



NATO



Topic I: The Ukrainian Crisis

Historical Context

After the Allied victory in World War II all of Ukraine was transferred to the Soviet Union, yet armed resistance to Soviet rule in the Ukraine lasted for another 9 years. The 1960s brought more opposition to Soviet rule albeit through more covert means, and resistance to Russian control culminated in 1990 protests that brought down the government of Vitaliy Masol and a referendum that showed 90% of the population in favour of independence. In 1991, Ukraine was finally independent – yet it still had to be decided whether it would be pro-Russian or pro-Western. Its stance, it turns out, has varied by the year.

NATO and its member countries have consistently attempted to maintain good relations with Ukraine since it achieved independence in the hopes of creating a steadfast ally on Russia's border. Russia has always enjoyed a great deal of respect in Ukraine, especially in the East, although its influence in and support for the country has waxed and waned with the attitudes of those in power in the Ukraine. Cooperation between NATO and the Ukraine began in 1991, with newly independent Ukraine joining the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. Ukraine joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme in 1994, a "program of practical bilateral cooperation between NATO and individual partner countries, through which, these countries can develop relations with NATO, independently determining their own priorities for cooperation. The essence of PfP is the partnership between NATO and a partner country, which is formed on the individual basis, according to the individual needs of the country, and is



implemented jointly at the level and with speed, chosen by the government of each participating country.”- NATO. The Ukraine PfP has worked primarily to boost the country’s defence and security capabilities. Relations between Ukraine and NATO were strengthened with the signing of the 1997 Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, which established the NATO- Ukraine Commission (NUC) to take cooperation forward. Ukraine seemed to be on track to join itself as an ally of NATO. However, in 1997 a friendship treaty between Russia and Ukraine was also signed, and the two countries reached an agreement on the Sevastopol Fleet based in Crimea the same year. Due to their geographical proximity, there was cooperation between them, helped greatly by the government in power in Ukraine at the time.

In 2001 Viktor Yushchenko’s government, respected by Western powers for his efforts against corruption, was dismissed following a no-confidence vote in parliament possibly spurred by prominent businessmen. This was seen as a setback for Western interests in the Ukraine and for democracy in the country as a whole. Ukraine’s political leanings continued to shift. In 2002, leadership in the Ukraine announced their intention of a formal bid to join NATO – an ambition that has not yet been realized. Despite this, relations with the west worsened in that same year as President Kuchma was found to have been selling radar systems to Iraq. In August of 2004, the government ignored the EU’s pleas and opened a canal in the Danube delta, connecting to the Black Sea.

In November of 2004 Viktor Yanukovych won the Presidential election, yet Western and independent observers found widespread evidence of election rigging. The candidate for the opposition, the previously mentioned Yushchenko, began a mass protest and civilians took to the street in orange – lending the Revolution its name. The Supreme Court annulled the first election, and in a



repeated vote Viktor Yushenko took power. Yushenko was sworn in on January 2005 with a promise to eliminate the rampant corruption as he had in his first try in government. Yushenko was also quite pro-Western. NATO's hopes were high. Unfortunately, Yushenko's government disappointed once it gained power. By 2006 his party trailed in 3rd in Parliamentary elections, and Yushenko was forced to permit his rival Yanukovych – the man he deposed just two years earlier - to become Prime Minister (yes, there are both a Prime Minister and President in the Ukraine). 2007 brought the resignation of a close ally of Yushenko and NATO, Yushenko's Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk. The parliamentary elections of that year brought no clear winner, but pro-Russian parties gained a small majority. These two events, along with the 2008 agreement between Gazprom and Ukraine, were not good signs for NATO. Pro-Russian Yanukovych came back to power in 2010 Presidential Elections, and appointed his ally Mykola Azarov as Prime Minister. Parliament, beginning to swing towards Russian influence, ratified an agreement to extend the Russian lease on the Black Sea Fleet by 25 years and voted to abandon NATO membership aspirations by the end of the year. In 2012 parliament passed a bill with little debate to give Russian regional language status, prompting protests in Kiev. Yet in October 2012 the first parliamentary elections since Yanukovych's elections produced a large win for his party and the advance of the far-right Freedom Party. The United States and European Union both expressed concerns over how the election was conducted. Despite this, at the same time Ukraine was attempting to integrate further into the EU. It was at this time that Russia halted imports from one of Ukraine's largest confectionary makers, a move that was seen as political punishment for the EU integration efforts.



In 2013 Parliament suddenly decided to abandon the signing of an association agreement with the EU, sparking another round of protests in Kiev as politicians were accused of being corrupt and under Russian influence. In February of 2014 seventy-seven protesters were killed in Kiev, and Yanukovych was forced to flee the country. The opposition under interim president Olexander Turchynov gained power and promised to strengthen ties to Europe. Russia did not recognize the change of government.

Current Situation

In 2013 Parliament suddenly decided to abandon the signing of an association agreement with the EU, sparking another round of protests in Kiev as politicians were accused of being corrupt and under Russian influence. In February of 2014 seventy-seven protesters were killed in Kiev, and Yanukovych was forced to flee the country. The opposition under interim president Olexander Turchynov gained power and promised to strengthen ties to Europe. Russia did not recognize the change of government.

March of 2014 brought the Russian annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea, and pro-Russian separatists also seized parts of Eastern Donetsk and Luhansk. The Ukrainian government began military operations in response. In 2014 Petro Poroshenko won the presidential election – albeit an election not including much of the east of the country – on a platform friendly to the West, and signed a delayed EU association accord. The conflict since has been characterized by broken ceasefire agreements (some negotiated by NATO members), allegations of Russian military involvement, and tension throughout



the region. Some fighting continues in the “Donbass” region, and Ukraine has yet to regain control over both Donetsk and Luhansk. Members of NATO have individually placed heavy sanctions on the Russian government in wake of the crisis, and NATO as a whole has repeatedly denounced the Russian annexation of Ukraine. NATO’s assistance has mostly been limited to behind-the-scenes strengthening of Ukraine’s defense capabilities, as well as the deployment of civil advisors. There has been no commitment of troops, and there does not seem to be one coming in the immediate future.

More recently, Russia has been taking aggressive action against other Baltic nations. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are all concerned about Russian intervention, considering that Russia has previously stated that they will stop at nothing to protect their citizens. In addition to this, there is currently an investigation into war crimes committed during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War between the Georgian government and Russian backed separatists. Russian intervention into Georgia sent a powerful message to other Baltic nations regarding Russia’s ability to defend it’s people.

NATO Actions

From the beginning of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, NATO has taken a stance in support of Ukraine's sovereignty. On April 1st, 2014, NATO met with Ukrainian ministers to halt military and civilian cooperation with Russia. Members of NATO have individually placed heavy sanctions on the Russian government in wake of the crisis, and NATO as a whole has repeatedly denounced the Russian annexation of Ukraine. NATO’s assistance has mostly been limited to behind-the-scenes strengthening of Ukraine’s defense



capabilities, as well as the deployment of civil advisors. There has been no commitment of troops, and there does not seem to be one coming in the immediate future. NATO has set up a trust fund support system for Ukraine in 5 key areas: Command, control, communications and computers (also known as C4), cyber defense, military career transition and medical rehabilitation. In addition to these 5 areas, NATO is also providing financial and advisory support to Ukraine and strengthening advisory positions in Kiev where they are helping to implement the trust fund supports.

Questions to Consider

1. Is your country at any special risk from Russian aggression?
2. How far can NATO go; are you willing to return to the hostility of the latter half of the 20th Century?
3. Can NATO allow Ukraine to function long-term without Crimea?
4. How can we address the issue of inconsistent leadership that rotates between the West and Russia?

Sources

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18010123>

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm

<http://www.natolibguides.info/nato-ukraine>

<http://nato.mfa.gov.ua/en/ukraine-nato/military>

<http://nato.mfa.gov.ua/en/ukraine-nato/Partnership>



http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/08/18/georgia-international-groups-should-send-missions>

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/georgia>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-eastern-europe-lithuania-vladimir-putin-estonia-latvia-a7449961.html>



Topic II: War in Syria

Historical Context

In 1970, after overthrowing the two ruling heads of Syria, Hafez al-Assad, the current minister of defense, took control of the Syrian government and began the Assad regime in Syria. Throughout the rest of the 1970's, Syria would involve itself in a multitude of wars, including declaring war against Israel and intervening in the Lebanese civil war to ensure that their allies remained in government. 1980 brought the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in which Syria backed Iran, creating tensions between Iraq and Syria which would last for many years to come. When Hafez al-Assad died in 2000, he was succeeded by Bashar al-Assad, the current ruler of Syria. Bashar was elected president after he ran unopposed in 2000. The new governance of Bashar al-Assad brought hope to Syrians, as he eased the government control over the media, allowing independent newspapers to be published for the first time in three decades. Meetings calling for democratic reform were even allowed to take place under the new Assad government, but only for a short time. Assad has since moved backwards on independence of Syria, seizing control of the media and shutting down and imprisoning political enemies. Even internet access is controlled by the government, the only two internet cafes in Damascus are state controlled.

Tensions between the US and Syria rose in 2002 when senior members of the bush administration listed Syria in a group of countries that made up an "axis of evil." In addition to this, then secretary of state John Bolton accused Damascus of acquiring weapons of mass destruction. In 2004 the US imposed economic sanctions in Syria citing a failure to stop militants from entering Iraq



and a support of terrorism. Tensions rose further after former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafik Hariri, was killed on February 14th, 2005. Many accused Syrian tampering in Lebanon as the cause of his death. Following Hariri's death, the US called for the immediate withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon and in April they obliged, pulling all 14,000 troops out of Lebanon.

During the latter half of the early 2000's, Syria sought to restore diplomatic ties with many countries across the Middle East and beyond, starting with Iraq in November of 2006. Just four months later in March of 2007, the European Union relaunched dialogue with Syria in order to regain ties with the country. In April of the same year, the US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi would meet with president Assad in Damascus, becoming the highest-ranking US government official to visit Syria in many years. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would meet with Syrian foreign minister Walid Muallem for the first time in two years. In 2008 Assad would meet with the current French President, Nicolas Sarkozy and Syria would establish diplomatic ties with Lebanon for the first time in since the countries became independent in the 1940s. During this time, Syria had made some economic strides and even launched a stock exchange to liberalize the government controlled economy.

Current Situation

In 2011 pro-democracy protests erupted across the Middle East. Originating in Tunisia in late 2010, the movement swept across Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. The movement was called the "Arab Spring," and its goals were to put a larger emphasis on a democratic government and the aspects that it entailed, election, economic freedom, human rights, employment, regime change and freedom of religion were all



issues that the Arab Spring sought to address. While in some countries the protests and social activism were effective in changing how the government operated (Egypt and Morocco are good examples of this), in Syria the Assad regime cracked down hard on protesters. Conflict first erupted in March of 2011 when Syrian forces killed protesters in the southern city of Deraa. This caused violence and unrest across the rest of the country, resulting in President Assad mobilizing the Syrian army and declaring a state of emergency. During this time the US and European Union had tightened economic sanctions and along with Britain, France and Turkey, recognized the National Coalition (Syrian opposition forces) as a “legitimate representative,” of the Syrian people. The violence in Syria had quickly morphed into an all out civil war between the government and opposition forces. Conflict was worsened in 2013 when UN inspectors concluded that chemical weapons had been deployed by the government against the Syrian people in a region of the capital city of Damascus. The UN called for the Syrian government to destroy its chemical weapons, which was completed in June of 2014. Fighting continued throughout 2014, with UN supervised peace talks in Geneva failing. To make matters even more complicated, the terrorist group calling themselves “the Islamic State,” (you may know them as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; ISIL or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; ISIS), participated in the violent conflicts between the Assad government and Syrian rebels. Assad was able to use the Islamic State of Iraq’s presence as an excuse to label his efforts as a “War on Terror”, with very similar rhetoric as NATO countries have been using for a long time. Meanwhile in Iraq, President Maliki arrested Sunni members of his cabinet on charges of supporting terrorism and oversaw crackdowns on the Sunni protests that followed. This gave rise to more antagonism from the Sunni population, antagonism that was quickly exploited by jihadists. The international



community has responded with bombing campaigns from the air in the face of an unwillingness to commit ground troops from major powers. Despite the volume of airstrikes launched, little impact has seemingly been made on ISIL – especially seeing their continued effects in NATO countries.

Russia, in efforts to support the Assad regime (the same one that NATO countries look to topple), lent its own air support in the region. They bombed mostly Syrian rebel factions, although claimed to be hitting ISIL. Turkey, a NATO member state, has been accused of covertly aiding ISIL, allowing ISIL oil to travel through their borders, and using the crisis as an excuse to fight the ethnic Kurd population.

Currently Syria is controlled by five major groups, Assad's government forces, Syrian Democratic forces (a multi-ethnic group fighting to create a democratic and secular Syria), the Islamic State, Tahrir al-Sham (a terrorist group, formerly Al-Qaeda), and Syrian opposition forces. Assad's forces control the more densely populated areas of Syria to the west, most importantly they control the capital city of Damascus and the port city of Latakia. Syrian Democratic forces control most of northern Syria and control the city of al-Hasakah. The Islamic State controls most of southeastern Syria, but mainly in remote areas and around where Syria borders Iraq. While the Islamic State does control a significant amount of land in Syria, they have been losing ground in recent years. Tahrir al-Sham controls small parts of northwestern Syria around Aleppo. Lastly the Syrian opposition forces control areas in the north and southwestern zones of Syria, in the north around Aleppo and in the south around Daraa.



NATO Response

NATO has currently taken no action in Syria other than member nations placing sanctions on the government and condemning Assad's actions. NATO has been worried about Russian actions in Syria, particularly in how determined they seem in supporting the Assad regime against the rebel opposition forces. NATO defence ministers have pledged to take action against Russia's "aggressive and dangerous," actions in Syria. NATO is prepared to respond to Russian action in Syria, but so far has not taken any steps to do so. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that "we now have everything in place to make the Response Force stronger, faster and more capable."

NATO, to this point, has taken no steps as a body to combat ISIL. All 28 member states are already a part of the air coalition, however NATO itself is not involved. Saudi Arabia has offered the possibility of sending their troops into Syria, and indeed NATO must use all its allies in the region to defeat ISIL (and must determine who truly is an ally in the conflict). At the end of 2015 NATO seemed to move away from the idea of ground troops, but it has become clear that someone's ground troops are needed – and those of other countries in the Middle East have their own problems and ulterior motives. In all, the situation in Iraq and Syria is chaos.



Questions to Consider

1. Which governments in the region could be allies? Enemies?
2. Are ground troops ever an option? If yes, at what point?
3. Which groups within Syria should NATO choose to side with?
4. How should NATO best deal with the Russian intervention into Syria?

Sources

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-conflict-nato-raises-response-force-to-40000-troops-in-face-of-russia-s-aggressive-and-a6687046.html>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17088270>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/26/syria-us-un-inspection-kerry>

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2579331.stm

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>