

2019 CONFLICT RISK DIAGNOSTIC: UKRAINE



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Executive Summary

With 13,000 dead and 30,000 wounded, the Ukrainian crisis remains pertinent moving into 2019. Commanding the interest of stakeholders on both sides of the globe, this is a crisis that does not show any signs of slowing down.

Caught between two monoliths of economic influence, Ukraine has seen ethnic and nationalist divisions be exacerbated following a rejected free trade agreement with the EU in 2013. Since then, separatist movements have gained significant traction in the region of Donbas, and Crimea has been annexed by the Russian Federation. Ukraine has endeavored to regain control of these territories and has been met with armed resistance. Russia, in particular, has moved to provide military and economic aid to the Donbas separatists.

Analyzing structural data and recent events, this report aims to provide an objective assessment of what has informed the Ukrainian conflict. Ultimately, this report maintains that Russian aggression, economic interdependence, and political instability/meddling are the primary factors of sustained conflict in this region. These findings are premised upon the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Project (CIFP) and were arrived at by utilizing its categorical risk assessment mechanism.

Background

In 2013, Ex-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich rejected a free trade agreement (FTA) that would have fostered closer economic and political ties to the European Union (EU). Civilian protests erupted in response to this decision, which saw state security forces violently crack down, and in turn intensify the conflict. As a result, Yanukovich fled to Moscow in 2014. Yanukovich called on Putin to send troops to destabilize the country. In this same year, Russian troops occupied the Crimean Peninsula, formally annexing it following a hotly disputed local referendum in Sevastopol, in which Crimeans purportedly voted to join the Russian Federation. This event sparked ethnic divisions in Ukraine, and incited pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk to hold their own referendums for independence.

Russian troops have since built up on the eastern border near Donetsk and Luhansk, and have been providing economic, humanitarian, and military assistance to the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), two separatist groups in the region of Donbas. Engagement with these groups have been violent. When a Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down in Ukrainian airspace in 2014, the conflict gained a truly international scope. Since 2015, France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine have brokered peace through the Minsk Accords (Minsk I and II). Provisions include a cease-fire, withdrawal of heavy weaponry, full Ukrainian control of the conflict zone and border, and greater autonomy for Donetsk and Luhansk vis a vis amending the Ukrainian constitution. Attempts to reach a broader diplomatic and political solution have been unsuccessful.

External Stakeholders

Russia (Negative)	Russia and Ukraine have been linked through history, and as such Russia has a vested interest in the conflict. Russia views the current governing party as illegitimate and has premised its involvement in the conflict on the matter of protecting ethnic Russians who reside in Ukraine. ¹ Russia maintains that the Crimean referendum was legitimate, and so holds that the peninsula is Russian territory. They believe the Minsk Accord to be asymmetric in its favoring of the current Ukrainian government and its Western sponsors, though still call on Ukraine to abide by its tenets ² . Russia continues to support separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk. ³
Canada (Positive)	Canada has been a consistent proponent of the Minsk Accord, and holds it to be the most feasible way to ensure peace. Minister Freeland has expressed unequivocal support for Ukraine. ⁴ Canada has unequivocally condemned Russia's actions in Crimea and its insurgence support in Eastern Ukraine. More recently, Canada has called on Russia to release three vessels that were captured in the Sea of Azov. ⁵ Canada has also implemented the CUFTA free trade deal with Ukraine, helping stabilize the Ukrainian economy and reducing economic pressure exerted by Russia. ⁶ In addition, it has put Ukraine on the automatic firearms control list (AFCCL), reducing arms flows into conflict areas. ⁷
European Union (Positive)	The EU has been instrumental in peace talks, particularly in promoting the Minsk Accord. They have exerted pressure on Russia to abide by its obligations to respect the ceasefire, withdraw their heavy weaponry, and respect Ukraine's jurisdiction over the conflict zone. ⁸ The EU regards the elections occurring on non-government-controlled territory as being unlawful, and in blatant violation of the Minsk Accord. ⁹ The EU has also signed a free trade agreement with Ukraine, and imposed sanctions on Russia and Crimea. ¹⁰
Belarus (Neutral)	Belarus remains committed to the Minsk Accord, having been instrumental in organizing the ceasefire. President Lukashenko has expressed that de-escalating the conflict will be integral to ensuring the stability of the post-Soviet bloc. ¹¹ Likewise, they are opposed to further NATO involvement in the conflict, for fear that escalation may engender security risks for Europe. ¹²
USA (Positive)	The USA has advocated for a long-term strategy aimed at increasing Ukraine's resilience and prosperity, and has been a staunch proponent of Ukraine's sovereignty in turn. ¹³ It aims to provide support for economic reforms, physical and cyber security, and broader defence initiatives. ¹⁴ Moreover, it has condemned Russian aggression and has expressed an intent to station troops in Baltic states so as to deter Russian meddling in the region. ¹⁵ Projects to support democratization and law enforcement agencies within Ukraine have been instrumental in providing support since 2014. In tandem with the international community, sanctions have been imposed on Russia and Crimea.

OSCE (Neutral)	The OSCE supports high level diplomacy, multilateral dialogue, the sustained monitoring of the security situation on the ground, the promotion of human rights, and democratization. ¹⁶ It has established a special monitoring mission to Ukraine which is tasked with monitoring and verifying the withdrawal of weaponry (as mandated by the Minsk Accord). ¹⁷ More broadly, it monitors general compliance of the Minsk Accord. It calls upon both Russia and Ukraine to respect the 30km buffer area beyond the immediate borders of the conflict zone – however, it has been reticent to explicitly condemn Russian aggression, instead opting to condemn the use of small arms in civilian areas generally. ¹⁸
NATO (Positive)	NATO affirms that Russia must withdraw from Ukraine and does not recognize the annexation of Crimea as legitimate. ¹⁹ It views Russia as the primary threat to stability in the region and has explicitly condemned Russian interference. While in support of reaching a political solution to the conflict, it maintains that the elections held in Donetsk and Luhansk on November 11, 2018 are in violation of the Minsk Accord. ²⁰

Internal Stakeholders

Poroshenko Government (Mixed)	The Ukrainian government, led by Petro Poroshenko, condemns continued Russian interference in what it holds to be its own domestic affairs. ²¹ It calls on the international community to impose sanctions on Russia for its illegal behaviour, and the government does not recognize the legitimacy of the DPR nor the LPR. Anti-Terrorist Operation Zones (ATO) have also been initiated to deal with insurgent groups in Donbas, providing Ukrainian military presence in the conflict. ²² Poroshenko’s government also views Russia’s actions in the Sea of Azov as posing a threat to Ukraine’s sovereignty, and its ability to engage in international trade. ²³
Opposition Bloc (Mixed)	The Ukrainian Opposition Bloc has called for decentralization initiatives within Ukraine, and is in favor of establishing a strong federalist framework. ²⁴ On foreign policy, it would prefer that Ukraine maintain a status of non-alignment. As a result, it is opposed to alignment with NATO and the EU. ²⁵ It has affirmed that the current government is illegitimate, and so has called for overt protection of Russian as a regional language. ²⁶ Internationally, it wants to work with Russia to achieve peace. Opposition chairman Viktor Medvedchuk has also called for a quadrangle peace treaty between Kyiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Moscow in particular. ²⁷
Donetsk People’s Republic (Negative)	The DNR claims independence from Ukraine. It receives assistance from Russia in the form of arms, economic and humanitarian aid, and “volunteers”, which have greatly destabilized the region and the integrity of the Ukrainian state. ²⁸ They have labelled the USA-supported Ukrainian government as fascist, and have condemned the government’s failure to give special status to Donbas – which they note is in opposition to the Minsk Accord. ²⁹
Luhansk People’s Republic (Negative)	The assassination of the Republic’s leader, Alexander Zakharchenko, has aggravated the LNR. It blames the Ukrainian government for the perpetuation of the conflict, and the general perpetuation of violence in the region. ³⁰ The current leader of the LNR, Leonid Paschenik, has expressed an overt desire to continue acting as a retaliator within the conflict. ³¹
Crimean Tatars (Positive)	The Crimea-based ethnic group of the Tatars are officially opposed to Russian occupation of Crimea and the continued influx of Russians into the region. The parliamentary representative of the Tatars, Mastafa Dzhemilev, views the federal government as legitimate. The group desires to work with the federal government to condemn Russia’s illegal referendum in Crimea, and the construction of the Kerch Strait bridge. ³² The group wants Russian settlers removed from the region, and so call on the international community to impose tougher sanctions against Vladimir Putin in order to pressure him to negotiate. ³³

CONFLICT INDICATORS

	Very High Risk	Worsening →
Militarization		
Stabilizing Factors	The placement of arm embargos by the international community has prevented Ukraine’s occupied regions (Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk) from having access to military exports. ³⁴ Imposing arms embargoes to these designated areas of Ukraine has prevented the risk of illicit procurement in the region. Efforts have been made to professionalize Ukraine’s police and military strategies. Martial-law has since been imposed (for a period of 30 days) to prevent the situation from being further aggravated. ³⁵	
Destabilizing Factors	The construction of a bridge between Russia and Crimea has expedited the transporting of military arms from Russia into the Crimean Peninsula, and Donbas in turn. These arms include ballistic missiles, tanks, and mortars. ³⁶ The transporting of these arms, in tandem with the seizing of three military vessels in the Azov Sea, have all served to aggravate tensions by way of contravening the Minsk Accord, and propagating further violence. ³⁷ Ukraine has bolstered its arms by purchasing 15,040 sub-machine guns from the United States and 503 mounted grenade launchers. ³⁸ The number of Ukrainian servicemen totals to 250,000. Moreover, Ukraine has imported 1 tank, 108 armoured combat vehicles, 1 attack helicopter and 23 missile launchers in 2017. ³⁹	
Assessment	At present, the status of Ukraine as a stabilized state is limited. With the current transfer of anti-defence missile systems in Crimea, and other stockpiles in Donbas and additional buildup of Russian servicemen around the vicinity of Ukraine’s territory, the risk of external invasion is heightened.	
History of Armed Conflict	Very High Risk	Worsening →
Stabilizing Factors	The effectuation of the Minsk Accord, and the establishment of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (SMM) pursuant to such, have brought some stability to the region. The Minsk Accord has served to de-escalate tensions between the Donbas separatists and the Ukrainian state by way of reciprocal exchanges of POWs, and mutual arms withdrawals. ⁴⁰ Furthermore, some 3,000 civilians and military personnel have been released from occupied territory. ⁴¹ The SMM has acted in this time as a monitoring group, serving to observe and report on	

	compliance issues pertaining to the Minsk Accord. While the SMM has been moderately successful in their doing so, they continue to be hindered by the presence of landmines in and around Donbas.
Destabilizing Factors	Russian non-compliance with the Minsk Accord has stymied progress toward mending its relations with Ukraine. The ceasefire provision is violated routinely, with some 9,500 violations being recorded in January 2019 alone. ⁴² Death tolls sit officially at 13,000, but may progress to as much as 30,000. ⁴³ This has resulted in Ukraine banning Russian males between the ages of 16 to 60 from entering the country, and in Russia imposing sanctions on Ukraine in response to this. ⁴⁴ Russia's seizing of 3 vessels (and the 24 servicemen onboard) on the Kerch Strait has only further strained relations, and Russia's refusal to entertain diplomatic solutions to this issue has jeopardized Ukraine's occupation of the Azov Sea. ⁴⁵
Assessment	The fragile nature of the ceasefire in Donbas, in combination with mounting international condemnation towards Russia's behavior in the Azov Sea, continues to hinder international efforts to solve this conflict. Failures on both sides to comply with the Minsk Accord have seen the conflict persist in the form of tit-for-tat retaliations. Russian-backed troops show no intent of halting their progress west if not for Ukrainian resistance.
Governance and Political Stability High Risk Worsening ↘	
Stabilizing Factors	Ukraine will hold both presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019. The political affiliation of the incumbents for these roles will have a significant effect on the trajectory of the current conflict, and efforts have been made to ensure that the elections are conducted in a fair and democratic manner. Multinational teams will be deployed to monitor polling stations and vote tallying in order to mitigate the risk of external meddling. ⁴⁶ In addition to this, anti-corruption mechanisms have been inaugurated by the Ukrainian government so as to promote trust in government institutions. ⁴⁷ The particular aims of these mechanisms include increasing transparency and accountability within Ukrainian bureaucracies.
Destabilizing Factors	Civil unrest is rampant in Ukraine. Journalists, civil rights activists, and members of visible minority groups frequently suffer discrimination and violence that goes unpunished. ⁴⁸ Far right parties such as the Union Party Svoboda (Freedom Party) and the Avoz Battalion utilize violence as a means of silencing political opponents and are gaining traction with disillusioned Ukrainian youth. ⁴⁹ Rule of law is waning, and there is a lack of popular support for the Supreme Court. As a result of this, a number of high-profile elites have been assassinated without significant consequence; Colonel Maskym Shapoval (Ukrainian), Alexander Zakharchenko (DPR), Mikhail "Givi" Tolstykh (DPR), and Arsen "Motorola" Pavlov (DPR) were all killed without repudiation between 2016 and 2018. ⁵⁰
Assessment	Political uncertainty reigns in Ukraine. With important elections taking place in March 2019, the political future of Ukraine is at once a hotly contested matter, and unpredictable in the present. There is a high probability that Russian interference will play a significant role in the outcome of these elections, especially given the Poroshenko government's noted dislike of Russian intervention in its domestic affairs. And while Ukraine has taken tangible steps to address its internal corruption issues, democratization is ultimately stifled. Delays in court proceedings and a general lack of forums through which to bring citizen issues to light plague Ukrainian efforts to ameliorate its political situation.
International Linkages Medium Risk Improving ↗	
Stabilizing Factors	Ukraine has moved in the past few years to establish economic partnerships and agreements with the western liberal democracies and has joined many countries in placing sanctions on Russia. ⁵¹ Ukraine has expressed a desire to integrate more significantly with the west. Ukraine's effort to sign free trade agreements with Canada (CUFTA) and the EU demonstrates its push for economic diversification from the traditional Eastern European and Eurasian sphere. ⁵²
Destabilizing Factors	Russia is the primary destination of both Ukrainian exports and expatriates. ⁵³ Following the annexation of Crimea, the number of Ukrainians moving into Russia has only increased. Ukraine boasts a trade deficit of 2.42 billion with Russia, and so is in less of a position to benefit from sanctions regimes. ⁵⁴
Assessment	Ukraine shares many linkages with Russia - the most significant being economic, social, communicative, and (in some regions more than others) ideational. These linkages provide leverage for Russia to exercise over Ukraine, and so prevents Ukraine from distancing itself from its aggressive neighbor. Efforts have been made to create links to the west, though these links have acted as a supplement to, as opposed to a replacement for, the existent links to Russia. A solution to the conflict, then, cannot be achieved without consideration for and input from Russia.
Population Heterogeneity Medium Risk Worsening ↘	
Factors	Population heterogeneity is rising in Ukraine, with 77.5% of the population being ethnic Ukrainians. ⁵⁵ Ethnic Russians, the second largest group, constitute 17.2%, though this figure has been falling since the dissolution of the USSR in the 1990s. ⁵⁶ Ethnic cleavages also overlap with religious affiliation, which are largely distributed geographically.
Assessment	Whereas Russia premises its interference in Ukraine as a means of protecting an ethnic enclave, the shrinking of this enclave could induce either a decrease in overt demand for Russian intervention on the part of the diaspora, or a perceived increase in the salience of protecting an increasingly 'marginalized' group. Furthermore, regional identities (such as Donetsk and Luhansk) have sparked division within the singular 'Ukrainian' ethnicity, and so nominal homogeneity may not connote the decrease in conflict prevalence predicted by some scholars.

Economic Performance		Low Risk	Improving →
Stabilizing Factors	From 2013 to 2015, Ukraine's GDP dropped from 183.31 billion (USD) to 91.03 billion. ⁵⁷ It has since stabilized and is growing at a real rate of roughly 2.5% per annum. ⁵⁸ This resurgence has been accredited partly to economic reforms, and partly to economic integration with the EU. Specific reforms include implementing energy tariffs, adopting a flexible exchange rate, and stabilizing the banking sector. ⁵⁹ The IMF has also provided a stimulus package valued at 3.9 billion (USD) to aid in the economic rejuvenation of Ukraine. ⁶⁰ Russia continues to be Ukraine's largest trading partner and provides much of the country's imports. ⁶¹ While the relationship is skewed in such a way as to foster dependency of Ukraine on Russia, the provision of these imports has nonetheless prevented the nation from becoming destitute.		
Destabilizing Factors	Ukraine struggles with investor confidence due to the Poroshenko government's failure to implement key reforms in the wake of various crises. Uncertainty plagues the prospect of political change presently, and so hinders investment in turn. ⁶² Ukraine requires large financing to manage its debt, which makes up 72% of its GDP, and necessitates ridged fiscal policy to manage. ⁶³ Additionally, President Poroshenko's economic blockades in Donbas and the international community's export controls against occupied regions have closed formerly active economic relations. ⁶⁴ Donbas will likely divert its coal exports toward Russia, which will increase Donbas' economic self-sufficiency and so ensure the long-term viability of rebel groups. ⁶⁵		
Assessment	Ukraine's economy has improved since the outbreak of the crisis but remains fragile. Uncertainty has the potential to damper economic growth; however, assistance from the international community will help mitigate these risks. The economic situation is unlikely to be a driving force of the crisis, but a further outbreak of violence would likely lead to a severe economic downturn.		
Demographic Stress		Low Risk	Improving →
Stabilizing Factors	Ukraine is undergoing a demographic transition toward urbanization at a rate of roughly 1.00% per decade. ⁶⁶ This represents a rate of urbanization that is lower than most western states, but higher than other countries in the immediate vicinity of Ukraine. GNI per capita is 2,390USD, which represents a Gini coefficient of around 0.25. ⁶⁷ Mortality rates and life expectancy have risen in the past twenty years, as has primary school enrollment, and poverty has decreased. ⁶⁸		
Destabilizing Factors	Ukraine's population has been steadily declining for the past twenty years at a rate of roughly 300,000 people annually. This has been attributed to low birth rates, which in this time have generally taken a figure of 1.3 children per woman (lower than replacement). ⁶⁹		
Assessment	Ukraine's rate of urbanization represents a stable transition to a more developed economy, shifting focus away from agriculture. While low birth rates tend to accompany demographic transitions toward urbanization, Ukraine has seen birth rates fall so low that the population has been steadily decreasing for some time, which may serve to burden its productive population in the future with a high dependency ratio. This being said, a Gini coefficient score of 0.25 is less than that of the United States, and so signifies markedly low rates of inequality within the country (this does not factor in the role of foreign influencers or oligarchs, however). Ultimately, Ukraine's demographic stress is not of such magnitude that it risks destabilizing the country in the present, nor is it particularly integral to the current conflict.		
Human Development		Low Risk	Improving →
Stabilizing Factors	Human development within Ukraine has largely been a stabilizing force in the region. The Human Development Index (HDI) in 2017 was relatively high, with a score of 0.751, and the state continues to score in the middle-low range on components such as political rights and civil liberties. ⁷⁰ The country continues to score high on the gender development index, and life expectancy has continuously increased in the last several years. ⁷¹ In addition, concrete measures have been put in place to maintain development, with the government having recently made progress in legislating improvements to corruption reduction and healthcare. ⁷²		
Destabilizing Factors	Corruption remains a perennial hindrance, with external interference in elections, harassment of journalists, and continued inequalities affecting the country's development. ⁷³ The Gini coefficient has dropped since its peak in 2014, prompting concern of stagnation or backsliding for equality. ⁷⁴ Likewise, the HDI score continues to be of concern, having remained nearly constant since Ukraine's independence 30 years ago. ⁷⁵ This is pertinent to the conflict, given that lowered expectations of future growth are liable to be a cause for grievances. ⁷⁶		
Assessment	Overall, Ukraine's relatively high human development has staved off further humanitarian catastrophe and expansion of the conflict. Ukraine continues to score well on education, health, and economic wellbeing, but concerns are raised for political freedoms. Likewise, stagnation of certain human development scores has the potential to breed grievances among the population, causing political instability and aggravating the conflict.		
Environment		Low Risk	Worsening →
Destabilizing Factors	The crisis in Ukraine, particularly in the Donbas region, has led to critical environmental issues. Water pollution from the flooding of mines, soil pollution, forest fires and illegal logging, and waste management problems are prevalent and unattended to. ⁷⁷ The Donetsk and Luhansk regions were centres for potentially environmentally hazardous industries, which the conflict disrupted through power outages and damage to infrastructure. ⁷⁸ The flooding of the Yunyi Komunar mine, the site of the 1979 nuclear explosion, is of particular concern as the groundwater may be radioactive. ⁷⁹		

Assessment	Ukraine is unable to monitor or enforce environmental regulations due to the conflict. The environmental impacts will have an effect on the quality of life in the conflict zones but is unlikely to drive further conflict as the conflict itself is the direct contributor of environmental problems.
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CONFLICT RISK SCENARIOS

Best Case	Donbas remains a part of Ukraine and receives a degree of federated autonomy in line with the Minsk Accord. Broadly, the aims of the Minsk Accord (withdrawal of arms, ceasefire, Ukrainian control of territory and borders), are respected and undisputed. Both the parliamentary and presidential elections are monitored by the SMM, and no matter the victors they are undisputed and deemed to be legitimate. Ukraine continues to strengthen its ties to the EU and diversifies its import profile so as to decrease its reliance on Russia. A diplomatic solution including stakeholders on all fronts is pursued, and in the meantime, violence is kept at bay.
Worst Case	The Donbas separatists declare independence from the Ukrainian state and accede to the Russian Federation. This development aggravates the existent conflict, and only serves to further inform geopolitical tensions between the two countries. Ukraine is unable to escape the economic, social, and political influence of Russia, and remains dependent on the Eastern European/Eurasian sphere moving forward. Efforts to integrate economically, politically, and militarily with the West result in heightened tensions, and amount to nothing. This leads to democratic backsliding, and economic deterioration. No matter the victor, the parliamentary and presidential elections are contested and seen as illegitimate, making the enforcing of law and order arbitrary, and the matter of who holds power unknown. The conflict demonstrates no sign of ending.
Most Likely Case	Ukraine maintains diplomatic and political dialogue with the Russia in order to prevent war from spreading outside of Donbas. Ultimately, the status quo persists. Ukraine's current foreign policy agenda is likely to be maintained regardless of who wins the election(s), in large part due to the accusations of external meddling and illegitimacy that are bound to be levied against them soon after taking office. With their exercising of authority being limited by way of these accusations, no one leader in particular is likely to single-handedly alter Ukraine's course of action. Through attrition, Russia will continue to consolidate its influence in Donbas, and its power in the broader region by way of such. Ukraine will be unable to escape Russian influence over its economy, which will be further informed by the cancellation of the Gazprom and Naftogaz energy deal (expiring by end of 2019). This will create further dependence on the IMF, and continue to implicate western states in the conflict. The Minsk Accord will continue to provide a framework for tentative peace, though contraventions by either side are likely to remain common. In the turn, the conflict shows no sign of subsiding.

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