ukrainian village and set up a roadblock.

"The people at the new checkpoint, they were polite military men wearing green. Definitely not Ukrainian. They're definitely not from around here," one man told Reuters.

The "green men" are a reminder of the [Russian special forces](#) that were used to annex the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea.

About a month after Russia annexed the strategic peninsula, [Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged](#) he had sent in Russian forces to protect Russian-speaking citizens in Crimea.

"Of course we had our servicemen behind the self-defense units of Crimea," Putin said during an annual televised call-in with the nation in April. "We had to make sure what is happening now in eastern Ukraine didn't happen there."

The officials told The Times that Russia has provided support for separatists in the region of Luhansk, where government forces recently had success in routing pro-Russian rebels. And they are also aiding a separatist push in the south toward the town of Mariupol, a major port on the Azov Sea.

According to the report, Western officials believe the Russian military has fired artillery from within Ukraine. They said it has already been fired to shell Ukrainian forces in Luhansk.

"Russia is clearly trying to put its finger on the scale to tip things back in favor of its proxies," a senior American official told The Times. "Artillery barrages and other Russian military actions have taken their toll on the Ukrainian military."

The Times notes that Putin, who is in Belarus for trades with Ukraine and European leaders, may be "calculating that Moscow could intervene in eastern Ukraine with conventional Russian forces without risking further Western economic sanctions."



Ukraine military

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