

Forum: United Nations Security Council
Issue: Territorial Dispute in Ukraine
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Overview

The crisis in Ukraine began with protests in the capital city of Kiev in November 2013 against Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. After a violent crackdown by state security forces unintentionally drew an even greater number of protesters and escalated the conflict, President Yanukovich fled the country in February 2014.



In March 2014, Russian troops took control of the Crimean region, before formally annexing the peninsula after Crimeans voted to join the Russian Federation in a disputed local referendum. Russian President Vladimir Putin cited the need to protect the rights of Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Crimea and southeast Ukraine. The crisis heightened ethnic

divisions, and two months later pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine held a referendum to declare independence from Ukraine.

Violence in Eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed separatist forces and the Ukrainian military has injured more than 22,400 and killed over 9,500. Although Moscow denies its involvement, Ukraine and NATO have reported the buildup of Russian troops and military equipment near Donetsk and Russian cross-border shelling.

International headlines have long featured stories and images of the ongoing refugee crisis in the Middle East, however, few are aware that the fourth-largest source of internal refugees in was within Europe itself. Ukraine now keeps company with Iraq, Syria, and Yemen as one of the world's leading producers of internal refugees, around 1.7 million internally displaced and another 1.4 million Ukrainians living as refugees in western Europe and Russia. Aid agencies say that 4.4 million people have been directly affected by the continuing hostilities, while 3.8 million need urgent assistance. The related migration wave sweeping southern Europe has generated a popular backlash that dominates the agenda of European politics.



STRINGER / REUTERS. A boy flees conflict in eastern Ukraine, February 2015.



Refugees are subject to violence from both sides of the conflict. A July 2016 report by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, condemned both the Russian and the Ukrainian governments for human rights abuses such as conscription, and the use of torture in the disputed territories. People often recounted the murder of their family members and the destruction of their home but was unaware which side was responsible. Even for the displaced who are able to reach safety, the governments from both sides offered minimal help. Most refugees struggled for shelter and often ended up in costly yet decrepit and overcrowded rentals.

The situation in Ukraine escalated into an international crisis, putting the United States and the European Union (EU) at odds with Russia, in July 2014, when a Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down over Ukrainian airspace, killing all 298 onboard, by what Dutch air accident investigators concluded in October 2015 was a Russian-built surface-to-air missile. In September 2016, investigators said that the missile system was provided by Russia, determining it was moved in to eastern Ukraine and then back to Russian territory following the downing of the airplane.

Since February 2015, Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany have attempted to broker a cessation in violence through the Minsk Accords, which include provisions for a cease-fire, withdrawal of heavy weaponry, and full Ukrainian government control throughout the conflict zone. However, efforts to reach a diplomatic settlement and satisfactory resolution have been unsuccessful.

Key Terms

Military Intervention

Russian troops took control of the Crimean region, before formally annexing the peninsula after Crimeans voted to join the Russian Federation in a disputed local referendum. Two months later pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine held a referendum to declare independence from Ukraine.

Displaced and Refugees

Over 4.4 million Ukrainians have been directly affected by the continuing hostilities, resulting a migration wave sweeping southern Europe and generated great concerns. Refugees suffered human rights abuses such as conscription, and the use of torture but was often unaware which side was responsible. Governments from both sides offered minimal help to refugees who struggled for shelter.

Lethal Supply

The United States and some of its allies already trained Ukrainian troops, and has been providing arms to Ukraine to the tune of \$300 million in 2016, claiming that weaponry will strengthen Kiev's hand and compel Russia to negotiate a just political settlement that ends the war in Ukraine's Donbas region.

Sanctions

In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and supporting rebels in eastern Ukraine, which has not been recognized internationally, Europe has imposed continuously escalated sanctions against Russia. The sanctions, included travel restrictions and asset freezes against 150 people and 38 companies.

Important Events/Timelines

Date	Event
2014	In February, Russian troops took control and then annexed Crimea after Crimeans allegedly voted to join the Russian Federation. In April, armed conflicts broke out between pro-Russian groups in the Donbas area and the Ukrainian government.
2015	In January, further evidences of Russian military vehicles inside conflict zones in Ukraine proved that military actions of separatists were Russian-backed.

- 2016** In September 28, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down by a Russian surface-to-air-missile.
- 2017** In July 25, France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine agreed on measures to reinforce a 2015 peace deal in Ukraine amid heightened conflict and called for the withdrawal of all forces and heavy weaponry. In December 20, fighting in eastern Ukraine escalated sharply, with European observers and Western diplomats reporting the heaviest fighting in nearly a year after heavy artillery barrages broke out.
- 2018** In September 14, The U.S. special envoy for Ukraine said the United States is considering sending additional lethal weaponry to the country amid concerns that Russia is increasing its military presence.

Major Nations/Organizations

Russian Federation

Russian troops took control of Crimea before its annexation and supported rebels in eastern Ukraine, like Donbas, by supplying lethal weapons. Russia faced condemnations from the international community but is yet to show any inclination to withdraw its troops.

Ukraine

Ukraine suffered from intervention from Russia and other influences in the past decade. The Eastern part of the country was involved in continuous conflicts and skirmishes leading to humanitarian abuses and labor loss. Although being supported by Western countries, Ukrainian governments' aim to join in the Western community was still held back by Russia and other intervening forces.

United States of America

United States strongly condemns Russia for its intervention in Ukraine. In contrast to former president Obama's objection of military assistance, the Trump administration is making a decision on transferring lethal weaponry to Ukraine, aiming to help Ukrainians defend

themselves by assisting with defense reforms and training Ukrainian forces under the risk of conflict escalation.

NATO

NATO has long opposed sending lethal weapons to Ukraine. NATO has moved in economic sanctions against Russia since the beginning of the conflict. European countries believe that negotiation is going to be the best and only solution to Ukrainian Conflict and warned against taking actions of any form which have the risk of escalating conflicts and other issues.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees provided humanitarian assistance to both sides of the conflict, presumably providing food, clothing, psychological counseling, employment services, and other forms of aid to the separatists.



The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is providing facilities for those displaced by the conflict, including tents at crossing points. Photograph: Oleksandr Ratushniak/European Union/ECHO

International Red Cross

IRC provides humanitarian aid to rebel-held areas, where the conventional economy has more or less broken down.

Important Documents/Passed Solutions

1. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine
2. Minsk Cease-fire Agreement
3. Minsk Cease-fire Agreement II

Statistics

(1) Civilian deaths in Ukraine from 14 April 2014 to 15 May 2017 (source: OHCHR)



(2) Recent arm-related civilian injuries.

	Adults			Children			Total
	Women	Men	Sex unkn.	Girls	Boys	Sex unkn.	
Killed	11	21	1		3		36
Injured	55	90	2	1	9		157
Total	66	111	3	1	12		193

Type of incident/weapon	Killed		Injured		Total
	Adults	Children	Adults	Children	
Mines, ERW, booby traps, IEDs and explosions of ammunition depots	19	3	60	4	86
Shelling (mortars, guns, howitzers, MLRS and tanks)	11		66	5	82
Small arms and light weapons	2		21	1	24
Other conflict-related incidents	1				1
TOTAL	33	3	147	10	193

Possible Solutions

Military Assistance

The Trump administration is in the midst of making a decision on whether to transfer lethal weaponry to Ukraine. The urge to give Ukraine lethal arms — most likely in the form of anti-tank weapons — is understandable. Since 2014, the Russians have occupied Crimea and sustained a separatist rebellion in Donbas that has claimed more than 10,000 lives. Russia has engaged in these acts of aggression in order to block Ukraine's desire to leave Moscow's sphere of influence and join the Western community. Under these circumstances, the United States aims to help Ukrainians defend themselves by assisting with defense reforms and training Ukrainian forces.

Even if the Trump administration were to take another step up the ladder of escalation, Russia still has the possibility to go one step further. Russia shares a 1500-mile land/sea border with Ukraine, making the Kremlin far more invested in the fate of Ukraine than Washington. Rather than playing to Russia's principal strength — its military advantage over Ukraine — the United States and its European allies intended to play to Russia's main vulnerability — its

economic weakness. This potential move also intended to give Ukraine's military the ability to impose new costs on the Russians and their proxies engaged in a separatist revolt in the country's eastern region of Donbas, thereby persuading the Kremlin to give up the fight.

But the result could be the opposite — an escalation in the conflict that might lead to further losses of Ukraine's territory and compromise its political stability. Sending lethal weapons to Ukraine has one further downside — it would cause a rift between the United States and Europe. Germany and France have been leading diplomatic efforts to find a diplomatic solution for Donbas — and both have long opposed sending lethal weapons to Ukraine because of its potential to escalate the conflict. The United States and Europe have moved in lock step since the beginning of the conflict, closely coordinating non-lethal military assistance to Ukraine as well as economic sanctions against Russia. European countries believed that Ukraine should not be encouraged to engage in an escalatory confrontation with Russia, warning that providing lethal weapons could further aggravate a zero-sum negotiation process that has failed to address issues central to a future settlement. Transatlantic solidarity has arguably been the West's strongest suit. If United States decides to head off on its own and send lethal weapons to Ukraine, solidarity on Ukraine may well come to end.

Cease-fire and Economic Sanction

Europeans warn of humanitarian catastrophe. French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for withdrawal of all forces and heavy arms from disputed areas in eastern Ukraine following a four-way “Normandy format” with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine. In his own readout from the Normandy call, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko pressed Russia to cease “aggressive actions,” stop the supply of weapons to occupied territories and let United Nations monitors into Donbas. The Franco-German plea came after more than two years of efforts to broker a cease-fire in Ukraine, on the sidelines of a G20 summit in France, back in 2014.

Despite years of talks and ongoing EU and U.S. sanctions against Moscow — Washington may soon reinforce their sanctions. The US sanctions would penalize firms, including European companies, that contribute to Russian energy development. The prospect prompted

a threat of retaliation from European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Some eastern EU countries in particular are opposed to retaliation, as they do not support projects that reinforce European dependence on Russian gas.

France and Germany also pressed the warring parties to let monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe into all conflict zones so they could verify withdrawals and compliance with cease-fire agreements. The loss of income due to the low price of fossil fuels and the international sanctions imposed in response to its aggression in Ukraine have taken a serious toll on the Russian economy. Keeping sanctions in place, confronting Russia with a united front and reap the accompanying commercial benefits is the West's strategy for pushing Russia to a diplomatic solution. However, neither side has fully complied with previously-agreed de-escalation measures as both Minsk Cease-fire Agreements went aborted.

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