

Ukrainian Troops Advance Upon MH17 Crash Site, Kiev Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko aims a rifle during his visit to a demonstration of new weapons for the Ukrainian armed forces at a military base outside Kiev.

At least three civilians were killed in overnight fighting in eastern Ukraine while government troops pressed ahead with their campaign against pro-Russian rebels, taking a strategic point close to where the Malaysian flight MH17 crashed, officials said Monday.

Fierce fighting in the vicinity of the airliner crash site prevented international monitors from reaching it on Sunday to investigate the downing of the plane with the loss of all 298 people on board.

Western leaders say rebels almost certainly shot the airliner down by mistake with a Russian-supplied surface-to-air missile.

Kiev said Monday that its troops recaptured Savur Mogila, a strategic piece of high ground

about 30 km (20 miles) from where the Malaysia Airlines Boeing hit the ground on July 17.

Experts are due to renew their efforts on Monday to reach the crash site, still in rebel-held territory. Roadblocks between the city of Donetsk and the crash site are variously controlled by Ukrainian army or rebel forces.

The rival sides accused each other of impeding access to the site on Sunday, with Kiev saying it was not engaged within a 20-km (12-mile) no-fight zone and rebels accusing the army of trying to destroy evidence on the ground.

In Kiev, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said she would discuss access with Ukrainian authorities.

"We will be seeking assurances that any military action does not compromise our humanitarian mission," Bishop told a news conference, adding she had information on fighting raging within the no-fight zone the day before.

Bishop also said Australia, which lost 28 citizens in the crash, hoped Russia would use its influence over the rebels to help allow wider access to the site so that investigators can determine who was behind the downing of the plane.

In Donetsk, local officials said fighting went on around various city districts overnight and artillery fire damaged several residential blocks and houses. Power lines and a gas pipeline were also hit, they said.

Ukraine's emergency service said that more than 56,000 people had fled the violence in two eastern regions since Kiev started what it calls an "anti-terrorist" operation against the rebels there three months ago.

Separatists also said five civilians were killed in the other rebel stronghold of Luhansk, northeast of Donetsk.

See also:

[International Investigation Stalled at MH17 Site](#)

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