



## The Russo-Ukraine crisis: Reactions of annexation and its global implications

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### Abstract

The Russo-Ukraine Crisis, which erupted in 2014, has emerged as a multifaceted and enduring geopolitical conundrum with far-reaching global ramifications. Originating from Ukraine's historical ties to Russia and its aspirations for closer integration with the European Union and NATO, the crisis has evolved through a series of pivotal events. This abstract provides a succinct overview of the crisis, shedding light on its origins and subsequent progression.

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 stands as a defining moment in the crisis. Following Ukraine's tumultuous political shift, Crimea, a region historically inhabited by a Russian-majority population but legally part of Ukraine since 1954, was seized by Russian forces. A controversial and widely condemned referendum, denounced by many as illegitimate, led to Crimea's integration into the Russian Federation. Simultaneously, a distinct but interconnected conflict was unfolding in Eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Pro-Russian separatist groups, suspected of receiving support from Moscow, declared independence and expressed their intention to join Russia. Over time, this regional unrest transformed into a protracted and devastating conflict, characterized by a heavy toll on human lives and the displacement of countless civilians. This abstract now proceeds to highlight the global implications stemming from the Russo-Ukraine Crisis. Notably, the crisis has profoundly disrupted security paradigms in Europe, prompting a robust response from NATO and increasing tensions between the alliance and Russia. The sanctions imposed by Western nations, particularly the European Union and the United States, have significantly impacted Russia's economy and strained its relations with the Western world.

**Keywords:** Global implications, Russo-Ukraine crisis

### Introduction

The Russo-Ukrainian War is an ongoing international conflict between Russia, alongside Russian-backed separatists, and Ukraine, which began in February 2014. Following Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity, Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine and supported pro-Russian separatists fighting the Ukrainian military in the Donbas war. The first eight years of conflict also included naval incidents, cyberwarfare, and heightened political tensions. In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In early 2014, the Euromaidan protests led to the Revolution of Dignity and the ousting of Ukraine's pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich. Shortly after, pro-Russian unrest erupted in eastern and southern Ukraine. Simultaneously, unmarked Russian troops moved into Ukraine's Crimea and took over government buildings, strategic sites and infrastructure. Russia soon annexed Crimea after a highly-disputed referendum. In April 2014, armed pro-Russian separatists seized government buildings in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region and proclaimed the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) as independent states, starting the Donbas war. The separatists received considerable but covert support from Russia, and Ukrainian attempts to fully retake separatist-held areas failed. Although Russia denied involvement, Russian troops took part in the fighting. In February 2015, Russia and Ukraine signed the Minsk II agreements to end the conflict, but the agreements were never fully implemented in the years that followed. The Donbas war settled into a violent but static conflict between Ukraine and Russian proxies, with many brief ceasefires but no lasting peace and few changes in territorial control.

Beginning in 2021, Russia built up a large military presence near its border with Ukraine, including within neighbouring Belarus. Russian officials repeatedly denied plans to attack Ukraine. Russian president Vladimir Putin criticized the enlargement of NATO and demanded that Ukraine be barred from ever joining the military alliance. He also expressed irredentist views and questioned Ukraine's right to exist. Russia recognized the DPR and LPR as independent states in February 2022, with Putin announcing a "special military operation" in Ukraine and subsequently invading the region for Ukraine's "demilitarization and denazification", and claiming Russia had no plans to occupy Ukrainian land. The invasion was internationally condemned; many countries imposed sanctions against Russia and increased existing sanctions. Russia abandoned an attempt to take Kyiv in early April 2022 amid fierce resistance. From August, Ukrainian forces began recapturing territories in the north-east and south as a result of counter-offensives.

### Historical Background

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991, Ukraine and Russia maintained close ties. In 1994, Ukraine agreed to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-nuclear-weapon state. Former Soviet nuclear weapons in Ukraine were removed and dismantled. In return, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States agreed to uphold the territorial integrity and political independence of Ukraine through the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. In 1999, Russia was one of the signatories of the Charter for European Security, which "reaffirmed the inherent right of each and every

participating State to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, as they evolve." In the years after the dissolution of the USSR, several former Eastern Bloc countries joined NATO, partly in response to regional security threats involving Russia such as the 1993 Russian constitutional crisis, the War in Abkhazia (1992-1993) and the First Chechen War (1994-1996). Putin claimed Western powers broke promises not to let any Eastern European countries join.

The 2004 Ukrainian presidential election was controversial. During the election campaign, opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko was poisoned by TCDD dioxin,<sup>[11] [12]</sup> he later accused Russia of involvement. In November, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich was declared the winner, despite allegations of vote-rigging by election observers. During a two-month period which became known as the Orange Revolution, large peaceful protests successfully challenged the outcome. After the Supreme Court of Ukraine annulled the initial result due to widespread electoral fraud, a second round re-run was held, bringing to power Yushchenko as president and Yulia Tymoshenko as prime minister, and leaving Yanukovich in opposition. The Orange Revolution is often grouped together with other early-21st century protest movements, particularly within the former USSR, known as colour revolutions. According to Anthony Cordesman, Russian military officers viewed such colour revolutions as an attempt by the US and European states to destabilise neighbouring countries and undermine Russia's national security. Russian President Vladimir Putin accused organisers of the 2011-2013 Russian protests of being former advisors to Yushchenko, and described the protests as an attempt to transfer the Orange Revolution to Russia. Rallies in favour of Putin during this period were called "anti-Orange protests".

At the 2008 Bucharest summit, Ukraine and Georgia sought to join NATO. The response among NATO members was divided; Western European countries opposed offering Membership Action Plans (MAP) in order to avoid antagonising Russia, while US President George W. Bush pushed for their admission. NATO ultimately refused to offer Ukraine and Georgia MAPs, but also issued a statement agreeing that "these countries will become members of NATO" at some point. Putin voiced strong opposition to Georgia and Ukraine's NATO membership bids. By January 2022, the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO remained remote.

In 2009, Yanukovich announced his intent to again run for president in the 2010 Ukrainian presidential election, which he subsequently won. In November 2013, a wave of large, pro-European Union (EU) protests erupted in response to Yanukovich's sudden decision not to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, instead choosing closer ties to Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union. On 22 February 2013 the Ukrainian parliament had overwhelmingly approved of finalizing the agreement with the EU subsequent to which Russia had put pressure on Ukraine to reject it.

### **The Euromaidan Movement**

Following months of protests as part of the Euromaidan movement, on 21 February 2014 Yanukovich and the leaders of the parliamentary opposition signed a settlement agreement that called for early elections. The following day, Yanukovich fled from the capital ahead of an impeachment

vote that stripped him of his powers as president. On 23 February, the parliament adopted a bill to repeal the 2012 law which gave Russian language an official status.<sup>[30]</sup> The bill was not enacted, however, the proposal provoked negative reactions in the Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine, intensified by Russian media saying that the ethnic Russian population was in imminent danger.

On 27 February, an interim government was established and early presidential elections were scheduled. The following day, Yanukovich resurfaced in Russia and in a press conference declared that he remained the acting president of Ukraine, just as Russia was beginning its overt military campaign in Crimea. Leaders of Russian-speaking eastern regions of Ukraine declared continuing loyalty to Yanukovich, causing the 2014 pro-Russian unrest in Ukraine.

### **Annexation of Crimea**

On 20 February 2014, Russia began an annexation of Crimea. On 22 and 23 February, under the relative power vacuum immediately after the ousting of Viktor Yanukovich, Russian troops and special forces began moving into Crimea through Novorossiysk. On 27 February, Russian forces without insignias began their advance into the Crimean Peninsula. They took strategic positions and captured the Crimean Parliament, raising a Russian flag. Security checkpoints isolated the Crimean Peninsula from the rest of Ukraine and restricted movement within the territory.

In the following days, Russian soldiers secured key airports and a communications center. Russian cyberattacks shut down websites associated with the Ukrainian government, news media, and social media. Cyberattacks also enabled Russian access to the mobile phones of Ukrainian officials and members of parliament, further disrupting communications.

On 1 March, the Russian legislature approved the use of armed forces, leading to an influx of Russian troops and military hardware into the peninsula. In the following days, all remaining Ukrainian military bases and installations were surrounded and besieged, including the Southern Naval Base. After Russia formally annexed the peninsula on 18 March, Ukrainian military bases and ships were stormed by Russian forces. On 24 March, Ukraine ordered troops to withdraw; by 30 March, all Ukrainian forces had left the peninsula.

On 15 April, the Ukrainian parliament declared Crimea a territory temporarily occupied by Russia. After the annexation, the Russian government increased its military presence in the region and made nuclear threats. Putin said that a Russian military task force would be established in Crimea. In November, NATO stated that it believed Russia was deploying nuclear-capable weapons to Crimea. Since the annexation of Crimea, certain NATO members have been providing training for the Ukrainian army.

### **Line of conflict stabilizes (2015-2021)**

After the Minsk agreements, the war settled into static trench warfare around the agreed line of contact, with few changes in territorial control. The conflict was marked by artillery duels, special forces operations, and trench warfare. Hostilities never ceased for a substantial period of time, but continued at a low level despite repeated attempts at ceasefire. In the months after the fall of Debaltseve, minor

skirmishes continued along the line of contact, but no territorial changes occurred. Both sides began fortifying their position by building networks of trenches, bunkers and tunnels, turning the conflict into static trench warfare. The relatively static conflict was labelled a "frozen" by some, but Russia never achieved this as the fighting never stopped. Between 2014 and 2022 there were 29 ceasefires, each agreed to remain in force indefinitely. However, none of them lasted more than two weeks.<sup>[156]</sup>

US and international officials continued to report the active presence of Russian military in eastern Ukraine, including in the Debaltseve area. In 2015, Russian separatist forces were estimated to number around 36,000 troops (compared to 34,000 Ukrainian), of whom 8,500-10,000 were Russian soldiers. Additionally, around 1,000 GRU troops were operating in the area. Another 2015 estimate held that Ukrainian forces outnumbered Russian forces 40,000 to 20,000. In 2017, on average one Ukrainian soldier died in combat every three days, with an estimated 6,000 Russian and 40,000 separatist troops in the region. In August 2016, the Ukrainian intelligence service, the SBU, published telephone intercepts from 2014 of Sergey Glazyev (Russian presidential adviser), Konstantin Zatulin, and other people in which they discussed covert funding of pro-Russian activists in Eastern Ukraine, the occupation of administration buildings and other actions that triggered the conflict. As early as February 2014, Glazyev gave direct instructions to various pro-Russian parties on how to take over local administration offices, what to do afterwards, how to formulate demands, and promised support from Russia, including "sending our guys"

**2019-2020:** More than 110 Ukrainian soldiers were killed in the conflict in 2019. In May 2019, newly elected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky took office promising to end the war in Donbas. In December 2019, Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists began swapping prisoners of war. Around 200 prisoners were exchanged on 29 December 2019. According to Ukrainian authorities, 50 Ukrainian soldiers were killed in 2020. Since 2019, Russia has issued over 650,000 internal Russian passports to Ukrainians.

### Human rights violations

Violations of human rights and atrocity crimes have both occurred during the war. From 2014 to 2021, there were more than 3,000 civilian casualties, with most occurring in 2014 and 2015. The right of movement was impeded for the inhabitants of the conflict zone. Arbitrary detention was practiced by both sides in the first years of the conflict. It decreased after 2016 in government-held areas, while in the separatist-held ones it continued. Investigations into the abuses committed by both sides made little progress. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian authorities and armed forces have committed multiple war crimes in the form of deliberate attacks against civilian targets, massacres of civilians, torture and rape of women and children, and indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas. After the Russian withdrawal from areas north of Kyiv, overwhelming evidence of war crimes by Russian forces was discovered. In particular, in the town of Bucha, evidence emerged of a massacre of civilians perpetrated by Russian troops, including torture, mutilation, rape, looting and deliberate killings of civilians, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (OHCHR) has documented the murder of at least 73 civilians - mostly

men, but also women and children - in Bucha. More than 1,200 bodies of civilians were found in the Kyiv region after Russian forces withdrew, some of them summarily executed. There were reports of forced deportations of thousands of civilians, including children, to Russia, mainly from Russian-occupied Mariupol, as well as sexual violence, including cases of rape, sexual assault and gang rape, and deliberate killing of Ukrainian civilians by Russian forces. Ukrainian forces have also been accused of committing various war crimes, including mistreatment of detainees, though on a much smaller scale than Russian forces.

### Reactions to the Russian annexation of Crimea Ukrainian response

Interim Ukrainian President Oleksandr Turchynov accused Russia of "provoking a conflict" by backing the seizure of the Crimean parliament building and other government offices on the Crimean peninsula. He compared Russia's military actions to the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, when Russian troops occupied parts of the Republic of Georgia and the breakaway enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were established under the control of Russian-backed administrations. He called on Putin to withdraw Russian troops from Crimea and stated that Ukraine will "preserve its territory" and "defend its independence". On 1 March, he warned, "Military intervention would be the beginning of war and the end of any relations between Ukraine and Russia." On 1 March, Acting President Oleksandr Turchynov placed the Armed Forces of Ukraine on full alert and combat readiness. The Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs was established by Ukrainian government on 20 April 2016 to manage occupied parts of Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea regions affected by Russian military intervention of 2014.

### Reactions to the Russian invasion of Ukraine Ukrainian public opinion

In March 2022, a week after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, 98% of Ukrainians - including 82% of ethnic Russians living in Ukraine - said they did not believe that any part of Ukraine was rightfully part of Russia, according to Lord Ashcroft's polls which did not include Crimea and the separatist-controlled part of Donbas. 97% of Ukrainians said they had an unfavourable view of Russian President Vladimir Putin, with a further 94% saying they had an unfavourable view of the Russian Armed Forces.

At the end of 2021, 75% of Ukrainians said they had a positive attitude toward ordinary Russians, while in May 2022, 82% of Ukrainians said they had a negative attitude toward ordinary Russians.

### Russian Public Opinion

An April 2022 survey by the Levada Centre reported that approximately 74% of the Russians polled supported the "special military operation" in Ukraine, suggesting that Russian public opinion has shifted considerably since 2014. According to some sources, a reason many Russians supported the "special military operation" has to do with the propaganda and disinformation. In addition, it has been suggested that some respondents did not want to answer pollsters' questions for fear of negative consequences. At the end of March, a poll conducted in Russia by the Levada Center concluded the following: When asked why they

think the military operation is taking place, respondents said it was to protect and defend civilians, ethnic Russians or Russian speakers in Ukraine (43%), to prevent an attack on Russia (25%), to get rid of nationalists and "denazify" Ukraine (21%), and to incorporate Ukraine or the Donbas region into Russia (3%). "According to polls, the Russian President's rating rose from 71% on the eve of the invasion to 82% in March 2023.

**The Russo-Ukraine crisis has far-reaching implications across multiple dimensions, impacting not only Russia and Ukraine but also the broader international community. Some of the key implications include Security Paradigms in Europe**

The crisis has significantly altered security dynamics in Europe. NATO has bolstered its presence in Eastern Europe in response to perceived Russian aggression, leading to increased military tensions between Russia and the alliance. This has raised questions about the security of NATO member states in the region and has prompted discussions about collective defense and deterrence.

**Economic Sanctions and Economic Impact**

Western nations, particularly the European Union and the United States, have imposed a series of economic sanctions on Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine. These sanctions have had a substantial economic impact on Russia, including restricted access to international financial markets and a depreciation of the ruble. Conversely, Ukraine's economy has faced significant challenges due to the ongoing conflict, including disruptions to trade and investment.

**Energy Security**

Ukraine serves as a critical transit route for Russian natural gas exports to Europe. The crisis has highlighted the vulnerability of European energy security and has spurred efforts to diversify energy sources and reduce dependency on Russian gas. This has implications for the global energy landscape and Russia's leverage over Europe.

**Nationalism and Identity Politics**

The conflict has fueled nationalism and identity politics in both Russia and Ukraine. In Russia, the annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine have been framed as acts of protecting Russian-speaking populations. In Ukraine, the conflict has reinforced a sense of national identity and unity. These dynamics have contributed to a hardening of attitudes and a deepening of historical grievances.

**Global Geopolitics**

The Russo-Ukraine crisis has not been confined to the immediate region; it has reverberated through global geopolitics. It has affected Russia's relations with other major powers, including China and the United States. Russia's more assertive foreign policy posture, coupled with tensions with the West, has created a more complex global geopolitical landscape.

**International Law and Territorial Integrity**

The annexation of Crimea by Russia challenged the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity enshrined in international law. This act set a troubling precedent for

the violation of established borders, raising concerns about the sanctity of international norms and the potential for similar actions in other regions.

**Humanitarian Impact**

The ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine has had severe humanitarian consequences, with thousands of deaths and a significant number of internally displaced persons. The humanitarian crisis has strained resources and posed challenges for international aid organizations.

**Diplomatic and Peace Efforts**

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis have been challenging, with ceasefires often violated and peace talks yielding limited progress. The Minsk agreements, brokered by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), have been the primary framework for negotiations but have faced difficulties in implementation.

**Conclusion**

Beginning in late February 2014, demonstrations by pro-Russian and anti-government groups took place in major cities across the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. The first protests across southern and eastern Ukraine were largely native expressions of discontent with the new Ukrainian government. Russian involvement at this stage was limited to voicing support for the demonstrations. Russia exploited this, however, launching a coordinated political and military campaign against Ukraine. Putin gave legitimacy to the separatists when he described the Donbas as part of "New Russia" (.Novorossiya), and expressed bewilderment as to how the region had ever become part of Ukraine.

In late March, Russia continued to gather forces near the Ukrainian eastern border, reaching 30-40,000 troops by April. The deployment was used to threaten escalation and disrupt Ukraine's response. This threat forced Ukraine to divert forces to its borders instead of the conflict zone.

Ukrainian authorities cracked down on the pro-Russian protests and arrested local separatist leaders in early March. Those leaders were replaced by people with ties to the Russian security services and interests in Russian businesses. By April 2014, Russian citizens had taken control of the separatist movement, supported by volunteers and materiel from Russia, including Chechen and Cossack fighters. According to Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) commander Igor Girkin, without this support in April, the movement would have dissipated, as it had in Kharkiv and Odesa. The separatist groups held disputed referendums in May which were not recognised by Ukraine or any other UN member state.

In April, armed conflict began in eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed separatist forces and Ukraine. The separatists declared the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. From 6 April, militants occupied government buildings in many cities and took control of border crossings to Russia, transport hubs, a broadcasting center, and other strategic infrastructure. On 12 April several armed groups took cities of Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and then Horlivka, Druzhkivka in subsequent days. They were lead by people like retired Russian colonel Igor Girkin, lieutenant colonel Igor Bezier. Faced with continued expansion of separatist territorial control, on 15 April the interim Ukrainian government launched an "Anti-Terrorist Operation" (ATO),

however, Ukrainian forces were poorly prepared and ill-positioned and the operation quickly stalled.

### Recommendation

1. All parties involved should make a concerted effort to reengage in diplomatic negotiations. This includes adherence to existing agreements such as the Minsk Agreements and seeking to update and strengthen them to address current challenges.
2. Encourage impartial international mediation to facilitate talks between Ukraine and Russia. The involvement of neutral mediators or organizations can help build trust and bridge gaps between the conflicting parties.
3. Prioritize humanitarian assistance to the affected regions in Eastern Ukraine. The wellbeing of the civilian population should be a primary concern, and efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis should be intensified.
4. Explore avenues to restore economic and trade relations between Ukraine and Russia in a way that benefits both countries. Economic cooperation can contribute to stability in the region.

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