

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 UNION²

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 Hungary 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, 2015⁶⁹. 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 sometimes swelled to a half million put tremendous pressure on the authorities. 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 support 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. Yanukovich tried to put pressure on the reformists by accusing them of tearing the country apart. On November 28, 2004, he arranged for two plane loads 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 separatists if Yushchenko used his influence to dissolve the encampment on the Maidan, Kyiv's main square. Prime Minister Yanukovich 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 millions of dollars into civil society groups for the purposes of democracy promotion. Most of the money was directed toward Yushchenko supporters. On the other side, Moscow had begun supporting Yanukovich 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 Yanukovich campaign.⁹¹

Russian President Putin visited Ukraine twice to back Yanukovich 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 Yanukovich 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 Yanukovich 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—fore-shadowing 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 Yanukovich 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 Yanukovich’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.

Yanukovich fled to Russia. The USA took no position on the legality of Yanukovich’s removal, but supported the interim government that followed. “We believe that Yanukovich 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 Yanukovich 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 Yanukovich, 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 Yanukovich (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 Tatars 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 state 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, *Novorossiia*, 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 *Novorossiia* (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 "peace-keeping 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 protesters 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 helicopters 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 passenger 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 convince 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 referendum, 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 preceding 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 additional 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’s 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'état" 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, Russia 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 Linkevičius, 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 Novorossiia.”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 and 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 stand-off.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 an 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 at 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 km² 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 Olynyk and Viktor Markov; and former speaker of the so-called Parliament of Novorossiia 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 m² 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 statehood, 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 curriculum 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 corruption.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 former 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 chairman, 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 Motuzanyk 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, Aleksander 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 Yanukovich 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

ANALYSIS

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 Novorossiia, 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 Novorossiia, 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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