



Ukraine: What Must Be Done Now

September 7, 2014 **Stephen Blank** *Forbes.com*

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Don't let the latest news out of Ukraine fool you; Russia actually invaded Ukraine six months ago. What is happening today is just an intensification of that assault.

The British government now estimates that 4,000 to 5,000 new Russian troops are fighting in Ukraine. This figure is in addition to those forces dispatched earlier, without identifying insignia, and the approximately 20,000 to 25,000 regular forces stationed in Crimea. Moscow no longer bothers to hide the origin of these "rebels" and "separatists," who are veterans of one or more of Moscow's multiple military forces.

Under these circumstances, one could easily wonder how long Moscow will continue to try the patience of Western leaders. The answer to this question is simple and straightforward: for as long as Russian President Vladimir Putin thinks that his future depends on destroying any hope of Ukrainian statehood, and that the costs to him and Russia are tolerable.

After all, why should he believe otherwise? Since 1992, the record of Western tolerance for Russian machinations in Eurasia's frozen conflicts—all of which Moscow has abetted or instigated—has been extensive, and uninspiring.

The stakes today, however, are much higher. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not just a geopolitical threat to Ukraine and Europe. It also represents a moral challenge to Europe and the world. Letting this war continue as a frozen conflict will demonstrate that aggression not only pays, but can be conducted with relative impunity. Millions of people will be condemned to long-term privation and suffering, of which we have only had a glimpse until now. And sensing the moral weakness and lack of conviction in Washington, Berlin, and Brussels, other similarly inclined forces will be emboldened to undertake their own aggression.

So, while more severe sanctions are most definitely in order, the West must do still more. It must wrest the strategic initiative away from Putin and prevent the emergence of another frozen conflict in Europe. Doing so requires that we not only help rebuild Ukraine's state and economy, but also that we provide it with the weapons, intelligence support, and training it desperately needs in order to defeat Moscow's onslaught.

NATO has a role to play here as well. Although Putin clearly is seeking to intimidate the Alliance, he has no desire to confront it directly. That is why he has consistently maintained violence in Ukraine below the level that would prompt a NATO response. Russia needs to be stripped of this tactic. It must therefore be made clear to Moscow that unless it ceases and desists, it will encounter not just Western weapons and trained personnel but also a capable NATO force ready to deter any threat of war.

By now, two things should be quite clear. The first is that Putin cannot tolerate any kind of independent Ukraine. The second is that, left to its own devices, Ukraine will gravitate toward the European Union. This makes the Ukrainian state a target for Russian aggression, and necessitates real, sustained support from the West. To deter further Russian aggression and the horrors of a protracted war or frozen conflict, the United States and Europe must make it clear that Ukraine will be accepted into Western organizations if it conducts its reforms, and that they will act forcefully to preserve its sovereignty. Only signs of superior Western resolve will make a sufficient impression upon Putin to regain the strategic initiative for NATO.

Time is of the essence. We must act now to prevent a wider and longer war, and to foreclose for good the prospect for a revived Russian empire, which represents the greatest threat to Eurasian security in today's world.