DEFENSE DOSSIER

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FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the March 2018 issue of AFPC's Defense Dossier. In this issue, we take a look at Ukraine, a country at war, in order to bring attention to the open conflict that still rages in that country's east, and the covert war taking place within the nation.

Since Russia's 2014 invasion, Ukraine has been in a state of continuous war, beset by Russian-supported separatism and a coordinated Kremlin campaign to undermine the nation's political stability. Yet today, there is scant coverage of the conflict itself, or of Russia's flagrant disregard for international norms and its role in perpetuating instability in Eastern Europe. This edition focuses on the political and military dimensions of the ongoing conflict engulfing Ukraine, the various "hybrid warfare" tactics being employed by Russia and its surrogates, and the case for why the United States needs to support Kyiv in this struggle. We hope the pages that follow are both illuminating and thought provoking.

Sincerely,

Ilan Berman
Chief Editor

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Ukraine: The Forgotten War

Congressman Ted Poe

Since Russia's seizure of Crimea in early 2014, American and European efforts to resolve the standoff in Ukraine and reverse Russian aggression have failed. Despite talks, sanctions, and repeated ceasefire agreements, Russian-backed separatists, and even Russian troops, continue to instigate violence in eastern Ukraine. Today, the conflict is in danger of being forgotten by the West. All too many underestimate the severe ramifications of allowing Moscow to violate the territorial integrity of yet another one of its neighbors. With circumstances unchanged, it is time to intensify U.S. efforts to alter Russian President Vladimir Putin's calculus in Ukraine.

Like many Eastern European countries that were once Soviet satellite states, Ukraine has steadily aspired to become more integrated with the West. Ukrainians, fed-up with decades of corruption and economic stagnation, made this clear during the "Euromaidan" Revolution of February 2014. It is no coincidence that a month after Ukraine's pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych, was removed from office as a result of those protests, the Kremlin ordered an invasion of the country's strategically important Crimean Peninsula.

Put simply, Vladimir Putin is terrified of the prospect of strong independent states aligned with the West existing on his country's border. After all, free societies that can determine their own future while sitting so close to Russia represent a direct threat to his authoritarian hold on power. This was evident in 2008, when Russian forces invaded the Republic of Georgia because of its warming relationship with the Euro-Atlantic community. Like the Euromaidan in Ukraine, Georgia had its own pro-Western revolution in the years preceding that Russian invasion. Ultimately, whenever Moscow cannot subjugate its neighbors through disinformation, intimidation, or corruption, it turns to concocting fake crises that are used to justify Russian military intervention.

For far too long, Putin has used this method to defy international law and to break promises his country made to live at peace with its neighbors. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S., UK, and the newly reconstituted Russian Federation signed the Budapest Memorandum. This 1994 agreement assured newly independent Ukraine that, in exchange for giving up the nuclear weapons positioned within its borders, the signatories would not threaten or use force against the "territorial integrity or political independence" of the former Soviet republic. Russia broke this pledge in 2014 when its "little green men" appeared in Crimea.

Additional agreements, such as the 1975 Helsinki Accords and the 1997 Friendship Treaty between Russia and Ukraine, also stipulate that signatories will respect each other's sovereignty and borders. Moscow's unilateral annexation of Crimea and intervention in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine clearly violate these guarantees, proving that Putin has no interest in abiding by diplomatic agreements or international norms. However, these violations – and the still climbing death toll in Ukraine – are quickly becoming a war forgotten by the West. Between April 2014 and August 2017, at least 10,225 people died and 24,541were injured from conflict-related causes in the region, according to the United Nations.

The Kremlin's land-grab in Crimea and war in the Donbas could have far larger repercussions beyond Ukraine and the post-Soviet space. The blatant violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity by Moscow undermines the rules-based international order that the U.S. established following the Second World War and has led since the conclusion of the Cold War. Attempts at negotiating a settlement to the conflict through the Minsk agreements have repeatedly failed because pro-Russian separatists refuse to abide by a complete ceasefire or to withdraw their heavy weapons – something that would undoubtedly occur if Putin ordered them to do so. Why some of our

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European allies continue to insist that a new agreement with Moscow can resolve a crisis that Russia itself created defies logic. Instead, in conjunction with efforts to strengthen Ukraine, additional pressure must be applied to Russia. Only when Putin sees that his objectives in eastern Ukraine are unachievable, or that holding Crimea is more trouble than it's worth, will he agree to terms that restore Kyiv's sovereignty.

The sanctions enacted in response to the seizure of Crimea have succeeded in substantially straining the Russian economy, but alone have proven insufficient. By strengthening Ukraine economically, politically, and militarily, Ukrainians will see their futures improve while those of the Russian people diminish. Altering this balance, in turn, will send a message to Putin that his attempts to bully his neighbors away from the West have the opposite of their intended effect, instead accelerating integration with Western institutions such as the European Union and NATO.

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To alter the status quo, the U.S. must remain committed to bolstering Kyiv's democracy and rule of law. This will maintain stability inside the territory the Ukrainian state still controls, protect against further Russian subversion, and deliver on the reforms that Ukrainians demanded during the Euromaidan. The European Union is playing its part in this process, recently ratifying the Association Agreement that lies at the heart of the 2014 revolution. This agreement ensures that Ukraine has access to the economic benefits of the West while requiring reforms to enable an independent judiciary and fair electoral laws. The U.S. can build on the EU's efforts and expand Ukraine's ties to the Euro-Atlantic community by offering similar economic carrots that incentivize Kyiv to continue on the path towards good governance. The FY2018 appropriations package that my colleagues and I in the House of Representatives have prepared provides $410 million in assistance to Ukraine that will help this goal, but more can be done—such as the removal of existing barriers to trade. With reports indicating that Ukraine has been backsliding on anti-corruption reforms, it is important that we in Congress move quickly to encourage our friends in Kyiv to stay on course.

Additionally we must demonstrate our commitment to Ukraine's future by upholding the obligations the U.S. made to preserve its security and independence under the Budapest Memorandum. While the agreement does not go as far as Article 5 of the NATO Charter, which would require the U.S. to consider an attack on Ukraine as an attack on itself, it does nevertheless stipulate that Washington and London should seek immediate UN Security Council action in the event of a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. Unsurprisingly, Russia vetoed every such Security Council attempt back in 2014. However, for the U.S. to maintain any credibility that its assurances mean something, it must demonstrate that Moscow cannot veto American commitments without consequence. Furthermore, given that the Budapest Memorandum was a deal made in exchange for the surrender of nuclear weapons, failing to maintain credibility here could impede future denuclearization and non-proliferation efforts elsewhere.

With this in mind, the most effective way to reassure Ukraine and penalize Russia for violating its promises is by providing the weapons Kyiv so desperately needs in order to gain superiority on the battlefield and halt Russian advances. For the past three years, Russia has poured weapons into eastern Ukraine, arming separatists who show little restraint when wielding destructive firepower – as was seen with the July 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine by separatist forces in an attack that killed 298. To increase the costs of Putin's war in the Donbas, the Ukrainian Armed Forces need the edge that U.S. defense technology can provide.

Fortunately, President Trump's State Department has agreed to provide anti-tank missiles and other lethal assistance—help that the Obama Administration hesitated to supply. Such weapons, including the highly accurate and mobile Javelin anti-tank missile, would render Russian-supplied armor vulnerable and minimize collateral damage. While it is true that Ukraine produces similar weapons, the American-made Javelin has a superior range, guidance system, and penetration abilities. Perhaps most importantly, the provision of lethal military aid sends a clear signal to Moscow that the United States is willing to match its escalation and firmly back Ukraine.

With this major step forward in strengthening Ukraine, we must also make clear who is responsible for any further bloodshed. The current OSCE monitoring regime has provided much needed transparency to the conflict in the Donbas, but more could be done to hold Russia responsible for the increasing number of violations there. The U.S. and our European allies must make it a priority to publicize each violation and support Ukraine's right to defend itself in a proportional manner. Teeth can be applied to this policy by enabling the counterbattery features on previously supplied Firefinder radars that would allow Ukrainian forces to accurately return fire on the source of every violation. With evidence indicating that a significant number of Russian troops are engaged in the fighting in Ukraine, whatever escalation occurs will undoubtedly result in Russian casualties. Although Putin frequently shrugs off Western pressure, he would find it difficult to ignore internal dissent spurred by the growing cost of blood and treasury lost in a war that Russia is supposedly no part of.

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The U.S. must also go on the offensive against the Kremlin's worldwide support for terrorism. Publically shaming Putin as an ambitious tyrant that utilizes terrorism to suppress dissent and destabilize his neighbors will strike at the heart of what Russia's president values most: acceptance as a major international player and his own political survival at home. From the murder of journalists and opposition members to the support of known terrorist groups, Putin has repeatedly shown that he prefers the use of violence to achieve his goals. Reports indicate that the Kremlin is providing arms not only to Ukrainian separatists but also to the Taliban in Afghanistan and to Iranian-aligned militias in Syria, such as Hezbollah. Even Putin critics who have fled to the West have frequently ended up dead. Now it appears that Putin has ordered an assassination campaign in Ukraine to eliminate those who stand in his way. In the past 16 months, six car bombs have rocked Ukraine, targeting security officials, journalists, and Kremlin critics. Exposing Putin as a state sponsor of terror will further isolate him on the world stage, strengthen his opposition at home, and assure Ukrainians and others in the post-Soviet space that their struggle against Russian aggression is far from forgotten.

The war in Ukraine may not always make headlines, but its importance cannot be overstated. Permitting Putin to continue violating sacred international norms endangers the world order our forebears fought so hard to establish and preserve. By adequately assisting states that seek to break free of the Kremlin's grip, Washington will demonstrate that it remains committed to leading the free world and maintaining the security of democracy around

the globe. In order for that to happen, however, Putin and other rogues must be reminded that aggression toward neighboring states comes with lasting costs. The U.S. has not only a strategic obligation to future stability and our own security, but a moral obligation to those seeking to live free. ■

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What Russia's War Has Wrought

Nolan Peterson

The war in Ukraine is not a civil war. It never was. It always has been, and remains, a Ukrainian defense against a Russian invasion.

After close to 50 months of nonstop combat, Ukrainian troops remain hunkered down in trenches and ad hoc forts along a 250-mile-long front line in the country's embattled, southeastern Donbas region. There, Ukraine's military continues to fight a grinding, static war against a combined force of pro-Russian separatists and Russian regulars that began in April 2014.

The operative cease-fire, known as Minsk II, was dead on arrival—although the war remains moderated in intensity and is geographically frozen according to its rules. About one-third of the war's fatalities happened after the cease-fire went into effect in February 2015. The conflict has, so far, killed more than 10,100 Ukrainians and displaced about 1.7 million people.

The conflict in Ukraine is a long distance war, not unlike World War I trench warfare, in which soldiers on either side of a no man's land, which can be as narrow as 50 meters in places, hardly ever saw at whom they were shooting. At some places, the front line is clearly defined by trenches. At others, soldiers fight from ad hoc forts built among the ruins, or on the outskirts, of artillery-ravaged front line towns and villages.

For those Ukrainians living within the war zone, life goes on. Children still attend school, even amid the daily shelling. Shops and grocery stores are still open. Families still gather together for dinner. For those living within its grasp, war has become a way of life. Yet, the physical consequences of the war are quarantined from most of the country. Life goes on pretty much unaffected by the war in cities hundreds of miles distant from the front lines.

There have been, however, a string of recent high-profile political assassinations in Kyiv, which Ukrainian security officials have blamed on Russian agents. One line of thinking among Ukrainian authorities is that with the war in the east frozen in a static stalemate, Russia may increasingly turn to covert warfare and dirty tricks to sow chaos and delegitimize the current government.

Still, the eastern war zone remains an existential sword of Damocles for the Ukrainian state. Inside the two breakaway territories in the Donbas, there are currently about 3,000 Russian soldiers embedded within a larger force of about 34,000 pro-Russian separatists and foreign mercenaries, according to Ukrainian and NATO reports.

Additionally, Russia has forward deployed about 100,000 troops within its own territory near the border with Ukraine. Ukraine, for its part, has about 60,000 troops deployed to the eastern war zone and on the border with Russian-occupied Crimea. All this while the Kremlin has continually denied that its forces are involved in the war.

Testing Ground

Since 2014, Russia has used Ukraine as a testing ground for its hybrid warfare doctrine, providing a case study for the new kinds of security threats the U.S. and its Western allies can anticipate from Moscow.

Russian hybrid warfare is not covert warfare. Rather, it is the combined use of conventional military force along with other means, such as cyberattacks and propaganda, both on the battlefield and deep behind the front lines. In conventional warfare, the effects of combat are limited to the ranges of the weapons used. In hybrid warfare, however, the battlefield knows no limit.

Russia's hybrid attacks against Ukraine have included, but are not limited to:

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- Using social media to shape public opinion among an adversary's population.
- Turning commercially available computer software into a tool for espionage and cyberwarfare.
- Exploiting smartphones to spy on and wage psychological warfare against an adversary's military forces.
- Using cyberattacks to undermine an adversary's electoral process.
- Using Kremlin-controlled news outlets to push a propaganda line that sows division within an adversary's national culture.

Hybrid warfare is an evolving threat spanning every combat domain. Particularly, hybrid warfare weaponizes many pieces of everyday life, including smartphones, social media networks, commercially available computer software, and journalism. Consequently, there's hardly any part of Ukrainian life that hasn't been affected by Russia's ongoing hybrid war. Russian cyberattacks have hit Ukraine's power grid, water supply systems, the country's banking system (shutting down ATMs), its largest international airport, and the electoral process. Russian forces have reportedly used the cell signals emitting from Ukrainian soldiers' phones to target its artillery. And for years Ukrainian soldiers have reported receiving threats and demands for their surrender from their enemies over cellphone text messages.

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In the eyes of Ukrainian security officials, the Internet has become as much of a battlefield as the trenches in the Donbas region. In December 2016, a cyberattack, which Ukrainian officials attributed to Russia, took down one-fifth of Kyiv's electrical grid. Since 2014, Ukrainian security services have thwarted numerous cyberattacks attempting to steal classified information from Ukrainian government networks. The main goal of Russia's information warfare, according to Ukrainian security officials, is to incite civil unrest throughout all of Ukraine and to undermine the government's credibility. To counter this threat, since 2014 Ukraine has established a Situation Center for Cybersecurity, and Ukrainian officials have fostered closer ties to Western intelligence agencies to bolster their cyberdefenses.

Russia has likewise exploited social media as a weapon of war against Ukraine. As a result, in May Ukrainian officials banned Russian Internet search engines, including Yandex, as well as popular Russian social media sites such as VKontakte. The ban spurred pushback from the millions of Ukrainians who used those Russian sites for daily tasks and social reasons. But Ukrainian officials insisted the sites posed a national security threat, and the ban stuck. The incident is a bellwether, perhaps, for the kinds of free-speech trade-offs that U.S. officials might face when defending against Russian political warfare.

Ukraine has also banned commercially available Russian software, including anti-virus software from Moscow-based Kaspersky Lab—the same company U.S. officials now say was used as a Trojan horse for Russian intelligence agencies to steal classified information from the U.S. government.

Journalism has been among Russia's hybrid weapons against Ukraine as well. Consequently, Ukrainian officials have banned a slew of Russian TV stations from broadcasting in Ukraine, and foreign journalists accused of spreading Russian propaganda have been expelled. Simultaneously, anti-propaganda outlets in Ukraine such as StopFake.org actively monitor media reports for Russian disinformation. And to counter Russian propaganda in the war zone, Ukraine's government has rebuilt its TV and radio broadcast network in the Donbas—which Russia and its separatist proxies destroyed at the war's outset. For years, Ukrainian citizens in eastern Ukraine could access only Russian TV channels for their news. Now, with

Ukraine back in control of the airwaves, Russia has lost a potent hybrid warfare weapon.

A History of Violence

The Ukraine conflict began on April 6, 2014, following Moscow's invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea the preceding month. Spurred by Russian security agents and Spetsnaz (Special Forces) troops, two Russian-backed territories in eastern Ukraine declared their independence from Kyiv—the Donetsk People's Republic, or DNR, and the Luhansk People's Republic, or LNR.

Through propaganda, Russia painted its 2014 seizure of Crimea and the ensuing conflict in the Donbas as grassroots uprisings created and led by disaffected Russian-speaking Ukrainians who believed the new government in Kyiv was illegitimate—the product of a CIA-orchestrated putsch to install a fascist, neo-Nazi, pro-American government in Kyiv.

For Kyiv, the situation was dire in the summer of 2014. A combined force of pro-Russian separatists and Russian regulars was on the march in eastern Ukraine, and there were worries then that Ukraine could be split in two, or that Russia might launch a large-scale invasion. Officials advised citizens in Kyiv to use the city's metro in case of a Russian aerial bombardment or artillery blitz. Spray-painted signs on the sides of buildings pointing to the nearest bomb shelter became ubiquitous sights in cities across Ukraine.

At that time, Ukraine's regular army was in shambles and on its heels against Russia's proxy separatist insurgency. A ragtag coalition of Ukraine's combined armed forces—including the regular army, civilian volunteer battalions, police units, and elements of the Security Service of Ukraine, or SBU—subsequently launched a military operation to counter the combined Russian-separatist advance and retake lost territory. This amalgamated, ad hoc Ukrainian military force set out for the front lines with legions of civilian volunteers ferrying supplies to support them.

By July of 2014, however, Ukraine's grassroots war effort had retaken 23 out of the 36 districts previously under combined Russian-separatist control. With its troops on the march, it looked, briefly, like Kyiv might be able to take back all the territory it had previously lost to Russia's proxies. But then, in August, Russia sent in thousands of its own troops and massive amounts of weaponry and military hardware. A conflict once defined by skirmishes and running gun battles became one of tank battles, heavy artillery barrages, and rocket attacks. Many Ukrainians feared a full-scale Russian invasion—a sack on the port city of Mariupol looked imminent at the time.

A subsequent September 2015 cease-fire stopped the war from escalating to truly catastrophic levels. That first cease-fire quickly collapsed in the weeks that followed, however. The subsequent, February 2015 Minsk II cease-fire ultimately froze the conflict along its current geographical boundaries. But the war never ended. There are still daily artillery and rocket strikes, and small arms gunfights. And soldiers and civilians on both sides of the conflict continue to die.

> "The main goal of Russia's information warfare, according to Ukrainian security officials, is to incite civil unrest throughout all of Ukraine and to undermine the government's credibility.

Battle Hardened

The war has hardened Ukraine, both its citizens and its soldiers, and proven that the country is willing to fight for its freedom. Nevertheless, Ukrainian soldiers, civilians, and politicians have largely accepted that there will not be a military solution to the conflict. Indeed, about 70 percent of Ukrainians are now willing to accept a political compromise to end Russia's proxy war in eastern Ukraine, according to a July report by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation.

One long-term consequence of the war is that it has fundamentally reshaped the balance of military power

in Eastern Europe. In 2014, the Ukrainian army had been gutted in terms of both equipment and personnel, a consequence of 25 years of purposeful neglect and dismantlement by successive, corrupt governments beholden to Moscow. Since that time, however, Ukraine's military evolution has been remarkable. In the past three years, and while fighting a war, Ukraine has rebuilt its military into Europe's second largest, comprising about 250,000 active-duty troops and 80,000 reservists. Ukraine now operates more than 2,800 tanks—compared with 423 in France, 407 in the UK, and 408 in Germany. On the Continent, only Russia's military is bigger.

Likewise, in a complete about-face from the Cold War, Ukraine's strategic military doctrine now identifies Russia as the country's top security threat. In response, Kyiv is rebuilding its military with the specific objective of defending against a Russian invasion and adopting NATO standards by the year 2020.

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It is also allocating resources to this cause. Ukraine increased its military budget by 23 percent the year after the war began. The country's current defense budget of about $6 billion represents roughly 6 percent of the country's gross domestic product. And military spending is set to increase by about 10 percent annually, according to IHS Jane's Defense Budgets.

While Ukraine maintains a numerical advantage over other European nations in terms of troops and conventional weapons, its military nonetheless needs to modernize, as much of its arsenal dates from the Cold War. To do so, Ukraine is revamping its military-industrial complex. The Ukrainian government allocated 13.5 billion hryvnias (about $500 million) in 2016 to repair, modernize, and produce new weapons for its armed forces. Yet, Ukraine's military-industrial modernization has been somewhat misguided.

Facing Forward

As the war approaches its fifth calendar year, morale remains high among the Ukrainian troops. In fact, a common complaint among front line troops is that they're bored. Yet no one takes the Russian threat lightly. A common refrain among Ukrainian troops is that they're in the trenches to hold back a Russian invasion. If they turned around and went home, many fear that Russia and its proxy armies would simply invade behind them all the way to Kyiv.

Underscoring this perceived existential threat to the homeland, Ukrainian society has militarized. Across the country, civilians regularly meet on the weekends for military training. They comprise a network of partisan forces called territorial defense battalions, which can be rapidly mobilized to defend against a Russian invasion.

This grassroots defense mindset—which saved Ukraine from disaster in 2014—promises a protracted guerrilla conflict should Russia ever again launch a major offensive in Ukraine.

Looking ahead, Ukrainian troops say the proposed delivery of U.S. weapons to Ukraine—such as the Javelin anti-tank missile—would be a game-changing morale booster. U.S. support in any form, whether through diplomatic gestures or weapons shipments, sends a signal to Ukraine's soldiers that they have the backing of the world's most powerful country. ■

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Russia and the Internal Political Struggle for Power in Ukraine

Andriy Levus and Borys Potapenko

Nearly four years have passed with no sign of an end to the military conflict and hybrid war unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Despite Russia's failure to implement its blitzkrieg beyond Crimea and parts of the Donbas, the threats to Ukraine's national security remain unchanged since 2014. There is likewise no change in Moscow's efforts to restore Russia's borders to the approximate size and shape of the former USSR. Russia's global policy reflects a continual effort to confront the West, while regionally reining in its former captive nations.

In this strategic plan, there is no place for Ukraine as an independent state. Thus, as of this writing, Ukraine faces a range of fundamental threats to national security, both external and internal, the resolution of which will help determine Ukraine's political trajectory and its larger place in the West.

A Formidable Foe

In 2014, Ukraine was not ready for war. Ukraine's national security strategy, adopted in 2007, did not consider Russia a possible enemy. Moreover, its military doctrine, introduced in 2012, assumed that any local or regional wars in or around Ukraine were unlikely. Practically, the Ukrainian army had – under the rule of former President Viktor Yanukovych – been progressively dismantled on an operational level. Ukrainian forces, demobilized and demoralized, were left vulnerable to recruitment by the Russian side. At the same time, security assurances from the West (and from Russia itself) under the Budapest Memorandum, concluded in 1994 in exchange for Ukraine giving up its nuclear weapons, proved as a practical matter to be empty promises.

Without meaningful military assistance, Ukraine found itself on its own, facing a much stronger enemy. And yet, the lightning assault and seizure of Crimea and part of the Donbas by Russia, accomplished with the help of local pro-Russian agents, did not succeed in the rest of Ukraine. At the cost of thousands of lives and many more wounded, voluntary military battalions, self-defense units, and the civilian population as a whole managed to stop Russia in the Donbas. The subsequent sanctions by the West were significant, but they would not have mattered were it not for the resolve of the Ukrainian people themselves.

The threat continues, however. Today, according to the Ukrainian General Staff, some 36,000 Russian mercenaries (of whom nearly 3,000 are members of the Russian Armed Forces) are permanently based in the Donbas on a rotational basis, with all of the requisite arms and equipment. The 1st and 2nd Army Corps, which are directly subordinate to the Command Center of the Territorial Army of the Southern Military District of the Russian Armed Forces, are deployed in the Donbas. Units of the corps, fully integrated into the operating system of the Southern Military District, are controlled by Russian command, financed by the Russian Army and armed with the latest Russian weapons, including heavy equipment (up to 500 tanks, 850 armored vehicles and 200 multiple rocket launcher systems). Russia has also concentrated its troops along the eastern and northern borders of Ukraine, and periodically conducts military exercises there. The most recent of these, a massive maneuver titled "Zapad-2017," included the territory of Belarus as well.

The Threat of Subversion

Yet, despite this disproportionate advantage, experts believe a full-scale offensive by Russia is unlikely. Four years into the war, Ukraine has partially recovered its military potential and has substantially increased the number of professional soldiers in its armed forces. In the

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event of an offensive, the projected losses for Russia would be unacceptable, both in military and economic terms.

> Russian agents of influence remain actively involved in the political life of Ukraine. These activities indicate that the primary threat from Russia is no longer military, but rather one that undermines Ukraine from within, exploiting the mistakes of Ukrainian authorities to pit all sides against each other.

As a result, Russia is intensivfying its hybrid war against Ukraine, which takes place not only in military terms but also in the political, economic and information spheres. Simultaneously, the Kremlin is hampering all attempts at a diplomatic solution to the conflict. Indeed, according to U.S. special representative for Ukraine Kurt Volker, the Minsk format is not working, and Russia refuses to consent to the deployment of UN peacekeepers in the Donbas under terms and conditions that are acceptable to the international community.

Against this backdrop, Ukraine's immediate policy trajectory is clear: orientation toward the EU and the U.S., as reflected in the recently-EU endorsed association agreement with Ukraine, cooperation with the U.S. in the defense sphere, the initiation of Western-backed reforms, and so forth. Beyond this, however, authorities in Kyiv have not articulated a more extensive foreign policy agenda – one that goes beyond defense and economic assistance and emphasizes the benefits that will accrue to the West in return for its assistance to Ukraine.

To the contrary, there is a palpable lack of appreciation by Ukrainian authorities of the growing dissatisfaction in the West with the slowness of Ukrainian reforms, especially on combating corruption. Yet losing EU and U.S. support would be dangerous not only for Ukraine, but also for the West as a whole. Russia's militant policy toward the West has not changed, and there is reason to believe that such changes will not be forthcoming for at least as long as Vladimir Putin is at the helm – and likely even beyond his tenure. This is because the restoration of a Russian empire and the destruction of unity in the West lie at the core of what is driving the current war against Ukraine.

Outside of the war zone, Ukraine is working to counteract the hybrid threat from Russia in other ways. Anti-Ukrainian parties controlled directly by Moscow, mainly the country's communist party, have been banned. The Security Service of Ukraine routinely arrests entire networks of subversive agents that had been recruited by Russia. Overt propaganda by Russian TV channels and social networks has partially stopped due to civic activism, which has also compelled governmental efforts to counter commercial hybrid warfare being carried out by Russian surrogates. Nonetheless, Russian agents of influence remain actively involved in the political life of Ukraine. These activities indicate that the primary threat from Russia is no longer military, but rather one that undermines Ukraine from within, exploiting the mistakes of Ukrainian authorities to pit all sides against each other.

The Road So Far

Over the past four years, Ukraine has changed profoundly. Among the leading achievements noted by the West to date in the military sphere has been the reform of the army and national police. But more must be done. Among the additional fundamental changes urged by the West are the need for civilian control over the armed forces, a determination of the role and place of Ukraine in NATO, the need for the government to speak with one voice on defense issues, the reform (liquidation) of state arms broker "Ukroboronprom," and reform of the state security service, the SBU.

In nonmilitary spheres, but still closely related to national security, are the successes that have taken place so far in the creation of anti-corruption legislation and new anti-corruption agencies and institutions. Here too, challenges remain. Today, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office and the Anti-Corruption Court (now

in formation) are under particular strain, having become politically weaponized by all sides ahead of impending national elections. It must be understood that, in the case of Ukraine, combatting corruption is a matter of national security, because corruption represents one of the chief means by which the Kremlin has attempted to bring the country back under its control. Indeed, the fight against corruption is of existential importance to the Ukrainian state, no less so than responding to Russia's shooting war in the east.

The successes are clearly visible, and include: fresh transparency in government procurement; more extensive electronic disclosures; efforts to increase energy independence from Russia; and reforms to health care, education, pensions, and banking. An accelerated process of decentralization underway within the country is also enhancing the fight against corruption. Meanwhile, de-communization and the restoration of Ukraine's national memory and language, including in schools, have helped to instill a sense of personal responsibility, pride and patriotism. The economy is slowly reforming, and there is modest growth in the GDP. Together, all of these measures indicate that the goals of the 2014 Maidan Revolution are gradually being fulfilled.

In the case of Ukraine, combatting corruption is a matter of national security, because corruption represents one of the chief means by which the Kremlin has attempted to bring the country back under its control.

Moreover, recently adopted legislation by the Ukrainian parliament relating to the Donbas establishes that Ukraine is at war with the Russian Federation, and that Russia controls an occupation regime on sovereign Ukrainian territory. As such, Russia carries full responsibility for the human and material loss of life and property and for the fate of the civilian population under its control, in accordance with international law. Significantly, command of the war is now in the hands Ukraine's Armed Forces Joint Operative Headquarters, formally ending the so-called "anti-terrorist operation" run by the SBU for nearly four years.

Fixes to Come

Yet much more undoubtedly remains to be done. The vast majority of the country's population still resides on the verge of profound poverty. Emigration is growing. In neighboring Poland alone, there are now approximately one million Ukrainian citizens seeking work. Within Ukraine, meanwhile, the influence of populist parties and demagogic leaders who promise quick fixes is on the rise. For its part, Russia is working to exacerbate all of these social frictions.

The unfettered expansion of presidential power is a threat that impacts the country's democratic development and raises fundamental questions of sovereignty and independence.

Another area of danger is the potential for a return of authoritarianism in the country. The main feature of the current constitution is dualism of power, which is manifested in a constant contest between the President and the parliament for influence over the executive branch. In all previous cases, the president emerged victorious, expanding his power and allowing the country to slip toward authoritarianism in the process. The most blatant example of this trend was the steady accretion of power carried out by former president Viktor Yanukovych.

Today, the Poroshenko government cannot be said to have followed the same path, at least so far. But the inherent imbalance of power that still exists within the Ukrainian government can lead to dangerous consequences. Indeed, in today's Ukraine the influence of the head of state is steadily increasing, in the process making government and

parliament subordinate bodies. The unfettered expansion of presidential power is a threat that impacts the country's democratic development and raises fundamental questions of sovereignty and independence. To date, largely as part of a national need to maintain stability during a time of war, President Petro Poroshenko has retained the support of pro-reform post-Maidan MPs. But this support is wearing thin.

Meanwhile, the impending presidential election, preparations for which have already begun, has the power to substantially change the political landscape in the country. For President Poroshenko, victory in that contest requires control over the government and parliament, the budget, law enforcement and security agencies, and provincial governments – as well as an alliance with ideological rivals, including pro-Russian business interests. Meanwhile, Poroshenko's main rivals – former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and former vice premier Yuriy Boyko – are themselves known to be tightly tied to Russian or pro-Russian companies and interests. Thus, irrespective of the victor, the political influence of Russia and its protagonists in Ukraine can only be expected to intensify if any of the three likely candidates enter the race. Demagogic or populist forces now have significant support within the country, due to the diminishing credibility of the presidential administration and government resulting from frustration over slow and controversial reforms, a lack of progress or the ineffectiveness of existing anticorruption measures, the ongoing economic crisis, and the perpetual state of war. Russia is exploiting these factors, as well as other real or imagined cleavages, to drive a wedge in the support among Ukrainians for staying the course on Putin's war in the Donbas and for joining European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Without constitutional reform, there could be a gradual slippage of Ukraine toward authoritarianism, and even a rapprochement with Russia on Putin's terms.

High Stakes

Transforming Ukraine's political elites, including supplanting the post-Soviet figures that today define its agenda, was the hope and aspiration of the Maidan Revolution. A key step in this regard is the creation of a new constitution – something that, in the current political environment, could only be done by eschewing established political power brokers in favor of experts, moral authority and the broadest possible civic engagement and participation.

Without constitutional reform, there could be a gradual slippage of Ukraine toward authoritarianism, and even a rapprochement with Russia on Putin's terms. Should that happen, the West may well lose Ukraine. If it does, it will face an even greater threat from an imperial Russia whose appetite for conquest has been whetted. ■

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The Maritime Dimension of the Russian-Ukrainian War

Glen E. Howard

Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea in February 2014, followed by the invasion of eastern Ukraine and the ongoing war in the Donbas, has riveted the West's attention on the ground war dimension of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. By contrast, little or no attention has been paid to the maritime threat posed by Russia to Ukrainian security.

Inside Ukraine, day-to-day coverage has focused on the frontlines of a war that has resulted in over 10,000 deaths to date. But, apart from the ground war component of the conflict, there is also a maritime aspect to the Russian military threat to Ukraine – one that is looming larger and larger as Russian naval forces in Crimea continue to modernize and expand their capabilities.

Countours of the Problem

With a 1,350-kilometer border with the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, Ukraine has a long maritime frontier with little or no navy, due to the fact that the country lost 70 percent of its fleet as a result of the 2014 Russian invasion of Crimea. Based in Crimea, the Ukrainian navy had its headquarters in Sevastopol, where fifty-one ships were based in the same port that serves as the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Russian forces used the surprise invasion to blockade the port and other strategic bases on the peninsula without warning, resulting in the handover of the fleet. The commander of the Ukrainian fleet at the time, Admiral Denis Berezovsky, also defected to the Russian side (although no other senior Ukrainian officers joined him).

What is left of the Ukrainian navy consists of just three combat ships, a handful of artillery boats, one minesweeper and about two-dozen auxiliary vessels. Russia, on the other hand, possesses a 12 to 1 advantage in naval vessels over Ukraine, and – according to Ukraine's leading naval strategist, retired Admiral Ihor Kabanenko – the offensive capabilities of the Russian navy in the Black Sea have more than doubled since 2014.

Interaction with the sea has a long and vibrant role in Ukrainian history. The national symbol of Ukraine, seen on the government's seals and emblems, is the trident. In commercial terms, as much as 20 percent of Ukraine's GDP is derived from areas of the country bordering the sea, with Odessa (strategically located on the Black Sea) serving as one of the country's largest seaports. Now, with no navy to speak of, Ukraine finds itself at pains to protect 30,000 square kilometers of territorial waters and a 70,000 square kilometer maritime economic zone rich with oil and gas resources in the Black Sea. (This energy wealth has not been lost on Moscow; two large gas fields at Odeske and Holitsynske were illegally seized by Russia in 2104, and now extract Ukrainian natural gas for Moscow's benefit.)

Zone of Danger

With the frozen conflict in the Donbas now entering its fourth year, Ukraine faces a growing naval threat from Russia in the northern Black Sea. The Russian Black Sea Fleet based in Sevastopol is rapidly modernizing its naval forces in nearby Crimea. Moscow is also investing in and expanding the size of its airborne forces and the airfield at Dzhankoy in northern Crimea. Additionally, dress rehearsals for a naval assault on Ukraine were actively being carried out in Crimea during the past year. In 2017, Russian forces practiced naval assaults from the sea at the naval training ground at Opuk, located near Theodosia on the eastern coast of Crimea, which is known for the similar type of sandy shoreline as the Ukrainian coast in the Sea of Azov. In the spring of 2017, Russian forces conducted a mock naval landing operation at Feodosia on the Crimean coast, which also appeared to be a dress rehearsal exercise for a naval assault against Ukraine.

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Against the backdrop of this military buildup, Ukraine remains practically defenseless to a Russian seaborne assault. Two of its largest commercial ports – Odessa and Mariupol – are highly susceptible to a Russian naval attack. To flaunt their superiority, Russian naval vessels have even unexpectedly appeared as close as 17 kilometers from the outskirts of the Black Sea port of Odessa in order to demonstrate Ukraine's inability to stop them from intruding into its territorial waters. In addition to a deficiency in ships, Ukraine also lacks anti-ship missiles such as the Harpoon to protect the strategic Black Sea port.

In the nearby Sea of Azov, the situation for the other major Ukrainian port of Mariupol is far more acute. Mariupol is the largest commercial artery for Ukraine because of its steel production and exports. Considered the maritime gateway to the Donbas, Mariupol is the center of the steel industry in eastern Ukraine, because the depth of the port allows Panamex-size tankers to load and transport Ukrainian steel to international markets. With a population of half a million, the port is highly vulnerable to a Russian attack due to a shortage of Ukrainian naval vessels and mines to protect the strategic harbor. Should Mariupol be closed by a Russian naval blockade, it would bring to a halt one of Ukraine's major production centers for steel and deprive its residents of a major means of employment. Such an attack could create economic havoc inside the Donbas and undermine Ukraine's delicate toehold in eastern Ukraine.

The Sea of Azov as a whole represents a major threat to Ukrainian security in the Donbas because of its proximity to Russian bases in Crimea. Since the Crimean War of 1844-45, the shallow waters of the Sea have often been a theater of naval warfare. During that conflict, Sir Edmund Lyons oversaw the creation of a joint British and French naval flotilla commanded by his son, Captain Edmund Lyons, that operated in the Sea of Azov. Captain Lyons conducted a highly successful naval campaign raiding the Russian shoreline up and down the coast, destroying food stocks and supplies that prevented Russian forces from resupplying Tsarist troops based in Crimea. This forgotten naval campaign has been largely ignored by Western historians in their writings about the Crimean War. Yet it was so decisive that it effectively starved the Russian garrison in Sevastopol of food and other military supplies, thereby playing a decisive role in the surrender of the fortress to Allied forces.

Capturing the Kerch

Today, the Sea of Azov is becoming the centerpiece of the maritime front between Russia and Ukraine. Kyiv has gone to great efforts to defend Mariupol against a Russian ground attack. But Russia now appears headed for tactical victory without even firing a shot as a result of its construction of a major bridge across the Kerch Strait.

This narrow body of water connects Crimea's Kerch peninsula to the Taman peninsula of Russia's Krasnodar province. Russia is rapidly moving to control this narrow body of water; in 2017, the Russian government announced the construction of a 12-mile bridge across the Strait that would link Russia to Crimea and essentially close the area to commercial traffic. Russian construction of the Kerch bridge has severely disrupted Ukrainian commercial traffic entering the Sea of Azov, and on several occasions in the past year halted traffic due to construction.

Ukraine's government, as well as a number of international law experts, considers the Kerch Strait to be part of an international waterway, making Russian construction a violation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to which Moscow and Kyiv are both parties. Scheduled for completion sometime in 2018, the Kerch bridge will have a height of 33 meters – significant because it would

severely limit the size of the Panamex tankers carrying Ukrainian steel from Mariupol (the average height of such a tanker is more than 38 meters).

The Crimean Front

Meanwhile, the Russian military buildup in Crimea is continuing with great intensity. Following the annexation of Crimea, Russia began a program of military modernization on the peninsula by undertaking major ground and naval upgrades to its bases there. Essentially, Moscow has turned Crimea into a land-based air craft carrier by creating an Anti-Access Aerial Denial (A2/AD) corridor through the deployment of Iskander missiles, Bastion anti-shipping missiles, S-300 and S-400 air defense batteries, and Tu-22 Backfire bombers with their long range anti-shipping missiles. Moscow also has continued modernizing the Russian Black Sea fleet based in Sevastopol, including through the deployment of stealthy Kilo-class submarines, which are extremely hard for NATO naval forces to detect. Utilizing its new naval bases in Crimea, Moscow has been able to project power into the Mediterranean and challenge U.S. naval supremacy there in a manner unseen since the Cold War.

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Increasingly, the Black Sea has emerged as a major new theater of naval activity for the U.S. Sixth Fleet based in Naples, Italy. NATO and the United States have significantly expanded their naval presence in the region since the 2014 Crimean invasion. The U.S. Navy, however, faces major operational challenges in the Black Sea due to the restrictions of the 1936 Montreux Convention, which limits non-signatory countries from operating in the Sea to only 20 days at a time. Moreover, under the agreement, only signatories can permanently base naval forces in the Black Sea. To show Alliance resolve, NATO forces hold annual naval exercises (known as Sea Breeze) in the area each summer. But upon the completion of the drills, NATO forces must leave the region altogether—leaving Ukraine and NATO member states Bulgaria and Romania to challenge Russian naval supremacy in the Black Sea.

The Ukrainian navy is eager to play a role in countering this threat. Indeed, despite its losses as a result of Russia's 2014 takeover of Crimea, Ukraine continues to harbor aspirations of rebuilding its navy. Such an objective, however, remains mostly notional; in the post-Maidan modernization strategy of the Ukrainian armed forces, the army and air force remain the dominant branches in terms of money and resources. Fresh with funding and overwhelming public support, the Ukrainian ground forces now total 400,000 men under arms, and are regarded by Ukrainian defense planners to be the chief military deterrent to a Russian ground invasion in the Donbas. The navy, by contrast, remains far down the list of Ukraine's strategic rearmament priorities. With only 10,000 men under arms, the Ukrainian navy has been largely relegated to the role of a coastal defense force, even though Ukrainian military planners face major challenges in protecting important seaports like Odessa and Mariupol from sea borne attacks.

Rebuilding the Fleet

Despite these challenges, the Ukrainian navy has developed a post-Crimea rebuilding strategy focused on building a modern naval force around the principle of the "mosquito fleet." Under the leadership of Ukrainian Admiral Ihor Voronchenko, the Ukrainian navy has outlined a goal of acquiring a fleet of agile fast attack craft in an effort to move away from the notion of a large surface fleet, which is expensive and unrealistic for a country the size of Ukraine. The Ukrainian navy now seeks to create a fleet of highly capable and potent fast attack boats capable of reaching speeds of 50 kilometers per hour. In this effort, the Ukrainian navy has been inspired by the success of Germany's World War II-era Schnellboats, or E-boats, as well as the subsequent American experience in the Pacific with PT boats.

In pursuit of this goal, Ukraine has embarked in the construction of up to 20 small riverine armored gunboats. Known as the Giurza-M class, these vessels are being built in the Leninska Kuznya (Lenin's Forge) shipyards in Kyiv, which are owned by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. In 2017, six of these gunboats were delivered to the Ukrainian navy, two of which have been deployed to the Sea of Azov to protect Mariupol. These gunboats will be used primarily to protect rivers, ports, and coastal areas.

> A Russian naval blockade would bring to a halt one of Ukraine's major production centers for steel and deprive its residents of a major means of employment. Such an attack could create economic havoc inside the Donbas and undermine Ukraine's delicate toehold in eastern Ukraine.

Step by step, Ukraine hopes to rebuild its navy and develop a more trans-oceanic capability. The future of these efforts lies in the Baltimore harbor, where two former U.S. Coast Guard vessels of the Island-class patrol boats have been awaiting their transfer to the Ukrainian navy once the corruption-mired Ukrainian Ministry of Defense provides the U.S. with the necessary funding.
While the Ukrainian army has grown in both size and capability, the southern seaboard of Ukraine remains at extreme risk due to the disastrous state of the Ukrainian navy. Ukrainian ground force commanders often mock the threat of a Russian attack via the Sea of Azov due to the height of the 20-meter cliffs that dominate most of Ukraine's coastline there. However, there are several major rivers and inlets that the Russians could use for a combined naval and air assault against the vulnerable rear of Ukrainian units forward deployed in the Donbas. Ukraine's coastal navy and artillery are currently insufficient to deter this threat. Until this major deficit in military strategy is corrected, the only viable naval deterrent to stop a Russian naval assault on Ukraine is the U.S. Navy.

The United States has sought to alleviate this problem by paying more port visits to Odessa and rotating its Aegis-class destroyers in and out of the Black Sea on a more frequent basis. However, the United States alone cannot ensure Ukraine's maritime security. Moreover, Washington is unlikely to intervene should Russia close the Kerch Strait to Ukrainian commercial traffic, which would likely spell the end of the Mariupol economy. Until policymakers in Kyiv awaken to the need to build a modern, modest sized navy capable of deterring the Russian navy, Ukraine's goal of one day regaining control over Crimea will go unfulfilled.■

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Why Ukraine Deserves American Support

Amanda Azinheira

The Trump administration's December decision to formally approve sending lethal aid to Ukraine touched off a fevered debate within the Washington Beltway, with various opponents taking to the airwaves to decry the move. Their main arguments followed familiar themes: that Ukraine is not strategically vital to the United States; that support for Ukraine could serve to antagonize Russia; and that Moscow has more at stake in Ukraine than does the U.S., and therefore has more leverage there.

All of these arguments, however, fail to address the core reasons why Kyiv is worthy of U.S. support – namely, that the U.S. has a moral obligation to help protect a developing democracy, especially in the face of human rights abuses, and that a strong and independent Ukraine would possess immense strategic value for the U.S. and the West. Each of these arguments is worth examining in turn, as a way of expanding popular understanding of, and support for, what is really at stake in the current conflict.

Captive Nation

Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine has perhaps been most acutely felt in Crimea. In turn, Crimea provides the clearest rationale for why American assistance to Ukraine is necessary on humanitarian grounds.

Since its 2014 invasion and forced occupation of the peninsula, Moscow has cracked down on dissent there, focusing above all on the indigenous Muslim Tatars, who have openly opposed Russian rule. Over the past four years, persecution of that minority group has intensified to include harassment, threats of violence, physical attacks, unlawful searches of property, unlawful detentions, bogus terrorism charges, enforced disappearances, exile, and political assassinations – all of them sponsored or supported by the Kremlin. The scope and means of this treatment, while certainly not on the same scale as the persecution carried out against the Tatars by the Soviet Union (which forced them into mass exile during the Stalin era), nevertheless falls under the United Nations definition of ethnic cleansing, which outlaws any attempt to "render an area ethnically homogenous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of a given group from the area." This standard, in turn, necessitates involvement from the international community, which has a collective duty under customary international law to prevent such crimes.

Promises Kept

America's own credibility is at stake as well. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Ukraine inherited the third largest nuclear stockpile in the world. Kyiv agreed to divest itself of these weapons in exchange for security guarantees from the U.S., Russia and the United Kingdom. That promise, encapsulated in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, included promises by Moscow, Washington and London to "respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine" and "to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine."

While the U.S. has not broken its promise under the Memorandum, Russia now has. And although it has no binding contractual obligation under the pact, Washington nonetheless has a responsibility to come to Ukraine's aid in such an event. For if it does not, inaction could send a dangerous signal to other states about the hollowness of U.S. commitments, and significantly set back the cause of global nonproliferation. In the future, countries such as North Korea could point to the case of Ukraine to call America's security assurances a bluff. Those same actors may well see Washington's failure to act as proof that nuclear possession is a guarantor of regime stability and integrity.

Ukraine as a Bellwether

Beyond these rationales, however, lies an even more compelling justification for U.S. support. It is that Ukraine is, in fact, of immense strategic importance to Washington, not necessarily because of vested economic and military interests there, but because of its geostrategic

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position between Europe and Eurasia, and its symbolism as a gateway to Europe from the East.

Ukraine is, in fact, of immense strategic importance to Washington, not necessarily because of vested economic and military interests there, but because of its geostrategic position between Europe and Eurasia, and its symbolism as a gateway to Europe from the East.

What's at stake in this ongoing conflict is more than simply Ukrainian sovereignty, but European regional stability as well. Russia, under President Vladimir Putin, is actively seeking to destabilize European democracies and erode confidence in Western institutions like NATO and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). OSCE monitors, tasked with enforcing peace and reporting on peace treaty violations, frequently experience harassment and even violence at the hands of Russian-backed separatists and Russian infantry in Eastern Ukraine. These forces have resorted to sexual harassment and targeted attacks on OSCE-marked vehicles to muddy information leaving the conflict zone and delegitimize peace efforts.

Beyond Ukraine, Moscow is influencing politics and supporting far-right parties across Europe in an attempt to garner favor and to drive these countries away from European institutions that the Kremlin sees as its competitors. In countries like Spain, Great Britain, and Germany, Moscow has amped up disinformation campaigns ahead of elections in order to gather support for far-right and far-left political parties that call for closer ties to Russia and greater distance from the EU and NATO. For example, it is widely believed the Kremlin was behind the group of hackers that infiltrated the servers of the campaign of France's Emmanuel Macron looking for dirt to help his far-right opponent, Marine Le Pen. Russia has gone as far as funding and promoting these parties. In 2014, Le Pen's National Front received a 9 million Euro loan from a Russian bank and the state-owned Russia Today media channel frequently provides air time and positive coverage to far-right candidates across Europe.

These attempts, coupled with inaction on the part of NATO, have resulted in an erosion of confidence in NATO as a whole on the part of the Euroatlantic community. As the conflict in Ukraine intensified, Baltic countries raised the alarm, fearing a spread of Russian aggression and cashing in their checks for NATO's security guarantees. Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have all asked for increased NATO security in the region, but with a limited results to date.

The same has rung true of Washington's limited response to Russian aggression. Russia's international maneuvers, and lackluster action on the part of the Trump administration (at least so far), are actively undermining America's authority and credibility on the world stage. Moscow, meanwhile, is continuing its efforts to destabilize U.S. democratic institutions and erode trust in them on the part of the American public. In fact, U.S. officials fear that Russia's already-extensive and long-running disinformation campaign will intensify anew as the U.S. approaches the 2018 midterm elections.

What's at Stake

American and European inaction have sent a dangerous signal to the Kremlin that neither NATO nor Washington are willing to fight for the West, or to take a resolute common stand in confronting Russia. That, in turn, has emboldened Russia to intensify its foreign policy adventurism – both in Eastern Europe and beyond. And without a resolute response, Putin will be emboldened to continue his efforts to push Russia's boundaries outward and westward, and to do so at the expense of the sovereignty of European states. Ukraine, in other words, is hardly the first victim of Russia's imperial aspirations. Nor will it be the last – unless, that is, the U.S. and NATO step up to the plate.

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Today, the United States needs to prove that it still has a vested interest in preserving the post-World War II international order, even as that construct comes under assault as a result of Russian actions. By protecting Ukraine, America and its allies can demonstrate that they are both ready and willing to confront Russia's efforts to undermine the current geopolitical status quo. That will require not only maintaining and expanding sanctions against Russia, but also investing in Ukraine's defense and development through the provision of military aid that can help Kyiv successfully roll back Russian aggression, and steadfast support for the democratic processes by which Ukraine can truly join the West. ■

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