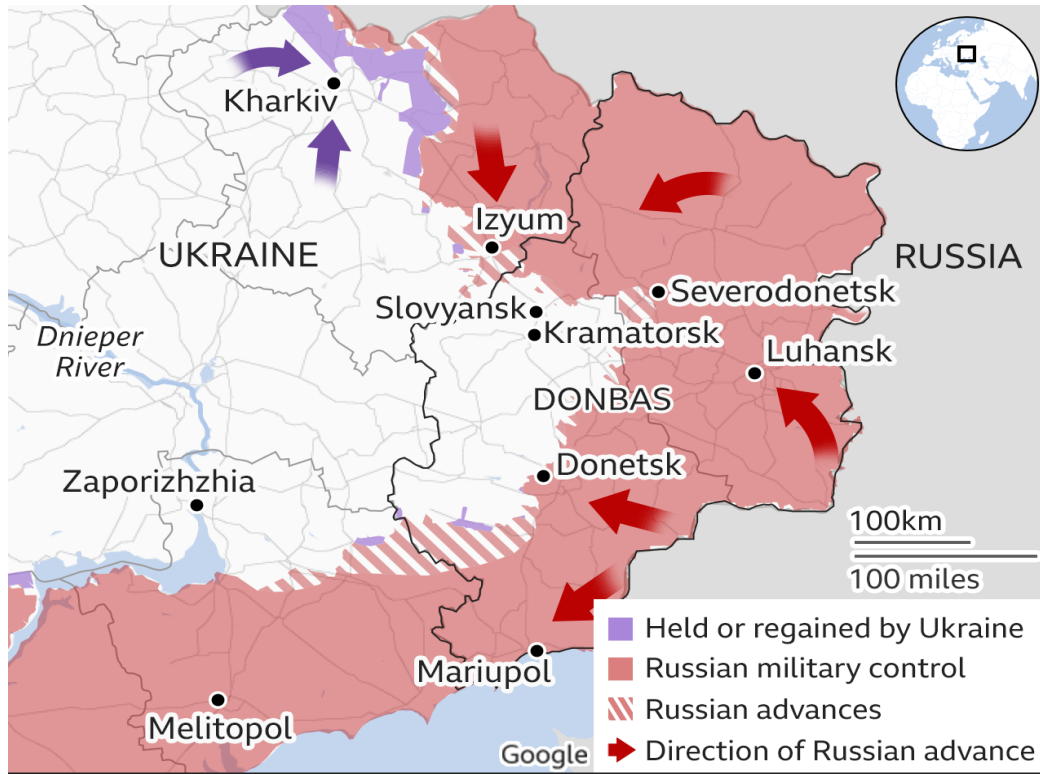


**After Severodonetsk, Russia takes Lysychansk and, with it, all of Luhansk region.
Now targets Slovyansk, Kramatorsk & the rest of Donetsk region**



Source: UK MoD / Institute for the Study of War (21:00 GMT, 3 July)

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On Feb. 21, Russian President Vladimir Putin convened Russia’s 30-member Security Council to discuss the situation in eastern Ukraine in light of what Russia regarded as the continued refusal of Ukraine to implement the package of measures agreed by the Russian, Ukrainian, French and German leaders at Minsk in February 2015. Those measures included, in addition to a renewed ceasefire between Ukraine and the two “People’s Republics” that pro-Russian separatists created in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, Ukraine amending its constitution to grant a special status and a significant degree of autonomy to the two regions. In those two regions, according to the 2001 census, almost 40 percent of the population were ethnic Russians, substantially more than in any other region in Ukraine (except Crimea, where almost 60 percent were ethnic Russians), and roughly 70 percent, far more than in any other region aside from Crimea, identified Russian as their native language.

In the meeting on Feb. 21, the Security Council agreed, in response to appeals from the leaders of the two “People’s Republics” that Russia recognize their independence and sovereignty and a resolution of the Russian Duma supporting recognition, to recognize their independence and sovereignty. Putin signed executive orders formally recognizing the independence of the two “People’s Republics” as well as treaties of “friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance” with both, and subsequently ordered the deployment of additional troops to the two entities to reinforce the troops already there.

Three days later, Putin announced a “special military operation” in eastern Ukraine to protect the people who “have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime.” The

“special military operation” was in fact a full-fledged, multi-pronged invasion of Ukraine from Belarus in the north, Crimea in the south and Russian territory adjacent to eastern and northeastern Ukraine, accompanied by intensive attacks by artillery and missiles on many cities throughout the country. Initially focused not only on eastern Ukraine but also on the Kyiv region, the territory between Kyiv and Kharkiv, and southern Ukraine adjacent to Crimea, in late March, after the attack in the Kyiv region had stalled in the face of strong resistance, Russia shifted the focus of the “special military operation” to eastern Ukraine and proclaimed as its main objective the “liberation” of the Donbas.

After the focus of the “special military operation” shifted to eastern Ukraine, one of the most prominent targets was Severodonetsk, a city of 100,000 (prior to the war) in the Luhansk region. After a prolonged attack on that city, its citizens, and its infrastructure that was reminiscent of its prolonged attack on Mariupol in the southern portion of the Donetsk region, and several weeks of stubborn and courageous defense, on June 24 the Ukrainian forces withdrew and the Russians quickly moved in. As they did, they turned their attention immediately to Lysychansk, another city of roughly 100,000 (prior to the war) just to the west, on the other side of the Siverskyi Donetsk River. Yesterday, after defending the city for more than a week, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine announced its forces had withdrawn from Lysychansk: “Amid the multiple superiority of the Russian occupying forces in artillery, aviation, multiple launch rocket systems, ammunition and personnel, the continuation of the defense of the city would lead to fatal consequences. In order to save the lives of the Ukrainian defenders, a decision was made to withdraw.” Also yesterday, Gen. Sergey Shoigu, Russian defense minister, reported to Putin that the Russian forces, with those of the Luhansk People’s Republic, had established full control over Lysychansk and a number of nearby settlements and, in so doing, had “liberated” the Luhansk People’s Republic. Indeed, in taking Lysychansk, the Russian forces had taken control of all of the territory of Ukraine’s region of Luhansk, not just the roughly 35 percent that had been controlled by the Luhansk People’s Republic prior to the war.

Russia’s attention turns now to several major cities in the Donetsk region west of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk – most notably, Kramatorsk, a city of roughly 160,000 (pre-war) in which a crowded train station was hit in April by a Russian missile and, ten miles to the north, Slovyansk, a city of roughly 110,000 (pre-war). Both cities were hit repeatedly over the weekend by multiple launch rocket systems and missiles. And so Putin’s war against the people and cities of Ukraine continues.

David R. Cameron
July 4, 2022