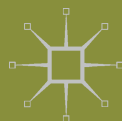# RUSSIA'S BORDER WARS & FROZEN CONFLICTS

James J. Coyle

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PREFACE

In April 2015, Chapman University held a conference in Los Angeles to examine several frozen conflicts around the world. Participants were asked to focus on what these conflicts have in common, how they differ, and what options remain unexplored to resolve these conflicts. The speakers looked at a number of conflicts on the periphery of the former Soviet Union. These conflicts provide an excellent example of disagreements where similarities and differences could be isolated. Frozen conflicts are not just a problem among emerging nations, however; they can be found in the continuing hostility between ethnic communities in the Balkans, in the struggle for political identity in the Kashmir, in the perpetuation of World War II between Russia and Japan over control of the Kuril Islands, etc. The conference also focused on a legacy of the Cold War, the frozen conflict on the Korean peninsula.

The conference was co-sponsored by Loyola Marymount University, the University of Southern California, and the Atlantic Council. This volume expands upon the presentations of two of the panels: Panel One addressed the situations in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine; and Panel Two looked at the struggle between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The review of these conflicts demonstrates that, whether the parties in the conflict began the conflict by themselves or in alliances with others, the two sides no longer have the ability to resolve the situation on their own. The longer a conflict perseveres, the greater ethnic tensions arise— even if the two sides share the same ethnic background, as in the case

of the two Koreas. The national interests of one side frequently clash directly with the interests of the other so that, on their own, compromise seems impossible.

In such situations, it becomes incumbent upon world leaders to mediate diplomatic negotiations to halt the conflicts. When everyone negotiates in good faith, then George Mitchell is able to shepherd the warring sides in Northern Ireland into signing the Good Friday accords. Jimmy Carter can convince Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat to sign the Camp David Accords. When the international mediators use the peace process to further their own ends at the expense of the belligerent parties, however, the result is continuation of conflict. To achieve peace in this situation, other possibilities may need to be explored: What are the absolute, non-negotiable interests of the principal actors? Where is compromise possible? Can confidence-building measures lead to a larger peace, or is a comprehensive solution called for? Are the negotiators pursuing the wrong strategy, such as pursuing confidence measures when the issue requires a comprehensive end? Or, are the mediators pursuing a comprehensive solution among parties that do not trust each other enough and need to pursue intermediate steps? Are new mediators required? Are all the interested parties involved in the negotiations, or will a final peace require additional parties at the negotiating table?

This book concentrates on four conflicts found on the periphery of the former Soviet Union: Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, and Armenia/Azerbaijan. A volume of this size cannot possibly provide the answers to all the questions, but can at least raise them in the context of the individual conflicts. The conference organizers wish to thank the presenters who gave so generously of their time and expertise: the Honorable Sergei Aloshyn, Consul General of Ukraine in San Francisco; the Honorable Doris Barnett, member of the German Parliament; Dr. Bruce Bennett of the Rand Corporation; Dr. Stepan Grigoryan, Chairman of the Board, Analytical Center on Globalization and Cooperation, Yerevan, Armenia; the Honorable Asim Mollazade, member of the Azerbaijan Parliament; Mr. Lynn Turk, Board of Directors, Pacific Century Institute; and Professor Edward W. Walker, University of California-Berkeley.

I would like to thank those who have made this book possible, including those who have read the text and given me feedback. I would particularly like to thank Ambassador Rudolf Perina and Oleksandr Kortenko for their invaluable assistance. While their thoughts were

welcome, the final product and any faults remains with me, the author. I also would like to thank my student assistants: Damaris Bangean for her tireless research and editing, and Brittney Souza for her help in bringing the text to a conclusion. Finally, I would like to thank my wife and daughter for giving me the emotional support as I wrote this volume.

Orange, USA   James J. Coyle

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INTRODUCTION

On the fringes of the Russian Federation, several conflicts continuously smolder. In examining these conflicts—in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan/Armenia—there are two sets of actors. At the systemic level, the primary actors are nation-states. At the sub-systemic level, the actors are groups of people united by nationalisms. These nationalisms, in turn, are based on either ideology or ethnicity. It is the interaction of these actors at the different levels of analyses that have kept the conflicts alive in a relatively "frozen" state.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC ANALYSIS

The three major ways of interpreting the actions of nation-states are by using the Liberal Democratic, Constructivist, or the Realist prism to dissect their behaviors. Each theory makes a partial contribution to understanding how states behave; each theory also fails to explain every action. Since no theory is perfect, one looks for the theory with the most explanatory power.

Liberal Democratic theory stresses the advantages of cooperation, emphasizing how more interaction between countries increase the chances for peace. There is an economic component to this theory, emphasizing trade flows as a guarantor that war is too expensive. This theory does not explain a number of instances in which trading partners

ended in conflict. As an example, before 1939, the USA provided Japan with most of its scrap metal and over 80% of its oil.[1]

The situation quickly deteriorated after Japan seized Indo-China and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt froze Japanese assets. The rest is history. Economic ties did not prevent the rapid spiral into war as the interests of the two countries came into conflict. Other examples of the failure of economic ties to prevent war are the numerous conflicts surrounding decolonialization. Britain was an exporter of capital to India; Algerian institutions were so closely enmeshed with France that it was considered a department of the French Republic. Economic ties would have predicted that Russia and Georgia would not clash in 2008, or Russia and Ukraine in 2014.

Liberal democratic theory also emphasizes the role of institutional ties: NATO countries do not fight one another. Unfortunately, the theory does not discuss causality: Why have these countries joined these institutions in the first place? A closely related subset, democratic peace theory, actually descends to the level of tautology. Democratic countries that are committed to peaceful interaction have peaceful interactions.

Constructivism

Constructivism comes to the world of international relations from sociology. It states that social constructs have no meaning until that meaning is assigned by others. At the level of nation-state, this has the most relevance in the definition of a state. A key component of statehood is international recognition. In other words, a group of people do not become a state within the international community until other states assign the meaning of statehood to that population.

Constructivism also provides insight into US–Chinese relations. In the waning days of the Cold War, Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter saw China as a useful foil to use against the Soviet Union. Gradually, this paradigm shifted. Presidents George H.W. Bush and Clinton considered China as a potential economic partner, and the relationship between the two countries grew stronger. Presidents George W Bush and Obama, however, cast China as an unfair economic competitor and strains developed in the relationship.

Missing from the constructivist account are answers to two key questions: Who should be the observer imparting meaning, and why is the observer giving that particular meaning at that particular time? There is

no systemic answer to the first question; answering the second requires one to delve into decision-making theory.

International Law

In both liberal democratic theory and constructivism, international law plays a huge role. For liberal democratic theory, the law provides the rules of the road that govern the interaction of nation-states. For constructivists, international law is one of the methods by which meaning is imparted to the world order. In the case of the countries under discussion, there are two legal principles of international law that often appear to conflict with one another: the inadmissibility of acquiring territory by force and the principle of self-determination for people. Unfortunately, these two principles can contradict each other.

Territory Acquired by Force

Until the end of World War I, if a country conquered territory they controlled it—either as a colony, a territory, or as part of the homeland itself. In 1928, however, the major powers signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact. In Article I, the contracting parties renounced war as an instrument of national power. In Article II, it declared that the settlement of all disputes or conflicts would be by pacific means.[2] The treaty has been widely criticized for lacking an enforcement mechanism and being unable to prevent World War II, but it established an international law that competing interests—such as the dispute over territory or support for co-ethnics in a neighboring country—could not be settled through the force of arms.

This principle has been violated many times, but the international community continues to hold it to be true. Every member of the United Nations has signed the UN Charter, whose preamble states that "armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest."[3] Article II recognizes the "sovereign equality of all its members," and that "all members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means… All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."[4] Article 33 states "The parties to any dispute… shall, first of all seek a solution by negotiation… or other peaceful means of their own choice."[5]

A UN member such as Russia that uses its military forces against another member, ignoring that member's sovereign equality, is in violation of the Charter and international law. Whether it be a unit in Moldova, peacekeeping forces in Georgia, or special and irregular forces in Ukraine, the use of Russian forces without the expressed approval of the government of that country would appear to violate international law.

UN Security Council Resolutions, such as 242, are also clear. "The Security Council… Emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war… affirms… termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force; Affirms further the necessity… for guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones."[6]

Measures designed to change the status of territory acquired by force, such as recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as states or annexing Crimea, also appear to violate The Fourth Geneva Convention. Article 2 establishes that the convention applies not only to declared war, but "any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them. The Convention shall also apply to all cases of partial or total occupation of the territory of a High Contracting Party, even if the said occupation meets with no resistance."[7]

Article 53 prohibits an occupying power from destroying real or personal property unless it is a military necessity; Article 54 prohibits the occupying power from altering the status of public officials or judges if they refuse to fulfill their duties by reasons of conscience. Article 55 says the occupying power must make sure the occupied populations receive adequate food, medicine, and other resources.[8] In every conflict on the Russian periphery where Russian soldiers destroyed or seized property, where they set up separatist enclaves where legally appointed representatives of the central government were not able to serve, and where residents suffered long-term deprivation, these articles appear to have been violated.

This convention also prohibits the occupying power from creating the conditions that have led to massive flows of international refugees and internally displaced persons in Georgia and Azerbaijan. In this respect,

Article 49 is particularly important, as it prohibits mass forcible transfer from the occupied territory, except for security reasons. In the event of a security evacuation, the population is to be returned to their homes as soon as hostilities cease. While the population is displaced, it is the occupying power's responsibility to insure those removed have proper accommodation.[9] In the case of Georgia and Azerbaijan, the occupied countries have borne the great cost of taking care of the refugees and displaced. The article also prohibits the occupier transferring parts of its own population into the occupied territory, something that may be occurring in the Crimea and in the Donbas.

SELF-DETERMINATION

It is human nature to root for the underdog, especially when the challenger poses as an embattled minority seeking the right to self-determination. American presidents as diverse as Thomas Jefferson, Woodrow Wilson, and George W. Bush have all written or spoken on the right of people to govern themselves. The American Declaration of Independence is itself a justification for self-determination. As the leaders of Transnistria, Crimea, Donbas, Abkhazia, Ossetia, and Karabakh lay claim to this mantle, it is only the most cold-hearted who would not wish them well.

Secessionists on the Russian periphery justify their actions on the basis of this principle. The UN Charter accepts as a sacred trust the need to develop self-government for non-self-governing territories.[10] This raises three important questions: What does it mean to be in a non-self-governing territory? How does one develop a self-government? What does it mean to be a people?

The questions are interrelated, as self-government is only lacking if the "people" are different from those who already govern the territory. All the separatist territories that will be discussed were recognized, and with a couple of exceptions continue to be recognized, by the international community and especially by Russia as having been part of a mother country. To give some examples, the Kremlin has implicitly accepted that the Donbas is part of its mother country, Ukraine, by demanding Kyiv pay for natural gas deliveries to the Ukrainian territory of the Donbas. Russia has refused Transnistrian demands for recognition or annexation. Moscow argues the Karabakh conflict is a domestic conflict within Azerbaijan. Armenia has also refused to recognize Karabakh's

independence. In Georgia, Russia had long accepted that Abkhazia and South Ossetia were part of that Republic, only recently recognizing them as independent countries. Russia accepted Crimea as part of Ukraine until that moment in 2014 that Russia annexed the peninsula. Given these facts, one can argue that the separatist movements are not in non-self-governing territories. Rather, they are operating as small sections of internationally recognized nation-states, governed by their own rulers.

If, for the sake of argument, one accepted the non-self-governing status of these areas, the question still arises as to how the territory can legally secede from the parent country and establish their own government. All the territories and states in question are successors to the Soviet Union. Under Article 72 of the former Soviet Constitution, and the 1990 USSR Law on Secession, separation is accomplished by referendum. Two-thirds of the citizenry in the separatist region must vote in the referendum, and the results had to be affirmed by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. [11]

There have been various referenda in the secessionist territories, but none have been verified by independent observers. Further, results of the votes have never been approved by the central authority of the parent state. Of course, these parent states are independent countries and no longer part of the Soviet Union. Perhaps the Soviet precedent does not apply to the successor states. The same principles apply, however, under international law.

> What matters is the group of people on which the community of states specifically confers an external right to self-determination. It is indisputable that at least the respective whole people of a state, known under the German term "Staatsvol," would have such a right. This comprises the totality of the citizens with a state regardless of their affiliation to individual ethnic groups or minorities. The whole people of a state form the permanent population, which is one of the constitutive pillars of modern states under international law, particularly alongside the defined territory and effective government.[12]

A territory cannot simply vote to leave its parent country; the majority within the entire country must consent to the action. This has not occurred in a single frozen conflict.

REALIST/NEOREALIST POLITICAL THEORY

So if any two men want a single thing which they can't both enjoy, they become enemies; and each of them on the way to his goal (which is principally his own survival, though sometimes merely his delight) tries to destroy or subdue the other. And so it comes about that when someone has…come to possess a pleasant estate, if an invader would have nothing to fear but that one man's individual power, there will probably be an invader—someone who comes with united forces to deprive him not only of the fruit of his labour but also of his life or liberty. And the successful invader will then be in similar danger from someone else.—Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Chapter 13, 1651.

The neorealist world is not a peaceful place. The primary actors on the world stage are nation-states: countries that range in size from Russia to Vanuatu. Each state is a law unto itself for its actions; the state is a sovereign power. As an example, in the USA the Supreme Law of the Land is the American Constitution and—because it is mentioned in the constitution—treaties with other countries. The US Congress makes the law, the president and the Executive Branch implements the law, and the Supreme Court decides on disputes that arise as to the law's interpretation. Nowhere in this schema is there the possibility of an appeal to a higher entity, such as the United Nations or the World Court. The USA is a sovereign power unto itself.

The same can be said for any country, regardless of size. The Seychelles does not have to answer to anyone before performing a governmental function. Sovereign countries are all legally equal.

Just as countries answer to no one for their actions, there is no one responsible for protecting countries other than themselves. If Bulgaria faces a threat from Romania, there is no world power who is responsible for acting as the world police, stepping in to enforce international law, or for ruling on the dispute (unless the two countries voluntarily agree to arbitration). A world without an overriding authority responsible for maintaining order is known as a world living in anarchy.

In such an anarchic state, each country is responsible for protecting itself and its self-described interests. It is here that the juridical equality of nation-states breaks down: Countries have differing capabilities to protect themselves. France has a larger army than Ireland. If the two ever came into conflict, Ireland by itself could not protect itself from French predations.

Because of this inequality of capabilities, and the anarchic nature of the world system, some countries take it upon themselves to further their interests by invading or fomenting rebellion within their neighbors. Throughout the centuries, the causes for these actions have been many: the desire to achieve more defensible borders, the wish for natural resources, the inclination to spread a particular ideology, etc. "The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must."[13]

Neorealism states that the anarchic nature of the international system causes conflict. In the Hobbesianworld of potential conflict, countries are constantly seeking to increase their power to better defend themselves from potential enemies. Since each country is responsible for its own security, all other countries fall into this category of being potentially hostile. Of course, there is room for cooperation as countries seek to balance or bandwagon with others to increase their power.

This search for power is the heart of realist theory. Increases in power are only effective, however, relative to other nation-states. An absolute increase in power is meaningless if another country's power increases by the same amount. But if a country increases its power more than the other country increases its power, then that country is considered safer.

The difficulty with this calculation is known as the "security dilemma." A country does not exist in a vacuum, able to take actions without a response from others. While a country might be attempting to increase its power for defensive or altruistic purposes, other countries could perceive the attempt to increase power as a hostile act. As the Cold War ended, the USA increased its external sources of power by expanding its principle military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Former Soviet allies throughout Eastern Europe queued up to join. American officials discussed the spread of democracy, but officials in the Kremlin interpreted this increase in American power as a hostile act. The Russian response on its periphery is what will be examined in the chapters that follow.

The Kremlin has taken the power equation once step further than realist political theory. Rather than concentrating on how to increase its own power, Russia appears to have stumbled into adopting a policy of decreasing the power of the countries surrounding it. They achieve the desired increase in relative power by decreasing the relative power of its rivals.

FROZEN CONFLICTS

In a hot war, two countries engage in open hostilities: People die, infrastructure is destroyed, and economies crumble. Most European countries, decimated in the last century by two world wars, try to avoid this alternative. It is simply too expensive in terms of blood and treasure.

In a frozen conflict, the issues remain unresolved but the fighting stops—or is controlled at a low level. Frozen conflicts can continue for years: They lack the kinetic energy of hot wars, and they do not disrupt the international system enough to merit a more vigorous intervention by countries who might find a hot war a challenge to their own interests. At the same time, frozen conflicts sap the power of the countries afflicted with this state of affairs. Russia has perfected the tactic of instigating frozen conflicts and keeping them ongoing.

Put more formally, a frozen conflict is "a conflict which remains between the stages of stalemate and de-escalation when peacekeeping efforts never result in the resolution of a conflict. This may lead to the establishment of a regime which has achieved de facto independence, but has not gained the international recognition. Incompatibility of goals has not found compromise and ceasefire does not necessarily mean the conflict parties have exited from violence. Quite the opposite might be the case, 'frozen' conflicts involve the simmering nature of interests of conflicting parties, which may transform the conflict back to the escalation stage."[14]

The fuel for these conflicts is found in sub-state actors and their own conflicting interests. Here, within existing nation-states, the central government has to compete with various other forces for the loyalty of their citizenry. As will be seen, Russia has skillfully played on the desire of these subgroups to break from the central governments, and these governments have called upon the West to support the status quo. Each side acquires additional power to face its rival by allying with external actors, a phenomenon known as balancing.

At this sub-national level, the sociological theory of constructivism comes into its own. The social constructs of nation and ethnicity acquire meaning when it is assigned such a meaning by others. As there are many different actors, there are many different meanings/interpretations of these concepts. In general, the differing sides in the sub-national conflicts that have allowed a Russian entry into their society base their definitions on either an ideological appeal to its people, on ethnic ties, or on a combination of the two.

Nationalism

The dispute between the parent countries and their secessionist territories is a battle over competing theories of nationalism. On one side is the central government, trying to attempt to create a nationalism that unites its citizenry by an expression of Rousseau's general will; on the other, secessionists want to define their nationalism on the basis of ethnicity.

Nationalism is the feeling of a group of people linked by either ethnic traits or by ideology. This ethnic or ideological bond links those who possess that bond and separates them from those who lack the bond. Those who share this trait believe their corporate interests are best protected through the control of their own states. They mobilize their group sentiment with the goal of establishing this state. When this entity is based on ethnic grounds, it is referred to as ethno-nationalism; when it is formed within an already existing state, it is referred to as mini-nationalism or separatism.

Various political scientists and sociologists have other definitions of nationalism. Each gives a slightly nuanced interpretation of the concept, the bond that mobilizes group sentiment to establish a state. Raymond Hall argues that nationalism is a demand for self-determination. "Nationalism conventionally means united and systematic political action by people or states to achieve or maintain self-determination in the international order… nationalism involves social action geared to bring about national self-determination or large-scale social change within a state… separatism is a subcategory of nationalism."[15] Sagarin and Moneymaker move beyond Hall's demand for self-determination, insisting that self-determination is only for those within a particular group.[16] Louis L. Snyder defines nationalism at both the state and sub-state level. He refers to nationalism, fissiparous nationalism, mini-nationalism, and ethno-nationalism. Nationalism is "a condition of mind, feeling or sentiment of a group of people living in a self-defined geographic area, speaking a common language, possessing a literature in which their aspirations are expressed, attached to common traditions and customs, venerating their own heroes, and, in some cases, having the same religion." Fissiparous nationalism calls for producing new units by splitting, and mini-nationalism is the demand for greater autonomy or independence by smaller nationalisms that have been absorbed into a larger, centralized state. Ethno-nationalism is linked with a sense of belonging due to common descent. Snyder states that this is "an elusive, confusing term often tied to discredited racial theories."[17]

Anthony D. Smith writes that nationalism is "an ideological move-ment, for the attainment and maintenance of self-government and inde-pendence on behalf of a group, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation' like others."[18] Smith identifies the ideological basis of nationalism; he avoids the ethnic basis of the phe-nomenon.

Hans Kohn defines nationalism as "a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state."[19] Richard Cottam's definition is similar, "a belief on the part of a large group of people that they comprise a political community, a nation, that is entitled to independent statehood, and a willingness of this group to grant their community a primary and their terminal loyalty."[20]

The difference between the latter two definitions seems to be on the level of analysis: Kohn discusses the individual and why an individual would form into a group, whereas Cottam assumes the group is already formed. Indeed, Cottam states this is one of the characteristics of nation-alism, a propensity to look to the community rather than to the individ-ual, thus reinforcing collectivist tendencies in a given system. Yet Cottam realizes that understanding what binds the group together is essential to understanding nationalism. "Any people who believe they are part of a community that deserves their terminal loyalty must be convinced that this community is distinctive. And strongly cohesive factors must be pre-sent if this belief is to persist… The essential starting point for a study of nationalism is, first, an exploration of these cohesive factors to gain an insight into the base of receptivity and, second, an investigation of the impact of nationalism once it appears on that base."[21]

Michael Banton describes ethnicity as a variety of nationalism, in which the leaders "seek to make their fellow constituents conscious of a shared attribute" and to persuade those constituents that the attribute is more important than group members previously realized.[22] This shared attribute is physical or cultural, and ethnic groups are created on the basis of this attribute. He does not specify what kind of physical or cul-tural attribute the group needs; once it has settled on the attribute, how-ever, the group has a self-identity and it reacts negatively to other groups which lack the same attribute.

Soviet scholars used the terms nationality and ethnicity interchange-ably. This fuzzing of the boundaries between these two concepts may lie at the core of modern Russia's stance toward ethnic Russians or Russian speakers on its periphery. Since the inhabitants are ethnically Russian,

they are part of the Russian nation. Their residence in an "artificial" non-Russian state is irrelevant.

Y.V. Bromley of Moscow's Institute of Ethnology points out that the Russian word *narod* means both ethnic community and nation. While Bromley discusses in great detail the physical differences between groups, he also notes an ethnic consciousness; "the awareness by members of a given ethnos of their affinity to it, this awareness being based on their opposition to other ethnos… an ethnos exists as long as its members preserve the idea of their affiliation to it."[23]

Nationalist sentiment can exist outside of a state. Bernard Nietschmann estimates there are between 3000 and 5000 "nations." By his count, more than 95% of the world's states are multinational.[24] Despite this, he believes it is the state rather than the nation which holds primacy in the modern world order. "The state has become the decisive political vehicle and political arena for ethnic groups… it redistributes even higher proportions of its citizens' and subjects' general income and assets. To protect and articulate their social, cultural, and economic interests… ethnic groups must enter the political area… And if an ethnic group's bid for an adequate share of political power and control within an extant multiethnic state proves unproductive, is repudiated as non-negotiable, or the like, it may then well make a secessionist bid for a state of its own."[25] Nietchmann's analysis offers insight into the interethnic fighting in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. It appears that the side that controls the government structure also controls the social, cultural, and economic interests in the area. The Russians have been able to interject themselves into the competition between the various sides for these interests.

French School of Nationalism

As seen, nationalism can be based on either an ideological self-identification with a group or on ascriptive criteria. Hans Kohn traces the origins of these two competing schools of nationalism to eighteenth-century Europe. He defines ideologically based nationalism as the French School, because it was epitomized in the French Revolution of 1789; and ethnically based nationalism as the German school. The French school was based on a rational, universal concept of political liberty and the rights of man; the German, on history. "These two concepts of nationalism are the poles around which the new age… will revolve."[26]

One of the earliest proponents of the French school was a Swiss exile who resided in France, Jean Jacques Rousseau. This political thinker argued that the true political community could be based only on the citizens' ardent love of the fatherland. The citizens' feeling of brotherhood and mutual devotion were the only moral and rational foundation of the state. He based his belief on the inalienable rights of the individual. Rousseau postulated that sovereignty resides in the individual. Since man cannot exist outside of an organized society, this sovereignty can be deeded to a state through a communal act of will. This newly created people soon find characteristics that bind themselves together and separate themselves from others.[27]

According to the French school, a nation consists of any group of people who, using their collective will, voluntarily assume allegiance to that body and believe that this group should have a country of their own. The emphasis is on the will of the people, which Rousseau called the general will, *volonté generale.*

The search for the *volonté generale* is often described as attempts at political institutionalization of social forces. Samuel P. Huntington writes that the level of political community that a society achieves reflects the relationship between its political institutions and the social forces which comprise it. Modernization involves the multiplication and diversification of these social forces. The level of political development of a society depends upon the extent to which political activists identify with political institutions. A complex society requires some definition of general principles of the bond which holds the group together and which distinguishes its community from other communities. This "community" involves the relation of individual men or groups to something apart from themselves. But a community is not just coming together, but a sustained coming together which requires institutionalization.[28] The bases on which a group cooperates, its *volonté generale*, is a byproduct of the correlation between social mobilization and political institutionalization.

The dominant school of Soviet scholars agreed with the French school concerning the importance of self-identification in the establishment of nationalism. Writers such as Bromley focused on the process of self-selection, and the perception of cultural or national uniqueness.[29]

The French school does not deny the existence of ascriptive characteristics such as kinship ties, common language, or territoriality; it acknowledges that sometimes these characteristics may play a part in the creation

of a group identity. But the French school is emphatic that none of these characteristics are the necessary and sufficient cause for group identification: In the end, *volonté generale* unites the group. A nation, then, is a polis based on the people holding a common ideology.

German School of Nationalism

When Napoleon used the new French nationalism as a tool to unify a conscript army into an effective fighting force, he had the unanticipated consequence of developing counter-nationalisms in the countries around France.[30] According to Lord Acton, "Napoleon called a new power into existence by attacking nationality in Russia, by delivering it in Italy, by governing in defiance of it in Germany and Spain."[31]

Nationalism spread throughout Europe through the interstate conflicts of the nineteenth century. It evolved from the French version with its emphasis on liberty and the rights of the individual into the German school of nationalism, with emphasis on the glorification of the nation-state's power. This glorification of the collectivity led to membership in the nation based on ascriptive criteria that the individual possessed or lacked.

Anthony D. Smith Summarizes the German School of Nationalism:

> The German "organic version" of nationalism, then, is based on the principle that nations possess "the capacity to shape destiny by the historic workings of the national will." It embraces three distinct notions: (1) that of cultural diversity, i.e. Herder's idea that the world has been divided into unique organic "nations" or language-groups, (2) the notion of national self-realization through political struggle, and (3) the idea that the individual's will must be absorbed in that of the organic state—both of these latter ideas being the peculiar contribution of Fichte.[32]

Once a nation has identified itself through its ascriptive criteria (whether it be language, race, lineage, et al.), it still must form itself into a state. Joseph Rothschild states that once an ethnic group has identified itself as a collective group whose members are descendants of either a real or putative ancestor, those primordial attributes are necessary but not sufficient for the politicization of these groups. This politicization, or creation of a potentially separatist ethno-nationalism, requires elites with a

capacity and interest in mobilizing the population into a self-conscious group; and competition over relatively scarce and valued resources and goals within the larger society. This competition could mobilize both the dominant population who feel themselves challenged and the minority population that perceives itself as disadvantaged.[33]

Rothschild believes ethnicity may not be the only system of cleavage that may develop; others may be more salient politically, depending on the circumstances. But ethnicity comes to prominence when anthropological markers that distinguish peripheral from core populations are perceived as markers for the economic roles and functions of the populations.

Comparison of the Two Schools of Nationalism

The German school of nationalism cannot survive a rigorous, empirical examination because it is impossible to delineate ethnic boundary markers. Ernest Renan, for example, dismisses the primacy of race or religion by pointing out all European nationalities, including German, are of mixed blood and/or belief.[34] Geography plays a part in the division of nations, but frontiers are strategic, not everlasting.

Whether one examines immigrant states such as the USA, or "ethnically pure" states such as in Scandinavia, modern nationalities are mixtures of different races. Language also fails as an ethnic marker. Many nationalities, such as the citizens of the USA, have no language of their own but borrow the dominant language (English) from colonial mother countries. This has become flavored by every succeeding wave of immigration. Elsewhere, there are Irish who cannot speak Gaelic and Basques who do not speak Basque. Kurds speak three different, mutually unintelligible, dialects. Yet these groups claim nationalisms without the tie of a mother tongue.

Even if one could identify the appropriate boundaries for ethnic markers, the markers themselves can be fabricated, changed, or destroyed as needed. British imperialists changed the primordial, ascriptive criteria used in Yorubaland to determine one's ethnic grouping.[35] The Iranian Shah created the Shahsevan tribe to assist him in governing previously unorganized clan groups from the Afshar and Shamlu clans of the Qizilbash tribes of Anatolia.[36] Lois Beck found that all tribal polities in Iran contained people whose ties to local and wider groups "were not

defined by actual or even fictive kinship ties… Genealogies were charters of organization and not maps of actual kinship ties."[37]

Since ascriptive criteria can change, the German theory of nationalism is flawed. Quite simply, the German theory is based on a belief in unchanging ties that have been proven malleable. The Soviet Union originally consisted of four republics: Ukraine, Byelorussia, Transcaucasia, and Russia. Between 1924 and 1940, Joseph Stalin created several new Republics, supposedly representing ethnic and national divisions. Five republics disappeared entirely. He redrew the lines several times until 1936. These lines, which today are considered boundaries for various nationalities, were drawn with little attention to the ethnicities of the residents. Rather, they were designed to blunt the appeal of pan-Turanism, the idea that the Turkic republics along the southern periphery shared a common nationality.[38] Even blood lines and tribal memberships, upon closer examination, prove fictitious. Soviet nationalism and, by extension, Vladimir Putin's understanding of Russian nationalism, is based on a false foundation.

APPLICABILITY OF NATIONALISM TO FROZEN CONFLICTS

While nationalism may have developed in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it became a worldwide movement in the twentieth century, "the world's major ideological legitimator and delegitimator of states, regimes, and governments."[39] Previous forms of organization, such as tribe and family, have been subsumed under the nation-state system.

This newly imported Western nationalism often served as the rallying cry for newly independent elites. But, in multiethnic states, a concept which brought legitimacy to a state's rulers could not be limited to the central government alone. Once the state is perceived to have been captured by a particular ethnic group, alternative nationalisms spring up among the other ethnicities. Rothschild writes that "When state institutions are perceived as having lost their autonomy to ethnic annexation… their legitimacy becomes compromised and their capacity to administer society's regulative values is subverted."[40]

In the Soviet Union, Lenin accepted that there were multiple nationalities throughout the USSR, but he (and more explicitly, Stalin) was convinced that national identify would wither as the proletariat adopted a class identity. This withering away proved to be more difficult than the

early Marxists believed. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the successor states of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan were faced with the fact that they were all multiethnic political entities. In other Republics, this was not necessarily the case. The Republic of Armenia, for example, was 98.1% ethnically Armenian, with 97.9% speaking Armenian as the mother tongue, and 92.6% belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church.[41] Such a country could rely on the German school of nationalism to define itself.

Others among the new republics are more suited for the French school. The new Republic of Ukraine had a population that consisted of 17.3% Russian, in addition to the majority Ukrainian population. Almost 30% of the population considered Russian its mother tongue. Followers of Orthodox Christianity are divided between the Russian and Ukrainian churches, as well as the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church. Moving away from orthodoxy, there are also Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and Jews.[42]

In Moldova, minorities include 8.4% Ukrainian, 5.9% Russian, 4.4% Gagauz, 2.2% Romanian, and 1.9% Bulgarian. Its languages include Moldovan 58.6% and Romanian 16.4%, which two languages are virtually identical. Yet 16% of the population speak Russian, 3.8% speak Ukrainian, 3.1% speak the Turkic language of Gagauz, and 1.1% speak Bulgarian. Seven percent of the population are not Orthodox Christians.[43]

Georgia tells mostly the same story. In its case, 6.5% of the population is Azeri, and 5.7% is Armenian. Only 1.5% is Russian. Languages are even more diverse. While 71% of the population speak Georgian, 9% consider Russian their mother tongue, 7% speak Armenian, and 6% speak Azeri. Almost 10% of the population is Muslim, with another 6% being non-Orthodox Christian.[44]

Azerbaijan's population contains 2% Lezgin, 1.3% Russian, 1.3% Talysh, and 1.3% Armenian. In addition, the entire current population of Karabakh (which is legally still part of Azerbaijan) is Armenian. Languages include 1.4% Russian, 1.4% Armenian (with the same caveat about Karabakh), and 4.7% speaking additional languages other than Azerbaijani. The country is basically Muslim, but religious affiliation is primarily nominal.[45]

What these figures tell us is that, to the extent the elites in these countries foster nationalism within their populations, it is predominantly a variant of the French school reliant on the *volonté generale*.

One identifies as Ukrainian regardless of one's mother tongue; one is Moldovan regardless of one's ethnicity; one is Georgian, whether one lives near Tbilisi or in Ajaria; one is Azerbaijani regardless of one's religion.

By contrast, separatist movements within these countries have leaned heavily on the ascriptive criteria described in the German school of nationalism—ascriptive criteria that can change over time. In Crimea, separatists claim a desire to be free of Kyiv's rule because of Russian ethnicity; in the Donbas, it is because of the Russian language. Transneister residents also claim they are Russian, although whether because of ethnicity or language is not certain. In Karabakh, the current inhabitants claim they cannot be ruled by Baku because the inhabitants are of Armenian ethnicity and heritage, speaking Armenian.

In all these cases, the ascriptive criteria have arisen because of historical circumstances. Crimea has an ethnic Russian population because the Russian (and USSR) Black Sea Fleet is headquartered there. Russian sailors have been marrying locals since the time of Catherine the Great. In Donbas, there are Russian speakers because it was a major industrial region of the USSR. Transneister can claim Russian ties because of immigration, and because of the role of the Soviet military forces stationed there throughout the Cold War. Karabakh's population has become primarily Armenian because the Azerbaijani minority was driven out in a wave of ethnic cleansing.

In the end, the nationalist call for separatism is best described, not by fictitious ethnic markers, but by an anonymous author quoted by Stuart J. Kaufman:

1. If an area was ours for 500 years and yours for 50 years, it should belong to us—you are merely occupiers;
2. If an area was yours for 500 years and ours for 50 years, it should belong to us—borders must not be changed;
3. If an area belonged to us 500 years ago but never since then, it should belong to us—it is the Cradle of our Nation;
4. If a majority of our people live there, it must belong to us—they must enjoy the right to self-determination;
5. If a minority of our people live there, it must belong to us—they must be protected against your oppression.
6. All of the above rules apply to us but not to you;
7. Our dream of greatness is Historical Necessity, yours is Fascism.[46]

Conclusion

The domestic conflicts and disputes outlined in this book are both local struggles and struggles over ideas. Which form of nationalism will reinforce the creation of a viable state is still an open question. Either can be used to define a people. If the ethnically homogenous minority can define themselves as a people separate from those who rule the parent state (German nationalism), then they lack self-rule unless they separate from the central government. If, however, people are described as those who belong to the *volonté generale* (French nationalism), then that separation cannot take place without the consent of all the people—both within the separatist enclave and within the larger state population.

Regardless of whether a separate people exists, under no circumstances can a people separate at the point of a foreign gun. This has been an established principle of international law since the 1920s. In addition, acquisition of territory by force is illegal, and respect for the sovereignty of member states is a requirement for all members of the United Nations. This means the Russian annexation of Crimea, an area that the Russian Federation previously recognized as part of Ukraine and guaranteed the inviolability of its borders, is illegal. Armenian de facto occupation of Karabakh is similarly illegal. The world has rejected an independent Abkhazia or South Ossetia. Russian support for separatist movements in Transneister and the Donbas has no basis in international law.

These domestic conflicts have provided a point of entry for Russia. Seeking to increase its own power by acquiring allies while simultaneously weakening the power of potential rivals, the Kremlin follows a realist perspective. It is the protection of Russian national interests which motivates Russia to intervene in these conflicts and to keep them going. The Kremlin intends to continue to increase its power regardless of international law.

It therefore becomes the responsibility of the world community to enforce the international law it professes to follow. That includes establishing real, viable mechanisms for negotiating the end of conflicts. This could take place under the auspices of the United Nations, the World Court, the International Arbitration Board, or in specialized negotiating sessions. If a chair or co-chair is a direct or indirect participant in the conflict, however, they should be disqualified from playing that role. At the very least, they should have their influence curtailed by balancing their role with other co-chairs with different interests in the conflict.

Above all, world leaders must take to heart international law's renunciation of war as a method of acquiring territory. When this stricture is flaunted, then the might of the world community should be brought down upon the violator. If anyone is to be condemned in a conflict, it should be the aggressor and not the victim.

The international community has a number of tools at its disposal to resolve conflicts, if it so chooses. These include military intervention, economic sanction, removing offenders from international forums, etc. Each of the conflicts in this book, except Ukraine, has been allowed to continue for decades. It is time for the international community to do more than talk, especially when the conversation is directed by one of the parties to the various conflicts.

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Ukraine

BACKGROUND

This chapter concentrates on Ukraine, but it also serves as the "scene-setter," by providing much of the early history of the Soviet Union as it pertains to the nations on its periphery. It also describes Lenin's theories on nationalities, and how those theories evolved over the years. The role of Ukraine in World War II is discussed, and the promises that Russia made after achieving independence. A discussion ensues on one of the principle strategic interests of Russia, namely Ukraine's role as an energy transit state. The chapter then turns to the events of modern times: Ukraine's efforts to change allegiances from the East to the West, and the disastrous results of those efforts (See Fig. 2.1).

Ukraine is an ancient land on the north side of the Black Sea, shaped roughly like an American football with an appendage. The Crimean Peninsula, home of the Charge of the Light Brigade, juts out into the water. The country is bounded on the northwest by Belarus, and on the northeast and east by Russia. To its south lies the Black Sea, and its western border is shared by Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria.

Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, is an ancient city founded in 482, almost 700 years before Moscow's founding in 1147. According to the mythology surrounding the creation of the Russian state, Kyiv is the birthplace of Mother Russia. In 879, Oleg the Viking established the first Eastern Slavic state, and shortly later made Kyiv its capital. (Russians claim that the founders were not Vikings but Slavs despite the fact that the

Fig. 2.1 Ukraine. *Source* http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ukraine.html. Ukraine (small map) 2016. Ukraine. 2016: US Central Intelligence Agency, University of Texas Libraries. Web. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia16/ukraine_sm_2016.gif

Slavic term "Rus" means Viking.) In 988, the kingdom (the Kyivan Rus Duchy) converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, which the Russian Orthodox Church marks as one of its founding moments.

The line from Kyiv to Moscow is not that direct, however. It is true that a group of Slavs followed a Kyiv prince north and founded Vladimir-Suzdal, later known as the Grand Duchy of Moscow. The Kyivan Rus Duchy continued on an independent course. In 1169, the Moscow prince Andrew the Pious sacked Kyiv and burned the city. The Kyivan Rus Duchy was finally destroyed by the thirteenth-century invasion of the Mongols. Various parts of the principality were absorbed by surrounding states. In 1325, the metropolitan (bishop) of Kyiv relocated to Moscow, marking the collapse of the last tie between Moscow and Kyiv. Most of the territory of modern Ukraine was then annexed by Poland and Lithuania.

One of Russia's claims to Ukraine is the Pereyaslav Treaty of 1654, agreed upon by the ruler of the recently created Cossack state (central Ukraine) and the representative of the Czar of Russia. Even this claim is less than meets the eye, as the treaty was never put in writing. It appears that Russia recognized the Cossack state, but the Hetman (leader of the Cossacks) only wanted a military alliance and not a vassal relationship.

Additional details were hammered out the following year in Moscow, and the Hetman surrendered the right to make independent foreign policy. Negotiators believed they had written an agreement of unity between two independent entities.[1]

In 1667, the territory of modern Ukraine was divided between Poland and Russia. The country's modern-day division between a European-leaning west and a Kremlin-oriented east is thus centuries old. When Poland was partitioned in 1793, almost all of Ukraine was integrated into the Russian empire by Empress Catherine II (the Great).

UKRAINE ENTERS THE SOVIET UNION[2]

Ukraine's history is one of contested nationalisms. Over the centuries, parts of the country have been ruled by Poland, Lithuania, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. When the Russian empire collapsed in the February 1917 Revolution, Ukraine declared its independence. What followed was 5 years of political intrigue, civil war, and foreign occupation. The rural western part of Ukraine supported the nationalist government in Kyiv, while the industrialized east was inclined to support the Russian-sponsored Bolsheviks. For their part, the Bolsheviks were uncertain as to how to proceed, divided philosophically between their support for nationalities and their support for a worldwide dictatorship of the proletariat. The Ukrainian nationalists viewed their struggle against the Bolsheviks as a continuation of their centuries-long struggle against Russian rule.

In a foreshadowing of modern events, the Russians decided they could no longer work with the nationalists in the Rada (Parliament). Russian troops began to flood into eastern Ukraine, with the first five regiments dispatched on December 1, 1917. On Christmas Eve, the Bolsheviks in Kharkov—protected by Russian troops—declared the creation of a Soviet Ukrainian Republic, to be ruled by a Central Executive Committee they had chosen. Moscow was delighted, and in mid-January 1918, Russian military units occupied Kyiv, unseating the Rada.

The Red victory was short-lived, however. Moscow was desperate to end Russia's involvement in World War I, and in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk accepted a number of German demands. The Communists guaranteed the independence of Ukraine and withdrew all Russian troops from Ukrainian soil. The Soviets in Kyiv were forced to flee, taking sanctuary inside Russian territory. The capital was then occupied by German

troops. The Rada was restored to power, controlled by right-wing supporters of the German occupation. The Bolsheviks called for a Ukrainian uprising against the Germans, but few listened.

The Germans did not stay on top for long. After imperial Germany signed an armistice with the Allied powers on November 11, 1918, the German troops withdrew from Ukraine. The right-wing government was forced to flee. The Red Army invaded Ukraine for the second time and reinstalled the Soviet Republic. Soon, however, the pendulum reversed directions again. This time, Ukraine became a battleground between the Red Army and the White Russians. By August 1919, the Bolsheviks were again thrown out of the country. By 1920, however, power shifted for the last time and the Bolsheviks—now fully under the authority of Moscow—were again in control of the eastern part of the country. They signed a Treaty of Alliance with Moscow. The west was absorbed into Poland. Finally, on December 29, 1922, representatives of the four Soviet republics (Russia, the Transcaucasian Federation, Ukraine, and Belarus) signed a treaty of union forming the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Ukrainian nationalism did not end with the birth of the USSR, however. The struggle continued, but within the newly created state. Ukraine had a firm, theoretical defense of their desire for a stronger nationalist presence, Lenin's writings on nationalism. Lenin warned against Great Russian nationalism as something that could separate the workers—particularly those workers from the peoples living on the edge of the Russian empire, such as Ukrainians. He accused the Russians of being an oppressor nation, with a nationalism that was feudal in nature. The leaders of the Communist Party in Ukraine pushed this interpretation of Lenin's work:

> Whether the Ukraine, for example, is destined to form an independent state…we firmly uphold something that is beyond doubt: the right of the Ukraine to form such a state. We respect this right; we do not uphold the privileges of Great Russians with regard to Ukrainians; we educate the masses in the spirit of recognition of that right, in the spirit of rejecting state privileges for any nation.[3]

Initially, the Bolsheviks found little support in the west of the country. There, Communists were supporters of another group, the Socialist Revolutionary Party (the Borotbists). These leftists were much more

nationalistic than the Kremlin-supported Bolsheviks. To consolidate their hold, the Bolsheviks merged with the Borotbists, and many Borotbists assumed leadership roles in the party. This cemented a nationalist wing into the party.

Ukrainian nationalism flourished within the Soviet system in the early part of the 1920s. The markers of this nationalism were language and culture. Russian was spoken in the industrial east, but Ukrainian was the language of the more rural West. Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin, accepted the independent path the Ukrainians were taking. "It is clear that a Ukrainian nation exists and that the development of its culture is an obligation for Communists," he wrote. "It is impossible to go against history. It is clear that although Russian elements still predominate in the cities of the Ukraine, in the course of time these cities will inevitably be Ukrainized."[4]

For Stalin, Ukrainian nationalism was essential in his plan to increase the Ukrainian people's desire to be part of the great Soviet proletariat:

> The second weak point of Soviet power is the Ukraine… The situation in the Ukraine is complicated further by certain peculiarities of the industrial development of the country…the composition of the proletariat of these industries is not local, not Ukrainian in language. And this peculiarity leads to the result that the cultural influence of the city over the countryside and the joining of the proletariat with the peasantry has been considerably delayed by these differences in the national composition of the proletariat and peasantry. All these peculiarities must be taken into account in the work of transforming the Ukraine into a model republic.[5]

Ukrainian nationalism probably reached its peak in 1926. Afterward Stalin began asserting a more Moscow-centric policy. Stalin said that mandatory Ukrainization would oppress minorities within the Republic, and even foster opposition among those oppressed minorities to the Ukrainian government. He also criticized nationalists who were trying to keep Ukraine estranged from general Soviet culture and life. Stalin characterized this effort as opposition to Moscow and suggested that more Marxists (i.e., Russians) be included in the leadership of the Ukrainian Communist Party.[6]

For the next decade and a half, Ukrainian nationalism slowly waned. Nationalist leaders were purged, and nationalist writers and poets were exiled. The fear of Great Russian chauvinism, so important in the

writings of Lenin, was forgotten. Among the leadership, Ukrainian nationalism all but disappeared before the outbreak of World War II.

Not so, however, among the peasantry in the countryside. Here, opposition to Soviet-style collectivization ran strong. The peasantry refused to work on collective farms, and productivity plummeted. With no food available, the Soviets allowed the peasants to starve. This man-made catastrophe reached its peak in the 1932–1933 Holodomor, in which somewhere between 2.5 and 7.5 million Ukrainians perished. (The current government of Ukraine memorializes the Holodomor annually as a USSR-induced genocide of the Ukrainian people.)

World War II

In 1939, following the completion of the Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression pact, Germany invaded Poland from the west and the USSR invaded from the east. The Soviets captured approximately three-fifths of Poland, including those portions of Ukraine that had been lost 20 years earlier. Germany captured the rest. Most of Ukraine was thus reunited by Soviet conquest.

Stalin did not consider Ukraine an inalienable part of Russia. According to the Russian historian Nikita Petrov, the Soviet premier authorized the head of the NKVD intelligence service to offer Ukraine to the Germans to save the Russian heartland.[7]

Within Ukraine, nationalists took advantage of the war's unrest. The leading group advocating for Ukrainian independence was the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). This group was split into two camps: one advocating independence through cooperation with Nazi Germany; the other, led by Stepan Bandera, advocated forcing the Germans to accept Ukrainian independence.

Bandera originally agreed to cooperate with German military intelligence. He created two military units, code named "Roland" and "Nachtigal." The Germans planned to use these movements to further their occupation. Instead, the members of these units swore allegiance to the Ukrainian national cause.[8] On June 30, 1941, after the Germans had already launched Operation Barbarossa (the June 22, 1941, invasion of the Soviet Union), the Bandera faction declared the establishment of a Ukrainian state centered on the western town of Lviv. The movement was put down by the Nazis who jailed thousands of western Ukrainian nationalists. It is ironic that even as large numbers of Ukrainians deserted

the Red Army for the shelter of the German lines, thousands of Bandera's followers starved in Hitler's prisoner of war camps.[9]

As the Nazis cracked down, the Bandera movement went underground. In 1942, they organized the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) to fight both the Soviets and the Germans. While many Ukrainians fought with the nationalists against the Soviet Union, far more Ukrainians fought for the USSR against the Germans. The vast majority who fought did so in the uniform of the Red Army, and more Ukrainians were killed fighting the Wehrmacht than American, British, and French soldiers combined.[10]

Bandera's historical reputation was sullied by his triggering massacres of the Polish population in Volhynia and Galacia in 1943. After the war, the UPA continued the struggle against Soviet occupation, as an underground partisan movement.

Crimea Joins Ukraine

Crimea has always held a special place in Russian mythology. Russia liberated the Crimean Khanate from the Ottoman Empire during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774, ratified by the treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca. Russia formally annexed the peninsula a decade later in 1783. Empress Catherine the Great then founded a naval base at Sevastopol which became the home of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Over the decades, Crimea became the home to a large population of Russians who were originally assigned to the naval base.

Before the recent conflict, Crimea is probably best known in the English language as being the location of Arthur Lord Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade." This took place during the 3 year war (1853–1856) that pitted the Russian empire against an alliance of the Ottomans, Britain, France, and Sardinia. During the Russian Civil War after the October 1917 revolution, Crimea became a center of White Russian resistance to the Bolsheviks. In 1921, it achieved autonomy as the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.[11]

There was considerable fighting in Crimea during World War II, particularly during the Defense of Sevastopol (1941–1942). The Axis powers had seized most of the peninsula in the opening days of Operation Barbarossa, but the port city held out. When military attacks failed to secure the city, the Germans launched a siege. Sevastopol remained free of Nazi occupation for almost a year,[12] delaying German efforts to seize

the Caucasus oil fields. This deprived the *Wehrmacht* of much of the fuel it needed to sustain its warfighting operations. Sevastopol's efforts to hold out against the Nazis may have contributed to Germany's ultimate defeat.

Russia shed blood for Crimea in the Russo-Turkish War, the Crimean War, the Civil War, and World War II. Perhaps in recognition of this, in 1945 the Soviet Union transferred the peninsula to the Russian SSR as the Crimean Oblast. Less than a decade later, however, on February 19, 1954, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted a resolution transferring Crimea from the Russian SSR to the Ukrainian SSR.[13] The reasons for the transfer were obscure, with the reasons given by members of the Presidium making little sense. They claimed the transfer marked an anniversary that had nothing to do with Crimea, and they cited Crimean cultural affinity with Ukraine when the vast majority of inhabitants of the peninsula were Russian. Kramer speculates that Premier Nikita Khrushchev had two reasons for the transfer: He wanted to win the support of Oleksiy Kyrychenko, first secretary of the Ukrainian SSR, in his internal power struggle with Soviet Prime Minister Georgii Malenkov; and he wanted to insure the loyalty of Ukraine by diluting the numbers of nationalists in Ukraine with the large Russian population in Crimea.[14] While there is no firm evidence to support Kramer's interpretation, he cites circumstantial evidence: Before the transfer, Khrushchev and Kyrychenko had been at odds, and afterward, Kyrychenko's support proved politically useful to Khrushchev. Further, Stalin had used a similar strategy of encouraging ethnic Russians to migrate to the Baltic States to dilute nationalist numbers in that region. So, there was a precedent for mixing populations to secure an area's loyalty.

Russian President Vladimir Putin would later claim that the transfer of Crimea had been illegal. According to Putin, the USSR did not follow proper procedures; his actions to restore Crimea to Russia thus fixed a historical wrong. In fact, however, procedures were followed. Article 18 of the Soviet constitution of 1936 prohibited the altering of territories of a Union Republic without the consent of the territories involved. From the Presidium proceedings, it appears that this consent was given.

Comrade M.P. Tarasov, a member of the Presidium and Chairman of the Presidium of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) Supreme Soviet, reported, "The Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet with the participation of the executive committees of the Crimean Oblast and Sevastopol City Soviet of Workers' Deputies has

examined the proposal…the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet considers it advisable to transfer the Crimean Oblast to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic." Similarly, Comrade D.S. Korotchenko, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR, spoke for his side. "The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR completely shares the proposal about the transfer… The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic expresses its heartfelt gratitude to the great Russian people for that exceptionally remarkable act of fraternal aid." The motion to approve the transfer, as read by Comrade N. M. Pegov, was a joint submission of the Presidiums of the RSFSR and Ukrainian Supreme Soviet. The decree was adopted unanimously.[15]

INDEPENDENCE AND DENUCLEARIZATION

In August 1991, Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev went for a vacation in his dacha in Crimea. A group of communist hardliners in Moscow, believing the collapse of the USSR was imminent, decided to save the state by overthrowing him. The August Putsch, as the incident later became known, collapsed after two days—but it did lead to the dissolution the coup leaders had feared. In December 1991, the leaders of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine annulled the 1922 treaty that had created the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union officially dissolved on December 26, 1991.

Ukraine had not waited. As Gorbachev reclaimed his government on August 24, 1991, Ukraine declared its independence. Almost immediately, RSFSR leader Boris Yeltsin threatened that if Ukraine seceded from the USSR, Russia might reclaim the Russian-speaking eastern and southern parts of the country. In May 1992, after Russia's own secession from the Union, the Russian Duma declared the 1954 transfer of Crimea from Russia to Ukraine to be illegitimate.[16] This pronouncement was subsequently ignored for many years by Presidents Yeltsin and Putin, who recognized Ukraine with Crimea as a part of it.

Ukraine inherited a share of the Soviet nuclear stockpile, becoming the third largest nuclear power in the world upon independence. The country gained 15% of the Soviet weaponry: 130 liquid-fuel SS-19 missiles (six warheads each); 46 solid-fuel SS-24 missiles (ten warheads each), and two types of strategic bombers with a total of 1081 nuclear cruise missiles. While Kyiv held the hardware, Moscow kept the

launch codes.[17] This prevented Ukraine from using the weapons, but also allowed Russia to launch Ukrainian weaponry—even against Kyiv's wishes. General Zhivitsa stated, "Administratively, strategic forces are under Ukrainian control although, operationally, they are subordinated to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)."[18]

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) had been negotiated with the USSR, but by the time it was to be ratified and implemented, the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. The treaty now had to be ratified by four countries to take effect, instead of it being a bilateral treaty with the USA. While the Ukrainian parliament made multiple declarations that it would not use, have or make nuclear weapons, the government took no measures to approve the treaty or eliminate the weapons from its soil. In January 1992, parliamentarian Serhiy Holovaty made it known that he considered the nuclear weapons a bargaining chip.

> Our deputies don't care where these things are aimed…I can tell you that Ukraine has been so burned by Russia in financial and economic matters, that after a year of this we will not lightly give up any more assets. We would never give up the nuclear weapons now, at least without something in return. We don't want to be the fool.[19]

Despite nationalist opposition, the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Anatoliy Zlenko finally committed the country to respect the Soviet commitments in START I by signing the Lisbon protocol in May 1992. He promised Ukraine would accede to the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-weapons state.[20]

Reports surfaced by the end of 1992 that Ukraine was attempting to break the launch codes. Russian officials feared Kyiv would succeed by the end of 1993 at the latest.[21] By August 1993, Ukrainian parliamentarian and chair of the foreign relations committee Dmytro Pavlychoko claimed Ukraine had "technical control" over the launch codes for the 46 SS-24 nuclear missiles that had originally been made in that country.[22] Following his statement, Ukrainian government repeatedly denied the assertion.

In September 1993, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk and Russian President Yeltsin concluded a bilateral agreement at the Massandra (Crimea) summit to transfer the weapons to Russia, but the agreement collapsed over competing interpretations of the agreement's clauses. Russia then tried to intimidate Kravchuk into surrendering the

weapons. In November 1993, Russian Foreign Ministry officials suggested economic pressure against Ukraine until the warheads were sent to Russia for destruction.[23] US Secretary of State Warren Christopher joined the Russians, by threatening to withhold from Ukraine over $300 million in aid.[24] In the end, the USA promised Kravchuk a half billion dollars in aid, Russian low-enriched uranium to be shipped to Kyiv, Russian forgiveness of Ukraine's energy debt, and the security guarantees found in the Budapest Memoranda (see below). Ukraine then transferred the warheads back to Mother Russia. The Rada voted in November 1994 to join the Non Proliferation treaty as a non-nuclear state. By the end of May 1996, Ukraine was nuclear-free. The last delivery vehicle, an SS-24 missile silo, was turned over to the Kremlin in 2001.[25]

BUDAPEST MEMORANDA

On December 5, 1994, at a summit meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Ukraine formally acceded to both START I and to the NPT. In return, the nuclear weapons states of Russia, the USA, and the UK gave Ukraine the security guarantees it had been seeking. They signed three memoranda. The following excerpts indicate the solemn promises Russia gave at that time, signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin:

1. The Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America reaffirm their commitment to Ukraine…to respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine;
2. The Russian Federation…reaffirm their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and that none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine…;
3. The Russian Federation…reaffirm their commitment…to refrain from economic coercion designed to subordinate to their own interest the exercise by Ukraine of the rights inherent in its sovereignty and thus to secure advantages of any kind…[26]

These commitments were later reaffirmed in 2009 by Russian President Dimitri Medvedev in a joint statement marking the end of the START treaty: "The United States of America and the Russian Federation

confirm that the assurances recorded in the Budapest Memoranda will remain in effect after December 4, 2009." As would be discovered in 2014, however, the memoranda lacked any enforcement measures. Paragraph six only made the vague promise of the three nuclear powers to "consult" with Ukraine in the event a situation arose that raised a question concerning the Budapest commitments.

In 1997, Russia signed a bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership with Ukraine, again reaffirming respect for the territorial integrity of the latter. Article 2 stated, "the High Contracting Parties" (Russia and Ukraine) "shall respect each other's territorial integrity and reaffirm the inviolability of the borders existing between them." Article 3 committed the parties to "mutual respect for their sovereign equality, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, peaceful resolution of disputes, non-use of force or the threat of force, including economic and other means of pressure…non-interference in internal affairs…" In Article 4, "the parties shall make efforts to ensure that the resolution of all contested problems should take place exclusively by peaceful means, and cooperate in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and situations that affect their interests." Article 6 was equally interesting: "Each of the High Contracting Parties shall abstain from participation in, or support of, any actions whatsoever directed against the other High Contracting Party, and obligates itself not to enter into any agreements with third countries directed against the other Party. Neither of the Parties will permit its territory to be used to the detriment of the other Party's security."[27]

Taken together, the Budapest Memoranda and the Treaty of Friendship represent firm recognition by Russia of the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, that Crimea and the Donbas are part of Ukraine, that Russia recognized these facts, and promised to take all necessary steps to maintain Ukraine's independence within its internationally recognized borders. Vladimir Putin would later ignore these solemn commitments made by his predecessors on behalf of the Russian state.

Ukraine as an Energy Transit State

No interest is more important to the Kremlin and the West than Ukraine's role in the energy trade. If Europe became hooked on cheap Russian energy, and that energy needed Ukraine as a transit route, then Ukraine became essential to Europe's well-being. This appeared

to be an American concern when the USSR began negotiating energy deals with the West during the Cold War. Ukraine's energy role is both an area of competition between East and West for influence and power; and it is a major area in which Kyiv struggled to achieve independence from action to ally with Europe. In 1981, advisors to US President Ronald Reagan took note of Soviet plans to build transit pipelines across Ukraine in order to provide cheap energy to Europe. "Our strategy is aimed at limiting Soviet economic leverage over the West," wrote Pentagon officials. Reagan got the message. "President Reagan clearly understood at the time that Russia was not interested in being part of the family of nations," said former State Department official Larry Eastland. "Anytime you allow someone to have their hand on the spigot, you've not only given them economic power, you've given them military power, as well."[28] Despite Reagan's opposition to the project, European economic interests overcame Cold War fears and large swaths of Europe became dependent on the Kremlin to heat their homes in winter.

When Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia continued to supply Europe through the old Soviet-era pipeline network. The continent quickly found the truth of Eastland's Cold War observation when Russia blocked natural gas exports to Ukraine in the winter of 1992, to pressure Ukraine to cease its efforts to steer a course independent of the Kremlin.[29]

As the 1990s continued, Ukraine consumed domestically up to 50 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas for which it was unable to pay. Gazprom halted gas supplies to the debtor nation on several occasions. As the debt mounted, the Russian energy giant Gazprom lent its Ukrainian counterpart, Naftogaz, sufficient funds to pay off the past liens.[30] A pricing dispute arose in the 2004–2005 time period, and Gazprom threatened to cease providing Ukraine with its domestic gas supply. Ukraine responded with threats of its own: It would make up any shortfall by confiscating transit gas in the pipeline. A compromise was reached, but the battle lines were drawn.

By late 2005, Gazprom proposed to increase the price of natural gas delivered to Ukraine, so that it would match the price the company was charging its downstream European customers. Gazprom Deputy Chairman Alexander Medvedev said, "It is now clear that the time when Ukraine could have considered $160/mcm (thousand cubic meters) to be a market price has now passed… the generally accepted

pricing formula ($230 per mcm) will apply to Ukraine from 2006."[31] Ukraine thought it could circumvent Gazprom by purchasing gas from Turkmenistan. Gazprom, however, preempted the Ukrainians by buying the entire Turkmen production for the first quarter of 2006.[32] When the Ukrainians rejected Gazprom's price demands, Gazprom cut off the gas flow on January 1, 2006.

The effect was felt in Europe almost immediately. Ukraine began siphoning gas to meet its needs, and Europe began to grow cold. "By January 2, Hungary was reported to have lost up to 40% of its Russian supplies; Austrian, Slovakian and Romanian supplies were said to be down by one third, France 25–30% and Poland by 14%. Italy reported having lost 32 million cubic meters, around 25% of deliveries, during January 1–3. German deliveries were also affected."[33] The crisis ended on January 4, when Gazprom and Naftogaz signed a 5-year contract. Henceforth, Ukraine would be wholly dependent on Gazprom.

The West reacted with accusations that Russia was trying to punish Ukraine for its pro-Western government. While it was true that there was a price dispute, went the logic, Moscow was providing subsidized gas to a number of other countries on its periphery. Surely, the reason for punishing Ukraine had to be political. The Swiss newspaper *Le Temps* editorialized, "There is less blood and less sand than in the conquest of Mesopotamia, but Russia is acting in the same strategic context driven by might and hydrocarbons."[34]

Not everyone agreed with this analysis. Jonathan Stern pointed out that neither Gazprom nor the Russian government made any political demands, and it is uncertain as to what kind of demands it could make.[35] The 2006 cutoff appears to have been because of a commercial dispute, and not because of politics. Stern does acknowledge, however, that the energy crisis wounded the pro-Western Ukrainian President Yushchenko politically 2 months before the March 2006 parliamentary elections.

In 2008, negotiations with Gazprom faltered again. The two sides renewed their threats to either halt or siphon transit gas. Finally, in a series of October 2008 agreements, Ukraine accepted that the price of gas would be raised to market prices. Russia agreed this would take place over a 3 year period. The 2006 agreement was annulled. By December the two sides were squabbling over the amount of debt Naftogaz owed Gazprom. The Ukrainians accepted a $1 billion charge, but the Russians wanted $2.195 billion. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said that if the debt were not paid, and if there was any

interference with transit gas, Russia would again cut off supplies to Ukraine.[36]

True to their word, Russia ceased supplying Ukraine on January 1, 2009—3 years to the day since the last break in the supply. Ukraine began to siphon gas from the transit line, calling the purloined fuel "technical" gas to which they were entitled. Russia tightened the screws and began to reduce the flow of transit gas. Prime Minister Putin upped the ante and personally insisted no gas should cross the border.[37] By January 7, all natural gas transiting Ukraine to Europe ceased to flow. The effect was immediate. Eighteen European nations reported either major shortfalls or complete cutoffs of their Gazprom supplies.[38]

The European Commission (EC) had been silent as the crisis built, but reacted immediately to the cutoff. The EC's President Manuel Barroso negotiated the creation of a monitoring mission and demanded the immediate resumption of the gas flow. Barroso condemned the situation, but did not blame either side specifically.[39]

Gazprom offered to renew gas deliveries on January 12. Naftogaz rejected the offer, citing the lack of a written agreement. In reality, Naftogaz had reversed the flow of gas in the pipeline to feed the energy-hungry east of Ukraine, depriving Europe of its deliveries. Without an agreement to regulate future domestic gas deliveries, it made no sense for the Ukrainians to alleviate European pressure on Moscow by accepting new Russian transit gas.[40]

The crisis was resolved on January 19, when Naftogaz and Gazprom signed a 10 year contract. Gas flows were resumed the following day, and by January 22, deliveries to Europe returned to their normal levels. The new contracts called for the delivery of 40 bcm of gas to Ukraine in 2009, and 52 bcm annually during the period 2010–2019. The price would move to the European market price in two steps: Ukraine would pay 80% of the European price in 2009, and 100% commencing in 2010. If Ukraine were to fall into arrears, Gazprom would require Naftogaz to pay in advance for any gas deliveries.[41]

Unlike in 2006, when commercial considerations seemed to dominate Russian calculations, it appears that the 2009 shutoff may have been more politically motivated. Cutting off supplies to Europe and endangering Russia's reputation as a stable energy supplier to punish Ukraine was against Gazprom's long-term interests. It suggests that Prime Minister Putin was more interested in geopolitical considerations.[42]

An alternative explanation, less plausible, is that Putin lost control of his emotions and ordered the cutoff in a fit of pique. "The critical Russian decision to cut back deliveries on 5 January was an unnecessarily risky and commercially irrational action at that stage of the dispute," wrote Oxford energy analysts. "That decision may have reflected Prime Minister Putin's anger and frustration, and been aimed at punishing Ukraine for its repeated threats to disrupt transit. These emotions may have been personalized to President Yushchenko, given the historical animosity of Russia towards the Orange Revolution and towards Yushchenko's subsequent policy orientation away from Russia."[43]

In the wake of the 2009 gas crisis, the European Union proposed the creation of the Nabucco pipeline that would make Europe less dependent on Russian energy. This pipeline was designed to take 32 bcm per year of natural gas from the Caspian to Central Europe. The Kremlin, in response, proposed the South Stream project which roughly paralleled Nabucco but would carry 65 bcm per year. The sources of the natural gas for this latter pipeline were the same fields in western Siberia that fed the Ukrainian transit pipelines. Both of the rival pipelines would reduce Europe's reliance on transit gas from Ukraine. Ukrainian officials had two concerns with these developments: the loss of transit revenues on the gas traveling to Europe and the loss of a domestic gas supply.

Ukraine wanted access to some product for its domestic market in the event of another Russian energy cutoff. In 2013, it began to negotiate with Slovakia for a compact that would allow Ukraine to receive natural gas from Europe by reversing the flow through existing pipelines. The amount that could be provided, however, was miniscule: analysts concluded it would be a "drop in the bucket."[44]

On April 15, 2014, the German company RWE began making deliveries to Ukraine, based on a 2012 framework agreement that would allow delivery of up to 10 bcm of gas per year.[45] Ukraine also renewed imports from Poland, maxing out the carrying capacity of that pipeline.[46] Finally, in late April, Slovakia came on board. In talks that stretched from April 24 to 26, the Slovak pipeline company Eustream and Naftogaz reached an agreement to use a pipeline to deliver "reverse flow" gas to the beleaguered nation.[47] The gas would use a small, disused subsidiary pipeline that could only carry 10% of Ukraine's needs. Naftogaz had requested the reverse flow use the spare capacity in the main trunk lines, but Eustream said secret agreements with Gazprom prohibited them from fulfilling the Ukrainian request.[48] Although the agreement was

signed, Slovakia did not begin to supply any gas because it feared offending Russia.

Russian President Putin increased Russia's demands. He gave Ukraine 1 month to settle its gas import debts to Russia,[49] now having grown to an estimated $3.4–11.4 billion. The Russians refused any negotiations until the Ukrainians came up with the money. "We are saying that in order to discuss any compromise, the debts must be paid first," said Russian Deputy Energy Minister Anatoly Yanovsky. "Pay the debts and then we can agree on something."[50]

US Vice President Joe Biden came to Kyiv to offer $50 million to repair the energy transit system. Ukrainian officials did not judge it sufficient to overhaul the aging Soviet infrastructure. Ukrainian Energy Minister Yuri Prodan said $3–4 billion would be needed just in the first stage of modernization.[51]

Gazprom notified Ukraine they accepted the debt level at the low end of the spectrum, at $3.5 billion. They also said that as of June, gas for consumers would only be delivered if Ukraine paid for the commodity in advance.[52]

Slovakia now came forward after Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov announced that Slovakia's agreement did not violate any agreements. The chairman of Eustream predicted they could ship 8–10 bcm by September, provided a way could be found to guarantee Ukrainian payment for the product.[53]

With days remaining before the threatened Russian gas cutoff, Ukraine paid Gazprom $786 million for February and March gas deliveries, calculated at the concessionary price of $268 per tcm. This was the price Russia had previously promised Ukraine at a different stage of the negotiations.[54] In response, Gazprom declared there was still an outstanding balance and gave Ukraine an additional week to pay the remainder of the bill.[55]

Russia insisted Ukraine pay the price in the original contract of $485 per tcm. Ukrainian acting Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk branded the Russian proposal a political price, not a market one.[56] Russia finally offered $385 per tcm. Ukraine said no, because the offer was coming from the Russian government rather than from Gazprom. The Ukrainians pointed out that if the government could grant the discount, they could just as easily take it away.[57]

Ukraine was seeking an agreement with more permanency. Still looking for compromise, it computed its outstanding gas bill at $1.95 billion

and offered a cash payment of $1 billion with more to be paid later. Russia, however, was through. Gazprom cut the delivery of gas to the country's domestic market, but pledged to continue supplying Europe through the transit pipelines. Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller was firm that Ukraine would now only be a cash customer, paying in advance for any fuel it received.[58]

The European Union almost brokered an agreement that would provide Ukraine with enough gas to last the winter, but it was scuttled by the Russian side. At a meeting in Brussels on September 25, Russia agreed to provide at least 5 bcm of gas over a 6 month period. Ukraine would pay the discounted price that Russia had offered previously of $385 per tcm and a prepayment of $3.1 billion. The agreement met all of Russia's preconditions. At the last moment, however, Russia announced the prepayment would not be used to pay for gas deliveries, but would be applied to Ukraine's outstanding debt, calculated at $5.3 billion. No gas would be provided. Further, the $385 price was not a fixed price, but a discount that would expire in the spring.[59] Such a Russian rejection of a deal that met its own terms showed that the disputes were not about energy, but a continuation of the political/military conflict that had broken out between the two countries.

Both sides finally signed onto the compromise in mid-October, with Ukraine promising to make the payment by December.[60] The EU would act as guarantor for the gas purchases, in a package that totaled $4.6 billion. The money would come from Ukraine and the International Monetary Fund.[61] Ukraine then made a prepayment of $378 million to Gazprom on December 5.[62]

The Russian gas began to flow. Europe also began to increase the amount of "reverse flow" gas it was providing. Slovakia continued its sales, and Hungry resumed sales at the beginning of 2015. European energy Chief Maros Secovic said the amount returning to Ukraine could climb from 31.5 to 40 tcm.[63]

The IMF then agreed to lend the Ukrainian pipeline company Ukrtransgaz $186 million to upgrade the pipeline to Europe.[64] The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) followed thereafter with an equal loan, the first time the EBRD ever agreed to invest in the Ukrainian pipelines.[65]

Russia continued to use the energy weapon in a different way, however. After the 2014 Ukrainian conflict began, authorities in Kyiv cut off natural gas to the rebel-held areas in the east. Russia began supplying gas

directly to the Donbas region, supposedly as a humanitarian gesture.[66] Because the Donbas is legally a part of Ukraine, however, Gazprom billed Naftogaz for the deliveries. President Putin even renewed the threat to halt the flow of gas to Europe if payment were not made.[67] When a ceasefire with the rebels took hold on 12 February 2015, however, Gazprom said it would exempt gas supplies to rebel-held regions from the contract with Naftogaz.[68]

With other sources coming on-line, Ukrainian Energy Minister Volodymyr Demchyshyn announced that Kyiv would stop purchasing Russian gas on April 1, 2015[69]. This threat had its desired effect, and Gazprom agreed to sell gas to Ukraine in the second quarter at $248 per tcm, a significant discount from the $329 per tcm it paid in the first quarter.[70] President Putin tried to put a positive spin on Moscow's retreat, claiming to be providing the discount for humanitarian reasons. "We understand that Ukraine's economy today cannot support the prices of Russian gas that are stated in the contract," the president said. "In principle, we are not required [to give discounts], but we think this is reasonable and we are meeting them halfway." Putin said it was in Russia's interest for Ukraine to have a strong economy so Ukraine could be a prosperous trading partner.[71]

The discount only lasted a month before President Putin insisted on raising prices because of the fall in world oil prices. "We cannot provide the same discount as earlier," he said in a government meeting. "The price for Ukrainian customers should be…in line with nearby countries like Poland."[72] Ukraine would not agree to the new price and announced another suspension in Russian gas purchases.[73]

Finally, the two sides came to terms. In discussions brokered by the European Commission, Russia agreed to provide Ukraine with natural gas at $227 per tcm through December 2015. Russia also agreed that future prices would be changed quarterly and would be close to the price being charged Poland. For their part, the European Commission agreed to organize financing.[74]

While the talks ultimately reached a consensus, such maneuvers were not to Gazprom's liking. Russian Energy Minister Novak announced the company planned to let its transit contract with Ukraine lapse after it expired in 2019. The Russians were counting on the construction of an alternative pipeline that would allow them to continue supplying Europe while bypassing Ukrainian territory.[75] When discussions with neighboring Turkey over this alternative route bogged down, Russia did

an about face. Gazprom's CEO Alexei Miller said he was willing to enter into negotiations to continue using the Ukrainian route. "When the contract is coming to an end, we… will hold talks on a transit deal with our Ukrainian colleagues," Miller told the press. "We have a direct order from the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin."[76] But, added Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, "We won't extend the transit contract with Ukraine on disadvantageous terms."[77]

In September 2015, the Russians announced a new pipeline route that would make Ukraine superfluous, Nord Stream-2. Russian analysts were aware that there was no business motive for the new pipeline. When the EU Commissioner for energy commented that Russian pipelines to Europe were well below capacity, the deputy director of the Energy Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Vladimir Likhachev, said that Russia wanted to bypass Ukraine regardless of current capacities.[78] The new pipeline route, like the other bypass proposals, was thus a political project.

Should Russia succeed in finding a way to bypass Ukraine, it could prove costly to Gazprom. The Soviet-era pipeline network travels to Europe via Slovakia and Bulgaria. While the Ukrainian contract expires in 2019, the contract with Slovakia runs until 2028 and with Bulgaria until 2030. Under these contracts, Gazprom is obligated to pay approximately $1 billion in transit fees whether it ships gas through the countries or not.[79]

The Orange Revolution

Post-Soviet politics in Ukraine consisted of competition among regional oligarchs. The citizenry only began to form a popular opposition movement to these rentiers after 2000, when investigative journalist Georgiy Gongadze was abducted and murdered. This crime became a sensation when audiotapes were released of President Leonid Kuchma demanding Gongadze's abduction. The tapes highlighted the president's involvement in high-level corruption and the criminal harassment of political opponents. Opposition politicians, civic groups, and students joined demonstrations under the banner "Ukraine without Kuchma."[80] The movement failed to change the system. In the 2002 parliamentary elections, the opposition may have won the popular vote—but were deprived

of the fruits of victory by political maneuvering. The opposition resolved to not let it happen again.

In 2004, the Supreme Court ruled President Kuchma was eligible for reelection, but Kuchma realized his extreme unpopularity meant he could not win. The establishment candidate Viktor Yanukovych, supported by outgoing President Kuchma, became prime minister. The prime minister was supported by three oligarchic groups: Rinat Akhmetov's System Capital Management, in Donetsk; Viktor Pinchuk's Interpipe, in Dnipropetrovsk (Pinchuk being married to Kuchma's only daughter); and the Kyiv-based oligarchs Hrihoriy Surkis and Viktor Medvedchuk.[81] The opposition candidate was former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko, who had been sacked in 2001 after reforming the government's finances. He was supported by a series of businessmen such as Ukraine's chocolate king, Petro Poroshenko. Yushchenko was also in an uneasy alliance with former Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, an oligarch who had made her money controlling United Energy Systems of Ukraine with her partner, former Prime Minister Lazarenko.

The public was galvanized when someone poisoned the opposition candidate Yushchenko with dioxin. He was seriously disfigured, but recovered. Yanukovych tried to portray Yushchenko as an American puppet who would disrupt good relations with Russia. His campaign strategy was to deliberately accentuate ethnic and regional divisions within Ukraine, mobilizing the Russian-speaking voters in the east against the Ukrainian-speaking supporters of Yushchenko in the west.[82] His propaganda themes were accompanied by massive fraud, such as ballot box stuffing, busing voters around the countryside to vote in multiple polling places, creating false parties and candidates to splinter the opposition vote, etc. The most flagrant abuse, however, was the remote accessing of the computers of the Central Election Commission and changing the vote tally to ensure a Yanukovych victory.[83]

The first round of voting gave Yushchenko a slight lead over Yanukovych, 39.9–39.2%, with the remaining 20.9% divided among 22 other candidates. In the second round of voting, a runoff between the top two candidates, pollsters from the Kiev International Institute of Sociology predicted a Yushchenko 53–43% win, but the authorities announced Yanukovych's 49–47% victory—before 35% of the votes had even been counted.[84] Demonstrators took to the street throughout

Ukraine, but the heart of the protest was in Kyiv. A tent city that some-times swelled to a half million put tremendous pressure on the authori-ties. This seventeen-day street demonstration became known as the Orange Revolution.

The revolution was not a mass movement. According to a 2005 poll, 4.8% of respondents reported they had taken part in the protests in Kyiv, and another 12.8% claimed to have been involved in other towns. While these numbers are impressive, it meant that even larger numbers did not protest the results. A quarter of the people surveyed did not fully sup-port the demonstrations, and another fifth were uncommitted.[85]

The demonstrations had not been spontaneous. Yushchenko's people planned the street demonstrations months in advance, anticipating the election results would be falsified. Truckloads of tents, mats, and food supplies, secured weeks before, quickly appeared.[86] Yushchenko tried to end the controversy by taking the oath of office on November 23 in a rump meeting of the legislature in front of 191 parliamentarians. Ukraine had two elected presidents. There had to be a way to break the impasse.

Under the watchful eye of the world press, the US government, and the European Union, 307 out of 450 members of the Rada (Parliament) voted on November 27 to invalidate the second round of voting. The Parliament then reversed itself three days later, recognizing the vote. Yanukovych tried to put pressure on the reformists by accusing them of tearing the country apart. On November 28, 2004, he arranged for two planeloads of foreign journalists to fly to Severodonetsk to observe a demonstration that urged the Donetsk region to separate from Ukraine. The star of the rally was Moscow's mayor, Yuri Luzhkov. President Kuchma offered to use his influence with these early separa-tists if Yushchenko used his influence to dissolve the encampment on the Maidan, Kyiv's main square. Prime Minister Yanukovych was clear that he was seeking a trade-off: "all the turmoil in the region will disappear, in the East, in the South, and everything that unfolded will disappear when we calm the people down."[87]

Western countries, including the USA, were pouring hundreds of mil-lions of dollars into civil society groups for the purposes of democracy promotion. Most of the money was directed toward Yushchenko sup-porters. On the other side, Moscow had begun supporting Yanukovych as early as the summer of 2003. The Kremlin believed cooperation with outgoing President Kuchma had been best for Russian foreign policy;

so, whomever Kuchma chose as his successor became the Kremlin's candidate.[88] As economic incentives for Ukrainians to support Kuchma's candidate, Russia reduced Ukraine's gas debt from $2.2 billion to $1.4 billion, abolished quotas for Ukrainian steel pipes, and signed a taxation agreement that yielded an extra $800 million in payments to the Ukrainian treasury.[89] A Russian political technologist wrote a plan that foreshadowed events of 2014. "Our task is to destabilize the situation in the regions (maybe involving political games, but not the everyday economy)" in something called "directed conflict....The task of the media is to interpret this as an ontological 'East-West' conflict."[90] Russian business interests, possibly including state-controlled Gazprom, provided $300 million to the Yanukovych campaign.[91]

Russian President Putin visited Ukraine twice to back Yanukovych during the election, doing so just before each round of voting.[92] Russian efforts to influence the election failed. On December 3, 2004, the Supreme Court ordered the second round of the vote to be rerun, since authorities had committed so much fraud it was impossible to determine the will of the people.[93] In the third round, Yushchenko emerged as the clear winner, defeating Yanukovych by 52–44%. Putin declared contemptuously, "A repeat of the second round would yield nothing. Are you going to conduct it three, four, maybe 25 times?"[94]

> The Kremlin decision to publicly intervene in the Ukrainian election was a conscious effort by Yanukovych to rally support among Russian-speakers in the east. A month before the election, he agreed to make Russian an official language in Ukraine, to recognize dual Ukrainian-Russian citizenship, and to abandon efforts to join NATO. In an analysis of the Russian intervention, Petrov and Ryabov pilloried the Kremlin for incompetence. "The problem is not that the Kremlin gambled on a candidate who lost, but that the Kremlin's involvement was so conspicuous and crude. The Kremlin seemed not only to want to win, but also to demonstrate that Ukraine remains a part of Russia's vital sphere of influence, where the Russian government has a right to act as it would within its own borders...The result was not simply a defeat, but also a scandalous humiliation."[95]

Paul D'Anieri analyzed the election's effects on foreign policy as revolutionary. "The events of late 2004 caused a fundamental re-evaluation of Ukraine by key actors... Better relationships with the West, and membership in NATO and the World Trade Organization (WTO) became real

possibilities… Russia's efforts to control Ukraine seemed to have been decisively rejected."[96]

Viktor Yushchenko, whose party had received the most votes, became president and appointed Yulia Tymoshenko his prime minister. This marriage of convenience would only last 8 months. Once Tymoshenko began to undermine Yushchenko, the president dismissed her in September 2005.[97]

Against a background of an economic slowdown, high inflation, and ballooning energy prices, the country went back to the polls in March 2006 to elect a new parliament. The allies of defeated presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovych won a plurality of votes (32.4%).[98] His Party of the Regions made a spectacular comeback from the relative oblivion in which he had been cast by the Orange Revolution. Yanukovych accomplished this by a relentless focus on the discontent of Ukrainian voters with Yushchenko's inability to deliver on the promises of the revolution.

After months of negotiations, Yushchenko appointed Yanukovych, the leader of the largest party in parliament, as his new prime minister.[99] Yanukovych immediately began to strengthen his power base, by convincing members of Yushchenko's party to defect to his own. One of the most influential parliamentarians to change sides was Yushchenko's former national security advisor, Anatoly Kinakh. The Yanukovych coalition grew to 260 members, out of 450. Leaders of the grouping predicted they would soon reach a veto-proof two-thirds majority of 300. Faced with the possibility of Yanukovych handing him a string of legislative defeats, the president ordered the parliament to be dissolved on April 2, 2007. The deputies defied the order, voting the decree of dissolution was unconstitutional.[100] Finally, in late May, Yanukovych and the Socialist speaker of the Parliament Oleksandr Moroz agreed to new elections for September 30, 2007. The Party of the Regions received 34.37% of the votes, once again giving them the lead to negotiate a governing coalition. It did so by merging with the second place finisher, Yuri Lutsenko's Bloc of Our Ukraine.[101]

To counter the parliament, President Yushchenko brought back his sometime-ally Yulia Tymoshenko as prime minister. She spent her years in that position continuing to undermine the public's support for Yushchenko, by accusing the president of corruption and incompetence. When war with Russia broke out next door in Georgia in September 2008, Tymoshenko refused to condemn Russia for its actions in South Ossetia. She then joined with the Party of the Regions in an attempt to

limit presidential powers.[102] Speaker of the parliament Arseniy Yatsenyuk dissolved the Parliament, again.[103] Instead of new elections, however, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko reconciled and created a new coalition.[104]

Presidential elections were scheduled for January 2010. Despite being occasional allies, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko spent the campaign cycle attacking each other. Viktor Yanukovych managed to win the prize with 48.95% of the vote. Although it was not a majority, it was enough to beat out second place Yulia Tymoshenko who had 45.47%. The OSCE declared the election a fair and impressive display of democracy.[105] Yanukovych's winning platform called for improved ties with the Kremlin, and opposition to Ukraine's membership in NATO.[106] Commentators considered the election a rebuke to the pro-Western forces that had backed the Orange Revolution and a clear victory for Moscow.[107]

International Relations

Ukraine applied to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2008, raising Russian President Putin's ire. At the April 2008 NATO meeting in Bucharest to which he was invited, Putin even questioned the legitimacy of Ukraine as a state. He intimated, instead, that Ukraine was an area of exclusive Russian interest:

> In Ukraine, one third are ethnic Russians. Out of forty- five million people, in line with the official census, seventeen millions are Russians. There are regions, where only the Russian population lives, for instance, in the Crimea. 90% are Russians. Generally speaking, Ukraine is a very complicated state. Ukraine, in the form it currently exists, was created in the Soviet times… (I)t received huge territories from Russia in the east and south of the country. It is a complicated state formation. If we introduce into it NATO problems, other problems, it may put the state on the verge of its existence…I want that all of us, when deciding such issues, realize that we have there our interests as well…The Crimea was merely received by Ukraine with the decision of the KPSS Political Bureau. There were not even any state procedures on transferring this territory.[108]

Putin told US President George W. Bush that Ukraine was not a state, that most of its territory was "given away" by Russia, and—foreshadowing the future—if Ukraine joined NATO it would cease to exist as a state. According to an unidentified foreign delegate to the

summit, Putin threatened to encourage the secession of the Crimean Peninsula and eastern Ukraine.[109] He had thus given warning to the West 6 years before he took any action.

Ukraine was not the only former Soviet republic whose legitimacy the Kremlin challenged. Shortly after the 2008 NATO meeting, Dmitri Medvedev became president of the Russian Federation. Putin stepped down to be prime minister. In September 2008, the new president outlined his Medvedev doctrine. He asserted various Russian rights over the countries of the near abroad. "There are regions in which Russia has privileged interests…The countries on our borders are priorities, of course, but our priorities do not end there." Medvedev began laying down the marker that Russia had responsibility for Russian speakers in other countries.[110] He expanded this the following year when the Duma passed a resolution allowing him to send troops abroad anywhere he decided "to defend the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens."[111] Clearly, the question of sovereignty of other countries was not a consideration in the passing of this legislation.

Ukrainians were lukewarm to the idea of joining NATO. A September 2009 poll found that 51% of Ukrainians opposed membership in the western bloc. This sentiment was particularly strong among ethnic Russians (74%) and in the eastern part of the country (72%).[112] On June 3, 2010, the Ukrainian parliament voted against integration into NATO and rejected the possibility of a NATO Membership Action Plan.[113] The lure of the West remained strong, however. In 2012, Yanukovych initialed an Association Agreement for a customs union with the European Union. While NATO may not have been attractive to the majority of Ukrainians, membership in the EU was perceived as a mark of civilization. In September 2013, he urged the parliament to pass whatever laws were needed to bring Ukraine into compliance with European demands.[114] The goal was for Ukraine to sign the agreement at the Vilnius NATO summit in late November.

It never happened. Moscow asked Yanukovych to delay signing the association agreement, and the president obliged. President Putin (after another title swap with Medvedev in 2012) stated that Ukraine's signing of an agreement with the European Union would have been a major threat to the Russian economy.[115] (The agreement would not be signed until June 2014, by Yanukovych's successor Petro Poroshenko).[116] Instead, Yanukovych traveled to the Kremlin and met personally with Putin in mid-December. Putin promised that, in return for Ukraine

maintaining a pro-Kremlin orientation, he would give the country a loan of $15 billion and reduce the price of natural gas from $400 per tcm to $268 per tcm.[117]

Russian pressure and enticements were certainly attractive to the Ukrainian president. Yanukovych was in a tight spot. For political purposes, he had been playing up the possibility of the association with the EU. In reality, however, such an association would have been extremely costly for Ukraine. EU Association would mean that they would get tariff relief on trade with the European bloc, but at the cost of increased tariffs on trade outside the bloc (meaning, with its major trading partner, Russia). Yanukovych had hoped Brussels would offer him some sort of financial package to ease the blow, but none was forthcoming.[118] The president tried to convince the masses the aid package from the Kremlin was a great victory, but the people were not listening. A small, pro-Western demonstration in the center of Kyiv exploded into the Maidan movement, the "Revolution of Dignity."

University students and intellectuals flooded Kyiv's Independence Square, the "Maidan." They remained there peaceably for days and were joined by opposition politicians. Then, on November 30, 2013, riot police tried to disperse the crowd. In the days of fighting that followed, at least 100 protestors died. Although the Russian propaganda machine tried to make it appear the protestors were neo-Nazis, the majority were members of the middle class who had become disgusted with the Yanukovych government.[119]

Russian Reaction to Ukraine's Turn to the West

Russian speakers in Crimea and eastern Ukraine did not understand what the new demonstrations were about. Only one of the activist leaders, Vitali Klychko, spoke Russian so the activists could not easily communicate with the south and east of the country. Russian speakers in Crimea and the Donbas had to rely on official Russian TV reports that were hostile to the movement.[120]

Some within Russia recognized the Maidan as an opportunity to expand Russian control over Ukraine. Russian oligarch Konstantin V. Malofeev circulated a memorandum urging the Kremlin take advantage of the chaos to annex Crimea and a large portion of southeastern Ukraine. The memo, published by Russian opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta, predicted President Yanukovych would be overthrown.

The Kremlin should then take advantage of the "centrifugal forces" tearing Ukraine apart to merge Crimea and Kharkiv with Russia. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry S. Peskov dismissed the memo as a hoax.[121]

Responding to the demonstrations, on February 22, 2014, the Ukrainian parliament removed President Viktor Yanukovych from power. Later that day, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to reverse the 2012 law that made Russian an official language, although Ukrainian acting President Turchynov refused to sign the repeal. That evening, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with his security chiefs. Putin was convinced there might be an assassination attempt against his Ukrainian ally, and the original purpose of the meeting was to devise a plan to save Yanukovych's life. As the evening wore on, Putin settled on an adventurous course of action. About 7 am the following morning, he told his special forces commanders to begin working to bring Crimea back into Russia.[122] Putin asked the Russian parliament for permission to use troops in Ukraine.

Yanukovych fled to Russia. The USA took no position on the legality of Yanukovych's removal, but supported the interim government that followed. "We believe that Yanukovych has lost his legitimacy as he abdicated his responsibilities. As you know, he left Ukraine—or left Kyiv, and he has left a vacuum of leadership," said the US State Department.[123]

Russia rejected the American reasoning. They pointed out that the Ukrainian constitution provided four ways a president could be removed: resignation, health, death, or impeachment. A vote to remove the president, rather than an impeachment proceeding, was therefore an unconstitutional act and Yanukovych remained the legally elected president. The new government, in the Russian view, was the product of a *coup d'etat.*

Fall of Crimea

With Russia unhappy with the overthrow of its ally Viktor Yanukovych, on March 1, 2014, Gazprom demanded payment of an estimated $1.55 billion it claimed Ukraine owed for natural gas. Ukrainian Energy Minister Yuriy Prodan did not deny the debt, but said he did not know when he could make the payment. In response, Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller threatened, "Either Ukraine makes good on its debt and pays for current supplies, or there is a risk of returning to the situation of early 2009."[124]

European Commissioner for Energy, Gunther Oettinger, said the EU would pay the Ukrainian gas bill.[125] Within days, the European Commission announced $15 billion in long-term economic aid to the country. The Europeans pressured Slovakia to sign the "reverse flow" agreement from 2013, while assuring themselves they had enough gas in reserve so there would not be a repeat of the 2009 shortages.

Energy was only one of the ways that Russia was using to pressure Kyiv. "little green men," Russian-speaking troops with non-Ukrainian accents, in uniforms without insignia, began appearing throughout Crimea. On March 2, these forces seized control of government buildings and airports on the peninsula.

President Putin denied there had been a Russian invasion. Speaking to the Federal Assembly on March 18, 2014, he said, "Russia's Armed Forces never entered Crimea; they were there already in line with an international agreement. True, we did enhance our forces there; however… we did not exceed the personnel limit of our Armed Forces in Crimea, which is set at 25,000, because there was no need to do so."[126] At the same time, however, he made it sound very much like Russia was active in the conflict. "Millions of Russians live in both Crimea and the Ukraine. Russia found itself in a position that it could not back down from. If you push the spring too hard, it will recoil."[127] The president outlined his world view. Russia saw itself as the core of a Russian civilization and assumed the role of the defender of this world. Further, membership included "compatriots" who lived beyond Russia's geographic borders.[128] In other words, Russia was assuming the role of defender of Russians wherever they lived.

For almost a year, Putin denied active Russian military involvement in Crimea. He reversed himself and admitted Russia's role in a television documentary entitled: "Crimea, Return to the Motherland." He refuted all his carefully worded denials of Russian involvement. "We needed specialists," he said. "I gave orders to the ministry of defense—what is there to hide?—to send military intelligence special troops, marines and paratroopers there under the guise of strengthening the protection of our military bases in Crimea."[129] Not only did he discuss Russian forces in the Crimea, but he admitted he was willing to put Russia's nuclear weapons into a state of combat readiness to support the seizure of the Crimea.[130]

At the United Nations, Russia presented a letter signed by the deposed President Yanukovych (still living on Russian soil) requesting

military assistance to return himself to Kyiv as the legitimate ruler of the country. "As the legitimately elected President of Ukraine, I wish to inform you that events in my country and capital have placed Ukraine on the brink of civil war… I therefore call on President Vladimir Putin of Russia to use the armed forces of the Russian Federation to establish legitimacy, peace, law and order and stability in defense of the people of Ukraine."[131]

Immediately after Russian troops seized Crimea's government buildings, the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council met on February 28, 2014. Acting president Oleksandr Turchynov raised the possibility of fighting back, but he was opposed by Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. "We're talking about declaring war on Russia," Yatsenyuk said. "Right after we do this, there will be a Russian statement 'On defending Russian citizens and Russian speakers who have ethnic ties to Russia.' That is the script the Russians have written, and we're playing to that script." Yatsenyuk said the government had no military ability to defend Kyiv if Russia invaded. As if on cue, Russia's speaker of the parliament called Turchynov to relay threats from Vladimir Putin. Russia was ready to make tough decisions on Ukraine for persecuting Russians and Russian-speaking people, Putin warned. That might include sending troops, and not just to Crimea. If a single Russian died, the Kremlin would declare the Kyiv government war criminals. The Council heeded the Russian threats, as well as American and German government assessments that Putin would invade, and voted not to fight back.[132]

In reaction to the Crimean takeover, the USA, UK, and Canada suspended preparations for a scheduled June meeting of the G-8 that was to take place in Sochi, Russia. The action was immediately branded ineffective by analysts.[133] Russia then opened negotiations with Western countries rather than Ukraine's officials. The Kremlin demanded a new Ukrainian constitution converting the unitary state into a federal republic, with each region receiving autonomy on questions of language and finances. It also requested a United Nations resolution declaring that Ukraine was, and always would remain, a neutral nation.[134]

President Putin did not annex Crimea immediately. His first step was to recognize the peninsula's independence from Kyiv. The "government" of Crimea organized a referendum on Sunday, March 16. The official results showed an 83.1% participation rate and, echoing the staged Soviet elections of the past, a full 96.77% voted that Crimea

should leave Ukraine and join Russia. The Crimean parliament voted the next day to follow the referendum's lead.[135]

Putin then used the election results to justify annexation. He presented to the Duma a bill to absorb the Crimean Peninsula. In his speech, the Russian president said that Crimea had always been part of Russia and that the people of Crimea had corrected the "historical injustice" of being part of Ukraine.[136] Crimea's inclusion in Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a robbery, in broad daylight. Putin reviewed Russian involvement on the peninsula from the birth of Prince Vladimir to the death of Soviet soldiers fighting the Nazis. "All these places are sacred to us," he said. He hinted that Russia could lay claim to larger parts of Ukraine, stating, "We are one nation. Kiev is the mother of all Russian cities." Despite that, however, the president renounced any claim on the remainder of the nation. "Don't believe those who say Russia will take other regions after Crimea. We don't need that."[137] The parliament then approved the reunion of Crimea with Mother Russia.

"Given the declaration of will by the Crimean people in a nationwide referendum held on March 16, 2014, the Russian Federation is to recognize the Republic of Crimea as a sovereign and independent state, whose city of Sevastopol has a special status," read an official Kremlin statement.[138]

Putin underlined the permanency of the annexation in August 2015 by making a three-day visit to the peninsula. The purported purpose of the visit was to explore how to develop Crimea and promote tourism there. He made it a point to underline its new membership in the Russian Federation. "Crimea is essentially a mirror of multi-ethnic Russia. Here, like everywhere in Russia…" he said.[139] He also took concrete steps to solidify his hold, by permanently relocating an additional 20,000 Russians to the area. The majority locating near the Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol. A large number were soldiers. The influx was so large it caused a housing shortage, with over three thousand soldiers waiting for a place to live.[140] At the same time, however, approximately 22,000 displaced persons fled from Crimea into Ukraine.[141]

The Kremlin continued to solidify its hold on the peninsula in 2015. Russia's naval Chief, Admiral Viktor Chirkov, announced plans for a major rearmament of the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Sevastopol. The most frightening announcement came from the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Department for Nuclear Non-Proliferation

and Weapons Control: "I don't know if there are any nuclear weapons there at the moment and I am not aware of such plans, but in principle Russia can do this," Mikhail Ulyanov told a press conference in Moscow. "Naturally Russia has the right to put nuclear weapons in any region on its territory if it deems it necessary."[142]

Some of the strongest opponents to Russian annexation were the Crimean Tatars, a non-Russian ethnic group who represented approximately 12% of Crimea's population. They had suffered at the Kremlin's hands under Stalin. Even though they had lived in Crimea for a 1000 years, in 1944 Stalin ordered 180,000 deported to Central Asia. Many were sent to labor camps under suspicion of having cooperated with the Nazis. According to Soviet archives, 30,000 died within 2 months of their deportation; activists estimate as many as 100,000 died as a result of this Soviet action.[143] The Tatars feared what would happen to them under Russian control. They found out almost immediately. Crimean Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Temirgaliyev announced that the Tatars would have to vacate part of their land for "social needs." He promised, however, the Tatars would be well represented in the new government. "We are ready to allocate and legalize many other plots of land to ensure a normal life for the Crimean Tatars," he said.[144] Normal life included prohibition of the Crimean Tatar Memorial Day of Deportation; the declaration that the Crimean legislative body, the Mejlis, was illegitimate; seizure of the Mejlis' and a Tatar charity's property and bank accounts; a search of the main mosques in Simferopol (center of the Tatar population); and a demand that the Tatar's accept Russian citizenship or leave.[145] In 2015, Moscow closed ATR, a Crimean Tatar television station. Authorities also shut down several other media outlets owned by ATR's holding company, including a children's TV channel and two radio stations.[146] The European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning "the unprecedented levels of human rights (violations) perpetuated against Crimean residents, most notably Crimean Tatars, who do not follow the imposed rule of the so-called local authorities."[147]

The Kremlin's crackdown on the Tatars was both practical and ideological. On the one hand, the Russian government considered the Crimean Tatar community to be the primary organized opposition group to its occupation and annexation of the peninsula. On the other, the Russian ideological claim that Crimea was always Russian had been weakened by the Ukrainian government's recognition that the Tatars were the native people of Crimea.[148]

Opposition to the post-invasion crackdown was not limited to the Tatars, however. Any businessman who had profited under the Kyiv government soon found himself in trouble. Russia seized an estimated 4000 enterprises, providing no compensation to the owners. Instead, the authorities claimed the corporations were guilty of unauthorized activities, or were of strategic significance. Still more were expropriated after March 1, 2015, when many companies missed a Russian registration deadline.[149] Crimea's Prime Minister, Sergei Aksyonov, justified the property seizures as redressing the wrongs created by the Kyiv-backed government. "Over the past 10 years, the majority of state property was illegally stolen from the government," he said. "Enterprises were privatized via fraudulent schemes and the sate didn't receive any money."[150]

Two Ukrainian energy companies went to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague seeking compensation for gas stations they lost on the Peninsula.[151] Ihor Kolomoyskiy, the former governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region, also sued Moscow in The Hague. He claimed the annexation and subsequent property seizures had unfairly deprived him of his right to operate a civilian airport in Crimea. Moscow claimed the court had no jurisdiction in the matter and would refuse to participate in the proceedings.[152] Instead, Russia took Kolomoyskiy and three associates to court in London, charging them with defrauding the Russian oil company Tatneft. The court ordered a lien on $380 million worth of the tycoons' property in England and France.[153]

Ukrainians remained unreconciled to the loss of the peninsula. On the second anniversary of the Euromaidan protests, on November 20, 2015, someone tried to cut electrical power transmission from Ukraine into Crimea by bombing two transmission towers on Ukrainian territory. When that effort failed to halt the energy flow, another bomb blast the following night took out the towers. The bomb blasts were located near where Crimean Tatar activists were staging a Crimea "blockade."[154] Tatars then tried to block Ukrainian repair teams from replacing the damaged cables.[155]

Power was partially restored by December 8. Prime Minister Yatsenyuk announced, however, that trade with Crimea—including electricity—would be cut by mid-January[156] Faced with months of limited electricity until Russia could lay an additional two cables under the Kerch Strait connecting the peninsula to the Russian grid, Crimea considered a new contract. They rejected the terms, however, which included a statement that Crimea and Sevastopol were still part of Ukraine.[157]

Ukrainian Reaction to the Fall of Crimea

Desperate to reverse the dismemberment of his country, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk tried to remove Russian objections by renouncing any plans to join NATO. In a televised address to the nation, he alluded to the loss of Crimea as the reason for his decision. "For the sole purpose of preserving the unity of Ukraine, the issue of accession to NATO is not on the agenda," he said. "The country will be defended by a strong and modern Ukrainian army." Yatsenyuk hoped Ukraine's progress toward an economic association with the EU would not alienate the Russians further. "We do not see relations with the EU and Russia according to the 'either-or' principle… I will do all in my power to preserve peace and build a true partnership and good neighborly relations with Russia."[158]

Russia was not appeased by Yatsenyuk's remarks. Rejecting the government in Kyiv as a group that had overthrown a democratically elected government, Moscow refused to recognize the government or the results of the Ukrainian elections until a new constitution was adopted. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov explained the new constitution had to be unanimously approved by all regions of Ukraine and had to transform Ukraine from a unitary to a federal state. In other words, he proposed that the Russian-speaking part of Ukraine be able to veto any initiatives of the central government. In addition, the various regions would be authorized to conduct their own foreign and economic policies. Both Russian and Ukrainian would be recognized as official languages. Kyiv saw these demands as a recipe for the dismemberment of the state, and rejected the plan as unacceptable.[159]

Once Russia declared the border between Crimea and the rest of Ukraine a "state border," Ukraine began to take action to emphasize Russia's responsibility for the occupied territory. To begin, it cut the North Crimea Canal, which provided Crimea with 80% of its freshwater. Echoing Russian complaints about Ukraine and natural gas deliveries, canal authorities cut the flow to the lowest technically feasible volume claiming that Crimea had accumulated a huge debt for water supplied the previous year.[160] The immediate effect was the loss of Crimea's rice harvest.[161] Russian army engineers eventually partially solved the problem by flying engineering battalions 2000 km to construct a series of 24 pipelines, to connect water from artesian wells in Crimea's west to the canal.[162]

Round One: The Donbas

The drumbeat for additional Russian action in Ukraine began slowly, with Russian Duma deputy speaker Vladimir Zhirinovsky sending official letters to Poland, Hungary, and Romania, suggesting those countries annex portions of Ukraine. Zhirinovsky was proposing the country be divided along the lines proposed in the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Soviet-Nazi non-aggression pact.[163] President Putin also reminded people of Russia's ties to eastern Ukraine. He called the area New Russia, Novorossiya, a medieval term for the area; and he pressed the legitimacy of Russian claims to the land. "The question is to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of Russian and Russian-speaking citizens of the south-east of Ukraine—to remember the terminology from more royal times, this is Novorossiya (New Russia): Kharkov, Lugansk (sic), Donetsk, Kherson, Mykolayiv, Odessa were not included in the Ukraine during tsarist times. They were all territories that were transferred to Ukraine in the 20s by the Soviet government. Why they did that, God knows."[164]

Russia issued appeals for volunteers to go to Ukraine and fight the illegal junta that had seized Kyiv. Interim Ukrainian President Oleksandr Turchynov decided to show some teeth. Rather than passively resisting Russian actions as Ukraine had in Crimea, he told the army to "accept battle" if there were further encroachments on Ukrainian soil. On March 17, 2014, the parliament mobilized 40,000 into the military and began to form a National Guard with a goal of 20,000 volunteers.[165] The Air Force took several MIG-29 Fulcrum fighter jets out of mothballs and returned them to combat service, but Defense Minister Ihor Tenyukh admitted the armed forces were in an unsatisfactory condition. He said that out of 507 combat planes and 121 attack helicopters, only 15% were serviceable. In addition, only 10% of Air Force crews had proper training and were capable of performing combat tasks.[166] Meanwhile, Moscow massed thousands of troops near the Ukrainian border.

Kyiv and Moscow began to trade spy charges. Kyiv accused the Russian FSB (descendent of the KGB) of having sent 30 agents to the Ukrainian capital during the Maidan demonstrations to organize anti-government protestors. The FSB, in turn, announced the detention of 25 Ukrainians for planning terrorist attacks while Crimea held their referendum on joining Russia. The detainees included three members of the ultra-nationalist group, Right Sector.[167]

On April 5, 2014, the Ukrainian state security service detained 15 people in the Luhansk region on suspicion of planning to overthrow the government. It confiscated 300 automatic rifles, an anti-tank gun, and large numbers of grenades, petrol bombs, and knives.[168]

The arrests were not enough to halt the coming storm. Protestors broke into regional government buildings in Donetsk and Kharkiv, but soon left the Kharkiv building. The next day, they seized state security buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk. Gunmen stormed a TV building in Donetsk but were driven off. On April 7, 2014, a Russian speaker appeared before the Donetsk assembly, in the seized government building, and declared the creation of the sovereign state of the People's Republic of Donetsk. He then asked for a referendum on the region's future, to be held on May 11. He also asked that Russia send a "peacekeeping contingent" to protect the separatists. The rebels seized as many as ten towns over the period 12–13 April.[169]

The Kyiv government was not under any illusion as to the backers of the protestors. Interim Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk laid the blame at the feet of the Russians. He pointed out the protestors' accents were Russian, not Ukrainian. "The plan is to destabilize the situation, the plan is for foreign troops to cross the border and seize the country's territory, which we will not allow." Interim President Oleksandr Turchynov called the move an attempt by Russia to dismember the state. Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsya warned that Kyiv would go to war with Russia if it sent troops into eastern Ukraine.[170]

Ukraine's interior minister Arsen Avakov confidently predicted the situation would be resolved in 48 hours. He said there was an anti-terrorist operation underway, and the rebels could either talk or face military action. "For those who want dialogue, we propose talks and a political solution. For the minority who want conflict they will get a forceful answer from the Ukrainian authorities." In response, agitators in Luhansk renewed calls for Russian intervention, identifying themselves as Putin's fighters. "Mr. Putin, have mercy on your fighters. If you lose us then you will lose the last hope to create a good neighbor."[171]

Russia increased the alert level to high for its troops on the Ukrainian border. Senior NATO military officers released commercial satellite images from DigitalGlobe of fast aircraft, tanks, armored vehicles, artillery, and temporary troop bases. They said the Russians were deployed in more than 100 makeshift bases and could move within hours of getting a command. NATO's Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the troops were ready for combat.[172]

Refusing to be cowed by the presence of Russian troops on its border, Kyiv sent troops into the field to oppose the separatists. On April 13, commandos engaged in gunfights at roadblocks and stormed a rebel-held police station in Slovyansk. Interim President Turchynov issued an ultimatum that separatists should vacate occupied buildings or face a "large-scale antiterrorist operation" that would involve the Ukrainian military.[173] Government forces made little headway, and renegades rejected the government's demands. Moscow was furious Kyiv was ignoring its wishes. The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement accusing Kyiv of threatening violence "against anyone who does not agree with the nationalist-radicals, chauvinistic and anti-Semitic actions," and that the violence was being carried out "with direct support from the United States and Europe."[174]

The threatened government operation began the next day. Things went badly for the army. Russian television reported 300 Ukrainian troops sent to Slovyansk agreed to lay down their arms and go home. One activist reported that the troops had been flying a Russian flag. Similarly, in the town of Kramatorsk in the Donetsk region, Ukrainian armored personnel carriers—some also flying Russian flags—were surrounded by locals and surrendered.[175] Acting President Turchynov told parliament that the unit, the 25th parachute brigade, would be demobilized and the servicemen brought before a court.[176]

In Donetsk, a leaflet appeared signed by the Donetsk People's Republic's chairman, Denis Pushilin. Three masked men carrying a Russian flag distributed them around the Donetsk synagogue, demanding that Jews register with the separatists' administration. "Because Jewish leaders have supported the illegal junta in Kyiv and are not friendly to the Orthodox Donetsk republic and its citizens, the leadership of the Donetsk republic decrees that all citizens of Jewish nationality older than sixteen report to Room 514 in the Donetsk state administration for registration," read the leaflet. Jews who failed to register would have their property confiscated. Pushilin subsequently repudiated the leaflet. The leaflet, however, included the official stamp of the separatists' movement.[177]

Ukraine launched another attack a month later, in late April. Commandos, backed by armored vehicles, engaged insurgents at checkpoints outside of Slovyansk. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu warned that if the Ukrainian military machine were not stopped, Moscow would be forced to react. He then ordered military exercises along the Ukrainian border, including elements of the Russian air force.[178]

Town after town fell to the rebels. In Donetsk, a "Ukrainian Unity March" was broken up by several dozen militants who arrived in buses, beat the demonstrators with bats and batons, and then left.[179] In despair, acting Ukrainian President Turchynov described the situation as hopeless. He admitted that security forces could not defend Ukrainians in Donetsk and Luhansk, nor could they control the militias demanding greater autonomy from the central government. He also confessed that some members of the Ukrainian military were cooperating with separatists.[180]

Security specialists warned the government that regional police in Donetsk could not be trusted, as was proven when police stood by as renegades seized the regional television center.[181] Ukrainian General Vasily Krutov said his men were facing special forces with experience in many global hot spots, who were operating extremely professionally,[182] an obvious reference to the Russian military.

Further evidence of Russian involvement was the commander of rebel forces in the east, Russian special forces Colonel Strelkov. His real name was Igor Girkin, a Russian citizen from Moscow. According to Russian Media, Strelkov previously served in Transnistria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Chechnya.[183] The Atlantic Council said that Strelkov was a member of the Russian Federal Security Service.[184] Strelkov was named defense minister of the Donetsk Peoples Republic.

Round One: Moves Toward Separation

Agitators in the east began to emulate the Crimean model. After gaining control of many towns and cities, the rebels called on the citizens of Donetsk and Luhansk to hold a referendum declaring the regions sovereign republics. Kyiv immediately called the measure illegal, but Russian state media began covering the upcoming vote. Organizers were confident the vote would embrace independence, since in a combat zone only separatist supporters were likely to vote. "I will consider the referendum successful no matter what," said Roman Lyagin, the self-proclaimed chairman of the Donetsk People's Republic Central Electoral Committee.[185]

In a surprise move, Russian President Putin called on the separatists to postpone the referendum.[186] "We are asking representatives in the southeast of Ukraine and supporters of federalization to postpone the referendum scheduled for the 11th of May," he told reporters. Putin said

that postponing the referendum would help create the "necessary conditions of dialogue" with the government in Kyiv.[187] Putin's call for a postponement may have been designed to highlight his role as a peacemaker, rather than to be considered a serious request. Almost immediately, rebel leaders in both Donetsk and Luhansk announced the referendum would proceed as originally planned.[188]

Ukraine's Interior Minister Arsen Avakov offered amnesty to any protester who had not committed a felony. "We are ready to negotiate with the protesters and their representatives," he said, "but there will be no clemency for terrorists and armed separatists."[189] The Ukrainians were confident they had the upper hand and surrounded Slavyansk. They succeeded in retaking the television tower, and the separatists retreated deep into the city.[190]

In Odessa, a city on the Black Sea in the south of Ukraine, the situation was more mixed. The Trade Union Hall, where pro-Russian protestors were huddled, caught fire. The cause was not clear: Some sources claimed the hall was set on fire by a pro-government mob that surrounded the building. The government, however, claimed the building was being used as a Molotov cocktail factory, and one of the cocktails dropped. At least 42 people died, 30 of whom were inside the building. Police then arrested the pro-Russians as they escaped the building. Russian supporters then stormed the police headquarters, freeing the prisoners.[191]

In Mariupol, Ukrainian forces captured Donetsk People's Republic "defense minister" Igor Kakidzyanov, thereby opening the position for Strelkov to fill. Separatists seized the city council building.[192] Later, a number of insurgents were killed as Ukrainian forces tried to drive separatists out of the police headquarters.[193]

As the fighting continued, journalist Anna Nemtsova reported that a power struggle had broken out among the separatist leaders. All were agreed on wanting independence, but were divided over who should rule the new government. The factions took their disputes into the street. Order was finally restored when billionaire industrialist Rinat Akhmetov ordered his employees to patrol the city.[194] Akhmetov said the people were tired of living in fear and accused separatists of leading Ukraine toward genocide. In response, Donetsk leader Denis Pushilin threatened to "nationalize" Akhmetov's holdings for failure to pay taxes to separatist forces.[195]

Separatists had another problem as well: They still had not won the support of the majority of residents in their area. According to the Kyiv

International Institute of Sociology, only about 10% of the region supported independence. Another poll in mid-April poll showed only 15.4% of residents in the south and east supported seceding from Ukraine and joining Russia, while 64.2% wanted to remain part of a unitary Ukraine.[196] These numbers made sense, as they roughly corresponded with the split between the Russian-speaking and non-Russian-speaking population in the area.

Despite a Pew Research poll showing that 70% of the population in the east wanted to remain in a united Ukraine, Donetsk election commission spokesman Roman Lyagin announced 75% of the population had voted, and 89% of the votes had been in favor of self-rule.[197] There were no independent poll watchers or international monitors, separatists were responsible for counting the votes, and some individuals were seen voting multiple times. Russian President Putin issued a statement that Moscow respected the will of the population and hoped that implementation of the referendum results could proceed peacefully.

The first thing the separatists did after the vote was to call for unification with Russia. "Based on the will of the people and on the restoration of a historic justice, we ask the Russian Federation to consider the absorption of the Donetsk People's Republic into the Russian Federation," said Denis Pushilin. "The people of Donetsk have always been part of the Russian world. For us, the history of Russia is our history."[198] Putin ignored Pushilin's request. Journalist, Christian Caryl opined that Putin probably preferred a nominally independent east, because a Crimea-style annexation would make Moscow responsible for repairing the region's decrepit infrastructure and for supporting an aging population.

Ukrainian security forces finally took the offensive. On May 14, soldiers destroyed two rebel bases near Slovyansk and seized control of a 5 km zone around the television tower that had again been seized by the separatists.[199] In Donetsk, rebels seized the airport but took major losses (over 100) as the government used fighter jets and helicopter gunships to repel the invasion.[200] At least 30 insurgents were killed when a truck carrying wounded rebels from the airport was attacked by a unit with a grenade launcher.[201]

As the tide of battle turned against the separatists at the airport, Denis Pushilin turned defiant. "We are not going to leave, and we are not going to surrender," he said. "This is our land and our home." Pushilin hinted that more direct Russian intervention was in the offing. He said

volunteers would be arriving over the borders of friendly regions and states as reinforcements. Local residents reported hearing fighters with South Ossetian or Chechen accents.[202]

The rebels hit back. In one of the deadliest attacks against government forces, members of a militia unit from Horlivka waved Ukrainian soldiers through a checkpoint near Donetsk. The attackers then shot the soldiers at point blank range, killing at least 14.[203]

Fighting moved to Luhansk where a Ukrainian National Guard regiment was besieged by 300 armed fighters. The government troops held out until they ran out of ammunition. The rebels also seized a border post in Luhansk after two days of fighting.[204] As sporadic firefights continued to erupt, Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov announced he would deploy police into the east and threatened to fire any who refused to go. Avakov promised appropriate ammunition and body armor to those who faced combat and pointed out that he had already fired 21 police officers for refusing to go.[205]

In Mariupol, government troops successfully freed the city from the rebels. The victory was almost overshadowed, however, by reports that rebels in Donetsk had obtained T-64 tanks. Kyiv claimed the tanks had come from Russia, while the separatists said they had looted them from a military warehouse.[206]

The end of round one fighting resulted in a military draw between government forces and the rebels. The government reclaimed some important locations such as Mariupol, but its success triggered more direct military support from Russia.

Round One: Russian Support for Separatists

Pro-Russian demonstrators seized the opera theater in downtown Kharkiv on April 7, 2014. The fact that they were Russian "volunteers" instead of natives of the city was demonstrated by their proud but mistaken announcement that they had liberated the city hall, not knowing the difference between the two buildings.[207]

On April 30, 2014, Ukrainian Security (SBU) arrested a Russian military attaché and charged him with receiving classified material from a colonel in the Ukrainian armed forces. The information reportedly discussed Ukraine's cooperation with NATO during the recent events. Officials declared the attaché persona non grata, turned him over to the Russian embassy, and ordered him out of the country.[208] As the conflict

moved into May 2014, rebel forces downed two Ukrainian army heli-copters in Slovyansk, killing the pilot and a serviceman.[209] The Ukrainian Defense Ministry said that the use of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles to down the MI-24 helicopter gunships was proof that Russian special forces were in the town.[210] In retaliation, Ukraine banned Russian pas-senger planes from flying to Donetsk and Kharkiv.[211]

On the diplomatic front, Russia apparently played a role in releasing OSCE observers whom the separatists had captured in late April 2014, although the Kremlin obfuscated exactly what that role was. Russia sent an envoy, Vladimir Lukin, to negotiate the release. After the captives were freed, however, Lukin said the separatists had allowed them to go voluntarily. President Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Pesov, continued to deny Moscow's hand in the east. "From now on Russia essentially has lost its influence over these people because it will be impossible to con-vince them to lay down arms when there's a direct threat to their lives," he said.[212] Another two teams of OSCE observers were captured in May, possibly by Cossack businessman Nikolai Kozitsyn. A Cossack member of the Russian parliament, Viktor Vodolatsky, was involved in negotiations to get them released.[213]

As fighting flared in Donetsk after the May 11 separatist referen-dum, Ukrainian prime minister openly accused Russia of supporting the rebels. "Russia is already engaged," said Prime Minister Yatsenyuk, "in supporting Russian-led protesters and terrorists." Defense Minister Mykhaylo Koval was more specific. "In our eastern regions we have an undeclared war. Our neighboring country unleashed the war, sending special forces and saboteurs into our territory." The Ukrainian public seemed confused. In a poll by the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center, two-thirds of respondents called Russia brotherly and friendly; at the same time, 56% believed they were at war with Russia and 53% wanted to join the European Union.[214]

Sergei Lavrov, Russian foreign minister, denied that his country had any plans to invade eastern Ukraine.[215] President Putin agreed. Asked during a call-in television program if there were Russian units in the east, he said the charge was complete nonsense. "There are no Russian troops, no special forces, no instructors. It's all local citizens."[216]

Russia continued to increase psychological pressure. When Ukraine scheduled presidential elections for May 25, Russia announced it would hold military exercises on the same day, and for much of the week pre-ceding the elections.[217] This decision was then reversed by President

Putin, who ordered the troops to return to their own bases. Both NATO and the US Department of Defense issued statements, however, that they had seen no indications of a troop withdrawal. BBC diplomatic correspondent Jonathan Marcus pointed out it was the third time Russia's units were ordered to withdraw. "There was supposedly a partial withdrawal at the end of March. Only one battalion moved. A full withdrawal was ordered in early May… now a withdrawal order has come from the Kremlin again… President Vladimir Putin clearly decided that, whatever the public pronouncements, the threat of 40,000 troops on Ukraine's border was a powerful tool whether they were used or not."[218] Finally, almost ten days later, US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel reported Russia had withdrawn most of the troops from the border region, but thousands still remained.[219] Military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer assessed Putin may have been trying to achieve his goals by non-military means. "They see no need to take the risky move of invasion, which would trigger serious sanctions."[220]

On the eve of the election, Ukraine announced its border guards had seized armed men in several vehicles trying to illegally cross the frontier from Russia.[221] The foreign ministry protested a further concentration of up to 40 truckloads of armed men, some of whom may have succeeded in crossing the border into Luhansk. "There are grounds to believe that Russian terrorists are being sent onto Ukrainian territory, organized and financed under the direct control of the Kremlin and Russian special forces," it announced.[222]

The reports continued to come in. On Thursday, May 29, *Reuters* correspondents saw coffins loaded onto a vegetable truck. Rebels said they were Russian volunteers whose remains were being repatriated. A border guard said they allowed the coffins to leave because "We don't need them to fertilize the land of Ukraine." The next day, Ukrainian border guards arrested 13 people attempting to cross from Russia. The smugglers were traveling in two cars, containing guns, machine guns, grenade launchers, sniper rifles, and 84 boxes of ammunition.[223]

Rebels shot down a government helicopter on the 29th, inflaming the situation. As events in Donetsk continued to deteriorate for the rebels, their militia was replaced by the Vostok Battalion, a disciplined group traveling with an armored personnel carrier and anti-aircraft guns. It was believed that the Vostok Battalion consisted largely of Russians. The battalion with its weaponry "disappeared" the next day, but many of its members were still seen in the area wearing civilian clothing.[224]

At the same time, Russia requested permission to send humanitarian aid to eastern Ukraine. When Kyiv rejected the request for fear it would be a cover for weapons smuggling, Russia began to provide it anyway. "We are providing aid with the support of self-defense forces," said Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.[225]

Ukrainian Ambassador to the EU presented a document to that body purportedly proving Russian support for the rebels. It included several photographs of Russian equipment used by the separatists, including drones and Grad rockets. There were also photographs of a T-64 battle tank registered to a Russian military base. Other photographs included Russian 18th infantry brigade army trucks crossing into Ukraine, and an armored personnel carrier (APC) with Russian federation shielding. There were also photographs of Russian mortar shells, grenade launchers, and IGLA missiles.[226] The US State Department released grainy satellite imagery showing a row of self-propelled artillery on the Russian side of the border, all aimed toward Ukraine. They also showed crater impacts on the Ukrainian side of the border they said were created by shells fired from self-propelled or towed artillery. Labels on the photographs said they "provided evidence that Russian forces have fired across the border at Ukrainian military forces, and that Russia-backed separatists have used heavy artillery, provided by Russia, in attacks on Ukrainian forces from inside Ukraine."[227]

ROUND ONE: INTERNAL POLITICS AND THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

Like the rebel leadership in the east, the government in Kyiv faced internal challenges. Anxious to procure legitimacy for its government, Kyiv held presidential elections on May 25, 2014. The OSCE provided over 1000 observers to assure the validity of the process. In the east, several polling places remained closed: Only 426 polling stations out of 2430 were open in the region, with none in the city of Donetsk.[228] Russian President Vladimir Putin announced he would respect the choice of the Ukrainian people and would work with the new authorities. "By all means, we will respect the choice of the Ukrainian people and will be working with authorities formed on the basis of this election," he told foreign journalists. Separatists vowed to neither participate in the elections nor recognize the results.[229]

As the votes were counted, Russian state television issued a fraudulent statement that far-right politician Dmytro Yarosh of the Right Sector was

winning the election. Channel One reported that with 37% of the vote counted, Yarosh held a comfortable lead.[230] Such a result would have supported the Kremlin's propaganda line that the government in Kyiv was run by fascists. In reality, preliminary results showed Yarosh had less than 1% of the vote. Billionaire chocolate king Petro Poroshenko won the election with 55% in the first round of voting.

Poroshenko took his oath of office on June 7, 2014. The new president took a hard line in his remarks, but he also did something of tremendous symbolic significance: He delivered a portion of his speech in Russian instead of Ukrainian. He also offered amnesty to those who did not have the blood of peaceful civilians on their hands, and safe passage home for Russian nationals in the rebel ranks.[231] These gestures of reconciliation did little to appease the insurgents.

Poroshenko's first concrete move was to order the creation of humanitarian corridors for civilians to flee conflict zones.[232] This was an important concession to the Russians, who had been rebuffed at the UN the week before when they proposed this step in a draft Security Council Resolution.

ROUND ONE: WESTERN REACTION

As Russian-backed forces seized Crimea, the international community stirred itself into limited action. Both the USA and the European Union imposed sanctions on Kremlin "cronies." The USA initially froze the assets of seven Russians and four Ukrainians, and banned their travel to the USA. The EU moved against 13 Russians, seven Crimeans, and a Ukrainian naval commander who had switched sides. Switzerland imposed restrictions on military exports to Russia. Professor Anatol Lieven at King's College, London, dismissed the sanctions and foreshadowed the next steps in the conflict. "Crimea is lost," he said. "In practice, there's no way that Ukraine is ever going to get it back. The question now, and it's a vastly greater strategic question, is what happens in eastern Ukraine."[233]

Russian reaction to the sanctions was mixed. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov threatened to destroy the P5+1 nuclear talks with Iran. "We wouldn't like to use these talks as an element of the game of raising the stakes… but if they force us into that, we will take retaliatory measures here as well," he blustered.[234]

The EU signed the association agreement with Ukraine on March 21, but was reluctant to increase sanctions. Lilit Gevorgyan, the senior sovereign risk analyst at HIS Global Insight in London, suggested future sanctions would hurt Europe as well as the Russian target: "It is not just energy dependence on Russia but also intertwined bilateral commercial relations, counting at an annual turnover of billions of U.S. dollars that makes EU decision-makers cautious."[235]

The greatest opponent to sanctions was German chancellor Angela Merkel. She had to protect German economic interests which were deeply intertwined with Russia. In 2013, there were 6000 German companies doing business in Russia with investments worth 20 billion Euros. Trade between the two countries was at 76 billion Euros, and 300,000 German jobs were dependent on good economic relations between the two countries.[236]

Merkel's reluctance was not based solely on economic realities. She also had to contend with the fact the majority of Germans were sympathetic to Russia. A public opinion poll by *Der Spiegel* showed that 55% of respondents showed either a lot of or some "understanding" for Crimea being part of a Russian zone of interest.[237] In the USA, there was a similar reluctance for more active measures. A Pew poll showed that 56% preferred the Obama administration "not to get involved in the situation with Russia and Ukraine," and only 29% wanted the USA to take a firm stand against Russia.[238]

German businessmen were positively apologetic on behalf of the Russians. Heinrich Hiesinger, the CEO of ThyssenKrupp, noted, "We have a situation here where Russia clearly sees itself pushed into a corner." Frank Appel, CEO of the German Mail, argued, "One should think in advance about the results of a policy bringing about political change in the forecourt of a great power." Joe Kaeser, CEO of Siemens, traveled to Moscow and met with Putin. Afterward, he said, "Siemens would not let its long term planning suffer from short-term turbulences."[239]

The international community did not abandon Ukraine, however. The International Monetary Fund agreed to provide an immediate $14–18 billion aid package, with the possibility of an additional $27 billion possible over the next 2 years. The EU and the USA also promised addition billion dollar grants, and Canada agreed to chip in $200 million.[240]

On April 1, 2014, NATO foreign ministers issued a statement condemning Russia for violating international law and acting in contradiction to a number of documents. Other than words, however, NATO's response was feeble. It suspended "all practical civilian and military

cooperation" between NATO and Russia, but would allow political dialogue in the NATO-Russia Council to continue.[241] NATO Secretary General Rasmussen characterized the annexation of Crimea as the gravest threat to Europe in a generation.[242]

Ukrainians pointed out that, just as Russia had violated the Budapest Memoranda by seizing Crimea, the USA and Great Britain were failing to uphold their Budapest promises to guarantee the territorial integrity of the country. Citing the memoranda's lack of enforcement provisions, however, America took the position that the agreements' guarantees were non-binding.[243]

The credit rating agency Moody's Investors Service downgraded Ukraine's government bond rating from Caa2 (extremely speculative) to Caa3 (default imminent with little prospect for recovery), citing its current political crisis and diminishing economic outlook. Due to the country's sizable fiscal deficit, the agency predicted a significant contraction of GDP, and a sharp currency depreciation as the debt to GDP ratio reached 55–60% by the end of 2014.[244]

At the Carnegie Council, the Director of the Russia and Eurasia Program, Eugene Rumer, said the crisis in Ukraine had caught everyone by surprise. "The West consistently underestimated Vladimir Putin's commitment to the goal of consolidating Russia's influence around its periphery and the capabilities of the Russian military. At the same time, Europe and the USA overestimated Putin's desire for good relations with the West." Visiting Scholar Ulrich Speck agreed, noting that Russia's tactics were to gain as much control over eastern Ukraine as possible without being punished by the EU.[245] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called again for legal guarantees of Ukraine's neutrality and warned NATO not to try to add Ukraine to its alliance.[246]

On April 13, 2014, Russia demanded an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council. Russian envoy Vitaly I. Churkin called on world leaders to condemn the "henchmen of the Maidan," and called on world powers to stop Kyiv from using force. In reply, British Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant accused Russia indirectly of "a well-orchestrated campaign to destabilize the country."[247]

The European Union extended a hand by temporarily removing 94.7% of EU tariffs on Ukrainian industrial goods, and 100% of the tariffs on Ukraine' agriculture exports.[248] It also issued a statement strongly condemning the "illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation." The European Council pledged not to recognize Russian actions.[249]

Russian President Vladimir Putin escalated the war of words. Using his annual Russian telephone call-in show, he claimed the right to invade Ukraine. "I very much hope that I am not obliged to use this right and that through political and diplomatic means we can solve all the acute problems in Ukraine," he said."[250] He continued to deny, however, that Russia was involved in the conflict.[251]

Washington increased its sanctions against Russia, adding 17 companies owned or controlled by Russian politicians to its list. The new list included Igor Sechin, chairman of Rosneft. The European Union followed the American government's lead the next day, adding 15 names to their own list of sanctions. The European list included Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak, Russian military Chief Valery Gerasimov, and the leader of the "Donetsk People's Republic," Denis Pushilin.[252] President Putin acknowledged that sanctions were hurting Russia, although how much of the damage was the result of sanctions and how much was from the weak oil market is debatable.

As Western sanctions tightened around Moscow, the oil industry went out of its way to assure the Kremlin that it wanted to continue "business as usual." Shell CEO Ben van Beurden met with President Putin on April 18 to reassure the Russian leader that Shell wanted to increase its role in the Russian Federation. BP's CEO suggested the company could act as a bridge between Russia and the West. Norway's Statoil reaffirmed its desire to stay in the market, while ExxonMobil continued to explore partnership opportunities with Rosneft. France's Total also signaled its willingness to continue cooperation. "Basically, they are torpedoing whatever the United States and the EU are trying to do, which is rattle Putin's cage," said oil analyst Fadel Gheit. "I'm very surprised the oil companies are going out of their way to assure Russia and Putin that they are going to do business as usual."[253]

Standard & Poor's downgraded Russia's sovereign credit rating to BBB, lowest of the investment grade rankings. Consensus estimates for Russian GDP growth was below 1%, and the US Treasury reported capital flight out of Russia had hit $60 billion for the year. The Russians had to raise their interest rates on bonds, and at least one bond auction was canceled because of investor demand.[254]

More sanctions would follow. American and European investments in Russia dried up, putting many long-term development projects on hold. Especially, hard hit were the energy projects. By the end of 2015, major projects designed to carry oil and natural gas to China, Turkey, and Germany had all stalled.[255]

As an added insult to the Kremlin's economic injury, Russia was excluded from the annual meeting of the G-8. The body convened in Brussels as the G-7. US President Barack Obama used the occasion to meet with Ukraine's new president-elect Poroshenko. German Chancellor Angela Merkel outlined the group's three-step approach: "Support Ukraine in economic issues, talks with Russia, and should there be no progress on all those issues… the possibility of sanctions, tougher sanctions, remains on the table."[256]

Europe upped the ante, turning to a proposed strategic asset of Russia. The Kremlin had long espoused the construction of the South Stream pipeline, which would allow Gazprom to ship 63 bcm annually of natural gas while bypassing Ukraine. The pipeline had been under fire by European regulators, for failing to meet the requirements of the EU Third Energy Package. This series of regulations was designed to increase competition in the energy field and required, among other things, that Gazprom divests itself of ownership of either the pipeline or the product moving through it. Brussels brought heavy pressure on Bulgaria, the first European country where the pipeline would achieve ground fall after crossing the Black Sea. Sofia caved to the pressure and announced it was halting preparations for construction of the pipeline until Russia and the EU could come to terms. Analysts, such as Jonathan Stern of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, said that such an agreement would depend on a political solution in Ukraine.[257]

As a cease fire on the battlefield went into effect in the beginning of September, the EU passed a new round of sanctions targeting exports of equipment used for exploration and exploitation of oil. In a tip of the hat to Russian efforts aimed at stopping the fighting, however, the EU decided to delay their application. "Taking into account the situation on the ground, the EU is willing to reconsider the sanctions approved in whole or in part," said European Council President Herman Van Rompuy.[258]

Round One: Peace Efforts

As the crisis in Crimea unfolded, the Ukrainian Ambassador to the United Nations Yuriy Sergeyev presented a letter to the Security Council requesting an urgent meeting of that body to discuss Ukraine's territorial integrity. The members met on March 15, 2014 to discuss an American-sponsored resolution calling on the Ukrainian government to respect the rights of all citizenry, including (unnamed Russian-speaking) minorities.

The 13-1-1 vote to approve the resolution was vetoed by Russian ambassador Vitaly Churkin (with China abstaining.) The superpowers traded charges. The Russian ambassador repeated the Kremlin's line that the situation in Crimea was the result of the February 2014 "unconstitutional armed coup d'etat" in Kyiv. In reply, US Ambassador Samantha Powers accused Russia of using its veto as "an accomplice to unlawful military occupation."[259] As a first step in a potential peace process, it was not a promising beginning.

In early April 2014, Ukraine's interim Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk began talks with billionaire industrialist Rinat Akhmetov, who had played a pivotal role in maintaining order in Donetsk. Yatsenyuk offered to devolve more powers to the eastern regions, and he pledged that Russian would keep its status as one of the country's two official languages.[260] Separately, in Geneva, the governments of the EU, Russia, the USA, and Ukraine agreed to meet on April 17, 2014. Before the delegates could get into the room, however, Russia tried to use the meeting as a platform for additional threats. When the Ukrainian government began its "counter-terrorist operation" on April 15, 2014, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that any use of force by the Ukrainian government in the east could undermine the planned talks.[261] "One cannot issue invitations to talks while at the same time issuing criminal orders for the use of armed force against the people there," he said in Beijing. "You can't send in tanks and at the same time hold talks, and the use of force would sabotage the opportunity offered by the four-party negotiations in Geneva."[262]

The diplomats agreed to immediately end all violence in the east and called on "illegal armed groups" to surrender their weapons and leave official buildings. By illegal armed groups, the separatists meant the Right Sector. For the Ukrainian government, illegal armed groups meant the insurgents in the east. The rebels ignored the diplomats. Four days later, pro-Russian militants continued to occupy at least nine towns and cities in the Donetsk region.[263]

The Geneva ceasefire was supposed to be monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) whose representatives fanned out to ten eastern cities to explain the accord. Then, on April 25, 2014, OSCE officials said they had lost contact with a group of their military observers in the east. The group consisted of three German soldiers, a German translator, and military observers from Czech Republic, Poland, Sweden, and Denmark.[264] They were escorted

by five Ukrainian Army soldiers. Ukraine's Interior Ministry reported that rebel forces had seized the bus on which the observers were traveling, and refused to release the observers until they had spoken to "competent authorities in Russia."[265] The self-proclaimed mayor of Slovyansk, who was holding the prisoners, accused the group of being NATO spies and denied having any communication with Russian authorities over the detention.[266] Russian television showed the observers being paraded, bloodied, blindfolded, stripped of trousers and shoes, with arms bound with packing tape. Initially, the Swedish officer was released from captivity for medical reasons.[267] Finally, after a week's captivity, the observers and their Ukrainian escorts were released.

In May, following a telephone conversation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Putin said it was necessary for Kyiv authorities to establish a direct dialogue with pro-Russian representatives in Ukraine's southeast.[268] In response, under the auspices of the OSCE, officials from the Ukrainian interim government met with religious and business leaders, two former Ukrainian presidents, a German diplomat, and some lawyers and mayors from the east. The meeting quickly fell apart, but the attendees agreed to hold a second round of talks in Donetsk. In reply, Denis Pushilin (who was not in the talks) said the only thing his government would discuss with Kyiv was an exchange of hostages and the removal of "occupation forces" from the east.[269] A spokesman for the Donetsk People's Republic gave authorities a 24 hour ultimatum to remove all government forces from the Donbas. If the withdrawal did not take place, everything [would] be destroyed and burned.[270]

Unable to meet in Donetsk, the group held its second session in Kharkiv—still without any separatist participation.[271] Former Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk said the talks were more open, with representatives present from Russian-influenced regions. Acting Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk introduced proposals calling for the protection of the Russian language and for the decentralization of power.[272] A third session was held in the southern shipyard city of Mykolayiv.

Ukraine's new President, Petro Poroshenko, made a number of offers designed to appeal to the separatists and Russian allies. He met most of their demands except independence or federation. Poroshenko proposed a devolution of power to the regions, giving mayors and city councils a greater say in spending. In addition, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk again guaranteed protection for the use of the Russian language.

"No one will ever limit the Russian language and the right to speak it in Ukraine," he said. Yatsenyuk also offered to never repeal the 2012 language law that guaranteed regions the right to declare an official second language when it is spoken by at least 10% of the population.[273]

Russia opened the month of June trying to involve the United Nations in the negotiations. Taking advantage of their month-long presidency, the Russians introduced a draft Security Council resolution, calling for an immediate end to the fighting and creation of a humanitarian corridor in eastern Ukraine. The text urged fighters to commit themselves to a "sustainable cease-fire." The State Department branded the move as hypocritical, since Russia was doing "nothing" to stop the separatists from attacking new targets.[274]

Poroshenko finally met with rebel leaders toward the end of June. In a meeting brokered by former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, separatists, Russian, European, and Ukrainian government officials agreed to honor a week-long ceasefire that Poroshenko had unilaterally declared.[275] In response to the direct talks between the government and the separatists, President Vladimir Putin sent a letter to the Russian parliament asking that they rescind the March 1 authorization for Russia to use force in Ukraine.[276] The upper house complied the following day. The ceasefire held for 10 days, but, once it expired, Ukrainian troops launched a full-scale military operation attacking rebel bases and strongholds with aircraft and artillery.[277] President Poroshenko said the rebels had met none of his demands for peace talks, such as releasing hostages, allowing international monitors on the borders, or halting weapons flows from Russia.[278]

On August 5, 2014, Russian ambassador Churkin again proposed the UN Security Council authorize a peacekeeping mission that would authorize sending Russian troops into eastern Ukraine. His proposal did not pass.[279]

World leaders decided to have a summit meeting in Minsk later in August. Presidents Putin and Poroshenko met with other European leaders; it was the first face-to-face meeting for the two antagonists. Putin took the position that the Ukraine crisis could only be solved in negotiations with representatives of eastern Ukraine, who had not been invited to the meeting.[280]

Following the summit, the contact group and separatists met again in Minsk. The rebels told Russian media they desired a special status for their regions that would leave the leaders of the insurgency in charge of

security. They also demanded amnesty from prosecution and recognition from Kyiv that their more autonomous eastern region would require "deepening economic integration" with Russia.[281]

ROUND TWO: RUSSIAN SUPPORT FOR THE SEPARATISTS

Violence characterized much of the negotiation period. Following the end of the June ceasefire, the government launched a military offensive against the rebel positions. Within a week, they forced the separatists to evacuate the city of Slovyansk: It was a major victory for Kyiv.[282] The rebels regrouped in Donetsk, where they held a rally. Donetsk Defense Minister Strelkov vowed to continue combat operations, while learning from past mistakes.[283] In preparation for the upcoming battle, three bridges leading into the city were destroyed, probably by the rebels.[284] Within insurgent ranks, there were signs of dissension over the retreat from Slovyansk, and reports of fighting among rebel groups.[285] As rebels launched a failed attack against troops at the Donetsk airport, separatist leader Alexander Borodai threatened Russia: If no reinforcements were coming, Russia would have to deal with a flood of civilian refugees. "This will be hundreds of thousands of people. This is an inevitability we have to face," he said.[286]

Ukrainian forces appeared to be on the verge of recapturing Donetsk and Luhansk, a development that would not have been in Russia's geopolitical interests. By early August, a government spokesman claimed Kyiv controlled three-quarters of the territory the rebels had once controlled.[287] The Kremlin decided to increase its support to the rebels, while still denying it was playing an overt role in the conflict. According to a group of satellite imagery analysts, military forces began shelling Ukrainian forces from artillery positions inside Russia.[288]

Ukrainian warplanes pummeled the rebel bases in and around Luhansk. Government security forces reported a convoy of 100 armored vehicles and trucks crossed into Ukraine carrying fighters from Russia. Russia also accused Ukraine of firing an artillery shell into Russia itself, killing a Russian citizen. In turn, Russian threatened Ukraine with "irreversible consequences."[289] Ukrainian President Poroshenko claimed there were Russian staff officers leading rebel forces. NATO reported that the Kremlin was rebuilding its forces on the border and that someone shot down a government military transport plane. The rebels took

credit for the downing, but Kyiv officials said the plane was out of range of the rebel missiles.[290] Rebels then claimed the downing of two fighter jets.[291] Ukrainian government forces seized tanks emblazoned with the insignia of the Russian Airborne troops, while the local Russian commander promised to expand his operations beyond Russian Federation territory.[292]

Russia announced military exercises near the Ukrainian border, to include missile-firing practice, and coordination between aviation and anti-missile defense. Russia's latest bomber, the SU-24, was taking part, as well as the SU-27 and MIG-31 fighter jets.[293] All told, there would be 100 aircraft.[294] The military vehicles, "far more advanced than the Soviet divisions that were pointed at NATO," had emblems painted on them stating they were peacekeepers.[295]

As the government tightened the noose around rebel forces, the Ukrainian 72nd motorized brigade split into two groups. One of the groups ran out of ammunition, and the Ukrainian soldiers fled across the Russian border to avoid the heavy fighting.[296] Most returned to Ukraine almost immediately.

The government offensive was slowly succeeding; the so-called prime minister of the Donetsk Republic, Moscow native Alexander Borodai, resigned his position. A Donetsk native, Alexander Zakharchenko, took his place.[297] Borodai was followed by the head of the Luhansk republic, Valery Bolotov, who said he was injured and could not carry on.[298] Bolotov had previously served in the Soviet Army in the late 1980s and was deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh in 1989–1990.[299] Donetsk Defense Minister Alexander Strelkov also resigned.[300] In another sign of cracks in the rebel leadership, a senior rebel leader announced the introduction of military tribunals to judge cases of treason, espionage, attempts on the lives of leadership, and sabotage. The tribunal would have the ability to impose the death penalty.[301]

Russia switched tactics, announcing it was going to send a humanitarian convoy of 198 trucks to eastern Ukraine under the auspices of the International Red Cross. The IRC, however, said there were insufficient security guarantees for them to participate.[302] Kyiv originally approved the mission but then withdrew its approval, claiming that there was an affiliation between the convoy and the Russian military.[303] The convoy's trucks had Russian military license plates.[304] It finally entered Ukraine on August 22, without Ukrainian approval and without the Red Cross.[305] Whether the purpose of the convoy was to smuggle weaponry to the

rebels may never be known, but President Putin's total disregard of the border and international law demonstrated again his contention that Ukraine was not a real country. The final OSCE count was 227 white trucks, all of which were covered. Observers were unable to confirm or deny Russian claims the contents were only humanitarian aid. Almost immediately, the Russians announced they were preparing a second convoy.[306] The second convoy crossed into Ukraine in early September. Like the first convoy, the majority of the 220 trucks were not inspected by Ukraine's government or by international observers.[307]

Reports of more Russian equipment entering Ukraine continued. The foreign minister of Lithuania, Linas Linkevicius, said he had received reports that 70 pieces of Russian equipment had crossed into Ukraine on the night of August 14–15.[308] The convoy of Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) was observed by Ukrainian forces, and President Poroshenko claimed to have destroyed most of them with artillery fire. The Kremlin denied the reported destruction, saying no Russian military vehicles were in Ukraine. Western reporters from the British newspapers Guardian and Telegraph, however, saw the APCs with full Russian identifying markers, including license plates.[309]

The new Donetsk Prime Minister Zakharchenko, perhaps not appreciating the sensitive nature of the issue, boasted in a video that the rebels were receiving 1200 fighters who had spent 4 months training in Russia, along with 150 armored vehicles, including 30 tanks.[310]

In late August, it became obvious that Russia was augmenting its support to the separatists. Ukrainian forces detained a group of armed Russian paratroopers who had crossed into the country. The soldiers had traveled by train to the Rostov region in Russia and joined "a march" in a column of dozens of armored personnel carriers. The soldiers said they thought they were on a military training exercise, but the commanders knew they were going into Ukraine. The USA reported that Russian tanks and armor had crossed the border. Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko reported that two Russian MI-24 helicopters had fired on a border post, killing four and wounding three border guards. He also reported that Russian military vehicles flying insurgent flags had entered Ukraine and engaged in firefights with Ukrainian forces.[311] Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk accused Russian units of operating in eastern Ukraine. "This information, coming from NATO and confirmed by our intelligence, is in fact unequivocal."[312]

According to NATO and the US Department of State, two columns of tanks and military vehicles, accompanied by at least 1000 Russian troops, were up to 30 miles inside Ukraine. The unit included sophisticated weaponry that required well-trained crews and command and control elements.[313] The combined Russian-separatist troops seized the town of Novoazovsk, with their ultimate goal the seizure of the port of Mariupol. Russia issued its usual denial that it had any troops in the area, but a member of Vladimir Putin's advisory council on human rights disagreed. "When masses of people, under commanders' orders, on tanks, APCs and with the use of heavy weapons, (are) on the territory of another country, cross the border, I consider this an invasion," said Ella Polyakova.[314] Russian oppositionists eventually published a report that documented 150 Russian soldiers had died in August at the battle for Ilovaisk, a small town in the Donetsk region.[315] With the infusion of Russian support, rebels pushed government forces out of the Luhansk airport and captured two platoons of Ukrainian soldiers at the Donetsk airport.[316]

A ceasefire went into effect September 4–5, but low-level fighting continued. It was shattered, however, the following week when rebels attacked the Ukrainian government troops holding Donetsk airport.[317] Shelling at the airport damaged two OSCE vehicles, although the watchdogs did not identify the source of the fire.[318]

Support in the international community for the ceasefire and accompanying peace plan continued to build. Implementation of the plan would have been contrary to Russia's goals of keeping Ukraine weak and divided, so the Kremlin needed to destabilize the situation further. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that foreign forces were building up near Russia's borders. He called for the deployment of reinforcements to Crimea and southern Russia. In response, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk called for the country to have full battle readiness. The Poroshenko peace plan did not mean "relaxing the work of the defense and interior ministries."[319]

Round Two: Fighting Continues

Fighting continued throughout the east. A dynamite factory was shelled near Donetsk, fighting continued at the airport, and rebels were repulsed after shelling a couple of villages. Russia sent another convoy of humanitarian aid, while rebel forces and pro-Russian militias reorganized under

the banner of the "Army of Novorossiya."[320] Kyiv announced it would not withdraw its military forces until the pro-Russian forces stopped firing, and the Russian troops left the area.[321] Rebels launched tank assaults on the Donetsk airport.[322]

Insurgents renewed their push to seize the port city of Mariupol. They attacked the town of Shyrokyne, about 6 miles from the port city.[323] Unmarked green military trucks were spotted by the OSCE headed toward Donetsk. Five of the trucks were towing 120-mm howitzers, and another five carried multi-launch rocket systems. Heavy artillery fire then rocked the city. General Philip Breedlove, NATO supreme allied commander in Europe, said the violence was increasing daily. "The cease-fire is in name only at this point," he said.[324] Ukraine's representative to the OSCE pronounced the ceasefire all but dead. Ihor Prokopchuk noted, "Since the Minsk agreement… we have more than 2400 breaches of the ceasefire by militant groups. More than 100 Ukrainian soldiers and dozens of civilians have been killed."[325]

In November and December, a number of Ukrainian cities away from the front lines were rocked by a series of bombings. In Odessa, a bomb destroyed a wall and shattered windows in a store called "Patriot" that sold items depicting Ukrainian national symbols. Another blast shattered glass and crumbled the wall of a building that housed an organization collecting donations for the army.[326] In Kharkiv, a bar collecting money for soldiers, a military hospital, an anti-aircraft unit, and a National Guard base were bombed.[327] The National Flag Memorial was also hit.[328]

More explosions followed in Odessa and Kyiv in December. Authorities foiled a plot for a bombing in Kyiv on December 17. Police arrested a woman from Luhansk with a large handbag filled with 3 kg (6.6 lb) of TNT. According to the Ukrainian Security Service, the woman was under the direction of Russian military intelligence, the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU).[329]

In April 2015, Ukraine's Ministry of the Interior reported they had arrested three people under suspicion of organizing the bombing campaign in Odessa. The detainees were suspected of being members of the pro-Russian "Anti-Maidan" movement.[330]

As 2015 opened, President Poroshenko presided over a rearming of Ukraine's military. He was personally present when fighter jets, howitzers, and armored cars were delivered to the town of Zhytomyr in the north of the country.[331] Russia's resupply effort to the rebels also

continued. "Tanks, howitzers, Grad systems, Smerch, Buk," counted off Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. "Radio-electronic surveillance stations are not on sale in the Donetsk market—they are only to be had from the Russian defense ministry and Russian military intelligence."[332]

To break the deadlock, the Ukrainian government tried for a military solution. It broke the on-again, off-again cease-fire with a mass operation to reclaim territory around the Donetsk airport. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin indirectly threatened Ukraine with dismemberment if the attack were not halted. "It's the biggest, even strategic mistake of the Ukrainian authorities to bank on a military solution to the crisis," he said. "This may lead to irreversible consequences for Ukrainian statehood."[333] The government attack proved unsuccessful. Within three days, rebel fighters drove government troops out of the airport's main terminal, a significant symbolic defeat.[334] Ukrainian military spokesman accused Russia of coming to the defense of the separatists with two battalions of the Russian army and threatening the border with three additional battalions on the Russian side.[335]

Separatists attacked a grouping of Right Sector nationalists in Kharkiv with a hand grenade—the first time a bomb attack in that city had been directed at people instead of buildings.[336] In Donetsk, the Ukrainian government said separatists had seized 190 square miles of territory beyond the originally agreed upon front line boundaries. In Luhansk, separatists advanced on a second front. An *Associated Press* reporter personally saw self-propelled howitzers, anti-tank cannons, Grad multiple rocket launchers, and 15 tanks in an area from which heavy weaponry was supposed to have been withdrawn.[337]

In January, rebel forces moved on Debaltseve in the north. They announced their objectives: to capture all of the Donetsk oblast, and push the Ukrainian heavy artillery out of range of the city center. At first, they were repulsed, only able to capture relatively small areas in the face of unexpectedly strong resistance. Things changed in the first or second week of February, when Russian troops, armor, artillery, and senior officers appear to have been deployed. Russian crews apparently manned the new tanks and heavy artillery pieces the separatists had acquired since October 2014.[338] As many as 70 Russian soldiers died in the battle, according to Russian oppositionists.[339] Mariupol was hit with long-range GRAD missiles.[340] The Ukrainian National Guard fought back and went on the offensive.[341]

With peace talks scheduled to resume in Minsk in mid-February 2015, Russia announced a new series of military exercises on the border of Ukraine. Two thousand Russian reconnaissance troops began large-scale exercises in the southern military district, and 600 soldiers began training in Crimea.[342]

As a reflection of its direct military involvement, Russian casualties were reported (and quickly removed by censors) by the Russian magazine *Business Life*. In a pro forma report entitled "Increases in Pay for the Military in 2015," the publication released the following data: "The Russian government… approved compensation for families of military personnel who were killed taking part in military action in Ukraine of three million rubles (about $50,000). For those who have become invalids during military action, the compensation is one a half million rubles (about $25,000). A payment of 1800 rubles is envisioned for contract fighters (*kontraktny*) for every day of their presence in the conflict zone. In all, as of February 1, 2015, monetary compensation had been paid to more than 2000 families of fallen soldiers and to 3200 military personnel suffering heavy wounds and recognized as invalids."[343]

Another telling aspect of Russian support to the separatists emerges by examining what became of the separatist leaders as the second round of fighting ceased: Virtually, all absconded to Russia. Alexander Borodai, the former prime minister of Donetsk, returned to his native Moscow and resumed his former job of running a public relations firm. His aide in Donetsk, Sergei Kavtaradze, returned to Russia to work on a film adaptation of his doctoral dissertation. Marat Bashirov, former prime minister of Luhansk, was back in Moscow working as a government relations consultant. He also chaired a committee on government relations at the Russian Managers Association.[344]

Round Two: Internal Politics and Elections

In the midst of all the turmoil, President Poroshenko decided he needed to rid the Rada of Yanukovych supporters. He ordered the legislature dissolved and new elections to be held on October 26, 2014. The election was as comprehensive as possible under the circumstances, but about 10% of the population (4.8 million voters) in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk could not vote. As a result, the decision was made to leave 27 seats vacant in the 450-member parliament.

The election lacked the excitement of previous campaigns, but one candidate from Prime Minister Yatsenyuk's party was shot at and came under a grenade attack as he left his home. The Peoples' Front Party issued a statement that Volodymyr Borysenko had survived because he had been wearing body armor.[345]

It was a resounding victory for the president. His coalition received 57% of the vote, with the prime minister only receiving 6%. The Communist Party did not even cross the 5% threshold.[346]

Kyiv scheduled local elections in the east for December. Demonstrating their refusal of Kyiv-granted autonomy, however, rebels announced they would hold local elections on November 2, a month before the date for elections set by the Ukrainian parliament.[347] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the separatist elections would be important "to legitimize the authorities there."[348]

The rebel elections confirmed Alexander Zakharchenko as head of the Donetsk People's Republic, and Igor Plotnitsky in charge of Luhansk.[349] The newly elected leaders demanded to be included in direct negotiations with Kyiv, something the central government rejected immediately. In retaliation for holding the elections, which asserted their independence from the Ukrainian government, the central authorities announced they were canceling all government payments to the rebel regions. This included money for schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure.[350]

A poll conducted in December by political scientists from Oxford University demonstrated the manufactured nature of the separatists' November elections. As with previous polls looking at the populations of southern and eastern Ukraine, including rebel-held areas, the poll showed fewer than 5% of respondents favored breaking up Ukraine. A majority of respondents favored maintaining a unitary system of government. While 18% demonstrated support of a federal solution to accommodate ethnic differences, this finding only held if the federalism was designed to preserve a strong central government. In Donetsk, only 6% believed rebel territories should be granted independence or join the Russian Federation. The number was even lower in Luhansk, at 4%. Most respondents preferred an increased use of government military force rather than see the occupied territories split from Ukraine.[351] The elections failed to provide the rebels the legitimacy Foreign Minister Lavrov had been seeking.

Round Two: Diplomacy

Worried that he was not receiving the aid he needed to oppose Russian subversion, in early September 2014 President Poroshenko said he would ask the next parliament to formally end Ukraine's status as a neutral nation, thereby freeing it to join NATO. This was met with a frigid response from the Kremlin. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov threatened continued conflict in the east if Ukraine tried to join the western bloc. Specifically, he warned that a Ukrainian attempt to abandon neutral status by joining the NATO alliance could "derail all efforts aimed at initiating a dialogue with the aim of ensuring national security."[352] Undeterred, Poroshenko created a Secretariat for Security Cooperation with NATO and the European Union; he appointed former Prime Minister and Defense Minister Yevhen Marchuk to head the new body.[353] Parliament repealed the neutrality legislation on December 23,[354] and President Poroshenko signed it into law on December 29. He predicted Ukraine would meet NATO membership criteria "in 5 or 6 years," at which time the people of Ukraine could choose to join or refrain from NATO membership.[355]

Faced with evidence of the late August direct Russian intervention into the conflict, France announced it was canceling its long-anticipated sale to Russia of two, Mistral-class helicopter carriers. It was a gallant and expensive decision, as the sale had been worth as much as $1.6 billion to the French defense industry.[356] France eventually agreed to reimburse Russia the advance payments for the ship and return all Russian equipment that had been installed.[357]

German Chancellor Angela Merkel tried unsuccessfully at the G-20 to understand what President Putin wanted in Ukraine. "He radiated coldness," said an official. "Putin has dug himself in and can't get out." German officials confessed that, after the Chancellor had over three dozen telephone calls with the Russian president, they had run out of ideas. As a result, Berlin was girding itself for a long standoff.[358]

French President Francois Hollande had better luck. In preparation for a planned summit scheduled for Astana, Kazakhstan in mid-January 2015, Hollande spoke directly to Putin. Afterward, he told reporters, "Mr. Putin does not want to annex eastern Ukraine… what he wants is to remain influential."[359]

EU foreign policy Chief Federica Mogherini circulated a confidential memo to European foreign ministers, suggesting the time might be right to begin talking with Moscow about the lifting of sanctions and restoring normal relations. Of course, the Kremlin would have to assist in the implementation of the Minsk peace agreement. As fighting around Donetsk airport renewed, however, the EU said there were no grounds for lifting sanctions. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius commented that Russia, not the EU, had to think about how to re-engage. Mogherini backpedaled on the earlier initiative. "There is no normalization, there is no 'back to business as usual' in any way," she said.[360]

In late January 2015, the Obama administration leaked that it was considering supplying lethal weaponry to Ukraine. The USA was concerned that the Kremlin was seeking to replace the Minsk agreement with a new accord that would create an economically viable enclave for the separatists.[361] This may have been triggered by a letter from Putin to Poroshenko with his latest proposals to halt the fighting. A Western diplomat characterized the new ideas as "a road map to creating a new Transnistria or Abkhazia in Ukraine. It is a cynical effort to get out of all the commitments made in Minsk."[362]

The leak proved ephemeral. President Obama said it would be unlikely that Ukraine could rebuff the Russian military and that the military alternatives the White House had been considering were symbolic and fraught with danger. Instead, he backed German diplomacy. In a joint press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the president said he was sending delegates back to talks in Minsk instead of weapons to Kyiv.[363] Obama's statement did not quell the division within the American administration, however. Secretary of State John Kerry told lawmakers he supported sending lethal aid, Vice President Biden said he would support Ukraine's security needs, and Secretary of Defense-nominee Ash Carter said he was inclined to send arms to Kyiv. Meanwhile, State Department spokesperson Jan Psaki tried to paper over the differences. Internal debates were good, she said, but "The bottom line is there is no military solution and right now our focus remains on supporting the diplomatic process."[364] Denied lethal aid from the West, President Poroshenko signed agreements with the United Arab Emirates and a South African company to assist with his military's modernization.[365]

While lethal aid was off the table, training was not. US Army Europe Commander Lt. General Ben Hodges announced a battalion of US

soldiers would train three battalions of Ukraine's Interior Ministry troops, beginning in March 2015. The training was designed to include defensive measures, such as protecting themselves against artillery and rockets, securing roads and other infrastructure, handling of casualties, and how to operate in an area where communications were jammed. Hodges used the announcement of training support to accuse Russia of supporting the rebels. "I think it's very important to recognize these are not separatists, these are proxies for President Putin," he said. He cited Russian supplies as evidence of Russian involvement. "It is obvious from the amount of ammunition, the type of equipment, that there is direct Russian military intervention in the area around Debaltseve."[366]

In April 2015, 300 paratroopers from the US Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived in Yavoriv, near Lviv in western Ukraine, on a 6 month training deployment.[367] When the Americans arrived, Russia's foreign ministry called the trainers' presence in Ukraine a provocation that threatened Russia's security.[368] The American move was matched in form by Britain, whose Prime Minister David Cameron also renounced lethal force in favor of training. Cameron said he would send up to 75 British soldiers in four teams to provide medical, logistics, intelligence, and infantry skills.[369]

In July, the American and British troops were joined with forces from 15 other NATO countries, and Ukraine's own soldiers, for an 1800 troop military exercise, Rapid Trident. The Kremlin warned that there would be explosive consequences to the maneuvers, and ordered naval live rocket fire drills off Crimea in response.[370]

The international community continued financially to prop up the government in Kyiv. The International Monetary Fund had provided the country with a $17 billion emergency bailout after troubles in Donbas had begun. Now, they announced a new, 4 year arrangement for $17.5 billion to replace the original emergency measures.[371] It did not prove enough, and the IMF soon followed with a debt restructuring. Private owners of Ukraine's Eurobonds agreed in August 2015 to a 20% haircut, which would reduce the country's financing needs by $15 billion over 4 years.[372] Russia, however, refused to accept such repayment terms. As a result, Prime Minister Yatsenyuk announced Ukraine refused to repay $3 billion in Eurobonds that the Kremlin owned.[373]

NATO commander Air Force General Philip Breedlove, continued to keep up the pressure on the east's Kremlin sponsors. "Let's examine what Mr. Putin has done already: well over a thousand combat vehicles,

Russian combat forces, some of their most sophisticated air defense, battalions of artillery. I would say that Mr. Putin has already set the… ante very high," he told Pentagon reporters. "Air defense systems that have never really been used anywhere outside Russia until now are being used in that area. Literally now we see that Mr. Putin is all in."[374]

The USA remained hesitant to take any steps that might endanger the shaky ceasefire. The White House decided to postpone sending another military training mission to Ukraine, to give diplomacy a chance to operate.[375] In the meantime, officials continued to withhold approval of the military's recommendations to arm Ukraine. While the military was proposing to send 1000 military vehicles, including 220 M1A1 Abrams main battle tanks, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and self-propelled 155 mm howitzers to the country by the end of 2015, US Assistant Secretary of State for European affairs Victoria Nuland reported President Obama had not yet decided to arm the Kyiv government.[376]

Whatever aid the West did provide Ukraine often proved to be substandard. Equipment included Humvees with plastic doors and windows, truck tires that blew apart after a few hundred kilometers, and obsolete bulletproof vests. The Americans defended the substandard equipment as being all that could be mustered in haste, but Ukrainian soldiers reported distrust of Americans and low morale because of the shoddy equipment.[377]

As 2016 began, the EU-Ukraine free trade treaty went into effect. This was the same agreement whose cancelation by the Yanukovich government led to his eventual overthrow. In retaliation, President Vladimir Putin canceled Ukraine's free trade privileges with Russia, citing a fear that cheap European goods would be re-exported by Ukraine and flood the Russian market. President Poroshenko said that Ukraine was prepared to pay the price of the lost Russian trading partner in return for freedom and the choice of Europe.[378]

ROUND TWO: PEACE PROCESS

President Putin called President Poroshenko on the morning of September 3, 2014, and outlined a seven-point peace plan. Putin believed he had obtained Poroshenko's approval of the broad principles in the plan, but Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk denounced it immediately as something that would destroy Ukraine and resurrect the Soviet Union.

Putin called for a ceasefire, during which time the Ukrainian government should withdraw its forces out of range of combat operations. International observers could then enter the region to ensure no further hostilities would take place. He then called for humanitarian aid corridors to be opened, an exchange of prisoners, an end to combat air operations, and for repair brigades to be allowed to rebuild infrastructure. The plan was silent on the political status of rebel-held territory.[379] This meant the ceasefire would keep the rebels in charge of the eastern urban centers.

> Putin's plan was expanded into a 12-point cease fire agreement signed in Minsk. The document was only one and a half pages long, but it became the basis for all future peace negotiations. Known as the Minsk Accords or the Minsk Protocol, the plan called for n immediate bilateral ceasefire, and the decentralization of power—giving more power to local governments in the east. It also called for OSCE monitoring of a 'buffer zone' on the Russia-Ukraine border, a prisoner release, and an amnesty for eastern rebels. There would be early local elections, under Ukrainian law, and a withdrawal of 'illegal militant groups' from Ukraine.[380]

What was missing was any discussion of sequencing. Which came first, a ceasefire or elections? Withdrawal of militias or control of the Russia-Ukraine border? Also missing from this Putin-Poroshenko plan was any agreement with the militants to abide by the proposals. A truce had been arranged to begin September 4–5. It was marred almost immediately by violations.[381] This should have surprised no one as the truce was opposed by both Ukrainian volunteer battalions (militia groups supporting the Kyiv government) and the rebels. "We will continue pursuing our goal of seceding from Ukraine," declared the new leader of Luhansk, Igor Plotnitsky.[382]

Despite the violations, at the end of the first week, the truce held precariously. President Poroshenko announced that 70% of Russian troops who had entered Ukraine had now returned to Russian territory. Pleased with the progress, he announced he would submit a bill to parliament proposing a special status for the rebel areas. At the same time, however, he rejected the insurgents' demands for full independence, or for a Russian-proposed federalization that would have left the Donbas in the thrall of the Kremlin. "The Minsk Protocol envisages the restoration and preservation of Ukrainian sovereignty on all the territory of the Donbas," said the president.[383]

Poroshenko took the Minsk agreement and turned it into a 1200-page peace plan that he presented to Parliament. It included self-government for the east for 3 years, general amnesty, the right to speak Russian in state institutions and an independent law enforcement establishment. Separatist leaders continued to reject it out of hand. "We will take care of our land by ourselves," said Alexander Zakharchenko. "On our land, it will be our people and our laws. There have been no discussions about staying within the territory of Ukraine."[384] Russia also protested the peace plan, but the EU formally ratified the agreement that was scheduled to be implemented at the end of 2015.[385]

The government and rebel leaders signed an amended cease fire, calling for the withdrawal of heavy artillery from the front lines. Each side was to withdraw all artillery larger than 100-mm caliber about 10 miles, leaving a 19-mile buffer zone. Also to be removed from the front were armored vehicles, military aircraft, and "foreign mercenaries." The rebels began to implement the plan but, according to Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council spokesman Colonel Andriy Lysenko, "not as massive as we expected."[386] Russia withdrew most of its forces from Ukraine, but Canadian Lt. Colonel Jay Janzen reported Russian special forces remained.[387]

A Ukrainian team and a 76-member group of Russian officers met with OSCE representatives north of Donetsk to work out details of the withdrawal from the front lines. The Russians must have considered the meeting clandestine because, when word leaked, they denied the presence of any Russian forces in Ukraine and denied the meeting had taken place. One monitor, however, reported the Russian side had been led by a general.[388] In December, Russian General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, finally admitted there was a small Russian military mission in eastern Ukraine. These troops were present at the invitation of the Kyiv government, assisting the OSCE.[389]

The Donetsk People's Republic then issued a statement on its website calling for the Kremlin's favorite policy tool in the near abroad: the imposition of a Russian peacekeeping mission. Pointing out that Kyiv had cut off government payments to rebel-held areas, and not explaining how peacekeeping troops would encourage Kyiv to restore the payments, the website nevertheless said the UN Security Council should approve the peacekeeping force to "resolve the humanitarian and social situation."[390]

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission tried flying a drone over rebel-held areas, but it proved a dangerous undertaking. On a least three occasions, the unmanned aerial vehicle was subjected to military-grade GPS jamming.[391]

At the Donetsk airport, a glimmer of hope appeared. Ukrainian and Russian representatives agreed to a temporary ceasefire to go into effect December 5, with heavy weapons to be withdrawn on December 6.[392] Hope was dashed the next day, however, as rebels shelled Ukrainian forces.[393] Another ceasefire was promised for December 9.[394] Both the insurgents and the government appeared to support the effort. President Poroshenko called for a "Day of Silence" at the front line, which might lead into a longer term cease fire. The Ukrainian chief of the General Staff, Viktor Muzhenko, said the truce was open-ended. Even the Russians struck a conciliatory tone, with Foreign Minister Lavrov stating the rebels were ready to restore "a common economic, humanitarian and political space" with Ukraine.[395]

The following day, however, Kyiv's envoy to the talks said a new round of negotiations should not take place because rebels were still violating the cease-fire. The envoy, former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, said he did not consider the meeting expedient when the second party (whether he meant the Russians or the Ukrainian insurgents was not clear) was unable to ensure the cease-fire.[396] Donetsk deputy speaker of their "peoples council" Denis Pushilin announced the rebels had begun to withdraw artillery units with a caliber greater than 100 mm from the south of the area.[397]

On December 12, the conflict reached a milestone: 24 hours passed without a single military casualty. "We have a real ceasefire in Ukraine," declared President Poroshenko.[398] The two sides agreed to an exchange of prisoners: 222 rebels in exchange for 145 Ukrainian troops from Donetsk, and an additional 5 from Luhansk. Ukrainian authorities said they would be willing to exchange a handful of rebels still being held in prison in return for approximately 500 soldiers held by the other side. The prisoner swap was arranged, but the comprehensive peace plan that had been promised failed to materialize.[399]

The OSCE tried to take a step toward implementation of Article 4 of the Minsk Protocol, restoring to Ukrainian control the border with Russia. It planned for more extensive border monitoring, but the Russians blocked implementation of the plan.[400]

The ceasefire continued to be broken by sporadic violence, but movement for peace had been sufficient for the Minsk Group to hold a summit meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, on January 15, 2015. At a preliminary meeting of foreign ministers held in Berlin three days before the scheduled talks, however, diplomats decided to postpone the summit.[401] Four-way talks among the Normandy Quartet continued, however. This was a group, usually represented by their foreign ministers, consisting of French President Francois Hollande, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. On January 21, the German foreign minister announced a possible breakthrough. The diplomats had agreed to establish a demarcation line and security zones between the competing forces. They ruled out a summit until "tangible progress" was made on the Minsk Protocol.[402] Talks in Minsk collapsed January 31.[403]

As a new round of fighting took place at Donetsk airport, Russian President Vladimir Putin encouraged Kyiv to have direct talks with the insurgents. In reply, the Ukrainian parliament declared the republics of Donetsk and Luhansk to be terrorist organizations. This effectively eliminated the possibility of direct negotiations. The parliament also officially declared Russia to be an "aggressor state," and called on the UN, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and other parliamentary organizations to recognize Russia accordingly.[404]

Negotiators in Minsk tried again. In mid-February 2015, they met in two different groups: the Normandy Quartet and a trilateral contact group, consisting of Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE. This latter group discussed with rebel leaders various proposals for settling the conflict. The contact group and the separatists signed a Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, which included another ceasefire.[405] The guns would stop after three days, and the withdrawal of heavy weapons would follow. All prisoners would be released, and the government in Kyiv would issue an amnesty for those involved in the fighting. Foreign troops and weapons would be withdrawn from Ukrainian territory, and "illegal groups" would be disarmed. Ukraine agreed to postpone for a year their key demand of regaining control of the international border and also agreed to constitutional reform to allow greater self-rule for the rebel areas. The ceasefire would be monitored by a handful of OSCE observers.[406]

The Normandy Quartet issued a declaration of support for the package, but President Putin immediately pointed out the declaration was

unsigned. This immediately gave rise to questions about the leaders' commitment to the process. Putin appeared pleased with the results, counseling the warring sides to avoid unnecessary bloodshed while withdrawing heavy weaponry.[407]

At least one commentator, Paul Gregory, said Vladimir Putin had emerged the clear winner. In the agreement, Russia pledged to use its influence on the separatists, but Russia had always claimed it had no influence on the insurgents. In other words, it had committed to nothing by accepting this proviso. Similarly, while the accord demanded foreign troops and mercenaries to withdraw, there was no deadline for this action. Russian troops could remain inside Ukraine, and they would not be violating the letter of the agreement. In fact, Russia reiterated it was not a party to the conflict and was therefore not bound by any part of the agreement. "Russia is the country that was called by the parties of the conflict," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. "Russia is not one of the parties to fulfill these measures. This is the country that is acting as the guarantor… obviously, it's not a party that needs to take any actions for (the fulfillment). We simply can't do this physically because Russia is not a participant in the conflict."[408] Since Ukraine would not regain control of its international border for almost a year, Russia could continue to resupply separatists with impunity, until such time that Kyiv gave the rebels more self-rule. In short, with the West refusing to provide Ukraine lethal aid, and Russia continuing to give rebels all the weaponry they needed, Russia obtained a comparative victory for its allies.[409]

Fighting continued in the pocket of Debaltseve. The implementation of the ceasefire was delayed three days to give the separatists the opportunity to seize the strategic railway junction. The accord did not address the fate of an additional 500 km^2 the separatists had seized in violation of the first Minsk proposals.

Ukrainian President Poroshenko called on UN peacekeepers, or a police mission from the EU, to be deployed as monitors. Russia immediately condemned the proposal as a violation of the ceasefire agreement.[410] Rebels pushed the defenders of Debaltseve hard, even after the cease fire's implementation date. Rebel commanders said that, since they had surrounded the town before the deadline, it should be considered theirs. Since government forces had not surrendered, the rebels believed they were within their rights to keep fighting in this salient.[411] On the fourth day of ceasefire violations, February 18, the rebels consolidated their hold on Debaltseve. Ukrainian troops retreated, leaving at least

90 soldiers captured and 82 missing.[412] Hundreds of tanks, armored vehicles, and other equipment were left behind, including two US-provided lightweight, counter-mortar radar systems.[413] According to insurgents' reporting, the battle was won by three battalions of Russian troops under the command of Russian Lt. General Aleksandr Lentsov.[414] The ceasefire began to take hold along most of the front, although fighting east of the port city of Mariupol continued.

With Debaltseve consolidated, rebel commanders insisted there would be no more fighting. They also invited reporters from the world press to observe their withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line. "However many there are, they will all be withdrawn," said Commander Eduard Basurin of the Donetsk Republic. "The mission of the OSCE will monitor all the sectors and confirm whether or not we are lying."[415]

The OSCE chief monitor in the east, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, expressed frustration. Despite a gradual decrease in ceasefire violations, he reported, there continued to be "daily exchanges of small arms fire, rocket propelled grenade launchers, heavy machine guns and 82 mm mortars." He complained that both the government and the separatists were only providing partial information, and he rejected a proposed doubling of OSCE monitors because they would not be able to do their work. "Only if the special monitoring mission has full access to all parts of eastern Ukraine, including all territories currently not under government control, and all areas along the Ukraine-Russian Federation state border, can it make full use of increased personnel resources," he reported. "Until such issues are resolved, additional monitors will have little impact on the ability of the mission to monitor the implementation of the Minsk package.[416]

Kyiv confirmed the rebels had begun the withdrawal of heavy weaponry. The Defense Ministry announced there had been no Ukrainian casualties in the previous 48 hours, a precondition they had set before beginning their own pullback. Such progress did little to offset the profound distrust that permeated the conflict, however. OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Ilkka Kanerva complained he was "profoundly disturbed" by rebels' refusal to give unlimited access to OSCE monitors.[417]

In early March, President Poroshenko confirmed the insurgents had withdrawn a "significant" amount of heavy weapons. He also confirmed that the government had withdrawn the "lion's share" of its rocket and heavy artillery systems.[418] Artillery exchanges continued, however, around the ruined Donetsk airport.[419]

Word began to leak of separatist human rights abuses. Amnesty International procured a film showing four Ukrainian soldiers being interrogated by rebel militia. Later pictures of the prisoners showed them dead, with bullet wounds to the head consistent with summary executions. One rebel unit commander bragged that he had personally shot dead 15 Ukrainian soldiers.[420]

Both sides remained suspicious of the other. On April 29, gunmen raided the Donetsk office of the British aid organization, the International Rescue Committee, and seized 37 staff members as possible spies. Most of the workers were put on a bus to Kyiv. Five of the staff were international workers and forced to leave the country; two, however, were Americans who were held by the Donetsk "Ministry of State Security" for 10 days before their release.[421]

The ceasefire continued to be marked with periodic outbreaks of violence. In early April 2015, OSCE monitors observed an intense clash north of Donetsk, which included the use of tanks, heavy artillery, grenade launchers, and mortars. Ukrainian Colonel Andry Lishchynskyi blamed the outbreak on "a highly emotional state and personal animosity" between the fighters on both sides.[422] Separately, four Ukrainian soldiers were killed when separatists fired on their vehicle near Luhansk. Two more soldiers were killed when their vehicle hit an anti-tank mine near Mariupol, and three soldiers were killed when their vehicle ran over a mine near Donetsk.[423]

As the month ground to an end, OSCE monitors were prevented from visiting rebel strongholds in the eastern port of Shyrokyne, near Mariupol. Despite the interference, they witnessed heavy fighting that included the rebel use of tanks. In the town of Avdiivka, near Donetsk, insurgents used GRAD multiple rocket launchers against government forces, again demonstrating a willingness to use heavy weaponry that was to have been removed from the front lines.[424]

Seeking to head off a new outbreak of greater violence, the Quartet's foreign ministers met in Berlin. They called for the withdrawal of tanks and other heavy weapons by all sides, characterizing the situation as "tense because of numerous cease-fire violations."[425]

In May, the Ukrainian parliament took the largely symbolic move of suspending military cooperation with Russia. The action had one concrete result, however: It cut the transit route between Russia and its Transneister separatist allies in neighboring Moldova.[426]

June opened with the first serious battles in months. The Ukrainian Defense Minister reported rebels tried to seize the town of Maryinka,

near Donetsk. Up to 1000 insurgents were in the battle, supported by tanks. The separatists denied they had launched the assault, but admitted that 15 people had been killed when the Ukrainian army fired artillery into rebel-held territory near the city.[427] Large-scale shelling continued through the month.

Russian, Ukrainian, and separatist delegates met in Minsk in early July, focusing on the removal of smaller caliber weapons from the front lines. The talks proved unsuccessful over the question of planned rebel-held local elections in the fall. The two sides clashed militarily the following day.[428]

Some progress, however, was made in Luhansk. Insurgents decided to take the initiative and began pulling back weapons with a caliber smaller than 100 mm. The head of the Luhansk militia, Sergei Kozlov, said "This is our unilateral step towards peace. We are showing the whole world that we are fulfilling the Minsk agreement."[429] Ukrainian President Poroshenko announced he would create a 30 km buffer zone in the area, although shelling continued elsewhere in the Donbas.[430] The OSCE subsequently reported fighting near Donetsk, and Kyiv reported 400 rebels supported by tanks attacking a village outside Mariupol.[431]

In fulfillment of promises made in Minsk, President Poroshenko introduced a bill into Parliament to give the east limited self-rule. The lawmakers voted 288-57 to refer the proposal to the Constitutional Court to determine the bill's legality.[432] Self-rule would require amending the constitution, and that would require two-thirds of the 450 parliamentarians for passage. The bill passed its first reading on August 31, prompting the Radical Party to leave the ruling coalition. This reduced the government's majority to 281, leaving it 19 votes short of the required 300.[433] The vote also engendered violent street protests. Protestors and opposition politicians were concerned that the constitutional amendment would authorize Donetsk and Luhansk to create their own militias and grant amnesty to those who fought against the Kyiv government.[434]

Ukrainian officials and the pro-Russian militants agreed that, effective September 1, both sides would attempt to halt truce violations.[435] As for the heads of state, the Normandy Quartet remained unsatisfied. "The ceasefire agreement hasn't been fully implemented and that's meant that there have been more and more victims," said Germany's chancellor. "We are here to implement the Minsk deal, not to call it into question."[436]

Another OSCE drone was jammed on August 31 as it attempted to monitor the ceasefire. When the Special Monitoring Mission tried to visit its last known location, they were prevented by armed rebels. The mission was able to observe burned patches on the ground in the area they could not visit.[437]

As the ceasefire entered its shaky 6th month, former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma assessed that the Kremlin benefited from the result. "The situation now is going in the direction of a frozen conflict, neither peace nor war, and this is of course in the interests of our neighbor."[438] There was another skirmish on the front line near Luhansk. Rebels ambushed a Ukrainian army vehicle engaged in an anti-smuggling operation. Two civilians were killed, and 6 soldiers were wounded. But it appeared the new efforts were paying off: The army reported six truce violations on September 1, but none on September 2.[439] Within a week, the Ukrainian Defense Minister went on record that fighting had fallen to its lowest level in 18 months. Attacks were down to only 2–4 times per day.[440] President Poroshenko announced that a real truce had begun, and ordered forces to begin withdrawing tanks in the Luhansk area.[441] It should be noted that this drop in fighting corresponded with the Kremlin's preparations for a larger military role in Syria.

In Berlin, the Normandy Quartet foreign ministers sounded a hopeful note. German Foreign Minister Steinmeier said significant progress had been made and that the warring sides were close to a deal that would see the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said the deal was "90% ready."[442]

There were a number of exchanges of prisoners to further the Minsk process. In August 2015, the government and the rebels exchanged 12 prisoners each.[443] In October 2015, Ukraine swapped 11 prisoners with the rebels, in return for eight soldiers and one civilian being held by the separatists. The swaps were primarily symbolic. Kyiv believed that, after the October exchange had been completed, the rebels still held 148 prisoners, including 59 civilians. The insurgents believed that Kyiv was holding 2400 fighters and civilians.[444]

Fighting picked up again in early November, as separatists launched a series of attacks along the entire ceasefire line. As the fighting flared, Ukraine threatened to return its artillery and mortars to the front line to defend Ukrainian positions.[445] By December, things had resumed the same level of fighting as in summer. Ukrainian presidential spokesman Col. Oleksandr Motuzyanyk reported, "The adversary got back to the

tactics of large-scale use of heavy weapons as it was in summer. Thus militant groups used mortars, 122-mm artillery, tanks and Grad systems." The Colonel said there had been no casualties, as the fire was not very precise.[446] While fighting continued near Donetsk, signs of hope continued to emerge in Luhansk. Rebels announced they had completed the withdrawal of small caliber artillery, completing a move begun in September.[447] The region also reopened to UN agencies.[448]

Round Three: Continued Russian Support for Separatists

American officials believed Russia was using any respite resulting from the cease fire agreement to resupply its separatist allies. NATO Supreme Commander General Philip M. Breedlove commented, "We continue to see disturbing evidence of air defense, command and control, resupply equipment coming across a completely porous border, so there are concerns whether Minsk is being followed or not." Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland seconded Breedlove's analysis: "We've seen, month on month, more lethal weaponry of a higher caliber" from "separatist Russian allies."[449]

Former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski opined that such behavior might continue for some time, as Russia sought to weaken the West economically. "I'm not sure that, at this stage, we have succeeded in convincing the Russians that we are prepared to deter the kind of steps they are adopting," he said. "The Russians may pursue an assertive policy toward Ukraine just far enough to avoid a military confrontation but produce the result of the total collapse of the Ukrainian economy, the wasting of billions of dollars that came from the West."[450]

Proof of direct Russian involvement continued to pour in: photographs on the internet, military burials, grief-stricken mothers who refused to remain silent, satellite imagery, Russian POW testimony. One soldier, a tank driver burned in the battle for Debaltseve, gave a detailed report of Russian involvement:

> I was called to service on November 25, 2013. I got here (Ukraine) voluntarily. Only contract soldiers could be sent here, but I came to Rostov as a conscript soldier… Closer to autumn, October (2014), they started to gather contract soldiers from all battalions of our unit in order to form one battalion… We were told that we were going to have maneuvers, but

we knew where we went. All of us knew where we went. I was morally and mentally ready to go to Ukraine. We painted over the tanks in Ulan-Ude. Just while they were in the train set. We painted over the plates. Some tanks were marked with the guard sign—we painted them over, too. We took off the arm patches and chevrons here…for conspiracy reasons… There are a lot of such training camps. Tent camps. One group arrives, another leaves. We met people from previous echelons there. The Kantemirovskay Brigade from the Moscow Oblast came after us. They had paratroopers and one tank squadron of low power… Our tank battalion has 31 tanks…

One month of the training passed, the second month, the third month already. Well then, this meant we really came for training! Or, maybe, to show that our sub-unit is at the boundary, so that Ukrainians got a little bit more scared…Then, suddenly, we got a signal. We started out… on February 8, I think. The captain of our group just said: "This is it, guys, we are going, full alert."…When we were about to leave the training range, they said to leave our phones and documents there. We left Kuzminskiy towards the Russian boundary…Then we got the signal. That was it…They said: "We are starting the March."… All of us understood that we were crossing the boundary. What else could we do? We couldn't stop then. We had to follow orders…

In Donetsk, we parked in the shelter… We found Sputnik radio. And listened to the radio discussion: are there Russian soldiers here, in Ukraine? And all the discussion participants said: "No-no-no." And our company was lying in the beds saying: yeah, sure…

We entered company by company. Ten tanks in each company. They added three ICVs, one medical vehicle and five Urals with ammunition per each dozen of tanks. This was the numerical strength of the tactical group of one company. The tank battalion is about 120 people—three tank squadrons, a support platoon, and a communication platoon. Plus infantry, of course. Approximately 300 people entered…

They (Ukrainian separatist fighters) would take one border, and, when they should proceed to lean on the enemy, they refuse to go. They would say: "We won't go there, it is dangerous." And we have an order—to continue the attack… So you go further… The rebels are strange. They shoot and shoot. Then they stop. It seems they go to work. No organization at all. No leader, military commanders.[451]

Another Russian soldier, Dmitry Sapozhnikov from St. Petersburg, summarized Russian involvement: "Naturally, all operations, especially

large-scale ones like encirclements, are directed by Russian soldiers, Russian generals."[452]

Ukrainian government officials charged that over the last weekend in March 2015, 22 tanks crossed from Russia into Luhansk, heading toward the city of Sverdlovsk for maintenance. The deputy head of Ukraine's anti-separatist military operations accused rebels of firing Grad missiles at a government-controlled city, stating the missiles had arrived as part of a Russian "humanitarian convoy."[453]

As the ceasefire gradually took hold, NATO commander Breedlove told the Senate Armed Services Committee that it appeared Russia had used the lull in fighting to reposition forces for another offensive. Other American officials said Russia had significantly deepened its command and control of the militants. State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf noted an increased use of Russian drones, a Russian deployment of air-defense systems, and increased troop levels near Kharkov.[454]

In May 2015, Ukrainian officials captured two Russians who confessed to being on a reconnaissance operation in the Luhansk region. They said they were members of a Russian army brigade that had been deployed in Ukraine for more than a month. Before the 200 men crossed the border, they were ordered to surrender their dog tags and military identification. They had to swap their military uniforms for mismatched camouflage fatigues. The Ukrainians claimed the two were active officers in Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate, the GRU; Russia said they were not active duty military but in Ukraine as volunteers.[455]

A *Reuters* reporter personally observed Russia massing troops, mobile rocket launchers, tanks and self-propelled howitzers at the Kuzminsky firing range in Russia, the same staging area from which the tank driver had come. The situation was similar: Vehicles had license plates, and identifying marks removed, soldiers had no insignia on their fatigues. Over a 4 day period, the reporter saw transports arriving filled with at least 26 tanks, 30 Uragan launchers, dozens of trucks, several armored personnel carriers, and self-propelled howitzers. A dirt road from the base to the Ukrainian border had been freshly prepared. *Reuters* did not observe any of the men or material crossing the border, and the Russian Ministry of Defense refused to comment on the buildup.[456]

In July 2015, Ukrainian border guards detained a Russian major assigned to a rocket-artillery unit. The officer was driving in a military truck containing 200 cases containing grenades and ammunition, including rocket-propelled shells. He was accompanied by a self-acknowledged

pro-Russian rebel fighter. The major had apparently gotten lost and driven directly up to a border checkpoint loyal to Kyiv.[457]

Russian efforts to destabilize Kyiv included political measures, as well as support to the separatists. In Moscow, Putin allowed former Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov to form a government-in-exile, the "Ukraine Salvation Committee." The goal of the organization was the overthrow of the Poroshenko government. The government of Ukraine already wanted Azarov on charges of embezzlement and abuse of power. Others in the group included former pro-Russian MPs Vladimir Oleynik and Viktor Markov; and former speaker of the so-called Parliament of Novorossiya Oleg Tsarev.[458]

As a new effort to respect the ceasefire took effect on September 1, Russia began building a major military base on its side of the border. Plans called for the capability to house 3500 soldiers, and to store rockets, artillery weapons, and other munitions. The 6000 m^2 unit would also house a large training complex and an infirmary that could be expanded in case of a "massive influx of wounded."[459]

In early November, Moscow sent its 44th convoy into the east. The line of more than 100 vehicles delivered more than 1000 tons of cargo to the separatists.[460] The Russian military presence appeared to have shrunk considerably. According to US Lt. General Ben Hodges, commander of US Army-Europe, as many as 10 battalions of Russian forces, between 5000 and 6000 troops, had left the area. As they departed, the Russians left behind their heavy equipment and other infrastructure.[461]

In December, Putin contradicted himself over an official Russian presence in eastern Ukraine, just as he previously reversed his denials of Russian military involvement in Crimea. As recently as April 2015, he said "I will say this clearly. There are no Russian troops in Ukraine." Putin took the position that, if there were Russians there, they were volunteers.[462] Now, in a Moscow press conference, he said "We never said there were not people there who carried out certain tasks including in the military sphere." However, he continued to deny there were regular Russian troops in the area.[463]

Russian military forces continued to be spotted, even in Kyiv and Kharkiv. In December 2015, Ukrainian special forces captured automatic weapons, grenades, thousands of rounds of ammunition, and parts of explosive devices when they broke up a sabotage group. The leader of the group, a member of a Russian special operations unit, was killed; three of the seven who were captured were Russian citizens.[464] Senior

Donetsk officials admitted Russian units capable of responding swiftly to any military emergency were positioned around Donetsk city and other parts of the oblast, and had almost certainly taken part in armed clashes with Ukrainian forces at least twice since the February 2015 ceasefire. Rebel militias were commanded, from the battalion level up, by Russian officers.[465]

Economically, Russia assumed responsibility for salaries and social payments in the breakaway regions. The rebels declared the ruble the official currency. The Russian costs are large. According to the International Crisis Group, "Approximately $40 million a month (is) for DNR (Donetsk) pensioners alone. If over 410,000 LNR (Luhansk) pensioners are added, the total exceeds $700 million a year. Social benefit payments were due to reach some $3.5 million in December for about 110,000 DNR recipients. Government salaries are not known, but Moscow's total outlay in pensions, allowances and state salaries is likely to exceed $1 billion a year in the east."[466] Donetsk national security secretary Alexander Khodakovsky admitted Russian material support to the rebel government was 70%, excluding military aid.[467]

Round Three: Internal Politics

Both sides of the ceasefire line faced continuing political controversies. In July 2015, the Ukrainian government decided to move against a radical group of its supporters, the Right Sector. This group, whom Russia often accused of harboring neo-Nazi sentiments, had developed into an independent power center. In the city of Mukacheve, on the border with the EU, police entered into a firefight with the 20-man Right Sector volunteer battalion. What the group was doing was not certain: Right Sector claimed it was cracking down on cigarette smugglers in lieu of central government authority, while the central government claimed it was the Right Sector who were the smugglers. There were a number killed and wounded, and Kyiv sent armored reinforcements to the area. The Right Sector then established a roadblock outside of the capital, demanding the resignation of the Interior Minister and other officials.[468]

Right Sector was not the only group of armed volunteers trying to defend the Ukrainian state. President Petro Poroshenko decided many of these groups, including those on the front lines in the east, were becoming a problem. The government ordered the Aidar battalion, formed by parliamentarian Serhiy Melnychuk, to merge into the Army's 24th

Assault Battalion. This followed accusations by Amnesty International that the Aidar group had committed war crimes. For his part, Melnychuk was under investigation for robbery and forming a criminal group. Melnychuk did not deny his loyalists had looted the east, but he said efforts to control the group were criminal, and were provoked by Russian propaganda.

Poroshenko was especially worried about the potential of militias to align with political parties. "No political force should have, and will not have, any kind of armed cells. No political organization has the right to establish… criminal groups," he said. One such group, loyal to the billionaire governor of Dnipropetrovsk, raided the offices of the state-owned oil company UkrTransNafta after his ally was fired as chairman. Poroshenko was forced to remove him from his government position.[469]

Kyiv scheduled local elections for October 25, 2015. The OSCE said the elections were competitive and well organized, but there was a need for further reform. Ihor Kolomoyskyi, the oligarch who President Poroshenko forced out of office as governor of Dnipropetrovsk when his supporters attacked the oil ministry, was the big winner. His candidates emerged on top in Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Odessa.[470] All told, the citizens elected 10,000 mayors and 160,000 city council members.

In the rebel-controlled East, the local elections again had to be canceled after authorities decided they could not guarantee voter or polling place safety.[471] In Mariupol and Krasnoarmeysk, the elections were postponed over the potential for fraud. The elections in Mariupol "were aborted… due to the improper preparation of election ballots, the absence of control over their printing and number, and reliable storage," said the Solidarity party.[472] Opposition leaders claimed, however, the elections were canceled or postponed because pre-election polls had shown that they would have beaten Poroshenko's Solidarity party 23–8%. "Over 300,000 voters in the largest Ukrainian-controlled city of Donbas could not exercise their constitutional right because the authorities decided to hide their total loss by disrupting the election," stated the Opposition Bloc.[473]

The Donetsk and Luhansk republics announced their own elections for October and November 2015. NATO Chief Jens Stoltenberg denounced the plans as fake elections that would not be recognized by any NATO ally. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, denounced the plans as a "serious breach" of the Minsk peace plan. Russia said it understood the decision of the rebels to hold

elections and viewed the decision as forced on the separatists by Kyiv's violations of the truce. Siebert decried Russia's failure to distance itself from the planned plebiscite.[474] In early October, the separatists delayed the elections until sometime in 2016, apparently in response to pressure via President Putin.[475]

The insurgent republics took other steps to build their claim of state-hood, although it is debatable as to whether the changes meant greater independence or greater integration with Russia. In August 2015, rebels announced a reform of the eastern educational system—bringing it more into line with that of Russia. Ukrainian national symbols were removed from report cards, the grading system was changed, and the curricu-lum revised. Russian history would receive more emphasis, as would the geography of Russian territories. Russian language and literature was increased, and Ukrainian was reduced from 8 hours per week to 2 hours. Graduates would receive Russian certificates, qualifying them to enter higher education institutions in the Russian Federation.[476] In September, the Russian ruble became the official currency for taxes, budget, wages, pensions, and social benefits. Russia also announced it was considering issuing Russian passports to the residents.[477]

President Poroshenko announced another series of sanctions against individuals and entities. He banned Russian airlines from the country's skies, and Russia reciprocated by banning Ukrainian flights over Russia. Russia's transport minister estimated the mutual bans would cost the two countries around $110 million per year.[478]

Kyiv was now forced to deal with a major corruption scandal. A poll showed how pervasive the problem had become: 40% of all respondents admitted having bribed someone in the previous 12 months, and only 7% thought the government's fight against corruption was yielding any results. Three-quarters were unhappy with the government's efforts, and two-thirds believed the government was not doing enough to fight cor-ruption.[479]

Corruption had always been a leitmotif in the post-Soviet elections. As reports of official corruption in the Yanukovych regime circulated, holdovers from that era were not lucky. On January 29, 2015, the for-mer head of the Kharkiv regional government, Oleksiy Kolesnyk, was found hanged. One month later, Serhiy Valter, the mayor of Melitopol was found hanged and Oleksandr Bordyuh, former deputy police chief in the same city, was found dead in his home. A former party deputy chair-man, Mykhaylo Chechetov, apparently jumped from a window and died.

Former MP Stanislav Melnyk was found shot dead in his bathroom on March 9. Former regional governor Oleksandr Peklushenko was found dead on March 12, apparently of a suicide.[480]

President Poroshenko appointed a group of reformists to government positions. In February 2016, these reformists began to flee the administration. In his resignation, Minister of the Economy Aivaras Abromavicius accused several minister of corruption, and added "Neither I nor my team have any desire to be a cover for open corruption, or to be a marionette of those who want to establish control over state money."[481] One of the accused was prosecutor general Viktor Shokin, who was accused of blocking investigations into top officials in the Yanukovych government. Several of Shokin's underlings were arrested, after piles of cash and diamonds were found in their apartments.[482] Shokin fired Deputy Prosecutor General Davit Sakvarelidze after he arrested Kyiv's top prosecutor whose office housed a treasure trove of cash, gold, and precious stones. Shokin submitted his letter of resignation on February 16; Parliament accepted it 6 weeks later.[483] Signaling that nothing would change with Shokin's resignation, the new Prosecutor General Yury Lutsenko announced he would not fire any of Shokin's top lieutenants.[484]

Prime Minister Yatseniuk accused the reformists of seeking to discredit his government to gain power and access to state revenues.[485] President Poroshenko turned on his long-time governing partner and called on the prime minister to resign. Poroshenko said he wanted to avoid early elections and urged "a complete government reboot."[486] Yulia Tymoshenko withdrew her party's support of the ruling coalition, calling it an alliance of clans that had brought the nation to the point of destruction.[487]

Yatseniuk took to the floor of the Parliament to defend his actions. After hours of debate, his fellow MPs overwhelmingly voted his report "unsatisfactory." This made Yatseniuk vulnerable to a no-confidence vote. A group of lawmakers loyal to various oligarchs walked out of the chamber, however, and three dozen legislators from Poroshenko's party voted against the motion. To bring down the government, reformers needed 226 votes; they only got 194.[488] Under parliamentary rules, this meant the legislature could not bring another no-confidence motion until its next session in September 2016.[489]

The pressure against Yatseniuk continued to build until April 10, when the prime minister announced his resignation. President

Poroshenko immediately nominated a close confidant, Voldymyr Groysman. Controversy temporarily subsided, but the underlying issue of corruption remained. As the European Council on Foreign Relations put it, "The appointment of Volodymyr Groysman as Ukraine's youngest-ever prime minister does not mark the end of the current political crisis, but only its midpoint."[490]

Round Three: War and the Peace Process

In 2016, the situation in the east deteriorated again. According to the deputy chief of the OSCE's mission to Ukraine, both sides continued to violate the provisions of the Minsk accord. Heavy weapons remained in the conflict zone, the two sides still held prisoners, Kyiv had not granted amnesty to separatists or amended the constitution to allow more autonomy in the east, the OSCE still was unable to visit all parts of the separatist regions, and Russia had not returned control of the border to the Ukrainian government.[491] The head of the OSCE mission, Ertugrul Apakan, reported that in April the OSCE had seen the highest number of ceasefire violations in months. He said that the artillery and mortars prescribed by the Minsk accords were being used in increased numbers. Many of the permanent storage facilities for these banned weapons were empty and completely abandoned.[492]

The first uptick in fighting began with the New Year. In January 2016, Ukrainian officials were reporting up to 71 attacks a day. The OSCE reported the return to use of both Grad multiple-launch rocket systems and 152-mm artillery.[493] Ukrainian military spokesman Oleksandr Motuzyanyk reported that every third enemy attack was from a heavy weapon or mortar banned by the ceasefire agreement.[494]

Most of the renewed fighting took place around the government-controlled town of Avdiivka. Located about 10 miles from the rebel stronghold of Donetsk, the town sat on two major roads. This location gave it an outsized strategic significance. According to Alexander Hug, deputy chief of the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission, the reason for so much fighting was that the two sides were physically too close to each other, sometimes within 50 meters of one another's positions.[495] He said there were 88 tanks visible on the rebel side of the cease fire line. "They just sit there, armed and battle-ready, within easy reach of the contact line," he said.[496]

President Putin's advisor Vladislav Surkov visited Donetsk in late April 2016 and exhorted the rebels to better perform two tasks: chase

government forces away from the town of Avdiivka, and distribute Russian military and financial aid. According to Ukrainian intelligence, Surkov's visit corresponded with the arrival of Russia's 10th special forces brigade in the area south of Donetsk, the return of 24 repaired tanks to Luhansk, and the delivery of 320 tons of ammunition and 1000 tons of diesel fuel.[497] While Russia would not confirm its forces were inside rebel territory, it did announce a snap combat readiness exercise on the border.[498]

The peace talks continued to grind along without any progress. Russian deputy foreign minister Grigory Karasin told a Russian business magazine that Russia would not return control of the Ukrainian border to the Kyiv government until after a comprehensive settlement was achieved.[499] The leader of the Donetsk People's Republic, Alexsander Zakharchenko, said he would refuse to allow elections be held under Ukrainian law, only allowing a ballot under the law of the separatists.[500]

On the diplomatic front, Britain announced in March 2016 it was signing a 15-year defense pact with Ukraine, to replace a previous one that expired in 2006 under the Yanukovych government. The agreement authorized additional joint training exercises, as well as the sharing of military intelligence.[501]

The Saga of MH-17

The continuous cycle of the cessation and resumption of conflict was notably eclipsed by the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight 17 (MH-17), which garnered the region an immediate increase in international attention. On July 17, 2014, the commercial flight was crossing Ukraine in an officially designated corridor for international flights. The plane was flying at an altitude of 33,000 ft when it was hit by a Buk missile. The plane crashed near the village of Grabovo in an area under the control of armed pro-Russian militants. 298 people died, including 210 EU citizens. Because so many of the dead were natives of the Netherlands, the Dutch Safety Board led the investigation into the crash.

The government of Ukraine immediately denied the plane had been downed by any of their missiles.[502] The rebel response was more nuanced. Commander of the rebel Vostok brigade Alexander Khodakovsky admitted, "I knew a Buk came from Luhansk… that Buk I know about… I think they sent it back." He then raised the theory that government forces had downed the plane to cast blame on the rebel cause.[503]

Attempts to reach the crash site were stymied. Remnants of the plane were taken to Kharkiv, to the Malyshev factory. In August, rebels attacked the factory with flamethrowers, possibly seeking to destroy evidence. Police arrested six Kharkiv locals, who were in possession of Russian-sourced flamethrowers, anti-tank mines, and Kalashnikov rifles.[504]

Investigators recovered the Boeing airplane's black box recorders. After reviewing the data, as well as photographic and radar evidence and satellite imagery, the Dutch issued an interim report in September 2014 stating the plane had been downed with "high energy objects." Local citizens provided eyewitness testimony to journalists that they had seen a rocket launch from rebel territory that destroyed the plane.[505]

The Dutch issued their final report a month later. They said a Russian-developed Buk missile detonated less than a yard away from the cockpit, causing the plane to break up so quickly it is likely the passengers barely understood what happened before they died. The report did not identify responsibility for the crash. They did, however, identify the area from which the missile was fired: a 123 square mile area, most of which was in the hands of the rebels. They also dismissed the Russian theory that the plane had been shot down by a Ukrainian air force jet. The Dutch findings were immediately denounced as biased by the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov.[506]

The British-based *Bellingcat* group of citizen journalists turned over a report in December that said a Buk mobile launcher had been spotted on the day of the crash in an area controlled by the separatists and that this missile launcher came from a military convoy from Russia's 53rd Antiaircraft Brigade. This is a unit normally based in Kursk, but it had been sent on maneuvers near the Ukrainian border. *Bellingcat's* founder said there were at least 20 Russian soldiers who "probably" either fired the missile or knew who fired it. "We have the names and photos of the soldiers in the June convoy who traveled with the MH17 Buk, their commanders, their commanders' commanders, etc.," he said. Dutch prosecutors said they would investigate the report.[507]

Families of Australian victims filed a lawsuit against the Russian government in the European Court of Human Rights. The claimants argued that the Russian Federation had worked to keep its involvement hidden, had failed to conduct an internal investigation, and had refused to participate in a cockpit reconstruction. It also argued that the federation's "Pawn Storm" cyber warfare unit hacked into the Dutch Safety Board

investigative website.[508] As of publication, the results of this legal action were unknown.

The circumstantial evidence points to separatist forces operating a Russian-supplied anti-aircraft weapon as the perpetrators. According to Paul Gregory, "Intercepted phone calls show the Russian side celebrating when the plane came down and then panicking when they learned it was a civilian plane. Social media shows the offending BUK entering from Russia, being moved to the firing location, and then skedaddling back to Russia. Most important, the simple explanation says the shooting down was an accident, which makes sense because the Russian side had nothing to gain and everything to lose from the incident."[509]

Nadiya Savchenko

One of the more confusing incidents in the war was the case of Ukrainian fighter pilot Nadiya Savchenko. This female veteran of the war in Iraq was arrested in Russia in mid-June 2014. Russian authorities claimed that she had crossed the border voluntarily, raising the question as to why Russians would arrest a defector. In contrast, Savchenko told a Ukrainian diplomat in mid-July that she had been captured by rebels, and smuggled across the border in handcuffs with a sack over her head.[510]

The Russian charges were heavy: that she directed artillery fire from a Ukrainian volunteer battalion at Russian journalists, killing two. Her motivation was supposedly hatred for all Russians. Savchenko vigorously denied the charges. She rapidly became a hero to the people of Ukraine, a symbol of resistance against Russia. She received the nickname of Ukraine's "Joan of Arc."[511] In September 2014, 3 months after her capture, she was elected in absentia to Ukraine's parliament and to Ukraine's delegation to PACE.

During her trial in Rostov, the fighter pilot remained defiant. "You have no right to judge me," she told the court. "I am an officer of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. I had every right to defend my country, and I was doing my job."[512] Savchenko's defense attorneys presented evidence showing she had been captured by pro-Russian separatists at least an hour before the journalists were killed.

The Russian news agency *Meduza* published a report that supported the defense's case. They interviewed Luhansk separatist lieutenant colonel "Ilim" who claimed to have captured Savchenko before the mortar

attack began. "The battle began around eight in the morning, and by noon Savchenko had already been handed over personally," he told Meduza. "She acted as a spotter from Stukalova Balka, and by the time shelling killed the journalists she had already arrived in Luhansk… It (the mortar fire) had been an hour since we retained her."[513]

The court did not call Ilim to the stand, but relied on the testimony of two others who claim to have transported Savchenko. The judge found Savchenko guilty on March 22, 2016. She was sentenced to 22 years in prison. It took almost eight hours to read the verdict, which consisted of detailed descriptions of how the Russian journalists were killed. There was no mention in the text, however, about Savchenko's direct involvement in the case.[514]

To protest her conviction, Savchenko went on a hunger strike, refusing all food or water for almost two weeks. She abandoned her strike after speaking to President Poroshenko on the phone. The president was hopeful that Ukraine could obtain her release in a prisoner swap. To that end, the Ukrainian government arrested two Russian intelligence officers, whom the Kremlin claimed were fighting in Ukraine in a private capacity. President Poroshenko pardoned the Russians, while President Putin pardoned Shevchenko, supposedly for humanitarian reasons. After 2 years in prison, Savchenko returned to her native country a "Hero of the Ukraine." By contrast, the Russians were met quietly at the airport by their wives.[515]

Cyberespionage: The New Front

Hackers have consistently used low-level cyberespionage tactics to advance Russian goals in Ukraine, marking the first time this phenomenon has been seen on a large scale. A dedicated group of hackers successfully infected the e-mail systems of the Ukrainian military, counterintelligence, border patrol, and local police. The goal was to steal information. Hackers used a spear-phishing attack in which malware was hidden in an attachment that appeared to be an official Ukrainian government e-mail. For the most part, the technologies have not been advanced but they have been persistent.[516] Lookingglass, a cybersecurity firm, suspects the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) was the culprit behind the virus dubbed Operation Armageddon.[517]

Rather than independent hackers, the Russian government may have been behind an even more dangerous virus, dubbed Snake. Since 2010

BAE Systems has been monitoring the activities of this malware, and numerous digital footprints point to a Russian hand. Moscow time zone stamps were left in the code, and Russian names were written into the software. Other clues point to the Kremlin. "It's unlikely to be hacktivists who made this. The level of sophistication is too high. It is very well written—and extremely stealthy," observed Dave Garfield, BAE's Managing Director for cyber security.[518]

According to the IT security company Symantec, since 2012 Snake has infected dozens of computers in the office of Ukraine's Prime Minister and at least ten Ukrainian embassies.[519] Snake was used against the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to access documents on the Ukraine crisis.[520] The malware establishes a "digital beachhead" that allows its operators to deliver malicious code to the targeted networks.

So far, Russian cyberattacks have been relatively low key. There's an obvious reason why: the Kremlin already has access to Ukrainian telecommunications. Russia built the system, even the monitoring system Ukraine uses against its own citizens. The "System for Operative Investigative Activities" or SORM was originally developed by the Russian KGB. When Russia invaded Crimea, it gained access to the national telephone company's operations center on the peninsula. If the Russian government wanted to shut down Ukraine's power and telecommunications, it could do so easily. "And there's nothing that Ukraine could do to stop it," said Jeffrey Carr, CEO of the cybersecurity firm TAIA Global.[521]

In addition to espionage, Russia has used cyber activity kinetically as it seized Crimea.[522] Ukrainian law enforcement agencies reported Russian cyberattacks had collapsed the communication systems of almost all Ukrainian forces that could pose a danger to the invading Russian troops. Mobile telephone services were blocked, Russian naval ships jammed radio communications, Crimean government websites were knocked offline, telecommunications offices were raided, and cables were cut.[523] Cyberattacks increased in frequency around the time of military action, possibly indicating that the attacks were part of the overall offensive. The number of callbacks—computer communications showing someone is hacking a computer—to Russia increased as the turmoil rose.[524]

The war in Ukraine may have also made US technology vulnerable: Russia claimed (and the Pentagon denied) that it used its control of the cyber battlefield to intercept a US drone as it patrolled Crimean skies

on March 14, 2014.[525] A Russian hacker group exploited a security flaw in Microsoft Windows software to spy on NATO, Ukraine, and several other targets. Dubbed Sandworm Team after researchers discovered references in the code to the Dune series of science fiction novels, the group used a "zero day" attack—a flaw in the software that has not been previously identified and for which there is no preexisting fix—which is usually associated with deep pockets. In Ukraine, the malware was targeted at regional governments,[526] another clue that the hackers were not criminals.

The group has repeatedly carried out reconnaissance operations against European energy firms, according to iSight Partners. In December 2015, this computer security firm identified Sandworm as the group almost certainly responsible for disrupting the power to 700,000 people.[527] The hackers launched a denial of service attack from Russian telephone lines against three power distribution companies and then flooded those companies' call centers with fake calls to prevent genuine customers from reporting the outage.[528]

A similar attack was launched in January 2016 against Kyiv's main airport. Malware similar to what was found on the energy companies' computers was found in the airports IT network. "The control center of the server, where the attacks originate, is in Russia," reported Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko.[529]

There is no real way to determine with certainty who is behind the various attacks. The results would appear to support Russian efforts to force Kyiv to accept its dependency on the Kremlin's good graces. But there is insufficient data to determine whether the hackers are Russian security services, private hackers whose actions are orchestrated by the security services, or hackers who are self-radicalized Russian "patriots." One thing is certain, however; Ukraine demonstrates the effectiveness of cyber operations in a conflict zone. Almost as certain, more cyber operations in other theaters will follow.

Just as Russia and its secessionist allies have used the computer to further its efforts, the government of Ukraine has also belatedly plunged into the field. Since hostilities began in 2014, a group of volunteers known as the Cyber Forces of Ukraine have fought the rebels online by freezing their bank accounts, blocking propaganda websites, and locating their GPS coordinates. On March 15, 2016, President Poroshenko approved a cyberstrategy, which is a conceptualization of the country's cyber direction, rather than a plan with concrete projects and budgeting.

The strategy focused primarily on cyber defense, but called for the creation of an offensive cyber command unit.[530]

<div align="center">ANALYSIS</div>

Looking at Ukraine from a sub-national level, we see that there is a clear division between two groups: Western-oriented individuals loyal to the central government, and Russian-oriented individuals in Crimea and the Donbas. These two groups are separated by historical circumstance, language, ethnicity, and culture. Ukrainian national unity would be difficult, at best, in the post-Soviet world. Kyiv has tried to call upon ideology, an affinity for Ukrainian nationalism, to unite the disparate groups. Their attempt to use the French school of nationalism to unite the country failed, however, possibly because the levels of corruption in the government kept the country in perpetual disunity.

Elites in Crimea and in the Donbas used the German school of nationalism, the reliance on ethnic and linguistic markers, to rally people behind their own oligarchic activities. When Kyiv decided to pursue a pro-Western foreign and economic policy, the Kremlin exploited the differences between West and East to weaken the country. Providing direct and indirect support to Russian-oriented rebels, Russia forced the country into a civil war.

Putin says that protecting ethnic Russians in Ukraine is a duty that may require him to intervene directly; in fact, Russia reserves the right to intervene anywhere ethnic Russians are threatened. "In connection with the extraordinary situation in Ukraine, the threat to the lives of citizens of the Russian Federation, our compatriots, and the personnel of the armed forces of the Russian Federation on Ukrainian territory (in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea)... I submit a proposal on using the armed forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine until normalization of the socio-political situation in that country," the president told the Duma.[531] Foreign Minister Lavrov echoed his boss' sentiments, "This is a question of defending our citizens and compatriots, ensuring human rights, especially the right to life," he told the United Nations.[532] His words have a universal tone that is disquieting to eastern European countries with Russian populations of their own.

The Russian president's desire to help Russians beyond his borders is a relatively new phenomenon. He ignored his co-ethnics in Ukraine for the first 14 years of his rule. His "duty" to protect them only emerged

once he was in conflict with the Ukrainian government over its pro-Western orientation. Much more likely is that Russia has destabilized its neighbor for geopolitical reasons. Efforts to keep Ukraine within the Kremlin's sphere of influence have been a constant theme of Presidents Yeltsin, Medvedyev, and Putin. The West may well have moved too far, too fast in discussing Ukraine's eventual membership in the EU and in NATO.

One thing is certain: The unrest since 2014 has had a catastrophic impact on Ukraine. The economy contracted 18% in 2 years. The current exchange rate is only one-third of what it was in 2014, public expenditures have been cut from 53 to 46% of GDP. Special pensions have been reduced, and 63 out of 180 banks have closed.[533] The cost in human suffering has been catastrophic: the exodus from Crimea and eastern Ukraine has left 1,476,226 internally displaced persons (IDPs) across Ukraine,[534] and fighting throughout the state has left over 9000 dead and 20,000 injured.[535] Ukraine's European neighbors seem to have shut the door in the face of its hailstorm of problems, stating that Ukraine's accession to NATO or the EU is not likely to happen for another 20–25 years.[536]

Crimea seems to be weathering the storm better than most areas of Ukraine, bolstered by the Russian naval base that has always been central to the area. The Kremlin is spending an estimated $4.5 billion per year maintain and modernize the peninsula.[537] In the east, where Russian aid is more indirect, things are worse. There is no more talk of Novorossiya, or of the unity of the Russian-speaking people. Donetsk, the former financial and industrial capital of the region, became a ghost town in a matter of a few months. Kyiv will pay pensioners their monthly stipends, but only if they can travel out of rebel-controlled areas to collect from Ukrainian banks. The region's economy has fallen by two-thirds. The price of essential commodities has risen 50–60% on average, while real mean income has fallen by 65–75%.[538] The situation has become so bad that the former Donetsk minister of defense, Igor Strelkov, said the separatists have created "a pigsty and a mess." Strelkov added that, "Those people who a year and a half ago were ready to really fight for Russia and proudly move forward, now consider themselves betrayed. They believe that Russia has betrayed them."[539]

At the level of the nation-state, realist political theory has a great deal of explanatory power in the Ukrainian conflict. From Kyiv's perspective,

Ukraine needed to increase its power by obtaining external alliances to balance against the Russian threat. They turned to the USA, NATO, and the European Union for help.

Looking at the same situation from Donetsk and Luhansk, rebels needed external alliances to balance against the central government. They bandwagoned with an eager Kremlin who sought to increase its own power against NATO. President Putin warned the West continuously that bringing Ukraine into the West's sphere of influence directly threatened Russian national interests. Looking at the West as a potential threat to these interests, Putin cannot find allies with sufficient military power to balance against NATO. Seeking to increase his relative power against his perceived threats and unable to increase his own power, Putin launched an operation to weaken the power of a country on his periphery that he saw as a Western entranceway. Through his seizure of Crimea and his support of rebels in the east, Putin has kept the country weak and divided. Further, through its position as a "peacekeeper" in the Minsk process, the Russian government perpetuates negotiating positions that keep the war going. Russia has the ability to increase or decrease the tempo of the fighting to meet its own requirements. It is probably no coincidence that rebel attacks have recommenced within a week of the new American President, Donald Trump, taking office.

Despite earlier talk of Novorossiya, however, it is clear that President Putin is not interested in absorbing eastern Ukraine into Russia. He wants neither the responsibility nor the costs of rebuilding the wartorn area. The continuing conflict is a low-cost method of expanding his influence, and Putin uses Russia's position as an arbiter to keep the coals stoked. His unwillingness to compromise on the sequencing of steps in the Minsk Protocol prevents the cessation of hostilities and perpetuates an expanded Russian footprint.

The Kyiv government cannot join NATO, because NATO requires a government to have control over all its territory before joining the alliance. The country is weak, dependent on Moscow for most things. The Russian Black Sea Fleet is secure in its base, and the east is controlled by people who owe their position to the Kremlin. Moscow can veto any peace plan of which it disapproves, either through its control of the diplomatic process or its control of events on the ground. As long as the status quo holds, Russia is the clear winner.

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Moldova

Background

This chapter focuses on Moldova, the location of one of the longest—yet least known—of the frozen conflicts on the Russian periphery. It examines the history of division within that country and the governing structures of both sides of the conflict. It then reviews the circumstances of the Transneister War, a brief conflict that saw direct Russian military intervention on the side of the rebels. It looks at peace negotiations, the position of the great powers on the conflict, and concludes with an analysis of events (See Fig. 3.1.)

Moldova is a small country of 3.5 million people on the eastern edge of Europe. It is bounded on the west by Romania and on the north, east, and south by Ukraine. It is landlocked, except for 450 m (about 1500 ft) on the banks of the Danube.[1] It is a true borderland, dividing Europe (Romania is both a member of the European Union and of NATO) from the former Soviet Union. The central government in Chisinau controls the lands on the western bank of the Dniester River, the former Bessarabia. The eastern bank, known as Transnistria, answers to a separatist government (the so-called Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic [PMR]) located in Tiraspol.

The two banks are divided by more than the river; they are also divided by ethnic and language differences. The western bank is inhabited by an ethnically united people related to the Romanians (except for the Gagauz, a small Orthodox Christian Turkish minority in the South), who speak a language that is a Romanian dialect. Over the last 75 years,

Fig. 3.1 Moldova. *Source* http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/moldova.html. Moldova Political 2001. Moldova. 2001: US Central Intelligence Agency, University of Texas Libraries. Web. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/moldova_pol01.jpg.

the language has changed somewhat. During the years that Moldova was part of the USSR, the Kremlin ordered the written language to use the

Cyrillic alphabet instead of the Latin script used next door. In this way, the language in Moldova began to change from its root Romanian language. The economy is primarily agricultural.

On the eastern bank, the area is populated by a majority of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians who prefer to speak Russian (although 40% of the inhabitants are ethnic Moldovans and 60% are Moldovan citizens.) The Russian speakers are in the urban centers and control the power. A Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty political analyst described it: "Transnistria can be viewed as a 'miniature Soviet Union', where Russians and the Russian language had the dominant position, but the native population is *de facto* denationalized."[2] During the Soviet era, this eastern bank was the industrialized heartland of Moldova.

Moldova is the poorest country in Europe, with a per capita GDP of \$3736.[3] Its economy is primarily agricultural, with exports including sunflower seeds and wine (5.2% of total exports each), nuts, wheat, corn, barley, etc. Its largest single export is insulated wire (9.9%). Its top import is refined petroleum.[4] To keep Moldova weak and unable to achieve an independent foreign policy, Russia keeps energy prices high while restricting Chisinau's ability to market its agricultural output. Russia has banned imports of wine, vegetables, and meat from Moldova, claiming the goods do not meet Moscow's high-quality standards. It exempts fruit from Transnistria, however, rewarding this area for its pro-Kremlin orientation.[5]

History

The two riverbanks are divided by historical experience. If there was ever a place where "the past is prologue," it is Moldova. Russian troops annexed Transnistria in 1792, separating the population from Ottoman-controlled Moldova across the river. Russia later extended its reach in 1812. Until 1940, the west bank lands were part of Romania, while the east comprised a part of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (along with parts of modern Ukraine.) As part of the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, Stalin detached Bessarabia from Romania, and annexed it.

It is here that history intervenes, and has continued to be felt until today. For Bessarabians, the integration into the USSR was the tragic culmination of their fight against 200 years of Russian encroachment. Because of this, communities in the east that today seek closer ties to

Moscow are perceived in the west as historical traitors to the cause of Moldovan independence.

By contrast, Transnistrians interpret history in light of their experiences in World War II. In June 1941, royal Romanian troops, acting as allies of Germany, attacked the USSR. They regained control of Bessarabia and then seized Transnistria. They declared the lands on the eastern bank had been "Bolshevized" and attempted to dismantle many of the Soviet governing structures. The leader of the fascist Romanian regime, General Antonescu, ordered Jews deported to Transnistria. Approximately 400,000 died, either en route or in starvation camps.[6] The Soviet Union finally reconquered a united Moldova in 1944. The Soviets were perceived as the saviors of Transnistria, rather than the conquerers.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, the Moldavian SSR became the current country of Moldova. The ties combining communities into a Soviet administrative unit were not sufficient to engender loyalty to the successor state. The historical divisions between Bessarabia and Transnistria reemerged. Today, communities in the west who identify as Moldovan seeking ties to the West are perceived in the east as Nazi fascists who seek reunification with Romania; communities in the east who seek closer ties with Russia are perceived as Russian-backed traitors to the republic.

Governing Structures

The government of Moldova, located in the city of Chisinau, has had difficulty ruling itself. There was considerable instability throughout its first decade of independence. Then, in July 2000, the Moldovan parliament changed the constitution, granting itself the power to elect the president. The Communist Party won the majority of votes in the 2001 election, and the government was run by the Communists throughout the 2000s. Communist control was a bit of an anomaly, since most countries of the former USSR (including Russia) spurned the old party. "Moldova has the distinction of being the first European country in which an unreformed communist party regained control of the government through democratic elections," wrote one analyst.[7] Despite being Communist, the government supported closer ties to Europe (while maintaining good relations with Russia). In 2009, however, a group of opposition parties formed the Alliance for European Integration and

won the election. The Alliance named Liberal Democratic Party member Vlad Filat as prime minister. Once in the opposition, the Communists opposed the Alliance's call for greater ties with Europe.

Moldova was without a president from September 2009, when Communist party member Vladimir Voronin resigned from the position. The absence of a president was not critical since the country had a parliamentary system and was governed by the prime minister. Finally, in March 2012, the parliamentary impasse was broken when the Communists boycotted the vote for president. An independent, Nicolae Timofti, was elected. Timofti was apolitical, having previously served as a judge and chair of the Supreme Magistrates Council.[8]

A scandal brought Prime Minister Filat's government to an end in 2013. High-level members of Filat's government had participated in an illegal hunt inside a nature reserve, during which a prominent Moldovan businessman was shot and killed. Filat forced the prosecutor general to resign over a cover-up of the incident. In return, the prosecutor's allies in parliament forced Filat to face a no-confidence vote, which he lost.[9] Filat wanted to run again until the court barred him on the grounds he had tolerated corrupt ministers—ironic since it was his charge of a corrupt cover-up that forced the resignation of the prosecutor general in the first place. Eventually, the shattered Alliance reorganized itself, and Foreign Minister Iurie Leanca became prime minister.

In the 2014 parliamentary elections, the pro-Russian Socialist Party received the most votes (20.7%), followed closely by the pro-European Liberal Democratic Party (20%). Even though the Socialists received the plurality, the pro-Western parties together had the larger block of votes (45%) as opposed to the pro-Russian (39%). Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri O. Rogozin, named Special Advisor to the Russian President on Transnistrian affairs by former Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, declared the vote had been rigged. On the eve of the election, the Central Election Commission prohibited the pro-Russian party Patria from participating on the grounds that Patria had accepted illegal foreign (Russian) financing. Rogozin claimed that if Patria had been allowed to compete, and if it had been easier for Moldovan migrant workers in Russia to vote, the pro-Russian parties would have secured control of the Parliament.[10]

Rogozin's analysis was incorrect. Compared to the previous election (2010), the Liberal Democratic Party suffered a 9% loss in votes, thereby impacting the party's lead in parliamentary seats. But the percentage of

votes that went to the pro-Kremlin parties remained basically unchanged. In other words, had Patria participated in the election, it probably would have taken votes from its allies, the Socialists, rather than improving the chances of the pro-Russian block.

The Liberal Democrats blamed their losses on their leader, the incumbent Prime Minister Leanca, who was forced to step down. In February 2015, Chiril Gaburici became the new prime minister. Gaburici was the former head of Azerbaijan's largest telecommunications company, Azercell, and was pro-Western in orientation. He would remain in office for only about 100 days.

Shortly before the parliamentary elections, the Moldovan Central Bank discovered that three of the country's biggest banks had made a series of bad loans. The money had disappeared into thin air. The Central Bank had to make an emergency bailout of the institutions, amounting to about $1 billion, or 15% of the country's GDP. The Central Bank believed that had they failed to provide the lifeline, the national economy would have collapsed.[11]

The prosecutor general launched an investigation, but was unable to track down the embezzlers. Gaburici demanded that the prosecutors and the central bank chief resign. In retaliation, the prosecutors opened a case against Gaburici for forging his school diplomas. They alleged the prime minister's diploma contained a forged signature and official stamp. Gaburici promptly resigned on June 12, 2015. He claimed he was innocent of wrongdoing, but stated he was not going to play political games. "I am a manager, and not a politician," he said.[12] The government resigned en masse. President Timofti then appointed Foreign Minister Natalia Gherman as acting prime minister.

Finally, in October 2015, prosecutors made an arrest: former Prime Minister Filat, the reformer who took a stand two years earlier against a cover-up in the prosecutor's office. After parliament stripped Filat of his parliamentary immunity, masked officials from the anti-corruption bureau entered the legislative chamber and placed him in handcuffs. Chief Prosecutor Adriana Betisor claimed to have irrefutable proof that Filat had taken bribes worth $250 million in return for giving indirect control of one of the pilfered banks.[13] Betsisor then seized a number of luxury vehicles belonging to Filat and his family, as part of the investigation.[14]

Politics moved on, with a new team coming in even before the arrest. On July 30, 2015, the three-party, pro-European Union alliance,

managed to obtain 52 votes in the 101-seat assembly to elect a business-man, Valeriu Strelet, as prime minister. Strelet promised to bring the country out of financial crisis.[15] The new Chief Prosecutor, Corneliu Gurin, said the government was investigating the money's disappearance, but he did not know how long the inquiry would take. The European Union, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank froze their financial aid to Moldova.[16] Thousands of protestors set up a tent city in the center of Chisinau, similar to the Maidan movement in neigh-boring Ukraine.

After 3 months, Strelet fell to a no-confidence motion. The Democratic Party defected from the ruling coalition and voted against him. The leader of the party, Marian Lupu, made it clear that this was a political move and not a repudiation of Moldova's European alignment. "This is a vote of no confidence in Prime Minister Valeriu Strelet, not against his government … (or) his policies."[17] A week later, Parliament then met in secret, at midnight, and called a snap vote. Deputies only had a couple of hours to reach the hall. They elected Pavel Filip, whom critics claim is an associate of the country's richest man, Vladimir Plahotniuc. "Moldova is a 'captured state' and Mr. Plahotniuc is the symbol of this evil," declared the Chisinau's Institute of Public Policy.[18] 15,000–20,000 demonstrators stormed the parliament building demand-ing the country be returned to the people. Presidential elections, replac-ing the choice of president by the parliament, was scheduled for October 2016.[19]

In Transnistria, the domestic political system is more stable. The terri-tory was led for 21 years by its Soviet-era leader, Communist party leader Igor Smirnov, who was elected in December 1991. Smirnov followed up his victory by unleashing paramilitary forces on symbols of the Moldovan state, such as police stations. Smirnov's stability was propped up by Moscow. As an example, until late 1996 the head of the Transnistrian central bank was reportedly a member of Russian intelligence, and bank officials received training in Moscow and St. Petersburg.[20] He was defeated in 2011 by the current leader, Yevgeni Shevcuk, who had been the head of the parliamentary opposition.

The titular head of the government is less important than the net-work of Moscow-connected criminals who control the country. In 2005, a reporter uncovered "a mysterious firm called Sheriff—headed by for-mer Red Army officers—runs much of the economy. It is hard to believe many drivers of shiny new Mercedes in dirt-poor Transnistria earned

their money legitimately."[21] The enclave has become a center for smuggling, weapons trading, human trafficking, and prostitution. There have also been numerous reports of individuals trying to sell nuclear materials on the black market. In at least one case, a Transnistrian resident (former police colonel Alexandr Agheenco) sold weapons-grade highly enriched uranium to an undercover Moldovan police informant.[22]

Conflict: The Transnistria War

As the Soviet Union entered its death throes, ethnic Russians in the East tried to cede from the Moldavian SSR to form the Dniester Republic. They were frightened by a number of factors outside of their control: the Moldavian Supreme Soviet issuing decrees declaring Moldovan to be the official language of the country, the dropping of Cyrillic in favor of the Roman alphabet, the adoption of the Romanian national anthem as their own, etc. All of these factors convinced ethnic Russians and their supporters in the east that Bessarabians would seek to unify with Romania.

While this Moldovan nationalist move was occurring on the edge of the USSR, there were similar stirrings at the heart of the Soviet Union. On June 12, 1990, the President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), Boris Yeltsin, signed a declaration of the RSFSR's Congress of People's Deputies that held the constitution and laws of the RSFSR took priority over the legislation of the USSR. Although the Soviet Union would survive another 18 months, this Russian assertion of sovereignty marked the *de facto* end of the USSR. Back in the Moldavian SSR, the east bank followed the Russian example and asserted its own sovereignty by declaring itself the Transnistria Moldavian SSR within the USSR. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev voided the move.

The Chisinau government tried to both subjugate and hold onto Transnistria by force. When Transnistrian parliamentary delegates in 1990 tried to weigh in on discussions about a new flag, Moldovan President Mircea Snegur refused to recognize them. After the debates, Snegur refused to authorize protection for the delegates who had to face mob violence outside of the parliament building. When Transnistrian officials decided to hold an extraordinary congress to request autonomy, Snegur threatened the members with arrest. He then declared a state of emergency to stop the Transnistrians.[23]

The Moldovan parliament declared its independence in August 1991. Thus, the stage was set so that, when the Soviet Union dissolved itself in

December 1991, Moldova was recognized by the international community within borders that included both Bessarabia and Transnistria.

In Transnistria, Russophone elites with the support of hardliners in Moscow mobilized the people against Moldovan nationalism.[24] Transnistrian leader Igor Smirnov decided to seize the territory by initiating a series of raids against police stations.[25] Russian Federation troops in Transnistria sided with the separatists. The troops were members of the Russian 14th Army, a unit that had been assigned to the area since 1956. Officers from this unit helped create the Transnistrian military and transferred large amounts of weaponry to the newly created force.[26] In December 1991, the 14th Army's commander became the head of Transnistria's military while retaining his Russian position, and his chief of staff became the defense minister.[27] Simultaneously, the Transnistrian regime carried out a policy of ethnic cleansing that led to 25,000 Moldovan citizens becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs).[28]

In March 1992, the 14th Army engaged the army of Moldova. It proved to be a short battle. Supplied with Russian armaments, the separatists and their Russian allies easily overwhelmed the Moldovan troops. After a couple of Russian military victories, a ceasefire was signed by Moldovan and Russian officials (not Transnistrians) on July 31, 1992. It is possible that at the beginning of the conflict, the 14th Army was operating independent of Moscow's control. Morike notes that members of the unit were deeply integrated into Tiraspol society. Many officers had married locals, and many reservists worked in the defense industries located in that city. In June 1992, Russian Minister of Defense Pavel Grachov confirmed the 14th Army had been operating independently. Its new commander had been almost forced into ordering the army into battle to regain control and unit cohesion. "The price paid for restoring discipline was initial partiality towards the PMR" (Transnistria).[29] Regardless of how it began, after the ceasefire the Russian Defense Ministry promoted the commander of the 14th Army for leadership in the Transnistrian campaign.[30]

The ceasefire created a security zone between the Moldovan and Transnistrian forces. This security zone is currently patrolled by peacekeeping contingents from each of the warring sides, and a peacekeeping contingent from Russia. Each group consists of 400 personnel, meaning 800 peacekeepers from Transnistria and Russia and 400 from Moldova. The peacekeepers are overseen by a Joint Control Commission that consists of a representative of each of the three peacekeeping forces, as well

as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as an observer. Within Transnistria, the Russian peacekeepers are supplemented by an additional 2100 Russian troops as well as huge stockpiles of weapons and ammunition. (In 1999, Russia agreed to withdraw these troops when they signed the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe. Russia's failure to abide by its commitments is one of the reasons for the refusal of various countries to ratify this treaty.)

Negotiations

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there was an opportunity for a negotiated solution. Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin entered into discussions with Transnistria's Igor Smirnov, under the eyes of Putin-appointed Russian mediator Dmitry Kozak. According to US Special Negotiator Rudolph Perina, "The document was terribly slanted in favor of Transnistria. It outlined a federal structure which retained almost all of Transnistria's independence but also enhanced its influence within Moldova through the legislative structure … There was also an annex allowing Russian troops to remain in Moldova for twenty years and perhaps longer."[31] The "Kozak Memorandum" would have given Transnistria one-third of the seats in the future Federation Senate. At the same time, the document stipulated that opposition from one-fourth of the Senate would have been sufficient to veto a measure, thereby giving Transnistria de facto veto power. While Voronin was ready to sign the document, mass public demonstrations in Chisinau forced him to reject the document.

Negotiations resumed in 2005, with the OSCE and the governments of Russia and Ukraine acting as mediators. The USA and the European Union joined the talks as observers. The resultant grouping became known as "5 + 2": the five mediators/observers plus Moldova and the separatists. No talks were held from 2006 until 2011. In March 2011, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov appeared to endorse Chisinau's positions. In talks with the Moldovan Foreign Affairs Minister Leanca, Lavrov recognized Moldova's territorial integrity and called for a "special status for Transnistria in the framework of a united Moldovan state." He then called for a resumption of "5 + 2" talks,[32] which recommenced in December 2011. Talks were ultimately unsuccessful, with Tiraspol rejecting Lavrov's formulation outright.

Chisinau has repeatedly attempted compromise in an effort to bring Transnistria back under its authority. The Moldovan government is willing to grant Transnistria a substantial degree of autonomy. It has also promised to respect Russian property rights in Transnistria. In return, they want Russia to withdraw its troops from the area and replace them with an EU-led peacekeeping force of civilian observers.[33] To get "5 + 2" negotiations restarted in 2011, it agreed to remove these latter points (withdrawal of Russian troops and their replacement by a civilian peacekeeping force) from the agenda.[34] In February 2016, in another bid to renew talks, speaker of the parliament Andrian Candu dangled the possibility of granting Transnistria a "special status." [35]

Tiraspol, by contrast, pockets Moldovan concessions but refuses to budge from its stance that it is an independent country. They withdrew from the talks in 2006 when, in an effort to stop smuggling, the Chisinau government agreed to cooperate with the EU and Ukraine to monitor the Transnistrian border. In September 2006, the separatists held a referendum on the territory's status that passed with 97% of Transnistrian voters agreeing Transnistria was independent. Separatists requested Russian recognition, which the Kremlin refused. Transnistrian "President" Shevchuk remains willing to discuss restoration of communication links with the west bank, and the lifting of trade restrictions between the two sides of the river. He is unwilling to countenance, however, any discussion on the status of the territory. Instead, he has applied for membership in the Russian-led Customs Union and the Eurasian Union. [36] Moscow could not admit the territory into these trade blocs, however, as long as they continue to recognize that Transnistria is legally part of Moldova.

Moldova and the West

Although Moldova is a self-declared neutral country, its western orientation is clear. According to the government's official website, "European integration is an irreversible strategic objective of the foreign and domestic policy of the Republic of Moldova."[37] While not a member of NATO or seeking candidacy, it nonetheless participates in NATO's Partnership for Peace program. In that capacity in 2016, it hosted Operation Dragon Pioneer, joint exercises that included 200 American troops who crossed into the country from Romania. A pro-Russian political party called for

demonstrations but, as a sign of the Moldovan desire to remain close to the West, few demonstrators bothered to show up.[38]

Moldova is also a member of the European Energy Community since 2010; its citizens have been able to enter the EU without a visa since April 2014. On June 27, 2014, it signed an Association Agreement with the EU, which included membership in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.[39] The Tiraspol government opposed Moldova's signing of the agreement, and only sent observers during the negotiations.

Moldova's closest ties remain with Romania. Upon signing a Romanian loan of 150 million euros, Moldovan Prime Minister Valeriu Strelet said Romania was "the only country in the world which constantly says: tell us how we can help you."[40] In 2009, Romania offered citizenship to any Moldovans who could prove recent Romanian ancestry. It is believed that one-fifth of Moldova's population may have taken advantage of the offer.[41] This should not surprise anyone since Romania is part of the European Union. Acceptance of Romanian citizenship gives Moldovans the ability to live and work anywhere in Europe.

Russia's Continuing Involvement in the Controversy

Throughout the last two and a half decades, the role of Russia in support of the Transnistrian separatists has been clear: from the early military interventions, through economic support, to diplomatic standoffs. The Russian 14th Army maintains its forces on Transnistrian soil and continues to modernize its equipment despite promises to the OSCE to withdraw all troops by the end of 2002. As an example, in 2012, it sent 20 new Ural type trucks to Transnistria to upgrade the equipment its "peacekeeping forces" use.[42]

Russian steps have been designed to keep Transnistria autonomous from the central Moldovan government. In 1995, the Russian State Duma refused to ratify an agreement with Moldova to withdraw Russian forces from Transnistria; instead, it recommended Russia recognize the breakaway republic's independence. In 1997, Russia sponsored a memorandum on the normalization of relations between Moldova and Transnistria which effectively placed the two governments on equal footing (meaning treating Transnistria as an independent state). The Kremlin lent its support to the Kozak memorandum in 2003, which would have

actually given Tiraspol the upper hand, by granting the separatists the ability to veto Moldovan decisions.[43]

Recent Russian threats have verged on full military intervention. In May 2014, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin traveled to Transnistria to collect a petition from the separatists requesting "reunification with Russia." He offered his support to the separatists and criticized Moldova for seeking closer ties to the European Union. Romania closed its air space to Rogozin's airplane, forcing it to land in Chisinau where the boxes of petitions were seized. In response, the deputy prime minister delivered an implied military threat. He tweeted that since Romania and Ukraine had closed their air space to him, next time he would travel on Russia's largest strategic bomber, the TU-160.[44] Moldovan officials were not amused.

The economic crisis in Russia caused by the collapse in world oil prices has impacted the Kremlin's ability to keep Transnistria afloat. Traditionally, Moscow provides 70% of the region's budget, but in late January 2015, an unnamed member of the Supreme Soviet told *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that Russia had refused to extend the government $100 million in assistance. Exports to Russia in January 2015 were 3.5 times lower than in January 2014. Tiraspol's draft budget for 2015 called for a $404 million deficit, despite slashing public sector salaries by 20% and canceling pension supplements.[45]

Despite moves to prop up Transnistrian autonomy, the Kremlin has not taken the final, irreconcilable step of recognizing its independence. This has led to a murky situation in which Moscow has attempted to force Chisinau to accept Transnistria's debts as Moldovan expenditures. Both banks of the Dniester River are totally reliant on Russia to meet its energy needs. At the end of 2011, MoldovaGaz (the West Bank gas company that was 50% owned by Russia's Gazprom) owed Gazprom $400 million, but the Kremlin and Gazprom insisted Moldova's energy bill was $3.9 billion. The reason for the discrepancy was that Tiraspol-TransGaz, the separatist gas distribution company, owed Gazprom $3.5 billion. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin said that if Chisinau did not recognize Transnister as an independent state, then Moldova was responsible for the breakaway region's debt.[46]

In addition to support for Tiraspol, Moscow employs other tactics to keep Chisinau off-balance. News broadcasts are dominated by Russian state-controlled television networks. Keeping the tensions alive between west and east, the Kremlin delivers a steady stream of false

news reporting on Chisinau's desire to reunite with Romania. Such an *Anschluss* would put the east's residents into a permanent minority status. Russian language news outlets consistently discuss the issue, despite the fact that public opinion polls in Moldova consistently indicate only 10% of the population would support such a move.[47]

Gazprom uses offshore companies to finance *Publika*, a Moldovan TV station that controls the country's political agenda. According to RFE/RL's Severin, *Publika* keeps the country divided by inviting politicians to speak with extreme points of view, such as either unifying with Romania or unifying with Russia. Similarly, *Publika* advertised two Russian-financed marches scheduled for the same time and place: One march supported unification of Moldova with Romania, while the other supported unification of Transnistria with Russia. The goals, according to Severin, were to reinforce the Romanian threat to Transnistria's existence while engendering a clash that would show the international community Moldova was an immature state with a divided society. *Publika* also airs Russian propaganda videos produced by the Kremlin-controlled news agency, RT[48] (formerly, Russia Today).

Another good example of Russian attempts to influence the news is Russian coverage of demonstrations against the Moldovan government in 2015. Demonstrators were upset that $1 billion had disappeared from the banking system, and the government had not identified the perpetrators. Russia, however, took the line that the demonstrations were proof of Moldovan unhappiness with the country's Western orientation—something the demonstrators themselves denied. Yet *RIA Novosti* news agency quoted Russian Duma member Leonid Slutsky complaining about the EU's ineffectiveness. "It's plain that the country has come to the point of collapse, and its people are in the mood for a U-turn in favor of the East," he said.[49]

Russia is on the verge of bringing Moldova fully into its orbit. In December 2016, disgusted by the political intrigue and corruption, the Moldovan electorate elected the pro-Russian candidate, Igor Dodon. He was elected on a platform that included settling the Transneister issue. To that end, he met in January 2017 with Vadim Krasnoselsky, himself newly elected as the head of the separatist region.[50] Dodon's first trip was to Moscow, where he pledged to President Vladmir Putin to terminate the country's 2014 association agreement with the European Union. Instead, Dodon said the majority of Moldovans supported joining Putin's Eurasian Economic Union. He also has said he will only

allow NATO to open a liaison office in Chisinau if NATO first signs a formal acknowledgment of Moldova's neutrality.[51]

ANALYSIS

We see many aspects of the Moldovan Frozen Conflict that are present in other areas of unrest on the periphery of the former Soviet Union. The state is divided between a majority and a minority population, with the minority identifying with Russia. The majority Bessarabian population have refused a Romanian ethnic identity; rather, they have supported a French version of nationalism in which both ethnic Romanians and ethnic Russians are included in the country. By contrast, Russia has stoked the ethnic feelings of the Russian and Ukrainian minorities living in Transnister. When the Soviet Union imploded, the Russian minority sought to break away from the newly formed Moldovan independent republic. Russia then intervened militarily in favor of the minority population.

It appears that Russia almost stumbled into its military intervention, with General Lebed making the decision to fight on behalf of the Transnistrians to restore command and unit cohesion in the 14th Army. While the military intervention was not the result of a master plan coming from the Kremlin, it furthered Russian interests—not the interests of the Transnistrians. Despite urgings from the Duma or from individual officials, Russia has refused to recognize Transnistria as an independent country, or to absorb it into the Russian Federation, despite the numerous times that separatist leaders have requested one or the other. Indeed, had the 14th Army been responsive to Kremlin orders and not disintegrated into various militia groups, it is conceivable that Russia might have stayed out of the local dispute.

Once the intervention occurred, however, Russia decided to take full advantage of the situation to advance a Russian agenda. The dispute provides an excuse to keep Russian troops in this western outpost of the former Soviet empire—despite the fact that it is now an independent country and despite the fact that Russia has given its solemn pledge to withdraw them. Its ability to bring leaders together in diplomatic forums, or to keep them apart through skillful use of the media, gives the Kremlin the ability to establish itself as the essential power in the region. It wants to use this role to keep Moldova a neutral nation.

Russia has had some setbacks. President Voronin's refusal to sign the Kozak memorandum meant that the conflict would not be solved

on Russian terms: giving Russia permission to keep troops in the area for decades, and giving its allies within the federation veto power over Moldova's foreign policy. Similarly, while Russia has been successful in keeping Moldova from seeking NATO membership, it has failed to keep Moldova from cooperating with the western alliance. Even though Russia wanted Moldova to join the Eurasian Customs Union, it chose instead the Association Agreement with the EU.

The prospects for resolving the conflict are few, but some steps could be taken to make conflict resolution a credible option. The Transnistrian government may favor an alliance with Russia, but an estimated 80% of the Transnistrian citizenry have Moldovan papers to take advantage of visa-free travel within Europe. Economic cooperation with the EU weakens the ability of Russia to blackmail Chisinau through its unequal application of bans on agricultural imports. Moldova should rapidly expand its economic ties with the European Union, especially its willing neighbor Romania.

Moldova needs to increase the public debate within its society by challenging the dominance of *Publika* in the media field. A Russian language broadcast that disabuses Transnistrians of its fears of Romanian takeover could have a long-term salubrious effect. Creating positions within the Chisinau government for citizens from the east bank could demonstrate to Transnistrians they are welcome in Moldovan society. Moldovan and European investments in the east could strengthen economic ties with Chisinau instead of with Moscow.

Militarily, there does not appear to be any steps that can be taken to convince Russia to withdraw its forces against its will. When next-door Ukraine terminated five agreements for military cooperation between the country and Russia, it meant Russia could no longer resupply its 14th Army by land.[52] This did not encourage Russia to remove its forces, nor has the West taken any substantive moves to force the Russians out. NATO takes its Article V obligations seriously, but does not appear interested in challenging Russia militarily over the fate of non-member states like Moldova. The USA and the OSCE tried to force the issue by creating a linkage between troop withdrawals and the ratification of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. The result was not a lessening of the Russian presence, but the collapse of the treaty. Until such time that the Kremlin decides it is to their benefit to withdraw its troops, Russia's military presence in Tiraspol is a *fait accompli*.

This leaves the diplomatic track. Europe and the USA have deferred to Russia in creating negotiating venues. The Kozak memorandum was a Russian initiative, and the "5 + 2" talks only reconvened when Russia decided the group should meet. Within these venues, however, Russia does not look for compromise solutions. Instead, it uses its position to advance the demands of the separatists. The sole point that Russia concedes, that Bessarabia and Transnistria comprise the unitary state of Moldova, is hotly disputed by Tiraspol. Russia makes little effort, however, to get its separatist allies to agree to even this most basic of points. Instead, we find the Russian deputy prime minister collecting signatures on separatist petitions and offering to arrive in a Russian heavy bomber.

Tiraspol demands "1 + 1" talks with Chisinau, keeping the international community out of the dispute. This might present the opportunity for the two sides independently to find a way out of the quagmire, except Tiraspol insists that its status as an independent country is non-negotiable. Clearly, a neutral arbiter is necessary. Unfortunately, the "5 + 2" venue is not effective. Chisinau perceives Russia as partial to Tiraspol, and Tiraspol sees the USA and the Europeans as allies of Chisinau. At least two of the members of the group, Russia and Ukraine, are themselves at loggerheads on issues separate from the Moldovan conflict.

The Secretary General of the United Nations might offer his good offices to the negotiation. Russia, the USA, the European powers, and Moldova are all members; and the UN has no partiality in the dispute. It is possible that Russia might agree to a UN role since it maintains a veto in the Security Council, guaranteeing the UN would impose nothing without the Kremlin's permission. It also coincides with President Putin's oft-stated position that use of force is only legitimate if approved by the UN.[53] By giving the Secretary General a role, however, it dilutes Russia's overall influence in the diplomatic arena—giving the opportunity for other measures to improve the civil society a chance to take effect.

In the end, the conflict cannot be resolved until Russia decides it is in its own interest to cease supporting the government in Tiraspol. Once that occurs, the two sides might have incentives to reach an accommodation. As long as Russian troops guarantee that no steps will be taken to forcefully reintegrate Transnistria, and as long as Russia continues to support Transnistria with financial aid, favorable import regulations, and—effectively—free natural gas, there is no reason for Tiraspol to abandon its maximalist positions.

Tiraspol's weak spot is its economy. A separatist region within the poorest country in Europe, it is slashing its public payroll because it can no longer finance its operations. Russia's willingness to cut aid to the country because of the Kremlin's own economic problems increases the economic squeeze on the beleaguered society. Tiraspol's economic difficulties also function as a poison pill to separatists' efforts to unite with Russia: Moscow would be reluctant to shoulder the separatists' $3.5 billion debt.

The Kremlin also has military problems. The increased tempo of exercises caused by the increased tension with the West over Ukraine and Syria is stressing military readiness.[54] The country has struggled to fulfill quotas for military conscripts, in part because of a shortage of eligible young men caused by the collapse of the birth rate in the 1990s.[55] If Russia were to decide it needed the men of the 14th Army elsewhere, and is no longer willing to underwrite the Tiraspol regime, there might be a glimmer of hope for conflict resolution.

It does not appear likely. As in Ukraine, realist political theory offers an explanation as to why it is to Russia's benefit to keep Moldova divided. Seeking to balance against Moscow, Romania has expressed interest in the past in joining NATO (it has a permanent delegation at NATO headquarters in Brussels) and in the European Union. From a realist perspective that sees all countries as potential threats, this puts a potentially hostile power on the doorstep of Moscow. Unable to increase its own power by finding allies to oppose NATO encroachment, Moscow made the decision (involuntarily at first) to weaken Moldova. This created a relative increase in power between the two countries, and blocs.

Moscow has tried to present itself as the solution, not the problem. It has sponsored peace talks and provided peacekeeping troops. It has used its position in these roles to provide unwavering support for Transnistrian autonomy, rather than trying to heal old wounds. Continuation of the Transnistrian conflict is another low-cost way to increase Russian presence abroad, while weakening the relative position of the Western alliance.

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Georgia

Background

This chapter begins with the effect on Georgians of the collapse of the USSR. Some ethnic groups, specifically Ossetians and Abkhazians, used ethnic markers to demand the creation of their own mini-states. This was opposed forcefully by the government of Georgia in Tbilisi, until Russia sent peacekeeping troops to the breakaway areas creating de facto separatist enclaves. An uneasy peace ensued until 2008, when the Georgian government tried to reunite the rebel provinces by force. Russian military intervention condemned this effort to failure and, in a larger geopolitical confrontation with the West, Russia subsequently recognized the provinces as independent countries. See Fig. 4.1.

The Republic of Georgia is located in the South Caucasus, on the eastern banks of the Black Sea. In Greek mythology, it is the land where Jason found the Golden Fleece. It claims to be the birthplace of viticulture (winemaking), and one of the first countries to convert to Christianity (approximately 330 A.D.) Geographically, the country is bound to the north and south by the Greater and Lesser Caucasus Mountains. It is bordered in the North by Russia, in the East by Azerbaijan, in the South by Armenia and Turkey, and in the West by the Black Sea. It has been a crossroads for thousands of years. In prehistoric times, much of it lay underwater as it connected the Black and Caspian seas. Today, through highways, railroads, and pipelines, it fulfills the same role.

Fig. 4.1 Georgia. *Source* http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/georgia_republic.html. *Georgia Political 1999. Georgia. 1999: US Central Intelligence Agency, University of Texas Libraries. Web.* http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/georgia_pol99.jpg

Because Georgia is composed of various ancient kingdoms and peoples, it is difficult to define an ethnic Georgian. An estimated 70% of the population self-identifies with that ethnicity.[1] As predicted by the

French school of nationalism, almost all the ethnicities identify themselves as citizens of the Republic of Georgia. The major exceptions to this are Abkhazians and Ossetians—both of whom have separatist movements. The Abkhazians and Ossetians now have territories that are not under the control of the Georgian central government in Tbilisi (Tiflis during the Soviet era). Abkhazia houses approximately 220,000 people; tiny South Ossetia, only 40,000–60,000.[2] The capital of Abkhazia is Sukhumi, and the capital of South Ossetia is Tskhinvali.

Another group whose leaders flirted briefly with separatism are the Ajaris, ethnic Georgians who converted to Islam under the Ottoman rule. These people, whose capital is the Black Sea port of Batumi, did not join the Russian empire until 1878. During Soviet times, it was part of the Georgian SSR, but it had its own Adjarian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Today, Ajaria remains an autonomous republic, but is an integral part of the Georgian state.

Georgia shares a common history with much of the Caucasus. Mostly absorbed into the Russian empire in the nineteenth century, Georgia had a brief period of independence from 1918 to 1921. During this period, Georgian troops fought and defeated Bolshevik troops from Abkhazia. Before arrangements for Abkhazian autonomy within a greater Georgia could be created, however, the Soviet Red Army conquered Georgia. Originally, the Kremlin linked the two entities into a confederation, and Abkhazia had its own constitution. Stalin downgraded Abkhazia in 1931 to an autonomous entity within Georgia.[3] When the USSR dissolved, Georgia reacquired its independence with both Abkhazia and South Ossetia within its internationally recognized borders.

COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

As in Moldova and Ukraine, the weakening of Moscow's control over the area at the end of the twentieth century created a power vacuum. Elites within Abkhazia and South Ossetia attempted to move into the vacuum, by establishing more freedom of maneuver for themselves. Their nationalist efforts were, in many ways, in reaction to the extreme nationalism of the majority Georgian population. Georgian nationalism flared in 1989, when Soviet Interior Ministry troops opened fire on peaceful independence protestors in Tbilisi. The Russians were backed by armored personnel carriers as they attacked with clubs, sharpened spades and gas. They refused to tell medics what kind of gas they were using, making it difficult to treat those who were exposed. Twenty people were

killed, mostly women. One teenaged girl was beaten to death by soldiers. The commanding officer claimed his troops had been attacked by the demonstrators, but videotape proved this to be false. In the subsequent investigation by Soviet parliamentarian Anatoly Sobchak, the troops' actions were labeled "a violent reprisal against civilians."[4]

Following the massacre, hundreds of thousands took to the streets demonstrating for independence. Public reaction to the massacre prevented any compromise between nationalist leaders and Soviet authorities. The struggle for Georgian independence moved into the Georgian Supreme Soviet. In August 1989, they passed a law requiring the use of the Georgian language in the public sector. While this might have been an anti-Russian measure, it was not received well in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In November, the Georgian Supreme Soviet passed a nullification measure, stating Georgia would not recognize Soviet laws that were contrary to its interests. In March 1990, it asserted Georgian sovereignty, annulling any treaties the Soviet Union had signed since incorporating Georgia in 1921. In a clear repudiation of its Soviet ties, it declared Georgia to be an occupied state.[5] Georgia finally declared its independence from the Soviet Union in April 1990, and the chairman of the Georgian Supreme Council Zviad Gamsakhurdia became its first leader. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia recognized the newly independent Republic of Georgia on July 1, 1992.

In many ways, Gamsakhurdia bears responsibility for the failure to integrate Abkhazia and Ossetia into the new state. Although he was not the most strident Georgian nationalist competing for the people's loyalty, he had to adopt a nationalist platform to succeed in the post-Soviet political climate. To his allies and himself, the problem of minority populations was a tool being used by the Kremlin to weaken the Georgian state. Gamsakhurdia quoted Gorbachev as admitting to the use of the divide-and-conquer strategy.[6] The Georgian leader's disregard for the wishes of the indigenous minority populations, combined with his Georgian nationalist ideology, resulted in a lack of any efforts to find common ground.[7] Gamsakhurdia was eventually overthrown by a *coup d'etat* in December 1991. He did not go easily. Over 200 people died in the fighting. After fleeing into exile, Gamsakhurdia eventually became a rebel commander and waged a civil war against Tbilisi until his death in December 1993.

The new leader was the former Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eduard Shevardnazde. During the period of *perestroika*, he came across as a modern, liberal politician. He was deeply involved in the

reunification of Germany and ending the Soviet war in Afghanistan. As president of Georgia, he proved incapable of dealing with the separatist movement in Abkhazia or with the corruption that was rampant throughout the country. In foreign policy, he tried to ride two horses, by developing closer ties with the West while not alienating the Kremlin. The longer he stayed in power and unable to solve society's woes, the lower his popularity fell.[8]

Shevardnazde was overthrown by the 2003 Rose Revolution. He was succeeded by the western-oriented Mikheil Saakashvili. President Saakashvili served two terms in office, stepped down peacefully due to term limitations. In many ways, he proved to be as controversial as his predecessor. He eliminated government corruption and launched a series of reforms transforming Georgia into a Western-style democracy. At the same time, he increased the country's prestige on the world stage. On the other hand, Saakashvili used decidedly undemocratic measures to persecute his political rivals. His pro-Western foreign policy stance eventually led him into a disastrous war with Russia.[9] Saakashvili stepped down after two terms in office, and his party was defeated in the subsequent election by a coalition of opposition parties—The Georgian Dream. He was replaced as political leader of the country by the pro-Kremlin Bidzina Ivanishvili. The wealthiest man in Georgia, Ivanishvili served as prime minister for a year—long enough to hand pick his own successor, and the president. He then stepped down from holding any public office. Since the Rose Revolution, the government in Tbilisi has been roiled by many controversies, but succession appears to be following parliamentary democracy procedures.

Abkhazia: Attempts to Secede

Abkhazia did not wait for the collapse of the Soviet Union to express its displeasure at the domination of ethnic Georgians. There were public demonstrations or strikes in 1931, 1957, 1965, and 1967. In 1978, there were a series of massive rallies demanding Abkhazia be allowed to secede from the Georgian SSR and join the Russian SSR. The request was renewed 10 years later in a letter from 58 members of the Abkhaz Communist Party to the central party in Moscow. Later in 1988, some Abkhaz created a popular front that demanded independence. This group organized a mass rally in March 1989, which, in turn, generated a Georgian counter-rally in Sukhumi.[10]

In March 1990, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet renewed its claim to be a separate Abkhaz SSR, and wanted to enter into a treaty with Georgia. The Georgian parliament in Tbilisi rejected the claim. Abkhazian nationalism showed itself again in March 1991, when Georgia boycotted a referendum on whether to join a new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, but 98.6 of non-Georgian Abkhazians voted to join. Abkhazia's participation in the referendum effectively separated itself from the Georgian polity.[11]

There were a number of skirmishes between the ethnic groups in Abkhazia over the next few months. Heavy fighting began on August 14, 1992, as a unit of the Georgian National Guard seized the Abkhazian capital of Sukhumi. It was hand-to-hand combat in the city streets and on the beaches. On August 16, Russian paratroopers arrived in Sukhumi to escort Russian tourists caught in the fighting back across the Russian border. The Black Sea Fleet evacuated 10,000 Russian civilians.[12]

Throughout the conflict, Russian troops intervened frequently on the side of the Abkhazians. They refused to vacate their military bases on Georgian territory (although they did surrender civilian facilities) and engaged in "forceful neutrality" to protect their forces on Georgian soil. According to Human Rights Watch, "The conflict in Abkhazia was heightened by the involvement of Russia, mostly on the Abkhaz side, especially during the war's initial stages. Whereas Russia has endorsed the territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia, Russian arms found their way into Abkhaz hands, Russian planes bombed civilian targets in Georgian-controlled territory, Russian military vessels, manned by supporters of the Abkhaz side, were made available to shell Georgian-held Sukhumi, and at least a handful of Russian-trained and Russian-paid fighters defended Abkhaz territory in Tkvarcheli."[13]

The Russians tried to impose a ceasefire on September 3, 1992, but it did not hold. By the beginning of 1993, Russian troops moved from being a neutral, humanitarian force to being partisans in the conflict. In February 1993, Russia bombed Georgian positions in Sukhumi. This was in retaliation for Georgia downing a Russian helicopter that had been resupplying separatists in Tkvarcheli, and for Georgia shelling near a Russian research facility. Russia then began a series of bombing raids using aircraft based within the Russian Federation. Human Rights Watch interviewed a group of six armed Russians in Abkhazia who admitted they had been brought to the conflict area on Russian helicopters, were all former KGB and Spetsnaz forces, had been fighting Georgian troops,

had previously been fighting in Transnistria, and had formed in Moscow as a group of 30 "experienced, disciplined, Russian professionals." They then denied being a member of Russian government forces, but said they were "independent, patriotic forces."[14] It was one of the earliest examples of the "little green men" made famous in the 2014 Russian seizure of Crimea.

Another ceasefire attempt was brokered between Georgia and Abkhazia by the United Nations on July 27, 1993. The UN passed Security Council Resolution 858, creating the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). The resolution instructed UNOMIG to investigate violations of the ceasefire and report such violations to the UN Secretary General. At the same time, it welcomed the deployment of mixed monitoring groups composed of Georgian, Abkhazian, and Russian troops.[15]

Abkhaz troops broke the cease fire on September 16, 1993, with multiple attacks on Georgian forces. The Russians seemed to have been taken by surprise by the Abkhaz actions. The Kremlin issued a denunciation of the troop movements. By the end of September, Sukhumi had fallen to the separatists. In retaliation for Georgian atrocities when they had seized Sukhumi the year before, Abkhazian forces took their revenge. They killed "many women, children, and elderly, capturing some as hostages and torturing others… they also killed large numbers of Georgian civilians who remained behind in Abkhaz-seized territory…"

"The separatists launched a reign of terror against the majority Georgian population. Chechens and other north Caucasians from the Russian Federation reportedly joined local Abkhaz troops in the commission of atrocities… Those fleeing Abkhazia made highly credible claims of atrocities, including the killing of civilians without regard for age or sex. Corpses recovered from Abkhaz-held territory showed signs of extensive torture."[16]

Desperate for a way to halt the fighting, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnazde reversed his long-standing opposition to closer relations with Moscow. He announced he was willing to join the Russian-sponsored Commonwealth of Independent States. Having achieved a major geopolitical goal, the Kremlin reversed course. Russian troops who had been tacitly supporting the Abkhazians were now thrown into battle to seize ports for the Georgian government. This led to a sustained ceasefire in December 1993, monitored by UNOMIG and—eventually—a Russian peacekeeping force of 1600 troops. While the UN

acquiesced to the presence of the Russian force, they did not ratify it as operating under UN auspices.

This ceasefire, known as the "Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces," or the Moscow Agreement, was ratified by Georgia and Abkhazia on May 14, 1994. Russia, the United Nations, and the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE-later the OSCE) witnessed—but did not sign—an annex that created a Coordinating Council which was subsequently suspended in 2006 and did not meet again for 5 years.

Georgia agreed to withdraw troops from the Kodori Valley (a section of Abkhazia the Tbilisi government would later recapture in a 2006 "police action"). The Abkhaz committed to disband volunteer formations made up of persons from beyond the frontiers of Abkhazia (Russian and North Caucasus volunteers). They also agreed to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons. The agreement enshrined the Russian role as peacekeeper by authorizing the force and military observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to be deployed in the security zone. It also gave the Russians permission to use military force when they saw fit: "In the event of an attack or a direct military threat against the peacekeeping force, it shall take appropriate measures for its safety and self-defense."[17] Neither side implemented fully the agreement.

In 1996, Georgia managed to convince its fellow members of the CIS (including Russia) to place an embargo on Abkhazia. The CIS condemned Abkhazia for setting obstacles to achieving a political settlement or securing the return of refugees. In addition to embargoing the secessionists, CIS members pledged not to allow the recruitment of its citizens for military entities in the zone of conflict. The delegates reaffirmed that Abkhazia was an inalienable part of Georgia.[18]

South Ossetia: Attempts to Secede

In South Ossetia, events followed a similar pattern—albeit on a smaller, more confused scale. There were numerous attempts at the end of the Soviet era to change the area's status. Inhabitants formed a popular front group in January 1989. In April, the leader of the group, a college instructor named Alan Chochiev, wrote a letter to an Abkhaz newspaper saying Ossetians sympathized with Abkhazian efforts to obtain autonomy.[19] Interethnic fighting between Ossetians and Georgians began

shortly thereafter. As Georgian expressions of nationalism increased, Ossetia moved closer to breaking away.

On September 20, 1989, the South Ossetian Supreme Council adopted a declaration on the sovereignty of South Ossetia. They demanded the conversion of the area's status from Autonomous Oblast to an Autonomous Republic and requested the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to absorb the area into the Soviet Union as an independent entity.[20] In November 1989, the South Ossetian oblast council petitioned the Georgian Supreme Soviet to upgrade its status. In 1990, the residents held a referendum to create a South Ossetian parliament.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the Chairman of the Georgian Supreme Council, believed these South Ossetian attempts for greater autonomy were actually efforts by the Kremlin to weaken a newly awakened Georgian spirit of independence.[21] He reacted by abolishing the territory's autonomous oblast status, which led to violence against ethnic Georgians living there. Both USSR and Georgian SSR troops intervened to reestablish authority. Soviet President Gorbachev ordered Georgian troops to withdraw from the oblast, without ordering South Ossetian paramilitary forces to disarm. His demands were ignored. Finally, in March and April 1991, order was restored as Soviet interior troops disarmed militias on both sides.[22] Negotiations extended throughout 1991,[23] concluding in June 1992 with a Russian-sponsored ceasefire.

An uneasy peace prevailed for over a decade. In 2004, however, the ascension of Mikheil Saakashvili to the Georgian presidency displeased the Russians. Moscow feared the power of the mob that brought Saakashvili to power (the Rose Revolution), his western orientation, and his desire to bring Georgia into the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). One of his top priorities was the restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia. He got a break early in his rule. Aslan Abashidze, the separatist leader of Ajaria, fled to Russia. This ended the secessionist movement there. Saakashvili, emboldened by the successful assertion of central government authority over Ajaria, decided to regain control of other parts of the country. He ordered his troops to close a smuggling market in Ergneti, South Ossetia. Residents decided this was a preparatory strike toward invasion, and clashes soon broke out.[24] The operation to restore Georgian sovereignty failed, and a new ceasefire was signed in August 2004.

In both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia had created footholds in Georgia, just as it had done previously in Moldova. It had done so by

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supporting separatist movements militarily, denying them sufficient support to be successful, diplomatically endorsing the right of the mother country to exist within its internationally recognized borders, and then establishing itself as a mediator and peacekeeper. Russian peacekeepers patrolled the ceasefire lines, deep inside another's country.

The Five Day War

Over the next 4 years, the conflicts between Georgia and its two remaining separatist regions remained frozen. In February 2008, however, 1200 miles to the west of Tbilisi, the government of Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia, a Russian ally. America and its allies granted the new government recognition. Russia was outraged. They called an emergency closed-door session of the UN Security Council, but failed to get the Kosovar decision declared "null and void."[25] Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitrii Rogozin threatened that Russia could use "raw force" if NATO denied Serbian officials access to Kosovo.[26]

Instead of raw force, however, the Kremlin decided to link the crisis in the Balkans to the crisis in Georgia. Russia held all the cards, since they controlled the peacekeeping forces. President Saakashvili, a relative newcomer to the international scene, fell for Ossetian/Russian provocations. Russia was motivated by great-power politics, not by any concern for the people in the secessionist areas. The International Crisis Group (ICG) wrote, "The Abkhaz find themselves being used for purposes having little to do with their own cause and in danger of being absorbed as a small minority into the giant Russian Federation."[27]

It began on March 6, 2008. Russia's foreign ministry announced that Russia had unilaterally lifted trade, economic, financial, and transportation sanctions on Abkhazia. "Due to a change of circumstances, the Russian Federation no longer considered itself bound" by the 1996 decision of the CIS to embargo the province.[28] It was mainly a symbolic action, as Russia had never implemented the sanctions in the first place. Abkhazia was so closely tied to Russia that its currency was the ruble, and not the Georgian lari. According to the ICG, Russia lifted the sanctions to prevent any incremental progress in Georgian–Abkhazian bilateral contacts.[29] 10 days later, the Russian Duma passed a resolution asking the president to consider recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries.[30] Outgoing Russian President Vladimir Putin established direct relations with

the Abkhaz and South Ossetian authorities. Georgia objected strenuously, claiming that it was tantamount to Russian recognition of the territories' independence.

President Saakashvili took a step back from the pending conflict and offered a peace plan for Abkhazia. Provided the territory remained within Georgia, Saakahsvili offered unlimited autonomy, a vice presidency, the right to veto any bills affecting Abkhazia, etc. Abkhaz officials refused to even consider the proposal, believing that it was a public relations stunt for the West's benefit.[31] 2 months later, Abkhazia rebuffed German Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier's efforts to restart peace talks. "These offers are unacceptable to us," said Abkhaz "President" Bagapsh. "We are not prepared to discuss the status of Abkhazia, which is already for many our republic. Abkhazia is an independent state, and this is not open to discussion."[32]

NATO heads of state met in Bucharest on April 4 to consider membership for both Georgia and Ukraine. Russian ambassador to NATO Rogozin threatened consequences. He warned that NATO would trigger the two territories' outright secession if the alliance put Georgia on a path to membership. "As soon as Georgia gets some kind of prospect from Washington of NATO membership, the next day the process of real secession of these two territories from Georgia will begin," he said. He hinted at future Russian support for the territories' independence.[33]

The delegates in Bucharest insisted that Russia would not have a veto power over NATO membership decisions. Under pressure from Germany and France, however, NATO refused to give Georgia a membership action plan. According to Russian journalist Yulia Latynina, the Kremlin interpreted this as having received a "blank check" for their activities in Georgia.[34] NATO reiterated, however, that both Ukraine and Georgia would eventually join NATO. President Putin responded angrily, purportedly telling US President George W Bush that this was a red line for Russia. If these countries tried to move toward NATO, Putin said that Russia might respond by recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia's secession from Georgia, and by instigating a partition of Ukraine.[35]

On March 31, 2008, the Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs announced 350 Georgian soldiers would be sent to Afghanistan. In addition, Georgia extended the deployment of its 2000 troops stationed in Iraq.[36] It was business as usual, with no anticipation of internal conflict that would have required the return of its forces to the homeland. Georgia did not realize the danger it was in.

Russia began to augment its forces in the territories. On April 29, it sent an airborne battalion consisting of 525 personnel into the restricted weapons zone. These were not peacekeepers but warfighters. They also sent a military railway unit of 400 troops to repair the lines south of Sukhumi (later used by Russian troops.) They increased the number of "peacekeepers" in the area from 2000 to 3000. The Russian justification was that more peacekeepers were needed because of Georgian aggression. "The strengthening by Georgia of its forces in the immediate proximity to the conflict zones, threats of military force and…provocations on the part of Georgian authorities prevent Russian servicemen from performing their peacekeeping tasks."[37] The West protested, but Russia claimed the troops were authorized by its peacekeeping mandate. Russia's Ambassador-at-large Valery Kenyaikin foreshadowed the next steps: "If a war is unleashed, we will have to defend our compatriots even through military means," he said. "We will use every means to do this; there should be no doubt about this."[38]

Georgia accused Russia of abandoning its neutral position and becoming a party to the conflict. Georgian Prime Minister Vladimir Gurgenidze said, "We condemn Russia's decision to increase the number of peacekeepers in the conflict zones as an extremely irresponsible move, especially against the background of Russia's latest statements about Abkhazia and South Ossetia…We will consider every soldier and every technical unit arriving in the conflict zone as…a potential aggressor."[39] The government threatened to withdraw its consent to the presence of CIS peacekeepers. Abkhazia replied that withdrawal of consent would mean a renewal of hostilities, and they would sign a bilateral military cooperation agreement to keep Russian forces there.

Georgians had been monitoring the situation with a series of drone flights. Abkhazia claimed to shoot down seven, and Georgia ultimately confirmed it had lost three. On April 20, the drone war took a new turn. An unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) over the Gali region was shot down—not by Abkhaz forces, but by a Russian MIG-29.

Russian incursions over Georgian territory continued. On July 8, while US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Tbilisi, four Russian Su-24's crossed into Georgian air space over South Ossetia. The planes stayed for 40 min, possibly signaling Russian capabilities and/or testing Georgian and American resolve.[40]

As tensions increased, an explosion in the Abkhaz city of Gali killed four people, including two members of the Abkhaz security service.

The Abkhaz de facto government accused Georgia of state-sponsored terrorism,[41] especially in the region of the Kodori Gorge. The Russians launched a major military exercise rehearsing operations in the secessionist area. The leader of Abkhazia confirmed that Russian combat troops had entered South Ossetia. "I have spoken to the president of South Ossetia. It has more or less stabilized now. A battalion from the North Caucasus District has entered the area," said Sergei Bagapsh on August 7.[42] The fact that Russian troops had entered the future combat zone first is often overlooked; the EU report on the outbreak of hostilities condemned Georgia's deployment into South Ossetia (see below) as illegal under international law[43] while remaining silent on Russia's opening gambit.

Georgia, on the other hand, was fast reaching a decision point. Separatist groups were shelling ethnic Georgian villages. Even though Georgia had been denied a Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the Bucharest summit, NATO had issued the statement that Georgia and Ukraine would eventually become members of the alliance. President Saakashvili interpreted these statements as NATO military support for Georgia. He was convinced Russia would recognize his close ties to NATO, and Russian fear of a NATO military response would deter the Kremlin from launching any response if Georgia moved against the separatists. The president resolved to reunite South Ossetia with the rest of Georgia.

On the night of August 7–8, shortly before midnight, Georgia launched a military operation to seize the "capital" of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali. Georgian officials were confident of an easy victory; instead, they found themselves outgunned by the Russian 58th Army. The Russians had been waiting for the Georgians to over-react to the shelling. "Not even the most effective military organization is able to mobilize 25,000 soldiers, 1200 tanks and dozens of aircraft, and deploy them in a mountainous region literally within a few hours…Russia's military operation against Georgia had been carefully planned in advance," wrote Martin Malek.[44]

Russia responded not only in South Ossetia, but they also launched ground attacks in Abkhazia, sea attacks from the Black Sea, and an aerial bombing of the strategic Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline. They surged into Georgian territory, coming within view of Gori, the birthplace of Joseph Stalin, and stopped only a dozen miles from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. Saakashvili's trust in NATO had been misplaced. The West did not respond militarily. Cohen and Hamilton wrote, "The war also demonstrated the weaknesses of NATO and the EU security system, because

they provided no efficient response to Russia's forced changing of the borders and occupation of an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) member state. The war demonstrated fissures in Europe between the Western powers eager to maintain good relations with Russia, and the Eastern European states which, 20 years after the collapse of the USSR, retain a political memory of the Soviet occupation. Specifically, Germany, France and Italy were anxious to put the war behind them and treat it as a nuisance, whereas the presidents of Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, and the Prime Minister of Latvia flew to Tbilisi during the war, to stand shoulder to shoulder with Saakashvili."[45] Georgia became a country with disputed borders—making it ineligible for NATO membership. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov commented that Georgia could forget about its territorial integrity.[46]

To end the war, Georgia and Russia signed a preliminary peace agreement on August 12, 2008. It had been mediated by the European Union (EU) and its president at the time, French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Russia withdrew from those parts of Georgia that had been uncontested before the conflict began. The EU launched a civilian monitoring mission, but they were denied access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia by the Russian "peacekeepers." Peace talks continue to the present in Geneva, sponsored by the EU's Special Representative.

The Kremlin granted recognition to Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states on August 26, 2008. It keeps 7600 troops in the tiny secessionist entities to deter further Georgian unification efforts. They continue to claim that these military units, housed in five new Russian military bases on territory the international community continues to recognize as Georgian, are not a violation of its peace agreement obligations to withdraw. Instead, they still claim these troops are peacekeepers and therefore not covered by the agreement. President Dmitry Medvedev said the two states were part of Moscow's "zone of privileged interests."[47]

Russian Post War Relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Before the 2008 war, Abkhazia had not been sure how much it could count on the Kremlin. Certainly, as part of Georgia (a CIS member state at the time), the statelet could depend on Russian protection from aggression by an outside power, but how the "peacekeepers"

would react to a probe from the Tbilisi government had been an open question. The five-day war showed that Russia would defend Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but at the cost of the statelets' internal sovereignty.

The governments of Russia and Abkhazia signed a border protection agreement in May 2009, authorizing Russian troops to defend the Abkhaz border. In September, the agreement was followed by a treaty of military cooperation. Russia received access to an Abkhazian military base for 49 years, with the right of unrestricted troop mobility throughout Abkhazia, immunity from Abkhaz law, and exemption from Abkhaz taxes. Much of Abkhazia's infrastructure was transferred to Russian ownership or control. "Abkhazia's overwhelming dependence on Russia as its principal security and economic partner has raised concerns about excessive dependence among Abkhaz politicians, media commentators, and civil society," wrote Cooley and Mitchell. "The vast majority of Abkhaz are grateful to Russia for providing it with security forces to deter Georgian aggression…But the one-sided terms of the Russian presence serve as a daily reminder that Sukhumi has delegated some very basic state functions to Moscow, even if they are couched as 'interstate agreements'."[48]

Similarly, South Ossetian President Leonid Tabilov signed an agreement in March 2015 with Russian President Putin, pledging to conduct a coordinated foreign policy and to create a common security and defense space. It included some units of the 800-man South Ossetian army being integrated into the Russian army.[49] The units would man the 4th Russian military base, which is located within South Ossetia.[50] Commentator Anton Mardasov noted that the agreement did nothing more than put on paper what was already a fact: The South Ossetian army was part of the Russian armed forces.[51]

While the statelets claim independence, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are totally dependent on Russian economic and political support. "An overwhelming majority of their inhabitants are Russian citizens, while Russia dominates their internal political processes, economy and media space, and provides them with security. At the same time, the breakaway region's contacts with other parts of Georgia and the outside world have diminished."[52]

Russian Post War Relations with Georgia

Bilateral relations between Russia and Georgia remained all but non-existent. People blamed President Mikheil Saakashvili for overstepping his authority, and for human rights abuses. Putin despised him and said he wanted to hang the Georgian leader "by the balls."[53] In his last year of office, Saakashvili had to share power with a new prime minister, an oligarch in the opposition named Bidzina Ivanishvili. There were many accusations against Ivanishvili that he was the Kremlin's candidate, because he made the vast majority of his wealth in Moscow in the 1990s. Ivanishvili had owned 1% of Gazprom, the Russian state-owned natural gas company. His platform included promises of a better relationship with Moscow. After a year, when Saakashvili left office and the opposition Georgian Dream assumed the presidency, Ivanishvili stepped down as well. Ivanishvili played a critical role in the firing of Georgia's defense minister in November 2014, fueling speculation that he remained the power behind the throne.[54]

It thus came as no surprise when the Georgian Dream Energy Minister, Kakha Kaladze, began a series of secret meetings in Europe with Gazprom officials. Kaladze claimed he was renegotiating Georgia's contract with the company, which paid Georgia approximately 200 million cubic meters of natural gas a year as transit fees for gas deliveries to Armenia in the south. Kaladze said he was trying to change the terms, so that Tbilisi could be paid in cash.[55] Kaladze said that Georgia received 88% of its gas from neighboring Azerbaijan, but the Azeris did not have enough to meet the Georgian need (a claim Azerbaijan promptly rejected). The cash payments were needed to purchase replacement gas more cheaply on the open market. Kaladze later said that he was trying to diversify the energy supply, by convincing Gazprom to sell more than the 12% of demand that it currently met. The Georgian public was outraged, aware of the Kremlin's use of energy as a weapon in neighboring states. After large street demonstrations, the move to make Georgia more dependent on Russia was canceled.[56]

Geneva Peace Talks[57]

The provisional peace agreement was signed on August 12, 2008. French President Nikolas Sarkozy and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev proposed a six-point cease fire plan that would be followed

by an international mediation process. Russia and Georgia would participate, as well as other interested parties such as the OSCE, the EU, the USA, and the United Nations. In addition, Russia insisted that officials from Abkhazia and South Ossetia also participate. Shortly thereafter, in October 2008, the first meeting of the Geneva International Discussions took place.

The talks were interrupted regularly by the representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia walking out. Sometimes the disputes were over substance, but at other times the differences were over procedure. As an example, the first meeting was suspended after the Abkhaz and South Ossetian representatives declared they would only participate if they were considered the equals of the other participants. Georgia could not agree to this demand without ceding their claim of sovereignty over the two secessionist areas. The negotiators finally agreed on a compromise: The Geneva talks would consist of plenary sessions that only included the fully recognized nation-states of Russia, the USA, and Georgia; separately, all the parties would participate in two informal working groups.

Another set of walkouts revolved around the issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs). This is a major issue for Georgia. As of December 2014, Georgia housed between 237,700 and 262,704 citizens who had to flee their homes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[58] About 200,000 are from Abkhazia alone. Georgia has taken the hardline position that they are unwilling to discuss other issues until the IDPs are first given the right to return to their homes. If the IDPs returned to Abkhazia, however, ethnic Georgians would be the majority of the population and would outnumber ethnic Abkhaz by almost 6:1. According to a 2003 Abkhaz census, without the IDPs in the territory there were 214,000 people of which 43,600 were Georgians. Only 94,000 were ethnic Abkhaz. So, whenever the issue was raised, the separatists left the table. On June 18, 2014, the Russian negotiator supported the separatists' demand that the issue of IDPs be removed from the meeting agenda. The result: another walkout.

Another issue that remains unresolved is the Georgian demand that Russia remounce the use of force in the region. Georgia has already made a unilateral statement to that effect. In a November 2010 speech to the European Parliament, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili committed Georgia to "never use force to restore its territorial integrity and sovereignty, and only resort to peaceful means in its quest for

de-occupation and reunification." The Georgian government subsequently distributed to the Geneva talks' participants letters repeating the pledge. The presidents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia quickly followed suit.[59] Russia, however, has refused to make such a statement, arguing that it is not a party to the conflict and such a statement would imply that it was. Given recent Russian actions in Ukraine, its refusal to commit to the non-use of force has ominous overtones.

With its efforts stymied in Geneva, Georgia turned to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. It charged the Kremlin with ethnic cleansing in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The alleged cleansing had begun in Abkhazia, in the early 1990s. "But in South Ossetia (in 2008)…regular units of the Russian army…carried out ethnic cleansing," reported a Ukrainian journalist. He predicted that when the court concluded its deliberations, "we will receive a completely new picture of a Russian general, a new Eichmann, who led this ethnic cleansing." Reacting to the new charges, the Kremlin announced it would review its relations with the court.[60]

Statelets' International Relations

International recognition is a problem for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Only a handful of countries—Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Nauru, Nicaragua, Russia, and Venezuela—have diplomatic relations with them. "For Nauru, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, recognitions seem to have resulted from Russian lobbying and bilateral deals promising Russian aid or broader investment in their respective energy sectors."[61] Vanuatu and Tuvalu later withdrew their recognition, leaving only the Kremlin and two client states in diplomatic relations with the breakaway lands.

Russian military ties remain strong. In August 2010, the commander of the Russian air force, General Alexander Zelin, announced Moscow had deployed a state-of-the-art, S-300 long-range air-defense system in Abkhazia. He said the purpose of the system was to prevent violations of Abkhaz and South Ossetian air space. The US once again chose not to respond to clear evidence that the Russians were violating the 2008 preliminary peace agreement. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said the deployment was not necessarily a new development: "I believe it's our understanding that Russia has had S-300 missiles in Abkhazia for the past 2 years."[62] Moscow had again pushed the envelope unchallenged.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Abkhaz "President" Raul Khadzhimba signed a defense treaty on November 24, 2014. The treaty placed military forces of the two entities under a joint command and committed the two parties to mutually patrolling Abkhazia's borders.[63]

Similarly, on March 18, 2015, Putin and South Ossetian "President" Leonid Tibilov signed a treaty of collective security. Russia agreed to spend 1 billion rubles (about $16 million) to provide full military protection to South Ossetia, including defense of the border with Georgia, and to allow part of the South Ossetian military to join the Russian military.[64]

This latter treaty goes a long way toward the South Ossetian goal of joining the Russian Federation. It states that the two parties shall have a coordinated foreign policy, citizens of the two parties can obtain citizenship from the other party; Russia assumes responsibility for South Ossetian law and order, public safety, control of drug trafficking, management of internal affairs agencies, etc. Russia takes over the customs authority, and its Central Bank will determine monetary policy for both countries. Government workers will have their wages raised until they meet Russian levels, and Russian citizens in South Ossetia are eligible for Russian pensions and social security. [65]

The signing of the treaty with South Ossetia coincided with a meeting of the Geneva peace talks. Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Davit Dundua raised the issue of the treaties in the context of discussing security and stability issues. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin refused to enter into discussions, however, stating that Russian treaties were not among the issues to be discussed in Geneva.[66]

Despite the tight alignment between Russian and South Ossetian policies, the semi-union remains unfinished business for the separatists. On October 19, 2015, Tibilov outlined to Russian presidential advisor Vladislav Surkov a plan for a Crimea-style referendum, in which South Ossetians would vote to unite the breakaway region with Russia. No date was established for the vote; Tibilov said details would have to be agreed upon by the Kremlin. Predictably, Georgian officials condemned the plan. Russia maintained the ambiguity that is the hallmark of its policies toward the border-states: There was no public comment on the proposal, other than to state Moscow recognized South Ossetia as an independent state.[67] Tiblilov later postponed the referendum until sometime after the 2017 presidential elections.[68]

Russian Motivations

Russian goals in Georgia appear to be the same as in all the border states. According to the Atlantic Council's David L. Phillips, "Russia perpetuates these conflicts in order to weaken Georgia, discredit its leadership, and diminish Georgia's attractiveness to NATO. Not only does Russia view NATO as an existential threat, but it also fears that membership for Georgia and Ukraine would block its influence in the near abroad while advancing Russia's perception that NATO's goal is encirclement. Russia has, therefore, been steadfast in its efforts to undermine security cooperation between Georgia and the West."[69] In other words, in an anarchic world order in which each country has the sovereign responsibility for protecting itself, Russia sees other countries as potential threats. By keeping these countries from increasing their power externally through balancing alliances, and keeping Georgia from increasing its power internally by destroying its national unity, Russia increases its own relative power.

Phillips lists the thoughts of a number of Russian officials. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia would do everything to block Georgia and Ukraine from joining NATO. The Armed Forces Chief of Staff threatened "military and other measures;" a spokesman for the Russian embassy in Tbilisi threatened to retarget missiles on Georgia if it proceeded with a membership action plan.[70]

Similarly, the Austrian National Defense Academy's researcher Martin Malek wrote, "Numerous statements from senior officials in politics and the military, as well as in media coverage, left no doubt that Russia sought to prevent Georgia's restoration of its territorial integrity, humiliate President Mikheil Saakashvili, intimidate the entire Georgian nation and damage Georgia's economy and civilian infrastructure, thereby undermining its relevance as a gas and oil transit country. Furthermore, Russia intended to send a strong signal to the US, NATO and the EU with the subtext not to 'meddle in' regions belonging to the former Soviet Union, because Moscow officially considers them as 'zone of vital interests'."[71]

Yet, the Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia appears to be a Pyrrhic victory. While it provides justification for its military force of 7600 "peacekeepers," in many ways Russia has lost the greater prize. In return for control of two secessionist pockets, it has lost Georgia. Even after the perceived pro-Kremlin coalition of the "Georgian Dream"

replaced Saakashvili's government in 2012, Georgia continued to seek membership in the European Union and NATO. There is little support for Russia's proposed counter-bloc, the Eurasian Union. "A staggering 85 percent of Georgians surveyed in November 2013 supported Georgia's goal of joining NATO and the EU," wrote the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.[72]

Russia has repeatedly raised Georgia's NATO aspirations in the Geneva talks. It has called Georgia's integration into the alliance a security threat to the South Caucasus, and therefore in conflict with the 2008 preliminary peace agreement. It also complained about frequent visits by US warships to the Georgian Black Sea port of Batumi, labeling the American presence "destabilizing on the situation in the Black Sea." The Russian MFA has identified issues of "particular concern" included NATO's intention to establish field infrastructure in Georgia (the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center) and US military exercises near the South Ossetian border (May 2015 training exercise Noble Partner).[73]

Despite the Russian bluster, Georgia continues to move closer to the West. It now participates in the annual NATO military exercise on Georgian soil, Noble Partner. In 2015, 300 American soldiers moved from Romania to Georgia across the Black Sea, with 14 Bradley fighting vehicles. They joined an equal number of Georgian troops to practice seizing and holding a small village of abandoned houses near a former Soviet airfield. It was the first time a company of battle armor had been transported by sea to the South Caucasus. US Major Vincent Mucker said it proved the USA could use the Black Sea as a transit corridor.[74] The Bradleys were accompanied by eight Abrams M1A2 main battle tanks. They were joined by Great Britain in 2016, for a force of 1300.[75] The Russian foreign ministry condemned the exercise as a provocation aimed at deliberately destabilizing the military-political situation in the Caucasus region.[76]

ANALYSIS

As in Ukraine and Moldova, at the sub-national level there was a clash of nationalisms in Georgia. The government in Tbilisi tried to preserve a more inclusive French nationalism, in which all nationalities could be citizens of the Republic. In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, however, people identified with their ethnicities and with their language ties. As violence

escalated between the populations, Russia intervened militarily on behalf of the minority populations. Unlike in Moldova where the military intervention seemed to be accidental, or in Ukraine where Russia has tried to hide its military activities, the Russian role in both 1993 and 2008 was blatant and overt. As a result of these maneuvers, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have remained free of control from Tbilisi. The two areas remain under Russian military protection.

Russia again used the ploy of portraying itself as a peacemaker to keep the conflict boiling. For almost two decades, it was able to keep its troops deep inside internationally recognized Georgian territory in the role of "peacekeeping" troops. Russia even justified its 2008 military intervention as a continuation of its peacekeeping role. It has used its role in the Geneva talks to protect maximalist claims by the separatists and to prevent any agreements that limit Russia's role in the area. Its refusal to renounce the use of force in the area is an example of this.

President Putin views the world from a realist perspective in which NATO and the USA are considered potential enemies of Russia. To protect itself from attack from these enemies, he has sought to maximize his relative power against the western bloc. In Georgia, he has both weakened the West by preventing NATO from expanding into the Caucasus, and he has weakened Georgia itself by keeping the country in a frozen conflict.

The Kremlin has gone further in its support to the secessionists in Georgia than it has in any other frozen conflict: it recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. As such, they have signed treaties with the "countries," and some of the Russian troops have been able to drop the guise of neutral peacekeepers. Russian troops now serve on internationally recognized Georgian soil, justified by mutual defense treaties with areas they recognize as states. In reality, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia now function as extensions of the Russian state. This is particularly troubling in the case of South Ossetia, where Russian troops are a mere 25 km from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi and can reach western Ukraine if needed.

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Nagorno-Karabakh

Background

This chapter traces the history of Nagorno-Karabakh within the Soviet Union and documents the ethnic tensions between Azerbaijanis and Armenians. It then examines the Nagorno-Karabakh War, highlighting the Khojaly massacre of which the current President of Armenia has bragged. Russia's intervention on both sides of the war has kept the conflict going. It traces the development of the Minsk peace process, and how Russia has used its role as co-chair to prevent progress being made (Figs. 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3).

The land known in Soviet times as the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) is approximately 4800 km², and—according to officials of the separatists currently controlling the area—the home of approximately 146,600.[1] In the 1980s, before the conflict erupted, the population of approximately 200,000 was divided between 140,000 ethnic Armenians and approximately 50,000 ethnic Azeris.[2] The land itself is a mountainous region totally within the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the NKAO was separated from today's Republic of Armenia by a corridor of land, known as the Lachin corridor, which is approximately 3 miles wide at its narrowest point.

Early history of the area is obscured by competing historical narratives, each framed by their respective nationalist rhetoric. To ethnic Armenians, the area was a home to Armenians for thousands of years and a hotbed for Armenian nationalism. Meanwhile, to Azerbaijanis, the area was home to Caucasian Albanians, a non-Armenian Christian population

Fig. 5.1 Nagorno-Karabakh. *Source* Nagorno- Karabakh 2011: US Central Intelligence Agency, University of Texas Libraries. Web. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/nagorno-karabakh.gif

Fig. 5.2 Armenia. *Source* http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/armenia.html. Armenia Political 2002. Armenia. 2002: US Central Intelligence Agency, University of Texas Libraries. Web. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/common-wealth/armenia_pol_2002.jpg

whom Azerbaijanis consider their ancestors. Over the years, numerous Azerbaijani poets and intellectuals were born here; such as the famed Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli who wrote the first opera and operetta in the Muslim world. In the Azerbaijani historiography, the area is a hotbed for Azerbaijani nationalism.

Fig. 5.3 Azerbaijan. *Source Source* http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/azerbaijan.html. Azerbaijan Political 2004. Azerbaijan. 2004: US Central Intelligence Agency, University of Texas Libraries. Web. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/azerbaijan_pol_2004.jpg

Some facts are not in dispute. The entire South Caucasus (consisting of today's Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan) converted to Christianity in the fourth century. In 387, Nagorno-Karabakh became

part of Sassanid Iran, while Armenia became part of the Byzantine Empire. When the Arabs invaded in 642, they converted to Islam the inhabitants of the plains lying west of the Caspian. The inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh, protected from the invading armies by its hilly terrain, remained Christian. The South Caucasus was incorporated into the Seljuk Turk Empire in 1071, and many of the Seljuk Turks' Muslim co-religionists there began using the Turkish language.[3]

Between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries, the area was controlled by a local Armenian leadership. This changed in the mid-eighteenth century: The local Armenian elites destroyed themselves through internal conflicts. An Azeri ruler, Panah Ali Khan, created the Khanate of Karabakh which included both the region of Nagorno-Karabakh and large territories surrounding it.[4] However, this short-lived principality did not last on the map for long. In 1805, as a result of the first Russo-Iranian war, Russia invaded the area and forced the last Khan of Karabakh to sign the Treaty of Kurekchay. This combined the Khanate with areas to the East to form the governorate of Elisavetpol. At this time, according to the Russian Empire's population surveys, the Armenian population of Karabakh was as little as 8%.[5] Armenia remained under Iranian rule for another 21 years before it, too, became part of the Russian empire. The combined area remained under Russian control until the Russian revolution of 1917.

SOVIET HISTORY

In the immediate years after the fall of the Russian Empire, the fate of Karabakh was undecided. Turks, British, Soviets, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis fought for its control.[6] Armenian authorities signed the Treaty of Batumi in June 1918, which defined Armenia as excluding the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.[7] British troops intervened in November of the same year to keep the area free from the Bolsheviks, but they were ultimately unsuccessful. As the British withdrew, they appointed an ethnic Azerbaijani governor in Shusha, the administrative and cultural center of the region. This reaffirmed that Nagorno-Karabakh belonged to the newly established Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.[8] Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh Peoples' Congress signed an agreement making the area an autonomous region of Azerbaijan, with its final status to be determined at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. The conference decided that Nagorno-Karabakh should stay within Azerbaijan.

Armenian freedom fighters, called Dashnaks, refused to accept this verdict and attempted to seize the area by force, only to be repulsed by the forces of the Azerbaijani governor.[9]

As the Soviet Union gained control over former Russian imperial territory in the South Caucasus, the revolutionary committee of Azerbaijan announced in 1920 that the area was being assigned to Armenian control. Stalin confirmed the decision. However, according to one commentator, "it turned out to be a mere propaganda ploy aimed at encouraging the Armenians to view the Red Army as a savior as it entered Yerevan."[10] In 1921, the Caucasus bureau of the Soviet Communist Party also voted to place Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia. The head of the Azerbaijan SSR, Nariman Narimanov, protested. The next day, the bureau reversed its decision citing the economic interdependence between the region and the rest of Azerbaijan. Stalin supported the bureau's reversal, telling Narimanov, "it is essential to take sides firmly with one of the two parties, in the present case, of course, Azerbaijan."[11] The area was named an oblast (province) in 1922, and Azerbaijani authorities adopted a decree on "The Creation of the Autonomous Region of Nagornyi Karabakh" on July 7, 1923.[12]

The decision to keep the region within Azerbaijan brought long-overdue peace to the region. Some ethnic Armenians remained dissatisfied. A small group of Armenian emigres circulated leaflets within Karabakh in 1926–1927 protesting the region's status. Ten years later, Armenian communist first secretary Khanjian reportedly raised it again.[13] Another small group of Armenian inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh petitioned unsuccessfully to allow the region to join the Armenian SSR in 1945.[14] First Secretary Harutunyan tried again in 1949.[15] Almost 20 years later, approximately 2500 Armenians sent a petition to USSR Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev, demanding unification with the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.[16] Khrushchev ignored the petition, and the region remained a part of Azerbaijan. There were further petition drives in 1963, 1967, and 1977.[17]

Planning for the first modern efforts to separate Karabakh from Azerbaijan began in the summer of 1986. Soviet economist Igor Muradian, an ethnic Armenian from the oblast, began helping Dashnaks obtain weaponry to arm the separatists. "All the organizations in Karabakh were armed," said Muradian. "The whole of the Komsomol (the Communist youth organization) was under arms."[18]

In 1987, the Armenian Academy of Sciences circulated a petition throughout Armenia. It obtained hundreds of thousands of signatures demanding that Nagorno-Karabakh be transferred to Armenia. There was no effort to consider the view of Azerbaijanis living in the oblast, who constituted around 30% of the region's population. Petition organizer Igor Muradian said this oversight was intentional. "I will tell you the truth," he told journalist Thomas de Waal. "We weren't interested in the fate of those people. Those people were the instruments of power, instruments of violence over us for many decades, many centuries even. We weren't interested in their fate [then] and we're not interested now."[19] Muradian's comment indicated the ethnocentric dimension of these petitions. The Armenian community had no intention to take into consideration the rights or desires of the Azerbaijanis in their midst.

Officials of the NKAO oblast followed up the petition in February 1988 by requesting the area be transferred. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union rejected the request, arguing the request was based on actions of "extremists" and "nationalists" who were contradicting the interests of both the Azerbaijan SSR and the Armenian SSR.[20] Russian Premier Mikhail Gorbachev told the Politburo there were 19 potential territorial conflicts in the Soviet Union, and agreeing to NKAO's secession would be a terrible precedent for others to follow.[21]

Peaceful demonstrators took to the streets of Armenia's capital, Yerevan. The secretary of the Armenian Communist Party, Karen Demirchyan, repeatedly called for the people to trust him and return to work.[22] After demonstrators marched on the airport, Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs troops attacked. Two demonstrators were killed, and more than 40 were injured.[23]

Armenians forced Azerbaijanis out of the NKAO capital of Stepanakert. In protest, residents of the majority Azerbaijani town of Aghdam marched on Stepanakert. At Askeran, the marchers were stopped by an Armenian force. In the skirmish that followed, two Azerbaijanis, Ali Hajiyev and Bakhtiyar Guliyev, were killed.[24] They were the first victims of the modern conflict.

As the ethnic violence escalated, Armenians began to abandon the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, while Azerbaijanis fled Armenia. Many who left Armenia settled in Sumgait, a town 22 miles outside of Baku. The ethnic violence pursued the refugees. With Soviet army and military forces failing

to intervene until well after the violence began in February 1988, some local groups turned on the Armenian refugees living there. Over the span of 3 days, according to official figures, 26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis were killed in Sumgait.[25] All the perpetrators were eventually prosecuted. Some were sentenced to death, while others received long prison sentences.

Some Azerbaijanis tried to help their Armenian neighbors escape the violence. Thomas de Waal documented some of their efforts. "Members of the local young Communist organization, the Komsomol, went out in small teams and ferried Armenians to the safety of the Palace of Culture in the central square. A Mrs. Ismailova was briefly made into a hero by the Soviet media for protecting several families in her apartment. The doctor's wife, Natevan Tagieva, remarked, 'We lived in a fourteen-story building with lots of Armenians in it. There were Armenians on the fourteenth floor and we hid them, none of them spent the night at home. In the hospital, people formed vigilante groups, every patient was guarded'."[26]

When Moscow finally intervened, Soviet official Grigory Kharchenko interviewed many of the thousands of Armenians who had taken shelter in the Palace of Culture. He was struck that none of the Sumgait Armenians wanted to move to Armenia for refuge. They requested they be evacuated to cities in the Russian SSR. "No one in Armenia needs us," said the survivors. "They don't think of us as real Armenians, we are not real Armenians."[27] This is significant, given the later Armenian narrative that the Republic of Armenia and resident of Nagorno-Karabakh are one people, who should have a united country. In early 1988, according to this reporting, Karabakh residents did not believe they were accepted in Yerevan as Armenian.

Similar attacks on Azerbaijanis occurred in the Armenian towns of Spitak, Gugark, and others. Two hundred sixteen were killed in Armenia, including 57 women, 5 infants, and 18 children.[28] The last Azerbaijanis were forced out of Armenia by the end of November 1988.[29] The net result of the various pogroms and ethnic cleansings was a homogenization of both populations. Razmik Panossian wrote, "Almost the entire Armenian population of Baku (close to 220,000) was forced to flee, as were Armenians in other parts of Azerbaijan, except in parts of Karabakh where they resisted. Simultaneously, the entire Azerbaijani population of Armenia (160,000) was intimidated to leave or forcibly expelled. This mutual ethnic cleansing was the culmination of a decades-long process of

homogenization in the two republics. As a result of these forced popula-tion transfers, a massive refugee problem emerged in both countries."[30] Panossian also mentioned an additional 750,000 Azerbaijanis who were later expelled from the occupied areas of Azerbaijan in the course of the war.[31]

As ethnic cleansing proceeded, the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union weighed in on the violence. On March 23, 1988, they rejected the Nagorno-Karabakh Soviet's petition to join Armenia and stated this decision had no appeal. The USSR sent troops to Yerevan to maintain peace in light of the decision, but the interethnic population exchanges continued. The Armenian Supreme Soviet passed a deci-sion to annex Nagorno-Karabakh in June, and the USSR Supreme Soviet rejected the move 2 days later. USSR Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev issued a statement on the inviolability of borders within the USSR. Nagorno-Karabakh then voted to secede from Azerbaijan (a vote that the Azerbaijani population of the region boycotted). The Supreme Soviet again invalidated the decision. In January 1989, Gorbachev passed a decree placing the NKAO under the control of a six-person committee that reported directly to Moscow. This placated neither side: Armenians lamented the loss of authority from the ethni-cally Armenian leaders of the NKAO, while Azerbaijan believed it was losing control over part of its territory. Armenian residents began to organize a parallel government, including paramilitary forces. Finally, in November 1989, Moscow returned NKAO to Azerbaijan, and a team of Azerbaijanis took control of the local government (although Moscow's special representative still maintained significant influence until he left 2 months later).

Responding to the return of the NKAO government to Baku, on December 1, 1989 the Armenian SSR again voted to annex Nagorno-Karabakh. NKAO officials concurred with the decision. A joint reso-lution of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR and the National Council of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast declared "the reunification of the Armenian republic and the NKAO. The Armenian republic citizenship rights extend over the population of the NKAO."[32] Based on this declaration, Svante Cornell reported that representa-tives from Nagorno-Karabakh sat in the parliament in Yerevan. If this were true, it placed in doubt Armenia's claims of neutrality in the con-flict. Officially, Armenia held and continues to hold that Nagorno-Karabakh is a separate entity, and any fighting there is an internal issue

for Azerbaijan. Armenia claims it is not a party to the conflict; Cornell's report indicated these assertions have been false from the beginning.[33]

Under Soviet law, boundary changes required the assent of both the gaining republic and the losing republic. Article 78 of the 1977 Soviet Constitution stated: "territory may be altered only by mutual agreement of the concerned republics, and subject to the ratification of the USSR."[34] The Azerbaijan SSR objected to any territorial transfer to the Armenian SSR, and the matter was then referred to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in Moscow. The highest leaders of the Soviet Union declared the transfer illegal, null, and void. They labeled the decision "an impermissible interference in the Sovereign Azerbaijan SSR's affairs and a measure aimed at encroaching on the Azerbaijan SSR's territorial integrity, which does not contribute toward the effort made to stabilize the situation in the region and restore normal relations."[35]

Anti-Armenian riots roiled Baku in January 1990. The spasm of violence led to the mass exodus of the remaining Armenians from the Azerbaijani capital. Laitin and Suny concluded the Armenian pogroms were much worse. As horrific as the killings in Azerbaijan were, the initial tragic events in Sumgait and Baku were affairs of a few days rather than a methodical, prolonged genocide of local Armenians. "Ethnic violence did not spread from city to city, village to village. There was no overall Azerbaijani plan to rid Azerbaijan of Armenians, certainly not to murder them systematically. Even today some Armenians manage to live in Baku without overt threat or ethnic slurs."[36]

Faced with a rise in Azerbaijani nationalism that had started around the issue of Karabakh but soon turned into a movement for independence from the USSR, the Soviet Union invaded Baku. During the night of January 19–20, 1990, up to 26,000 Soviet troops occupied the city, killing between 130 and 150. Hundreds more were wounded in the intervention that became known as "Black January." According to eyewitnesses, "(T)he troops shot at buses and civilian cars and into apartment windows. Their tanks crushed both cars and people who got in the way."[37] Soviet Defense Minister Dimitri Yazov personally commanded the operation. He later confirmed the armed intervention had little to do with ethnic violence, but was designed to maintain central government control. Lenin's support for a nationalities policy was completely discarded when the Soviet Union faced the possibility of nationalists taking control of their own destiny. Whether the question was an Armenian

petition for annexation of Karabakh, or an Azerbaijani nationalist movement, preservation of the ruling status of the USSR Communist Party always seemed to take priority in the Caucasus. "The military occupation of Azerbaijan's capital was designed to prevent the Azerbaijan National Front from seizing power from the Communist Party," explained Yazov.[38] Faced with the birth and growth of the Azerbaijan National Front, Secretary General Gorbachev and his security advisors had authorized the intervention for political rather than security purposes.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, a state of emergency was declared as it, too, was occupied by Soviet troops. In response, Armenians began purchasing weapons from abroad and shipping them to the oblast. Armenians also tried to raid USSR weapons depots. In one incident, in May 1990, 22 were killed. This followed immediately after Yerevan defied Moscow's authority and declared that Nagorno-Karabakh residents could participate in Armenian elections.[39]

Within Armenia, the newly formed paramilitary group, the Armenian National Army (ANA), began patrolling the border of Nagorno-Karabakh. Their conflicts with Azerbaijani villagers led to numerous deaths. These militias also began attacking Soviet troops, to seize Soviet weaponry. The Armenian SSR eventually disbanded the ANA, but not before its leader—Levon Ter-Petrosyan—was elected chairman of the Armenian Supreme Soviet.[40]

Other armed groups did not disband, however, and Azerbaijani militia brigades within the NKAO found themselves in frequent battles with them. One Armenian writer described over two hundred operations that included blowing up bridges and railway track, firing on vehicles, and the seizing of hostages that would then be traded for prisoners in the Shusha jail.[41] As the situation deteriorated, in April 1991, the Kremlin deployed elements of the 23rd Motorized Rifle Division of the Fourth Army along the Armenian–Azerbaijan border. These troops joined with the Azerbaijani militia in another effort to disarm illegal Armenian armed formations. They launched Operation Ring both outside and within NKAO. In one action, in the village of Getashen, Armenian residents were deported and their homes were given to Azerbaijanis who had previously fled Armenia. The new president of the Russian SSR government, Boris Yeltsin, condemned the operation. He perceived the precedent of using central government security forces in this manner as a threat to his own plans for a more autonomous Russia. The fledgling Russian government thus began creating ties of friendship with leaders in Yerevan.[42]

Operation Ring, designed to end illegal armed groups, resulted in a hardening of mutual feelings of animosity.[43] The operation proved to be a tremendous aid to Armenian recruitment efforts for fighters to send to the NKAO,[44] but its success against the Armenian formations generated peace feelers. Nagorno-Karabakh leaders proposed, and the Armenian parliament approved, a measure to reconsidering some of their decisions. The leaders wrote to Azerbaijan leader Ayaz Mutalibov proposing talks, albeit with a number of preconditions. The two sides had one meeting, after which one of the Armenian negotiators was assassinated, probably by a hardline Armenian militia member.[45]

Events in Moscow overtook local events in August 1991, as hardliners attempted a coup d'état against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. In the confusion that followed, Soviet forces discontinued their operations with the Azerbaijanis in NKAO. As the Kremlin lost control and the Soviet Union began its disintegration, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis helped themselves to Soviet weaponry. Sometimes they bought weapons illegally from Soviet troops; at other times, they seized weapons being left behind as those troops departed.

The Nagorno-Karabakh National Council declared the oblast's independence on September 2, 1991. This was a significant change in strategy from previous attempts to unite the NKAO with the Armenian SSR. From this point on, the official Armenian response would be a desire to see Nagorno-Karabakh as independent, and not seek unification. In reply, Baku canceled Nagorno-Karabakh's oblast status and reduced it to a region—thereby eliminating its previous autonomy. As the Soviet Union did not officially end until December 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh was still under its ultimate authority. Article 72 of the constitution granted republics the right to secede from the USSR,[46] but it did not grant the same right to oblasts. Accordingly, Nagorno-Karabakh had no legal right to declare its independence, even if Armenia and Azerbaijan were doing the same all around it.

Russian and Kazakh Presidents Yeltsin and Nazarbayev tried to sponsor peace talks, but the talks came to a spectacular end on November 20, 1991. An Armenian rocket shot down an Azerbaijani helicopter carrying a peacekeeping mission. Thirteen high-ranking Azerbaijani government officials, two Russian and one Kazakhstani Ministry of Internal Affairs officials, three journalists, and the helicopter crew were killed in the crash, which later became known as the Karakend tragedy. In retaliation, Azerbaijan imposed a full rail blockade of Armenia and cut

communication links with the NKAO capital, Stepanakert. As the Soviet Union ceased to exist on December 8, 1991, the newly born countries of Armenia and Azerbaijan stood on the brink of war.[47] The collapse of the USSR would hurt Baku more than Yerevan, as the Armenians had been organizing their own paramilitary forces for some time while Baku had been more dependent on Moscow to uphold its rights.

Azerbaijan declared its independence on August 30, 1991, and Armenia declared its own on September 21, 1991. On January 18, 1992, following a plebiscite with a Soviet-era majority of 99% in favor (excluding the region's Azerbaijani population which had been ethnically cleansed), the Supreme Soviet of the former NKAO proclaimed the creation of an independent Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR).[48]

The Nagorno-Karabakh War

The various declarations of independence led to chaos. Initially, there were Russian units cooperating with both the Armenian side and the Azerbaijani side—depending on where the unit was physically located. Karabakh Armenians hired tanks from the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment on several occasions, while the 23rd Division in Ganja began to cooperate with the Azerbaijanis. Often, the Russians were operating as mercenaries. One such officer tried to sell his tank for $3000 to an American observer whom he thought was a businessman.[49] Most of the Soviet weaponry went to the Armenians. "It was a solid foundation," said the future president of Armenia Robert Kocharian. "All of the equipment stayed, we did not allow it to be removed."[50]

Armenia became the Russian favorite. "No one bothers to hide the fact that Russians, Belorussians, and other soldiers of the former Soviet army have stayed behind to fight alongside Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian irregulars," wrote a Western journalist.[51] Russian favoritism was so intense that in 1992 the Ministry of Defense would promote the commander of the Seventh Army in Armenia citing his leadership in the Karabakh campaign.[52] Armenian paramilitary forces were able to "borrow" ten tanks from the 366th Regiment on several occasions.[53] The involvement of the government of the Republic of Armenia was also clear. "In Armenia itself… the government is dropping the pretense of being just an interested observer," wrote a reporter. "In downtown Yerevan, a pile of rocket-propelled grenades sits in the office of the special government committee that handles relations

with Karabakh. A staffer keeps an AK-47 behind his desk and fiddles absentmindedly with his side arm as he makes phone calls. Armed guerillas with luxuriant Fidel-style beards and wearing rumpled fatigues walk diffidently in the boardroom-size office."[54] In February 1992, Armenian forces began a major assault on Khojaly, a town north of Nagorno-Karabakh's capital of Stepanakert. Khojaly was an Azerbaijani town that was being used as an artillery base against the Armenian separatists. It also housed the only airport in the former oblast that could be used by large, fixed-wing aircraft.[55] Armenian paramilitary forces had cut the road to Khojaly in October 1991, so the only way to resupply the city was by air. Azerbaijan airlifted most of the inhabitants out via helicopter, so by mid-February there were only 3000 inhabitants left, defended by 160 lightly armed men.[56]

The assault on Khojaly began on the night of February 25/26. Armenian forces and Russia's 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment surrounded the town, leaving open a single avenue of escape from the fighting. The route, which would later be called a "humanitarian corridor" by the Armenian side, turned out to be a "humanitarian trap." Many of the fleeing population were massacred in an ambush as they tried to reach another Azerbaijani-populated city, Aghdam. The attackers killed 613 Azerbaijanis, including up to 300 women, children and elderly. Over a thousand people were taken prisoner. Many of them had to undergo severe torture in Askeran and Stepanakert. Western reporters described victims shot at close range, with the bodies of many mutilated and disfigured. Human Rights Watch would later call the killing spree "the largest massacre to date in the conflict." The organization also put the entire blame for the massacre on the Armenian forces. "We place direct responsibility for the civilian deaths with Karabakh Armenian forces," wrote executive director Holly Cartner.[57]

Moscow denied any official involvement. The Russian ambassador to Turkey, however, used language straight from the Russian playbook. He said it was possible that some soldiers could have been involved in the fighting as mercenaries or volunteers.[58] For his part, Azerbaijani President Mutalibov said he was surprised the 366th Regiment had fought alongside Armenian forces.[59] Mutalibov's mishandling of the massacre and attempts to hide news of the tragedy led to his resignation. As for the regiment, when word of their involvement in the massacre was made public, the Kremlin ordered the 366th to leave Karabakh. When it reached Georgia, it was disbanded. The ethnic Armenians in the

regiment, as well as the regiment's equipment, remained in the former oblast on the side of the separatists.[60]

The Azerbaijani government delayed announcing news of the massacre for 2 days, but then confirmed the atrocity, citing eyewitnesses who either saw or experienced the butchery. The Armenians could not get their story straight as to what occurred. Initially, they claimed that no massacre had taken place. They claimed Armenian forces had faced little resistance when they took the town, which was virtually empty. At the same time, an Armenian police major told a Western journalist that many of the Armenians were natives of Sumgait and that the attack had taken place on the fourth anniversary of the anti-Armenian riots in that town.[61] Western news reporters visited the killing fields and reported seeing bodies on the ground, some with heads and genitalia removed.[62]

Unlike previous ethnic pogroms, the Khojaly massacre was an intentional display of Armenian intent. Karabakh Armenian's Defense Minister, the current president of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sarkisyan, expressed satisfaction. "We don't speak loudly about these things," he prefaced his remarks. "But I think the main point is… (b)efore Khojaly, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We were able to break that (stereotype). And that's what happened."[63] There had been massacres and pogroms in the days leading up to the war, and against both ethnic populations during the fighting. Sarkisyan's admission that Khojaly was an intentional act to prove the willingness of Armenian forces to wage war on civilian populations marks a departure from the norms of the laws of war.

In May 1992, Armenians seized Shusha, the last remaining Azerbaijani town in the former oblast. Immediately following the capture of this historical capital of the region, they created the so-called NKR Defense Army on May 9, 1992. This united the existing self-defense units of NK in order to "defend Nagorno-Karabakh's population against Azerbaijani military aggression."[64] The loss of Shusha, which has a special place in the Azerbaijani psychology because of its role as the cradle of Azerbaijani music and culture, caused tremendous political upheaval in Baku.

While Azerbaijan was distracted by political infighting, the Armenians expanded the conflict by attacking portions of Azerbaijan that were outside of Nagorno-Karabakh proper. They seized the town of Lachin,

which was strategically located on a narrow strip of land between the former oblast and the Republic of Armenia. The separatists now had a land bridge connecting themselves with Yerevan.

Baku launched a successful counter-attack in June 1992, using Russian armor driven by Russian mercenaries. They managed to regain the northern half of Nagorno-Karabakh. Faced with a military defeat, Armenia turned directly to the Russian government for help. The Kremlin intervened directly, sending military attack helicopters flown by Russian pilots to stop the Azerbaijan offensive. Russia intervened again in late summer, building an anti-aircraft system to protect Stepanakert.[65]

Russia intervened on behalf of Armenia a third time after the former military assets of the Soviet Union were divided among successor states. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan inherited large quantities of military equipment but, because the preponderance of Soviet forces had been in Azerbaijan during the USSR, Baku received the majority of the weaponry. This was supplemented by the Azerbaijanis purchasing equipment from the departing Soviet forces. Armenian President Ter-Petrosyan turned to his friend Boris Yeltsin to make up the difference. "It turned out there were three times more weapons in Azerbaijan than in Armenia," said the former president. "And when we talked to the Russian side, we came to the conclusion…that we should be compensated for this. And Yeltsin agreed to this and agreed that the balance had to be preserved. … And in 1994, we were on the same level." According to Russian general Lev Rohklin, the billion dollar aid package was in direct contravention of a Russian commitment not to arm either of the combatants in the conflict.[66]

In September 1992, Azerbaijani forces captured six members of the Spetsnaz, Russian special forces. These soldiers were supposedly freelancing and had been working on their own for the Armenians for almost a year. Their claims of being volunteers were suspect, however. They were not listed as missing or deserters by their headquarters in Yerevan,[67] implying they were still on active duty. Azerbaijan prosecutor Rovshan Aliev commented on the case: "We have no evidence and no means of obtaining any specific Russian orders dispatching the men to go kill our people on the front," he said. "But as a citizen of what was once the Soviet Union, I can assure you that no Russian soldier could take the sort of extended absences from duty that these men took without some sort of collusion much higher up."[68]

The men themselves testified they were members of a unit commanded by Captain Katanja, reportedly a relative of Major General Nevoruv, second in command of the Russian 7th Army. In the spring of 1992, Captain Katanja introduced the recruits to a Colonel Jena, a Russian special forces officer who had served in the 366th Motorized Rifle regiment (the same group who participated in the Khojaly massacre). Colonel Jena's responsibilities included recruiting other special forces for a new unit. In April 1992, Jena promised the men that if they served in Karabakh, their service time would be reduced 6 months and their salaries increased tenfold, with bonuses for destroying Azerbaijani mechanized weaponry. The men would be carried on their original unit's roster, and they would not be listed as deserters.[69] The fact that the men were active duty Russian soldiers, that they remained listed on their unit's roster, that their service time was reduced in return for serving in Karabakh, and that they were commanded by Russian officers, all point to official Russian involvement.

By spring 1993, Armenians expanded the conflict into other areas of Azerbaijan, opening a second land corridor to the Republic of Armenia near Kelbajar. The Karabakh Armenians were supported in the attack by artillery fire originating in Armenia. Armenian Defense Minister Vazgen Manukian hid the full extent of Armenia's involvement from President Ter-Petrosyan. "I presented a small part of this operation," he confessed. "Receiving permission for this small part, we did more." Troops from both the Republic of Armenia and Russia's Seventh Army participated in the fighting.[70] They then seized consecutively the Azerbaijani-populated regions of Aghdam, Jaebrayil, Fuzuli, Gubadly, and Zangilan. By October 1993, Armenians controlled all of Southwest Azerbaijan.[71] The entire Azerbaijani population of these regions was expelled. Over 600,000 Azerbaijanis from these occupied regions were turned into internally displaced persons, domestic refugees. Around 50,000 Azerbaijanis were driven out of Nagorno-Karabakh proper. All of these created a huge refugee crisis in Azerbaijan.

Alarmed at the Azerbaijani losses, Turkey decided to take action to support its ally. It amassed military forces on the western border of Armenia. Yerevan responded by sending elements of the Seventh Army to defend its border, "still controlled ostensibly by Moscow and staffed partly with Russian soldiers."[72] In reality, only 20–40% of the soldiers were Russian; the vast majority was Armenian, as was 20–30% of the officer corps.[73] While Turkey did not actually participate in the fighting,

the threat of a possible Turkish military intervention meant Russia and Armenia had to divide their forces in the area to protect their rear. This gave Azerbaijan some breathing room. Turkey supported Azerbaijan in a different way, as well, by ceasing all official/diplomatic contacts with Armenia. The two countries had established diplomatic relations following the collapse of the USSR. Turkey closed its border in solidarity with its ally Azerbaijan, and it remains closed until today. The Turkish position is that relations cannot be thawed further without significant movement on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.[74]

Azerbaijan launched a counter-attack in December and managed to regain some of the territory it had lost. This led to a ceasefire on May 12, 1994, that had been negotiated by the Russians and signed by the defense ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the head of the Nagorno-Karabakh defense forces.[75]

It is an interesting note that Armenia signed the ceasefire, given its official position that it was not a party to the conflict. That position was further undermined by the Armenian Minister of Defense Vazgen Manukian, who admitted Armenia's aggression against its neighbor. "You can be sure that whatever we said politically," he said, "the Karabakh Armenian and Armenian army were united in military actions. It was not important for me if someone was a Karabakhi or an Armenian."[76]

The exact number of those killed in the war is still a matter of some debate, but the deputy speaker of the Armenian parliament Vahan Hovanessian put the number at 30,000. "I am proud that in the Karabakh war we killed 25,000 Azeris," he said, "and only 5000 Armenians were killed. I am proud that my friends and I took part in that war. And my son is also proud of this. And if they again start the war, they should know that the score will be the same. And I am not proud of this secretly at night, I am openly proud of this. I think there is nothing shameful in it. It is in this way that any nation is educated."[77] The atmosphere reflected by such statements by a government official would make peace negotiations a difficult prospect.

Huseynov Rebellion

While Azerbaijan fought to maintain its hold on Karabakh, the conflict did not stop others from attempting to benefit from the unrest. Colonel Surat Huseynov was the Republic's representative to Nagorno-Karabakh.

As such, he controlled the military forces that protected Kalbajar. When Huseynov moved his troops to his native Ganja, Kalbajar fell. President Abulfaz Elchibey dismissed Huseynov from military service, but Huseynov's troops remained united and loyal to him. Huseynov was supported by the Russian 104th Airborne Regiment, which announced in May 1993 that it was withdrawing from Azerbaijan 6 months ahead of the scheduled departure date. This made Azerbaijan the first country in the South Caucasus to rid itself of Russian troops. As they pulled out, the 104th left all their weapons and munitions to Huseynov rather than to the central government. This was possibly designed to give a Russian-supported group the opportunity to seize power in Baku, without there being direct Russian involvement.[78]

Huseynov marched on Baku, coming within 50 miles of the capital city. This forced President Elchibey to flee the capital. Before his flight, the president invited Heydar Aliyev to Baku to help resolve the political crisis. Aliyev had led Azerbaijan during Soviet times and had previously served as the first deputy prime minister of the USSR. The Parliament elected him Speaker and, after Elchibey's departure, he became president. To defang Huseynov, Aliyev appointed him prime minister. In return, Huseynov ceased his march on the capital and ordered some of his troops back to the Karabakh front. Huseynov survived in power for less than a year, after which he was deposed for coup plotting against the new president. He then fled to Russia.[79]

With Aliyev in power, Russia used its ability to provide support to either side of the conflict to its tactical advantage. It wanted Azerbaijan to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). As the Armenians moved on the city of Jebrail, a Russian deputy minister of foreign affairs came to Baku to inquire of Aliyev his views on membership. Aliyev flew to Moscow, and subsequently joined the CIS in September 1993. Almost immediately, the Russians demanded the Armenians cease their attack and pledged 200 military advisors to the Azerbaijan military. While Armenia remained the Russian favorite, Moscow's rapid change of tactics demonstrated its willingness to curry favor with both sides.

IRANIAN REACTION

In 1992, both the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers asked Iran to mediate the conflict. Representatives of the three countries met in March and reached a draft plan to resolve the dispute. This resulted

in a ceasefire that broke down in May 1992 after a single week, when Armenians captured the city of Shusha.

In March 1993, Iran tried its hand again at negotiating a ceasefire between the two sides. While it resulted in a Tehran declaration in May, this effort at peacemaking also failed. Ultimately, Azerbaijan President Elchibey refused to use Iran's good offices any further, while Armenia used the Iranian-brokered ceasefires to rearm its troops.[80]

While the fighting may have stopped Iran's diplomatic negotiations, it did not end Iran's potential military involvement. When Armenian forces descended on Fuzuli in April 1993, the conflict approached the Iranian border. Iran's Foreign Ministry expressed deep concern about recent fighting and "the massacre of innocent people," calling on Armenian forces to withdraw from the areas of Azerbaijan it had occupied.[81] The statement was less important than it seemed, however, in that it did not specify whether Iran included Nagorno-Karabakh in its interpretation of occupied lands. As the fighting continued in August, hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis sought refuge inside Iran. Iran immediately set up refugee camps to house children and the elderly. Armed Iranian units then crossed the border into Azerbaijan to establish a safe haven for the refugees. This led to a swift condemnation by Moscow. "Whatever their motivation," said a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman, "We cannot show any understanding or support for the actions of the Iranian side. The fact that Iranian armed groups have crossed the border into Azerbaijan will not only lead to a further escalation of the conflict, but also pushes it dangerously close to the verge of internationalization."[82] Iran withdrew its forces, but it had made the point that the fighting could not get closer to its border without internationalizing the conflict.

Iran maintained its armed neutrality throughout most of the conflict, but developed strong economic ties with Armenia. This was a welcome lifeline for Yerevan, since Armenia's only other window to the outside world was impoverished Georgia. When Azerbaijan signed a consortium agreement to build a pipeline to the Mediterranean and excluded Iran as a partner (see below, "Deal of the Century") Iran openly began signing commercial deals with Armenia. Tehran followed traditional balance of power tactics, balancing against Azerbaijan by aligning itself with the weaker country in the dispute. This made Iran indispensable to Armenia. Armenian Prime Minister Bagratyan travelled to Tehran in May 1995 and signed a number of economic cooperation agreements, including deals to provide

energy-starved Armenia with natural gas and electricity for 20 years. Three weeks later, Iran cut electrical supplies to Nakhchivan,[83] the Azerbaijani exclave surrounded on three sides by Armenia.

UN Security Council Resolutions

The UN Security Council took a belated interest in the NK dispute. Its first resolution on the conflict was UNSC 822, passed on April 23, 1993, after Azerbaijan's Kalbajar was occupied. The resolution mostly supported the Azerbaijani position. The international body reaffirmed respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States in the region and reaffirmed the inviolability of international borders. This put the Council in direct opposition to Armenia, which was demanding international recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as a state. The resolution also reaffirmed the inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory. It demanded an immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces from "the Kalbajar district and other recently occupied areas of Azerbaijan." Under pressure from Russia, there was also a bone thrown in the direction of Armenian supporters. The resolution stated that Kalbajar had been invaded by "local Armenian forces" instead of mentioning forces of the Republic of Armenia, or any Russian support to those forces. [84]

A second resolution, UNSC 853, passed on July 29, 1993, following the Armenian seizure of Aghdam (see below). This resolution confused the situation even further by calling on the Republic of Armenia to act, not as a party to the conflict, but to use its influence on the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to achieve compliance.[85]

The Security Council passed UNSC 874 on October 14, 1993. Faced with the seriousness of the situation, the UN Security Council finally realized that Yerevan was also a party to the conflict. "Tensions between the Republic of Armenia and the Azerbaijani Republic, would endanger peace and security in the region," the resolution read. It gave full support to the CSCE's peace efforts and urged all states in the region "to refrain from any hostile acts and from any interference or intervention which would lead to the widening of the conflict and undermine peace and security in the region."[86]

The fourth and final Security Council resolution followed Armenian forces' seizure of a bridge that crossed into Iran. UNSC 884, adopted November 12, 1993, did not cover any new issues.[87] All four resolutions

reaffirmed the territorial integrity of UN member state Azerbaijan, three of them recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and all demanded a cessation of hostilities. Although the resolutions were unanimous in demanding "the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal" of the Armenian occupying forces from Azerbaijan's territory, none of the resolutions had any enforcement mechanism. Except for participation in peace talks, neither the international community nor the UN Security Council has done anything to convert these resolutions into "facts on the ground."

US Reaction

Faced with a strong Armenian lobby and almost no countervailing Azerbaijani presence in the US, the American Congress passed the Freedom Support Act in October 1992. Despite the fact that Azerbaijan had been invaded by Armenia, and Armenia was illegally occupying large swaths of Azerbaijan's territory, the US Congress placed sanctions on the victim rather than the aggressor.

Specifically, Section 907 of the act prohibited direct US government aid to Azerbaijan. "United States assistance under this or any other act… may not be provided to the Government of Azerbaijan until the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh."[88]

Under international law, a blockade is an act of war, so this resolution ostensibly accused Azerbaijan of waging war against Armenia. Of course, it was impossible for Azerbaijan to blockade Armenia, even with the help of its ally Turkey, as Azerbaijan did not have the capability of surrounding Armenia and cutting all commerce with the country. Even with Turkey and Azerbaijan closing its borders, Armenia still had Georgia in the north and Iran in the south. Thus, citing the situation as a blockade was an overstatement and completely overlooked the circumstances surrounding the border closings.

The result of this one-sided tilt in a conflict on the other side of the world came to the attention of the Washington Post:

> The United States continue to intervene mischievously in the appalling conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Its particular contribution is to

increase the misery of a million Azeri refugees, and in that way to draw out hopes for a settlement. Why would Washington wish to conduct such a policy, which runs against its own substantial strategic, economic and political interests? It's a policy thrust on a reluctant president by a Congress heavily influenced by Armenian Americans. This lobby has forced tough restrictions on direct American humanitarian and other aid to Azerbaijan.

… it is not only that Karabakh Armenians seized and hold the long-sovereign Azeri enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh… Armenians also occupy 20 percent of Azerbaijan proper. In short, the United States is punishing the loser and comforting the conqueror, occupier and evident winner of the war… (W)hat is on display is ethnic political power. The irony is that its wielding may not even be to the advantage of the Armenians. They would be better served, as would the Azeris, by enlisting the United States as an impartial moderator… But instead the Armenian lobby tends to tip American policy and to invite political intervention by an imperially inclined Moscow.[89]

The Clinton administration, in the form of a letter from Secretary of State Madeline Albright to Congressman Robert Livingston, protested the law. "Section 907 damages US national interests by undermining the administration's neutrality in promoting a settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh, the ability to encourage economic and broad legal reforms in Azerbaijan, and efforts to advance an East-West energy corridor."[90] Albright's aide Stephen Sestanovich seconded her views. "The Azerbaijani government is strongly pro-U.S. It is being helpful to us on Caspian energy questions, on proliferation, on Iranian terrorism—and on Nagorno-Karabakh. Section 907 has limited, and will continue to limit, the expansion of US-Azerbaijani relations—to no useful purpose."[91]

Section 907 remains on the books, despite successive administrations' efforts to have it repealed. Former US Ambassador to Armenia Peter Tomsen stated, "No country recognizes Karabakh's independence. This is US policy and the policy of the OSCE. In other words all of these countries (53 out of 54) recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and that Karabakh is within the borders of Azerbaijan."[92] Finally, in 2001, Congress passed PL 107-115 authorizing the president to waive Section 907, something both Presidents Bush and Obama have done annually.[93]

As Azerbaijani oil began to reach world markets in 2005, the executive branch of the US government continued to favor Baku's position. Secretary of State Colin Powell sent a letter to Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Elmar Mammedyarov. "The United States unequivocally supports

Azerbaijani territorial integrity…and is glad to take part in a monitoring mission on the occupied territories," he wrote. Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Jones said there were corruption and criminal secessionists in areas such as Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Transneister. When her remarks sparked an anti-American campaign in Yerevan, the US Embassy there doubled-down with a statement that the USA "does not recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent country, does not recognize its leadership, and supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan."[94]

Minsk Group

The history of the peace process is a history of Russian attempts to reestablish its mastery of the region. This policy was enunciated by Russian President Boris Yeltsin. "Russia continues to have a vital interest in the cessation of all armed conflicts on the territory of the former USSR," he said. He then emphasized his belief that the Caucasus was in the Kremlin's exclusive sphere of influence. "The world community is increasingly coming to realize our country's special responsibility in this difficult matter. I believe the time has come for the authoritative international organizations, including the United Nations, to grant Russia special powers as the guarantor of peace and stability in this region."[95]

In 1991, President Yeltsin of Russia and President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan proposed a ceasefire at the Almaty conference, where Armenia and Azerbaijan signed the accession to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)[96] Armenian leader Ter-Petrosyan risked alienating his co-ethnics in Karabakh by offering to forego the goal of unification with the territory if Azerbaijan gave wide-ranging autonomy to the oblast.[97]

In June 1992, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) convened a conference in Rome to prepare for a formal peace conference to take place in Minsk, Belarus. While the conference never took place, at the preparatory meeting envoys from Russia, Sweden, Turkey, Italy, Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, Belarus, and the USA met with Armenian and Azerbaijani representatives. The talks were unable to resolve Armenia's contention that it was not a party to the conflict. Baku refused to give a seat at the table to Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh because they did not want to accord the separatists any form of official recognition. Moscow then stepped in unilaterally and negotiated a ceasefire (that was ignored by both sides of the conflict).[98]

The Russian Minister of Defense tried his hand at perpetuating a Russian presence by hosting a peace conference in September 1992 with the region's defense ministers. Supposedly, the Armenian and Azerbaijani defense ministers signed a call for a ceasefire and the deployment of CIS observers which would give Russia use of the Lachin corridor. This would have given Russian troops in the Lachin corridor strategic control over the entire area. The peace effort was uncoordinated with other elements of the various governments, however, and ultimately failed.[99]

Another attempt to use the CSCE venue followed the April 1993 passage of UNSC 822. A Turkish-Russian-US plan was adopted by Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Karabakh Armenians. It called for a withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijani territory outside of the former oblast and a ceasefire. Implementation was interrupted, however, when Surat Husaynov's June 1993 attempted coup d'etat caused a huge turmoil in Azerbaijani politics. Taking advantage of the political unrest, Armenians seized the Azerbaijani town of Aghdam and broke the ceasefire.

Baku turned to Moscow for help in brokering a ceasefire, a role the Kremlin was eager to fill so as to restore Russian primacy in the area. In October 1993, at a meeting of President Yeltsin with the heads of state of the three Caucasus countries, the Russian president proposed, outside of the Minsk process, that Moscow install peacekeeping forces in the area. In return, he demanded Azerbaijan allow a Russian paratrooper division be deployed in the republic, and Russian border guards to resume their old Soviet positions. This was too high a price for President Aliyev to accept, especially since he was concerned the Russian troops would allow Armenians to maintain the territory they had seized.[100]

Another attempt to craft a ceasefire outside of the Minsk process took place in Kyrgyzstan in May 1994. Under Russian leadership, lawmakers of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly drew up the Bishkek protocol, which called for a ceasefire followed by withdrawal of forces from Azerbaijan's occupied territories. Talks to determine Nagorno-Karabakh's final status would follow. The Russians intentionally excluded the CSCE from the process leading up to the ceasefire. Azerbaijan requested that the head of the CSCE mediating group, Mathias Mossberg, be party to the talks and the Russians refused.[101] The ceasefire was originally for 90 days. A draft permanent agreement allowed the CSCE to provide its own peacekeeping force, but the force would have to abide by terms dictated by Moscow. The Azerbaijanis rejected

this precondition and refused to sign the agreement drawn up by the Kremlin.[102] Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev then asked the parties to sign a second version authorizing the introduction of an 1800 strong Russian peacekeeping force.[103] Azerbaijani President Aliyev told Russian special envoy Vladimir Kazimirov that unless Russian forces were part of a CSCE mission they would only enter Azerbaijan "over my dead body."[104] By contrast, Armenia was more than happy to accept a Russian troop presence. The Armenian acceptance of a Russian role was further accented on June 9, 1994, when Yerevan agreed to establish two Russian military bases on Armenian soil. A permanent ceasefire was signed on July 27, almost 6 weeks later.

In December 1994, the CSCE met in Budapest and changed its name from the CSCE to the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe). In an effort to bring Russia's peacemaking attempts under the organization, it named Russia the permanent co-chair of the Minsk Group. It also requested the Minsk Group to name additional co-chairs "to ensure a common and agreed basis for negotiations and to realize full co-ordination in all mediation and negotiation activities."[105] The co-chairs were tasked to conduct "speedy negotiations for the conclusion of a political agreement on the cessation of the armed conflict…the conclusion of the agreement mentioned above would also make it possible to deploy multinational peacekeeping forces."[106]

The mandate of the chairs was spelled out more fully in 1995. The OSCE instructed the chairs to "realize full coordination in all mediating and negotiating activities;" in other words, the mandate was meant to prevent unilateral mediation efforts. In addition to the usual instructions to work for a ceasefire and negotiate with all the parties, the chairs were instructed to assist the OSCE Chairman-in-office in developing plans for an OSCE, multinational peacekeeping force.[107] This force has yet to be established. Russia insists it should provide the majority of the peacekeepers to the force, a position which the OSCE has rejected

The Minsk group has been unable to achieve progress for a variety of reasons. Baku insists Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians not be treated as full equal negotiators, while Yerevan says they should be. A second issue is the role of the Azerbaijanis who fled the conflict zone: Baku insists this group must have a say in any final settlement, but Yerevan does not see the point. The largest area of contention, however, remains the differing basis on which to view the conflict: Azerbaijan insists on its rights of territorial integrity and state borders, and Armenia insists on the rights

of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh to the exercise of their right to self-determination.

In 1996, at the OSCE Lisbon summit, Azerbaijan inserted an annex into the summit meeting's final declaration. This annex stated that the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan needed to be protected. All OSCE members except Armenia supported this annex. Armenia refused to sign the document and walked out of the talks.[108] The Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians also left, never to return.

New Minsk co-chairs were appointed in February 1997, when the USA and France replaced a rotating EU co-chair. As a result, the Minsk Group, a supposedly neutral arbiter, is chaired by three countries (the USA, Russia, and France) with significant Armenian populations who act as pressure groups inside the co-chairs' domestic political systems.

A glimmer of hope for a compromise emerged in October 1997, when the Karabakh "president" Arkadiy Gukasyan offered to enter into a confederation with Azerbaijan in return for security guarantees. The security guarantees included international legal guarantees to defend Karabakh from attack; individual defense guarantees from Russia, the USA, and possibly Iran; and recognition of Armenian's right to intervene automatically to defend Karabakh from attack. In return, Karabakh could settle for "abridged statehood…abridged in Azerbaijan's favor."[109] Gukasyan said he would be willing to accept a "horizontal" relationship with Baku, but never a "vertical" one.[110] The Minsk Group was not in session at the time, and the offer was ignored.

Faced with this intransigence, the OSCE abandoned the search for a comprehensive solution in favor of a phased approach to the peacekeeping. The Minsk Group suggested a troop withdrawal from Armenian-occupied territories and the return of internally displaced persons (IDP)s be decided in a first set of negotiations; the issue of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh would be left for a second step. The "step by step" draft agreement called for a phased withdrawal of troops and the possible deployment of a multinational OSCE division in a militarily secure buffer zone. The buffer zone would line the 1988 borders of Karabakh, as well as the north and south boundaries of the Lachin corridor. Displaced persons would then be allowed to return to their homes. The sides to the conflict would then work for a comprehensive settlement of other aspects, including the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh.[111]

The proposal was accepted by Baku, but rejected by Karabakh Armenians because it gave away its main bargaining chip in the opening

round: the Azerbaijani territory it occupied. Surprisingly, however, the proposal was accepted by Armenian President Ter-Petrosyan, who argued it was "not realistic" to demand Nagorno-Karabakh's unilateral secession from Azerbaijan.[112] Ter-Petrosyan's acceptance of the peace proposal led directly to his replacement by Nagorno-Karabakh's former Defense Chief Robert Kocharian 6 months later. Ter-Petrosyan had accepted a concession in the negotiations without first preparing the people of Armenia for that concession.

The co-chairs tried again in November 1998. Abandoning the phased approach that had been Ter-Petrosyan's undoing, they proposed a "unitary state" approach. Under this formulation, terms like "autonomy" and "territorial integrity" were abandoned as they were too value laden. Instead, the co-chairs adopted a formulation originally created by Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov: Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh would become a unitary state, but the terms of the union were not specified. Since the proposal would require Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis to negotiate the terms of the union, the Armenians accepted the proposal and the Azerbaijanis rejected it: another stalemate.[113]

In April 1999, Armenian President Robert Kocharian and Azerbaijan President Heydar Aliyev met twice: in Geneva and at a NATO summit in Washington, DC. The face-to-face meetings restarted the talks. The exact details of the conversations are unknown. They may have agreed on a territorial exchange that would give Armenia the Lachin corridor (guaranteeing a direct connection between Armenia and Karabakh) and give Azerbaijan the Megri corridor (guaranteeing a direct connection between the main part of Azerbaijan and Nakhchiavan).[114] While this sort of territorial swap might have led to some progress, the peace process stalled when shootings in the Armenian parliament turned the political scene in Yerevan upside down.

President Putin visited Baku in 2001. In coordination with French President Jacques Chirac, he sponsored meetings in Paris in February and March. Secretary of State Colin Powell followed up by inviting the two presidents to Key West, Florida. Leaks suggest discussion revolved around swaps of territory, and on a decentralized status for Karabakh.[115] US co-chair Rodolph Perina commented that the two were "unbelievably close" to resolving the conflict. Neither president, however, believed that their domestic audiences were prepared to accept the compromises they had negotiated.[116] All told, Haidar Aliyev and Robert Kocharian met 21 times, and never found a way to peace.

In 2004, the Minsk co-chairs established a bilateral communication channel between the deputy foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Tatul Markarian and Araz Azimov. This back channel became known as the Prague Process. While the connection did not achieve any significant results, it kept contact between the two countries alive through some difficult years.

The European Union tried to create a space for their independent intervention in the peace process. Its rapporteur Per Gahrton issued recommendations that Armenia withdraw from five occupied regions surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh; in return, Azerbaijan could reopen communications and other forms of cooperation with Armenia. Yerevan did not address the merits of the proposals, but dismissed them on procedural grounds. "Armenia does not support separate initiatives which are different from the OSCE Karabakh settlement package," said Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanyan. Armenia's opposition may have been based on the abandonment of Armenian settlements in the occupied territories. "International law bans this (settlements) and it is unfavorable for the future," said Gahrton.[117]

Turkey then tried to bring order into its neighborhood by sponsoring trilateral meetings among Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. One such meeting was held on the sidelines of a 2004 NATO meeting in Istanbul. Turkey agreed to create a special mechanism for more active involvement in the negotiations and to continue sponsoring the meetings. Moscow promptly protested,[118] demonstrating its continued commitment to be the only lead negotiator in the conflict.

Europe tried again, in the form of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). This group laid the majority of blame for the failure of peace talks with Armenia. PACE Resolution 1614 noted that "Considerable parts of the territory of Azerbaijan are still occupied by Armenian forces, and separatist forces are still in control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region." It supported the Azerbaijani position that Azerbaijani residents of Nagorno-Karabakh needed to be returned to the region before any decision was taken on final status: "The Assembly reaffirms that independence and secession of a regional territory from a state may only be achieved through a lawful and peaceful process based on the democratic support of the inhabitants of such territory and not in the wake of an armed conflict leading to ethnic expulsion and the de facto annexation of such territory to another state." It suggested that if the Minsk group could not get its act together, Armenia and Azerbaijan should consider using the International Court of Justice to arbitrate

the dispute. The resolution was not totally one-sided, however; it condemned the media in both Armenia and Azerbaijan for expressions of hatred, and it called on Azerbaijan to renew contacts "without preconditions" with political representatives of both Azerbaijani and Armenian communities from Nagorno-Karabakh.[119]

The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan reattempted negotiations in Warsaw in May 2005. After the meeting, the Azerbaijani foreign minister told the press that Armenia was prepared to give up the seven regions of Azerbaijan that surrounded Nagorno-Karabakh; Armenia was just trying to decide the best time for such an action. An Armenian foreign ministry spokesman in Yerevan immediately denied the report.[120] Faced with the contradictory positions expressed, there were no results from this meeting, either.

In 2006, the Minsk co-chairs invited the presidents to Rambouillet (near Paris) and Bucharest. The co-chairs developed a draft set of basic principles, combining elements of the comprehensive and step-by-step approaches. They proposed Nagorno-Karabakh remain within Azerbaijan during negotiations, but the final status would be determined by a referendum.[121] The agreement left open questions such as: what a corridor to Armenia meant; when various phases should be implemented; whether a referendum could change the internationally recognized status of Nagorno-Karabakh; and who could participate in the referendum (current residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, or legal residents of Nagorno-Karabakh including the Azerbaijani IDPs).

Intensive diplomatic activity followed these summits. The foreign ministers continued to meet throughout 2006. This culminated in another presidential meeting on the sidelines of a CIS summit meeting in Minsk. President Aliyev said the sides were approaching the final stage of negotiations, and Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanian said there were hopes of achieving agreement on even the most difficult issues.[122]

Despite all the efforts, little or no progress was made. Azerbaijani former negotiator Vafa Guluzade explained Russia was not ready for the settlement of the conflict. "Russia spares no effort in trying to stay in the region, (and) the signing of a peace agreement… would mean the pullout of the Russian military bases from Armenia," he said. He accused Russia of pressuring Armenia to present proposals that Azerbaijan could never accept.[123]

The Minsk Group co-chairs met in November 2007 in Madrid. There, they presented what has become known as the "Basic Principles."

These are the bases of all subsequent negotiations. The principles call for the final legal status of NK to be determined through a plebiscite;

> Azerbaijani territories under Armenian control around NK would be returned to Azerbaijan's control; but a corridor would link NK to Armenia. In addition, IDPs would have a right to return to NK on a voluntary basis. When the final Peace Agreement would be signed, international peacekeeping operations would be deployed to monitor the Armenian redeployment and the demilitarization of evacuated areas. [124]

Like previous proposals, most of the points of dispute were glossed over: Which step would be taken first; what was the nature of the interim status; what form would a corridor take; who would vote on the final legal status, and what was a legally binding expression of will; when could people return to their homes; what would be the nature of international security guarantees; who would be in the peacekeeping operation, etc., were all decisions left for future negotiations.

Russian President Medvedev sponsored two summit meetings between Ilham Aliyev and Armenian President Serzh Sarkisyan in 2008: in St. Petersburg in June and in Moscow in November. Little was accomplished. Medvedev also tried some shuttle diplomacy.

In July 2008, the Russian president visited Baku for meetings on a series of bilateral issues. He and President Aliyev signed a joint Declaration on Friendship and Strategic Partnership between Russia and Azerbaijan. It included language committing the parties to resolving the Karabakh conflict on the basis of the principles and norms of international law, UN Security Council resolutions, and the decisions of the OSCE relating to territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the inviolability of state borders.[125] Such language was not welcomed in Yerevan. To appease his Armenian allies, Medvedev traveled to Armenia in October for the opening of Russia Square there. At the conclusion of the visit, Sarkisyan said Armenia renewed their commitment to solving the conflict on the basis of the Madrid principles.[126]

As negotiations carried on, Armenian attitudes hardened. The non-Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijani territory that Armenia had captured during the war had long been considered bargaining chips to be traded for Azerbaijan's recognition of Karabakh's independence. As this end-state failed to materialize, Armenia no longer referred to the land as occupied territory, but rather as liberated territory. They developed a number of

historical and archeological arguments to "prove" the land was part of the ancestral Armenian homeland.[127] To the Armenian people, the seven captured provinces were no longer considered to be on the negotiating table. Peace negotiations stalled in 2010 and reached a full deadlock in 2011.[128]

In August 2014, Russian President Putin held a meeting in Sochi with Presidents Sarkisyan and Aliyev. It was another unilateral effort by the Russians to remain relevant. All the attendees pledged a willingness to compromise to achieve peace, but promised nothing. President Putin did not repudiate the Minsk process, stating Moscow respected all international formats for mediating the conflict. He said Russia had taken a unilateral initiative only because of its "special and particularly close relations" with both Armenia and Azerbaijan.[129] In a tit-for-tat response, US Secretary of State John Kerry organized a meeting of the two presidents the following month at the NATO summit that excluded Russia. This unilateral effort also failed to achieve any results.

In October 2014, French President Francois Hollande hosted Sarkisyan and Aliyev at a meeting that finally included the other Minsk co-chairs. A second summit meeting was in December 2015, when Switzerland invited the two leaders to meet in Zurich. Though tangible results of these meetings were negligible, they demonstrated the mediators' continuing ambition to achieve an agreement. In addition, the Minsk co-chairs visited the Caucasus in February 2015 on a fact-finding mission.

In late 2015, PACE weighed in again. It approved a draft resolution—with the Armenian delegates dissenting—for consideration by the entire Parliamentary Committee that stated, "The Assembly regrets that the Nagorno-Karabakh problem has been sidelined by other major international crises, and that the daily suffering of the victims of this conflict has been overshadowed by other human tragedies." It expressed regret that 20 years after armed hostilities had begun, Azerbaijani territory was still under Armenian occupation. It said secession could not take place "in the wake of an armed conflict leading to ethnic expulsion and the de facto annexation of such territory to another state." It then called for "the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces and other irregular armed forces from Nagorno-Karabakh and the other occupied territories of Azerbaijan," and "the establishment of full sovereignty of Azerbaijan in these territories."[130]

Despite unilateral and multilateral efforts to mediate, a number of outstanding issues remain between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The primary talks have long been paralyzed. In Steve Blank's assessment, "(T)he Minsk process has long since proven itself to be a failure—Moscow

has exploited and incited tensions here to advance its own ends.[131] The Council of Europe's PACE said that, in light of the lack of progress over the last 20 years, the Minsk Group should consider reviewing its approach to the resolution of the conflict.[132]

To break the impasse, in January 2016 Iran's Foreign Ministry renewed its offer to mediate the conflict. After fighting broke out again in April 2016, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif called Armenian Foreign Minister Nalbandian to declare the Islamic Republic's readiness to mediate. He then delivered the same message personally at a trilateral meeting with Azerbaijan and Turkish foreign ministers Mammadyarov and Cavusoglu. Iranian President Rouhani followed up at the highest level.[133] This offer of "friendly offices" was rejected in favor of continuing with the Minsk process, despite Minsk's lack of progress.

CONTRACT OF THE CENTURY

From the founding of the USSR through the Second World War, Baku was the center of the Soviet oil industry. As the USSR moved its production facilities to Western Siberia, however, Azerbaijani production declined because of a lack of investment. Between 1975 and 1995, production dropped by almost half: from 17 to 9 million tons per year.[134]

It appeared that Azerbaijan was destined to remain a poor country, although still the richest country in the South Caucasus. President Heydar Aliyev had other ideas, however. Geologists reported unexplored offshore oil and gas deposits in the Caspian Sea. Aliyev negotiated for western investment in new wells and in a pipeline to take the oil to world markets. On September 20, 1994, he signed the "Contract of the Century" that would turn Azerbaijan into a petroleum-fueled, regional economic powerhouse. Thirteen companies from eight countries signed a production sharing agreement that allowed a consortium to develop the offshore deposits at three fields: Azeri, Chiraq, and Guneshli (ACG). By 2014, Azerbaijan's net profit from ACG was $106 billion.[135]

The lead company for ACG and the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline was British Petroleum (BP). Even though it was a longer route than some, the new pipeline bypassed Russia and traversed Georgia and Turkey. This BTC pipeline became Azerbaijan's economic lifeline while reducing its economic dependency on Moscow.

Ever aware of the politics of the situation, Aliyev did two things to appease the Russians. He gave 10% of the offshore project to the Russian

oil company Lukoil (led by an ethnic Azerbaijani Vagit Alekperov), and he decided the first, early oil from the new platforms would feed the Russian pipeline network via an older pipeline. The first oil from ACG followed this Russian route and was loaded onto tankers at the Russian port of Novorossiysk in December 1999.[136]

The BTC pipeline went online in May 2005, and the first tanker departed Ceyhan terminal in June 2006. As the money poured in, Azerbaijan used it to build infrastructure and reduce unemployment. By 2011, Azerbaijan led the South Caucasus on indicators of development: It had a per capita GDP of $5,290, with less than 6% unemployment.[137] Oil accounted for 94% of the country's exports, and 73% of the national budget.[138]

The oil wealth transformed Azerbaijan, allowing President Aliyev to turn Baku into a model city. He also built the country's military capabilities. Azerbaijan was able to increase defense spending from $175 million in 2004 to an estimated $3.1 billion in 2011, exceeding Armenia's entire national budget.[139] *The Economist* reports that Azerbaijan's military spending increased 30-fold in the past decade, and it was planned to be $4.8 billion in 2015. As a result, the BTC pipeline became a strategic target. Nagorno-Karabakh's minister of war Levon Mnatsakanyan says the pipeline will be one the first targets in any new war. "This is a very serious financial resource for Azerbaijan and we need to deprive them of these means," he said. "If we'd known the situation would be like this today, we'd never have signed that truce 20 years ago."[140]

Some of the military spending has flowed to Israel, one of Azerbaijan's closest allies. President Aliyev described Azerbaijan's relationship with the Jewish state as like an iceberg, nine-tenths of it below the surface. Israel purchases 40–50% of its oil from Azerbaijan, and much of the revenue is funneled back to the Jewish state in the form of weapons purchases. In 2012, Baku signed contracts worth $1.6 billion to buy advanced weapons from Israel, and the two countries have begun joint production of drones in Baku.[141]

In 2015, the price of oil plummeted from a high of over $140 per barrel to approximately $30 per barrel. Azerbaijan's cost per barrel of production is $11,[142] so it continues to make a profit on its hydrocarbon exports. The drop in price has limited Azerbaijan's economic growth, slowing to 1% in 2015 from 2.8% in 2014.[143]

While the importance of the Caspian oil supply to the world market cannot be doubted, it should not be overstated. Caspian oil has not been the primary motivator for American support to Azerbaijan.

Rather, according to former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, "From the perspective of the Department of Defense, the biggest concern was with the role of the new post-Soviet military establishments in the Caucasian Republics."[144]

Russian Formal Support of Armenia

In 1995, Russia and Armenia signed a bilateral defense treaty that allowed the Soviet Red Army 261st Rifle Division to remain on Armenian soil. The 5000-man unit was renamed the 102nd Military Base of the Russian Forces in Transcaucasia and is located in Gyumri, about 75 miles north of Yerevan. The treaty was ratified by the Russian and Armenian parliaments in 1997. Under the terms of the treaty, the troops would be used to ensure security for Armenia along with the entire perimeter of the Armenia–Turkey border, and the Armenia–Iran borders.[145] There was no mention of Azerbaijan or Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia deepened its military ties with Armenia in August 1997, when Armenia's new government signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with Russia. The Kremlin committed itself to providing military support to Yerevan in the event of an attack or threats by a third party. While Armenia claims that this is a full military alliance that protects Karabakh, Russian Foreign Minister Primakov denied this. "I am authorized by Russian President Boris Yeltsin to state that the Treaty of the Russian Federation with Armenia is in no way targeted against Azerbaijan and will never be used in favor of those who are speaking against its territorial integrity," he said.[146]

Even before the treaty, Russia began providing Armenia with additional weaponry. Armenian Defense Minister Vazgen Sarkisyan boasted that Armenia's defense capability had doubled at no cost to the country's budget. Russian newspapers in early 1997 reported that Russia had delivered to Yerevan some $1 billion in military hardware, including 84 T-72 tanks, 50 BMP2 armored personnel carriers, 8 SCUD-B ballistic missile launchers, and 32 SCUD-B missiles, despite a Yeltsin directive of September 1993 banning arms sales to either Armenia or Azerbaijan pending a settlement in Karabakh.[147] In 2009, Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian proclaimed Armenia expected direct military assistance from the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in the event of another war with Azerbaijan. He quoted the CSTO's Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha, as confirming this promise of support.[148]

The 1995 bilateral treaty was renewed in 2010, extending the purpose of the troops to protect both the interests of the Russian Federation and the security of the Republic of Armenia. Armenian President Serzh Sarkisyan noted that the treaty extended the geographic and strategic responsibility of the troops.[149] While Russian leaders have been careful not to specify what their reaction would be in another Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict, Armenians believe Russia is committed to their side. An Interfax news agency report disclosed that President Medvedev had submitted a "protocol" to the Russian government that made clear the troops would protect Armenia's security "together with Armenian Army units."[150] The implication was that, if Armenia ever admitted it had Army units in Karabakh, Russia would be obligated to protect them.

Top officials from Russia and Armenia signed five defense agreements in June 2013, including an expanded military pact. Following the signing, Russian Security Council head Nikolai Patrushev commented that the two countries have "the highest possible level of ties—strategic relations."[151] The Russians followed up on Patrushev's comments in mid-February 2016, when they deployed a new fleet of MIG-29 fighter jets and MI-8MT helicopters to Gyumri.[152]

The Situation Today

Russia clearly tilts toward Armenia in the South Caucasus, but it has concurrently continued its role as the chief arms supplier to Azerbaijan. As an example, while the 2010 Russian–Armenian military agreement extended its Gyumri basing rights to 2044, at the same time Russia negotiated the sale of an S-300 air-defense system to Azerbaijan. Dashnak international bureau leader Giro Manoyan was outraged. "It is incomprehensible and worrisome that our strategic partner has entered into such a deal with our opponent," he commented. "We have to express our concern and dismay…"[153] As the Kremlin signed five bilateral military deals with Yerevan, Baku held a military parade featuring advanced Russian weaponry. Russia delivered $1 billion worth of weapons to Baku in June 2013, bringing the total value of weapons sales since 2010 to $3–4 billion.[154] "(M)ilitary and technical cooperation with Russia is measured at $4 billion and it tends to grow further," said Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev.[155]

The only clear winner in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been Russia, who has benefited by arms sales to belligerents on both sides. Russia does not appear interested in either country "winning" the

dispute. Rather, it seeks to preserve the mutual distraction and weakening of these former territories by keeping the conflict alive. Russia gains from the arm sales and has a reason to maintain a military presence in its former territory.

Despite its overwhelming military superiority in the area, Azerbaijan has hesitated to use force to reconquer Karabakh because of the presence of Russian troops in Armenia. This has not reduced its commitment to regaining control over its territory. President Aliyev continues to threaten Armenia with a military option. "Negotiations will continue whilst we have hope that territorial integrity will be restored," he said. "If we consider this to be impossible, then the state of Azerbaijan will restore its territorial integrity, using the military option… We can restore its territorial integrity through military means."[156]

Low-level violence along the line of contact has escalated in recent years. Beginning in July 2014, there was an increase in the number of incursions, casualties, and targeting of the civilian population. There was also and an increase in the use of heavy weaponry. In November 2014, an Armenian MI-24 military helicopter was downed during an Armenian military exercise in Aghdam. Three Armenian crew members were killed. It was the worst military incident between the two countries in 20 years.[157] Ambassadors in Baku concluded the entire year had been the most violent since the 1994 ceasefire.[158]

In early April 2016, heavy fighting broke out along the line of contact, with both sides claiming the other had broken the ceasefire. At least 18 Armenians and 12 Azerbaijanis were killed. Hundreds of Armenian volunteers rushed to the front line from inside the republic of Armenia.[159] Unlike previous small arms and mortar exchanges across the line, this fighting included drones[160] and Grad missiles. Azerbaijan reclaimed some villages and strategic highlands.[161] The Armenians denied they had lost any land, but their negotiating position proved they had: Karabakh military officials said they were ready to discuss terms of a truce, but only in the context of "restoring former positions."[162] Presidents Aliyev and Sarkisyan signed a truce in May 2016, while reiterating that there was no military solution to the overall conflict.[163]

The conflict demonstrated one thing clearly: With the Russian army overextended on the borders of Ukraine and fighting in Syria, its security guarantees to Armenia are subject to the Kremlin's interpretation—not Yerevan's. Despite the fact that Armenians believe the Russian military at Erebuni would defend Armenians in Karabakh, Moscow provided no

military support to the separatists. Instead, they put Foreign Minister Lavrov in front of a microphone to announce there was no military solution to the conflict. "It is inadvisable to change the format of the OSCE Minsk Group," he said.[164]

Russia's overstretched military may not have been the only reason why it did not intervene: It may not have decided which side in the conflict best served Russian national interests. In 2014, Russia's state-owned oil company Rosneft created a joint venture with Azerbaijan's state-owned oil company SOCAR, to jointly explore oil and gas fields in the two countries. Russia's arms sales to Azerbaijan are large, and Azerbaijani exports to Russia have been growing. Despite the years of military support to Armenia, "Putin cannot afford to lose Azerbaijan," said independent political analysts Dmitriy Oreshkin.[165]

As for the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic," no country (including Armenia) has given it legal recognition. By many objective measures, Nagorno-Karabakh has become a de facto extension of the neighboring Republic of Armenia. Its policies are determined by a small group who are dependent on Yerevan. Telecommunications and transport—by necessity—go through Armenia. Karabakh uses the Armenian Dram as its currency, and much of its budget is subsidized by the Armenian government. When traveling abroad, residents of Nagorno-Karabakh use Republic of Armenia passports which attest to their status as citizens of Armenia. Finally, much of its military strength comes from either Republic of Armenia soldiers or advisors. [166]

In some ways, however, Yerevan is a captive of Stepanakert, and not the other way around. When Armenian President Ter-Petrosyan indicated a willingness to compromise on Karabakh's status following the OSCE Lisbon Summit in 1996, his term came to an abrupt end. The last two presidents of Armenia, Kocharian and Sarkisyan, are from Karabakh and were military leaders there. They have been interested in protecting the interests of Armenians living in that enclave. Further proof of the ascendance of Karabakh interests over Yerevan's interests is the continuing inability of Armenia to reach a peace accord at the beginning of the Obama administration, despite the fact that such an accord would have resulted in the opening of Armenian borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan—prerequisites for the growth of international trade with the landlocked country.

ANALYSIS

Much has not been discussed in this narrative. There are reports of human rights abuses, political crackdowns, shootings on the line of contact, beheadings and pardons, and Russian soldiers killing families in their homes. As these incidents appear incidental to the main narrative, they have been glossed over. The focus, instead, has been on Russia's involvement in creating the crisis through its military support to both sides, Russia's attempts to maintain primacy of the peace process, and the benefits Russia receives from the continuing conflict.

Ceding leadership in the Minsk process to Russia through inaction and inattention of the other chairs means a perpetuation of the status quo, since Russia is the only country that benefits from that status quo.

The continuing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has resulted in over 30,000 dead, almost a million internally displaced persons (mostly Azerbaijani), Azerbaijan's loss of 14% of its territory, and Armenia's impoverishment and isolation. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh are either refugees or living in poverty and totally isolated from the international community. The only side to benefit from the status quo is Russia, who uses the conflict to fuel weapons sales to all sides and to maintain its presence in the South Caucasus.

The PACE rapporteur Robert Walter visited Baku in March 2015. (He also tried to visit Armenia, but governmental approval of his travel was repeatedly postponed). In discussions with Azerbaijani members of parliament, most of the MPs questioned how Russia could be part of any solution, since they were at the origin of the conflict and thus part of the problem. They also expressed their frustration with the Minsk Group, arguing that it preserved the status quo.[167]

Just as the MEPs criticized the role of Russia as a co-chair, the USA and France have their own problems maintaining neutrality. The large Armenian population in the USA has a significant role in guiding US policy on the issue, as evidenced by Congress' passage of Section 907. France has a similar Armenian constituency. It may be time to consider expanding the number of co-chairs to include countries that could be more neutral.

One possible co-chair could be the European Union. EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby has tried to secure a greater role for Brussels in the peace process, but has not found a useful role in this conflict on Europe's borders.[168]

Individual European countries might be also interested. Germany, for example, has already shown its ability to foster negotiations through its role in creating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran.

Another possible co-chair is the Republic of Turkey. There are reasons to believe that Turkey could be impartial. Eldar Mamedov, a member of the European Parliament, notes that the strategic alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan is actually a "not so perfect partnership." Mamedov points out that Azerbaijan remained neutral after Turkey shot down a Russian plane that crossed its Syrian border. Further, a good relationship with Moscow is crucial for Azerbaijan, since Russia is its major trading partner.[169] The country may not walk in lock step with Baku if it meant opposing the Kremlin.

Armenia has shown an ability to work with Turkey. In 2009, the two countries signed protocols restoring diplomatic relations and pledging to open its common border, despite previous Turkish statements that the border would only be opened after Armenia and Azerbaijan settled the Karabakh conflict. While the agreement was suspended after heavy Azerbaijani pressure on the Turkish government, it was significant that Ankara was willing to take such a position against Baku's interests in the first place.

This conflict differs in two respects from the other conflicts discussed in this book. First, Russia has no peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, although the conflict provides justification for Russia to keep its troops in Armenia. Second, there is a pronounced role of a neighboring state, not Russia, in perpetuating the conflict within Azerbaijan. Other than that, however, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict follows the pattern we have seen repeatedly.

An ethnic minority (Armenians) used ethnicity as the basis of their identity. By contrast, the central government (Baku) tried to incorporate all ethnicities into a new nation of Azerbaijan through an appeal to a shared ideology of inclusiveness. Within Azerbaijan today, the three major Abrahamic religions are all represented: Muslim, Christian, and Jewish. People speak different languages and are of differing ethnicities.

The two types of nationalism conflicted in the territories of both Armenia and Azerbaijan throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. By the time of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, mass population movements had eliminated the possibility of conflict except in NK itself. There, the ethnically based minority, supported by their co-ethnics in neighboring Armenia, rebelled against the internationally recognized government of

Azerbaijan. Russia intervened on both sides of the conflict. It supplies weaponry and military aid to both sides. As a co-chair of the Minsk peace process, it has made sure that no other country or organization is successful in mediating a peace. Minsk itself remains stalemated, because it is in Russia's influence to perpetuate the stalemate.

Specifically, the stalemate keeps a potential rival—Azerbaijan, the strongest country in the South Caucasus—weak and divided. At the same time, Russia augments its power by acquiring a diplomatic ally—Armenia. It also allows Russia to expand its military footprint by acquiring basing rights in Armenia. Faced with a world the Russian president perceives as potentially weak, Russia uses its intervention on both sides of the conflict to maintain its own power superiority in the region.

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Conclusion

The international world order is composed primarily of nation-states. There are also international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) or the European Union (EU); non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International; multilateral organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); and international corporations such as ExxonMobil. All of these organizations are either governed by rules established by nation-states or are composed of the nation-states themselves. In the latter case, nation-states have voluntarily agreed to join together for their own advantage. In short, the nation-states are sovereign, with no external power exercising authority over them. Some of these nation-states include the USA, the Russian Federation, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. All are sovereign—free to pursue policies for their own benefit.

The main benefit that all countries seek is their own survival. People seeking to rule themselves birthed most countries of the world in the twentieth century. They emerged from colonialism and joined the ranks of nation-states when other nation-states recognized their existence. In cases where smaller units have sought independence from the nation-state, the result has been civil war. In some cases, such as Ethiopia–Eritrea or North Sudan–South Sudan, the struggle for separation has been successful. In other cases, such as Nigeria–Biafra or the USA–the Confederate States of America, the struggle for separation was brutally suppressed. In all cases, the international community accepted the parent nation-state as the legitimate government until both the secessionist

unit and the central government agreed to an independent status for the rebels.

The twentieth century also witnessed an example of a country trying to extinguish itself by merging with another country. This was the United Arab Republic experiment. Charged with the spirit of Arab Nationalism, Syria (along with Yemen) agreed in 1958 to be subsumed by Egypt. The experiment failed in 1961 when a military coup in Syria brought to power a government dedicated to regaining its own sovereignty.

Another post-colonial experiment is the United Arab Emirates, in which seven independent emirates agreed to join in a federation. It survives because, while the emirates have surrendered some external sovereignty to the central government, each has retained internal sovereignty over its territory. An even looser confederation is the European Union, in which states "pool" their sovereignty over certain issues, such as the right of Brussels to decide the kind of potato one can use to make fries. Individual states maintain their external sovereignty, with their own defense and foreign policies. "It isn't really absolutely clear when America wants to deal with Europe who exactly the authorized voice of Europe would be," said former Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. "Most importantly, on many issues, there doesn't really exist a unified European strategic approach."[1]

A world order composed of units with no overarching authority is considered an anarchic world order. Each sovereign nation-state is responsible for its own security. Because the primary goal of a nation-state is its survival, and other nation-states are the governing units that could challenge its survival, every country views others in the world system as potential threats. To manage these potential threats, each country seeks to defend itself by maximizing its own power. The power differential is a zero-sum game where it is the increase or decrease in power relative to the potential threats that are important. Traditional realist political theory and neorealist political theory often concentrate on governments trying to increase their power. Since the important element is how much power one possesses *relative to* another country, then a decrease in the second country's power is equally as important as in increase in one's own.

If a country cannot generate internally enough power to prevent hostile action by a potential threat, it must seek to increase its power externally. This means aligning itself with other countries. If a country seeks

to align itself with another country or countries to stave off a potential threat, this is referred to as balancing. If, on the other hand, the country believes that even alliances will not bring it sufficient power to oppose the larger country, then it joins with the larger country in an arrangement known as bandwagoning.

In eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, the most powerful country in the two regions (and thus the greatest potential enemy) is the Russian Federation. Various countries have employed various strategies to build their strength, so that they may remain sovereign despite the potential threat they face. Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine have sought to balance against Russia; Armenia has chosen to bandwagon with Russia. Only Azerbaijan has attempted to pursue both strategies simultaneously, with mixed results.

Moldova sought closer alignment with Romania, a member of the European Union and NATO. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, it sought its independence from Russia. It signed an economic Association Agreement with the European Union, joined the European Energy Community, and became a NATO partner for peace.

Georgia also sought good relations with the West. Achieving its independence from the ruins of the Soviet Union, it applied for NATO membership despite Russian warnings that membership would threaten the Kremlin's vital interests. Georgia also signed an Association Agreement with the EU.

Ukraine achieved international recognition after the USSR's collapse, even if President Vladimir Putin did not believe Ukraine was a real country. The Russian Federation recognized this independence and guaranteed Ukraine's international borders (including Crimea) in the Budapest Memoranda. Ukraine sought NATO membership and signed the Association Agreement with the EU. Moscow's attempts to stop the association with the European Union was one of the causes of the Maidan Revolution that led to the current fighting in Ukraine.

In Armenia's case, the government chose to bandwagon with the Kremlin. It has welcomed Russian troops on its soil and has remained a solid ally of Russia. It is a member of the Kremlin-backed Collective Security Treaty Organization and is a dialogue partner of the Beijing/Moscow-endorsed Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It is a member of the Eurasian Economic Community and is not in association with the European Union.

Azerbaijan is unique, in that it has established successful economic ties to the West while maintaining some security ties to Moscow. In building the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline, the Azerbaijanis established themselves as an energy source independent of the Kremlin. At the same time, Baku has managed its foreign policy in such a manner that Moscow is Azerbaijan's principle weapons supplier. While a NATO Partner for Peace, it has signed an Association Agreement with neither the EU nor the Eurasian Economic Community.

Russia is also a member of the world order of sovereign states. It, too, must consider the threat to itself from other countries. It also must build its power to oppose these potential threats. President Vladimir Putin subscribes to this realist view of the world. He believes that other countries, such as NATO members and specifically the USA, represent a threat to the Russian Federation. His National Security Strategy demonstrates this approach. "The strengthening of Russia is taking place against a backdrop of new threats to national security that are of a multifarious and interconnected nature. The Russian Federation's implementation of an independent foreign and domestic policy is giving rise to opposition from the United States and its allies, who are seeking to retain their dominance in world affairs."[2]

In the Russian view, it is the increase in Western power that is a threat to Russia's national security. "The buildup of the military potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the endowment of it with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law, the galvanization of the bloc countries' military activity, the further expansion of the alliance, and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders are creating a threat to national security." Most troublesome is the West's attempts to halt Russian balancing attempts with countries on its periphery, such as Ukraine.[3]

History molds the Russian perception of potential external threats. Mongols destroyed the supposed birthplace of the Russian state, the Duchy of Kievan Rus, in 1223. Lithuania seized territory in 1368–72, Poland invaded in 1609, and Sweden invaded in 1707. Napoleon's invasion is memorialized in Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, Hitler's Operation Barbarossa brought the Wehrmacht close enough to see the towers of the Kremlin. George Kennan's containment strategy was designed to limit the power of the Soviet Union. It resulted in a series of alliances that encircled the USSR: NATO, CENTO, SEATO, etc. After the

collapse of the Soviet empire, the Russians perceived NATO encroachment into eastern Europe as a direct threat to their national interests.

The Kremlin protected itself during the Soviet era by establishing a *cordon sanitaire* between the USSR and its major nemeses, the Western powers. Despite power-sharing promises made at Yalta, the Kremlin kept full monopoly control of the eastern European countries that became known as the Warsaw pact. These nations were also the location of Soviet military bases. The upheaval of 1989–1991 eliminated this buffer zone, and the Red Army was forced to withdraw from most of its cantons to new areas behind Russian borders.

The Russian Federation wanted a new security buffer and eyed the former republics of the Soviet Union. Where the newly independent republics were willing to cooperate, organizations such as the Confederation of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Union sprang up. When the Kremlin believed it risked a borderland slipping into a Western orbit, however, Moscow created frozen conflicts to weaken, divide, and—ultimately—prevent these countries from drifting far from their eastern orbits.

It did so through the manipulation of nationalist impulses among border populations. These countries had identified themselves for seven decades as members of the Soviet Union. While there had been sporadic nationalist outbursts against the Kremlin's rule, those movements took a more ethnic tinge after independence. When the USSR dissolved, the successor states faced a Herculean task: to build new nationalist feelings for the new nations. To do so, they adopted the French form of nationalism: regardless of ethnicity, residents of a state were members of that state's polity.

The process was not seamless. Central governments had a tendency to reflect the interests of majority population rather than those of the minorities. Interethnic conflicts arose, usually over the sharing of resources. The Kremlin encouraged minorities to think of themselves as distinct from the majority population. In Transnister, Moscow built up the belief that the local minority possessed its own ethnic nationalism. It followed a similar strategy in Georgia for many years, before pushing the concept that the Abkhazians and Ossetians were actually Russian citizens. In Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia supported groups claiming an affinity with neighboring Armenia. Finally, in Ukraine, Russia denied the legitimacy of the Ukrainian state. In all cases, Russia claimed a special status, and

the right to intervene to protect either the peace or the rights of Russian citizenry.

Once the Kremlin succeeded in inflaming secessionist tendencies, it provided military support in various formats to the rebels. It then used its overwhelming regional presence to claim a place in negotiations, where Moscow used its position to keep any peace from reaching fruition.

Unwilling to risk more than limited open military intervention, the Russians invented a new form of warfare: a hybrid war. It used the presence of its peacekeepers and its diplomatic prowess to keep these conflicts in a "no war, no peace" situation that perpetuates a Russian role in its borderlands. (Of course, when looking at eastern Ukraine, the "no war" part of the equation is strained.) It is a pattern that the Kremlin has perfected.

In Moldova, Russia's 14th Army appears to have stumbled into discovering the Russian technique. This military unit intervened on behalf of the Transnistrian separatists, apparently without the prior knowledge or approval of the Kremlin. Once Moscow recognized the ceasefire provided a justification for the continuation of a Russian military presence, the troops remained as peacekeepers. Russia then provided unconditional support to maximal separatist demands, so that the Moldovan government could find no common ground in negotiations with the rebels. Transnister also remained economically dependent on Russia. Russia maintained that Transnister is still a part of Moldova despite Chisinau's inability to exercise authority in the area.

In Azerbaijan, Russia originally tried militarily supporting both the government of Baku and Armenian separatists. As in Moldova, at least some of the military units acted independently of Moscow. By the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, however, the Kremlin was clearly supporting the Armenians. This allowed the Kremlin to assume the role of "defender" of Armenia. As a result, the largest Russian military base outside of the Russian Federation itself is located on Armenian territory. To keep the pot boiling, the Kremlin assumed the role of co-chair of the Minsk process. This is the principle negotiation designed to restore peace in the area. Rather than moving negotiations toward a peaceful conclusion, however, Moscow appeared to have two goals: (1) To keep all other countries from assuming a leadership role in the peace talks; and (2) To keep the two sides of the conflict from achieving peace. It did this by accepting the principles of the Minsk process, but by keeping the

two sides from agreeing as to which principles should be implemented in what particular order. The frozen conflict provides a rationale for Russian troops in Armenia, for Armenian troops allied to Russia to be on internationally recognized Armenian soil, for Armenia to be kept economically destitute and totally dependent on Moscow's largesse, and to give Moscow a major market for weaponry. The Kremlin is an equal opportunity arms merchant: selling to the governments of both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In Georgia, Russia has assumed a more overt role. It provided "peacekeepers" to stop the violence surrounding separatists' attempts to leave Georgia during the Soviet breakup. In doing so, it established a de facto border with the rest of Georgia for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They agreed to withdraw all troops from the area, but then claimed peacekeepers were not part of the withdrawal. When President Saakashvili decided in 2008 to restore Georgian sovereignty over the separatist regions, the Kremlin used two excuses for invading Georgia: (1) It was fulfilling its duty as a peacekeeper; and (2) It was protecting the rights of Russian citizens living in the area. The Kremlin eventually scored a decisive victory in the conflict, although the Russian army's weakness surprised everyone. It then reverted to its peacekeeping role until Moscow recognized the independence of the two countries. Russia has military bases in both of the enclaves and is in the process of absorbing the statelets' militaries into the Russian army.

Russia participated in the Geneva Peace Talks in the role of mediator. In that capacity, it supported separatist demands that internally displaced persons not be included in any discussions. It also used the venue to argue for the continued presence of Russian troops in the area, claiming that demands for withdrawal of military forces should only include combatants in the 2008 conflict. Russia argued that it was not a participant in the conflict and therefore did not have to withdraw. Russia also refused to accept a Georgian proposal that all sides renounce the use of force, again stating it never used force in the first place and therefore should not be bound by such a pledge.

Ukraine has seen many of the same Russian tactics used in other conflicts. On the Crimean Peninsula, Russian troops staged a putsch. Following a rigged plebiscite, the Kremlin annexed the area. In the East, Russia supplied military support to separatists, while denying they had played any military role in the area. It dismissed large concentrations of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border as participants in routine

military exercises. Russia played its all too familiar role of mediator in negotiating the two Minsk accords. In that capacity, it insisted on positions designed to legitimate the claims of the rebels to some sort of sovereign status. President Putin introduced proposals to resolve the conflict but, as in the Nagorno-Karabakh Minsk process, the Kremlin refused to negotiate on sequencing. All agreed on a ceasefire, exchange of prisoners, devolution of some power to local authorities, and Ukrainian control of the Ukrainian border. Until all separatist demands were met first; however, Russia refused to pressure the rebels to meet Kyiv's demands.

In Moldova and in Nagorno-Karabakh, Moscow and the international community have consistently refused to recognize separatist regions as states. In Georgia, the Kremlin has recognized the breakaway regions as independent states, although it is slowly integrating state structures into the Russian Federation. In Ukraine, the Kremlin annexed Crimea outright. Despite Putin's claims of a right to intervene in "Novorossiya," however, Russia has neither recognized the independence nor annexed separatist regions in Eastern Ukraine. It maintains there are no Russian troops serving in an official capacity in the Donbas, despite repeated sightings of Russian officers, troops, and materiel. The Russian ruble circulates as the rebel currency, and Russian financial aid supported rebel governments.

The first Western chronicler of the Kojaly massacre, Thomas Goltz, described the Russian tactics this way: "There is not a civil war or separatist conflict in the former Soviet Union without them. They fight alongside Armenians against Azeris in Nagorno-Karabakh and fly bombing missions for Abkhaz rebels in the war against Georgia; they openly side with the conservative forces in Tajikistan against the independence-minded Islamists, and join their own ethnic kin against the state in Moldova. They are the Russians…No colonial power, from Darius to de Gaulle, has ever voluntarily and peacefully relinquished its previous sphere of influence, and the crumbling of the Russian-led Soviet empire is yet another case of painful decolonization…(T)he Russian policy appears to be based on the tacit threat of dismemberment of those states that wish to leave Moscow's orbit. That is effected by promoting the concept of self-determination of local minorities at the expense of the territorial integrity of existing states ."[4]

In its border wars and frozen conflicts, Russia is winning the struggle. While the West basked in the conceit it had "won" the Cold War, Russia rebuilt its economic, military, and diplomatic capabilities. It has kept its

nuclear deterrent, guaranteeing no direct retaliation on its own territory, and converted at least a portion of its military into an expeditionary force. While Russia may lack the American worldwide lift capability, it became an effective regional power.

The Kremlin has slowly rebuilt its security buffer for the Russian Federation. The 14th Army is stationed in Transnistria, Moldova; its 102nd military base is in Gyumri, Armenia; its Armenian allies fight in Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian troops are in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, even as separatist forces in those breakaway provinces are absorbed into the Russian army. In Ukraine, the Russian military fully controls Crimea, its allies fight in the Donbas, and there are credible reports of direct Russian military intervention in the conflict to protect those allies. Because the governments of Ukraine and Georgia do not exercise control over all its international territory, they are unable to join the NATO alliance.

Diplomatically, Russia is the author of the Minsk accords in Ukraine and maintains they are peaceful arbiters. In Moldova, Russia was the author of the failed Kozak memorandum and continues to be a cosponsor of ineffective peace talks. In Georgia, Russia is a cosponsor of the Geneva Talks while aggravating the conflict through its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as states. In Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia is a cosponsor of the Minsk process that has failed to make any movement for two decades while providing weaponry to all sides in the conflict. With little forward movement in any of these diplomatic initiatives, Russia has a justification for its presence in these countries.

Politically, all the separatist "governments" are allied with Moscow. At the same time, pro-Kremlin officials lead the governments of Moldova, Georgia and Armenia. Economically, Russia convinced Armenia and Moldova to abandon its association with the European Union.

As a result of these efforts, Russia stands to benefit from a regional realignment. Realist political theory predicts that if a country is unable to find allies sufficient to balance against a potential threat, then the country will bandwagon with that threat. The West has made clear it will not oppose Russian incursions into non-NATO countries. This is true even if the USA pledged to guarantee the international borders of a country, as it did for Ukraine in the Budapest Memoranda . Neither Western participation in peace talks nor anti-Russian economic sanctions have dislodged Russian influence in the borderlands. Rather, the continuation of frozen conflicts has only strengthened the Russian position.

A final proposition of realist political theory is the security dilemma. Two sides in a conflict seeking to increase their own security by acquiring additional power actually destabilize the international system. Russian actions in the borderlands, particularly in Georgia and Ukraine, have resulted in increasing instability. The USA and the European Union have imposed sanctions on Kremlin insiders, Western military maneuvers and trainers have moved into some of the borderlands, civilian airliners have been shot down, and active fighting has flared up on lines of control. There is talk of a "new" Cold War on both sides of the ideological divide.

Russian successes in the borderlands have encouraged the Kremlin to pursue a more aggressive policy. In energy policy, Russia is taking steps to become less reliant on the West as a principle customer. It has developed the Eastern Siberia–Pacific Ocean (ESPO) Pipeline to deliver oil to China and the developing countries of Southeast Asia. It also is completing the Power of Siberia pipeline to deliver 38 bcm annually of natural gas to China. It is negotiating a second pipeline to increase deliveries to China, as well as the Turkstream pipeline and Nord Stream 2 pipeline to bypass Ukraine.

Politically, Russia continues attempts to stop NATO expansion. Faced with Montenegro's desire to become a member of the alliance, which would deprive Moscow of a possible naval base on the Adriatic, it appears that Russia was behind a 2016 failed coup attempt. The goal was to replace the pro-Western government with one more amenable to the Kremlin. The coup plotters had planned to dress in police uniforms, storm the Parliament building, and shoot the prime minister. Montenegro's authorities arrested twenty Montenegrins and Serbs, many of whom had obtained military experience fighting alongside pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. The arrests were coordinated with the government of Serbia, who detained several Russian nationals in possession of money and special forces uniforms. The Serbian government then deported the Russians, reportedly after the personal intervention of the Russian Security Council Chief, Nikolai Patrushev. Days later, an arms cache was unearthed near the home of the Serbian prime minister, who previously had countenanced Serbian participation in NATO military exercises.[5]

Diplomatically, Moscow appears to be creating a new, anti-Western regional alliance consisting of Russia, Syria, Iran, Hizballah, and Hamas. This grouping opposes a loose, unofficial alliance of the USA, Saudi Arabia,

and Israel. The Russian-supported grouping opposes Western activity in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, the Palestinian territories, etc.

By far, the most important development is Russia's willingness to intervene directly in the Syrian Civil War. This time, Russia has not had to stir up ethnic hatreds to secure a reason for their military presence: The Syrian government invited them to intervene. Russia did so to protect its national interests. The government of Bashar al-Assad is a major Russian arms customer, and Syria has long been allied with both the Soviet Union and Russia. Moscow only has one military base in the Eastern Mediterranean: at Tartus. Officially, it is a naval repair facility leased from the Syrian government. In January 2017, the two governments agreed to an agreement to upgrade the facility and extend the Russian lease for 49 years. The agreement stipulates that Syria will not make any objections to military activities at the base and that the base will be outside of Syrian government jurisdiction.[6] In addition, in October 2016 Syria gave Russia its first permanent airbase in the Middle East, Khmeimim in Latakia. Russia does not pay any fee, or pay taxes, for the possession and use of the base.[7]

Russia also built an integrated air-defense system in the country, with S-300 and S-400 missile batteries. The stated purpose of the missile batteries is to defend Russian service members in the country, but the Ministry of Defense defined this protection in such a way that it places the Syrian military under its defensive umbrella. "Any missile or air strikes on the territory controlled by the Syrian government will create a clear threat to Russian servicemen," said Russian Defense Ministry Spokesman General Igor Konashenov.[8]

The Russian navy had used the base a rotational basis from the fall of the USSR until 2013. In June, Russian chief of staff Valerie Gerasimov announced the first permanent Russian naval deployment in the Mediterranean: 16 warships and three ship-based helicopters.[9]

As Russian military personnel poured into a country outside of the former Soviet Union for the first time, in September 2015 the air force began a series of strikes. Moscow claimed the attacks were against Islamic State (ISIS, ISIL, Da'esh) targets. The US disagreed and accused Moscow of striking pro-Western rebel forces. The attacks were highly effective, and in October, President Assad thanked President Vladimir Putin for his intervention. Assad implied that the central government had been on the verge of losing the civil war, but Russia's intervention had saved him. In November, Russia deployed ground troops, including

its most advanced battlefield tank, the T-90. In March 2016, Putin reported he was withdrawing the majority of his troops from Russia, since they had accomplished their mission.[10]

Whether the troops were truly withdrawn or not, Putin's announcement did little to stop the tempo of Russian operations. Russian troops immediately began supporting the Syrian army in its capture of Palmyra from ISIS. In November, the Russian navy's sole nuclear aircraft carrier, the Admiral Kuznetsov, and a flotilla of eight vessels including its salvage tug, assumed their station off the Syrian coast. It soon began air operations, losing two aircraft that crashed into the sea. Eventually, the Kuznetsov wandered away, having achieved little by its presence.

The Russians turned to their ally, the Iranians, to assist in its operations in Syria. With no base of operations in the east of Syria, it sent a fleet of bombers to the Iranian Noje airbase in Hamedan. From there they launched airstrikes on Syrian rebel targets, destroying ammunition dumps linked to ISIS. The Russian Defense Ministry confirmed the attacks. Previously, the Russian planes had to use airbases in Russia, and the Iranian base shortened the flight by a thousand miles.[11]

What happened next was unexpected and demonstrated some of the pitfalls Russia faces in its efforts to expand its international military reach. Article 146 of the Iranian Constitution states that the establishment of any kind of foreign military base in Iran, even for peaceful purposes, is forbidden. There is no modifying clause, such as "unless it is in the interest of the state." The ban is total. Officials in Tehran had granted Russia permission to use the Hamadan base in violation of their own constitution. Once the matter became public, members of the Iranian parliament threatened to launch an investigation. Faced with an intense public backlash, Iran withdrew its permission. Minister of Defense Brig. General Hossein Dehghan accused Russia of publicizing Iranian acquiescence excessively. He branded the Russian behavior as a "betrayal of trust" and "ungentlemanly."

Russia withdrew its military wing amid a flurry of face-saving statements on all side. Minister Deghan denied there was any written agreement, that Iran had only allowed the Russians to use the base temporarily as a refueling stop. He said the Russians were not there to stay. Russian Major General Igor Konashenkov replied that all aircraft had returned to Russian territory because they had completed their mission.[12]

The Russians have continued their long-standing practice of being involved militarily in a conflict while also playing a role in peace talks. Although the Arab League launched a peace plan as early as 2011, Russia tried to elbow its way into the negotiation's leadership at the beginning of 2012. After the opposition, Syrian National Council rejected the possibility of talks in Moscow with the Syrian government, Russian ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin proposed a three-point peace plan. According to former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, the proposal included Bashar Assad surrendering his power after peace talks began. The proposal went nowhere, either because the West was convinced the Assad regime was on the verge of collapse or because they did not believe Churkin could deliver.[13]

Two Geneva conferences sponsored by the United Nations, failed to halt the conflict. In Geneva 1, Kofi Annan issued a communique on the need for a transitional government. Supposedly, the five members of the UN Security Council, including Russia, agreed to the proposal. Although Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that Assad could not be part of the transition, Russia blocked a provision that called for the Syrian president to step down.[14] The parties failed to reach any agreement in Geneva 2.

Preliminary peace talks began in Vienna in October 2015. By mid-November, participants agreed the UN should again try to convene negotiations between the Syrian government and opposition. In anticipation, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2254, endorsing the talks. Geneva 3 began in January 2016, with the Syrian government and opposition representatives refusing to sit in the same room. When the talks were suspended 4 days later, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov gave full support to the Syrian government. He called on the USA to put pressure on the Syrian opposition, while describing the belief that Syria without Assad would be a better place to be an "illusion." He also characterized the Syrian opposition's positions as unconstructive.[15]

Geneva peace talks continue, but Russia has tried to assume control by creating parallel talks in Astana, Kazakhstan. Russia invited Iran, Turkey, the Syrian government and the opposition to the January 2017 talks—leaving the USA in the cold. At a second round in March, the opposition refused to attend.[16] Should the Astana talks continue, Russia would again have the ability to delay peace until it achieves its goals.

The other place to watch for Russia's expansion of influence is the Republic of Turkey. Relations between the two countries had been

warming for some time, despite being on opposite sides in the Syrian conflict. Russian aircraft began violating Turkish airspace in October 2015, and there were incidents of Russian pilots illuminating Turkish aircraft flying on the border with their attack radar. US Secretary of State John Kerry condemned the Russians for this behavior, warning that it could lead to an aircraft being shot down.[17]

Despite cooperation in other fields (primarily economic), warming relations came abruptly to a halt in November 2015 when Kerry's warning came true. A Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian SU-24 fighter aircraft. Rebel ground forces killed the pilot as he parachuted. Turkey claimed that the Russian plane had violated Turkish airspace, and was only shot down after repeated radio commands to the aircraft to turn back. Russia denied both the radio calls and the border violation. It claimed the Turks fired on the Russian aircraft over Syrian territory.

Russian President Putin described the attack as a stab in the back by terrorist accomplices. He said Russia would never tolerate crimes such as the attack, and he warned of serious consequences.[18] Within hours, Russia slapped Ankara with a series of sanctions. The Kremlin banned Turkish foodstuffs from the Russian export market, Turkish travel in Russia without visas, and Russian tourists' vacations on Turkish beaches. It put on hold plans to build the Turkstream natural gas pipeline.

The sanctions hurt Ankara, especially the ones aimed at the Turkish tourism industry. Turkey sought to restore relations with the Kremlin. After 9 months, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sent a letter to Vladimir Putin. The president said Turkey never intended to shoot down a Russian Federation aircraft and that he had always seen Russia as a strategic partner and a friend. Erdogan expressed regret at the incident, offered damages to the family of the deceased pilot, and expressed interest in resolving the dispute.[19] Deputy Foreign Minister Mehmet Simsek said the pilot had made the decision on his own authority to shoot down the plane. Turkey had no hostile feelings toward Russia.[20] Erdogan then made a pilgrimage to St. Petersburg to meet with Putin directly. In response, President Putin announced he would gradually remove the economic restrictions on Turkey.

Almost immediately, talks resumed on the construction of Turkstream under the Black Sea. In addition, Turkey moved closer militarily to Russia. In Syria, Turkey reversed its 5-year position that Bashar al-Assad had to be deposed. Instead, they accepted a Russian peace proposal that would allow Assad to stay in power. A settlement without Assad, said a

representative, would be unrealistic.[21] With a Russian–Turkish ceasefire going into effect, Russia was in the Syrian drivers' seat.

As Turkish relations with Russia improved, its ties to the West frayed considerably. Turkey had long opposed the Western coalition aligning with Kurdish militias in Syria. Ankara believed these Kurds—the People's Protection Forces, or YPG, were an arm of a terrorist group fighting the Turkish state, the PKK. In addition, Turkey accused the West of supporting a failed coup attempt in July 2016. Ankara identified the coup plotters as followers of Fethullah Gulen, a religious figure who had broken with the Erdogan government. Gulen lived on a farm in Pennsylvania, having previously received political asylum. This appeared to many to mean a US hand in the coup attempt. Things looked even worse when the top military officers at the Incirlik airbase were implicated in the coup. Incirlik is a NATO airbase in the south of Turkey and the home of a major American military force.

Turkey then launched a massive crackdown on the opposition. The government fired tens of thousands of government workers in the civil service, universities, judges, etc. As both the USA and the European Union condemned Turkey for using the coup attempt as an excuse to destroy a democratic opposition, the Erdogan government grew ever closer to the Kremlin.

Russia has inflamed nationalist tendencies among ethnic groups on its borders, which has led these groups to demand self-government. As the separatists turned violent, Russia sent its military into the fray to restore order. It then sponsored peace talks that they controlled, to ensure that no peace would be reached. This gave Russia the opportunity to weaken its opponents and to keep their troops bivouacked in forward positions. As the frozen conflicts have dragged on, pro-Moscow forces are slowly assuming control of the governments on both sides. Russian power and influence has grown, especially in relation to the countries on its borders.

Looking to the future, Russia continues to expand its power. For the first time since 1991, it has deployed its troops outside the borders of the Soviet Union. It has not had to formulate ethnic strife in Syria; the conflict was ongoing. As in the borderlands, however, Russia has used the conflict as an excuse to expand its military position in the country. It has signed a basing agreement that gives it unfettered use of Syrian territory for the next five decades. Then, following its Standard Operating Procedure, Russia has taken control of the peace process. It is now in the

position of dictating the pace of negotiations, and of controlling events on the ground to maximize its own advantage.

Russian adventurism in Moldova and Karabakh paid it few dividends outside of its immediate area. The biggest gain for Moscow for its involvement in Georgia and Ukraine has been the weakening Eurasian belief in Western commitments to the region. Russian involvement in Syria, however, has had a major payoff: It is on the verge of splitting the NATO alliance. Cognizant of its reliance on Russian energy, aware that Russia can control unrest on its southern border, and angry at the West's perceived abandonment, Turkey is moving closer to the Kremlin.

In all cases, realist political theory explains Russian actions. By weakening the countries on the borderlands, Russia grows its power relative to its neighbors, the European Union, and the USA. In Syria, Russia has expanded its military footprint while winning the loyalty of an old ally. In Turkey, Russia seems to have succeed in convincing the authorities to bandwagon with the Kremlin. In the zero-sum game of realpolitik, this is a double win: It strengthens Russia by gaining a new ally, and it weakens the West as an ally slips away.

As long as Russia's realist calculations justify its continued meddling in the borderlands in violation of international law, there is little hope for compromise. The West has to find some way to increase the cost for Russia, until it is no longer in the Russian interest to encourage frozen conflicts. Until then, Russia will continue to protect its national security interests by destabilizing its borderlands.

Faced with these challenges, what should be the response of the USA and its allies? First, the USA must reassure its treaty allies, such as the countries of NATO, that American commitment to the common defense remains strong. American and European support of Article V has proven an effective deterrent against aggression for almost seven decades.

Second, there should be no exceptions to this NATO commitment. The USA needs to support all its NATO allies, especially when a NATO ally believes one of its vital interests in being threatened. The USA must tell its NATO ally Turkey that America is committed to its common defense, and will not treat with groups that Turkey has identified as terrorists dedicated to the overthrow of the Turkish state. Turkey has fought on the side of the USA in the Korean War and has given NATO permission to enforce from Incirlik Airbase the "no fly" zone over Northern Iraq. It served as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism for

four decades, and much of the fuel that is essential to the economies of Israel and Europe transits Turkish territory. Turkey is too valuable to the Western alliance to be lost.

Third, the USA and NATO should be careful when making promises. If the West was not prepared to defend Georgia and Ukraine against aggression, it should not have dangled potential NATO membership before those countries. Similarly, if the USA declares a "red line" as in Syria, or signs international guarantees such as the Budapest Memoranda, it must be prepared to back up words with action.

Fourth, ever since Dean Acheson stood "Present at the Creation" at the end of World War II, the West has stood for the preservation of international order. This has led the spread of democracy, decolonization, the liberation of eastern Europe and Central Asia, and an explosion of international trade that has lifted millions from poverty. This international order includes the renunciation of the acquisition of territory by force and the preservation of international boundaries. America and NATO need to oppose Russian actions in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Ukraine, Donbas, and Karabakh. The form this opposition takes should be based on national interest, and not on rhetorical flourishes.

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