

# Russia-Ukraine crisis

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## Evolution of conflict (Cremian crisis)

- In 1991, after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union into Russia and 14 independent countries, Russia felt the West took advantage of its weakness to bring many of its near neighbors into its military alliance.
- By 1997, NATO expanded to 16 new countries in the region, including those like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania that share borders with Russia in 2004.
- With Russian President Vladimir Putin coming to power in 1999, Russia began to regain its strength as a global power, and the U.S. and other NATO members- like Canada, France, Germany and other European countries began to worry about Russian expansionism once again.
- In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula that was part of Ukraine, through a referendum.
- After a year of violence- cross border shelling and action between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian militia, there was a ceasefire- negotiated as the Minsk agreement, and the U.S. and Europe also responded with crippling financial sanctions.
- Russia is also backing separatists in the self-declared Luhansk and Donetsk republics (Donbas) in eastern Ukraine.

## Minsk agreements –

The Minsk Protocol was an agreement aimed at ending the conflict in Ukraine's Donbas area. Following are the two sets of agreements that were signed in Minsk in 2014 and 2015:

### **MINSK I-**

- Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatists agreed a 12-point ceasefire deal in the capital of Belarus in

September 2014.

- Its provisions included prisoner exchanges, deliveries of humanitarian aid and the withdrawal of heavy weapons.
- The agreement quickly broke down, with violations by both sides.

## **MINSK II-**

- It is a **13-point agreement** signed in February 2015 in Minsk.
- It was signed by Representatives of Russia, Ukraine, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the leaders of two pro-Russian separatist regions- Donetsk and Luhansk.
- The new agreement had provisions for an immediate cease-fire, withdrawal of heavy weaponry, OSCE monitoring, dialogue on interim self-government for Donetsk and Luhansk, in accordance with Ukrainian law, and acknowledgement of special status by Parliament, pardon and amnesty for fighters, exchange of hostages and prisoners, humanitarian aid, constitutional reforms in Ukraine including decentralization, with specific mention of Donetsk and Luhansk.
- However, these provisions have not been implemented because of what is popularly known as the '**Minsk Conundrum**'.
- This essentially means that Ukraine and Russia have contradictory interpretations about the agreement, particularly about when each part of the agreement is to be fulfilled.
- Russia believes that the agreement means that Ukraine has to grant the Russia-backed rebels in Donbas comprehensive autonomy and representation in the central Government, effectively giving Russia a veto over Ukraine's foreign policy. Only when this is done is Russia ready to hand over control of the Russia-Ukraine border to Ukraine.

- Ukraine, on the other hand, feels that Minsk 2 allows it to first re-establish control over Donbas, then give it control of the Russia-Ukraine border, elections in the Donbas, and a limited devolution of power to the rebels in that sequence.
- So, Minsk-2 is ambiguous.

## **Ukraine importance to Russia**

- For centuries, Russia has viewed the Black Sea as central to its security due to its abundance of warm water ports, including Sevastopol in Crimea.
- Most of Russia's ports on the Arctic freeze for several months of the year while **Vladivostok, the largest Russian port on the Pacific Ocean**, is ice-locked for four months of the year and enclosed by the Sea of Japan which is dominated by the Japanese.
- By seizing Crimea, Russia got access to **its only true warm water port in Sevastopol**.
- However, access out of the Black Sea into the Mediterranean is still restricted by the **Montreux Convention of 1936**, which gave Turkey, now a NATO member, control of the Bosphorus.
- According to the census conducted in 2001, there are around eight million Russians living in Ukraine, mostly in the South and East and the Kremlin has a law which compels the government to protect ethnic Russians which is defined very loosely.
- Moscow has provided Russian passports to over 500,000 people.



## Ukraine attempts to join NATO

- Although Ukraine has no membership offer from NATO, it has drawn closer to the alliance over time, starting with the establishment in **1997 of a NATO-Ukraine Charter** to further develop cooperation.
- Ukraine applied to begin a [NATO Membership Action Plan \(MAP\)](#) in 2008.
- Plans for NATO membership were shelved by Ukraine following the [2010 presidential election](#) in which [Viktor Yanukovych](#), who preferred to keep the country non-aligned, was elected [President](#).
- Amid the [Euromaidan](#) unrest, Yanukovych fled Ukraine in February 2014.
- Following the [Russian military invasion in Ukraine](#) and [parliamentary elections](#) in October 2014, the new government made joining NATO a priority.
- On 21 February 2019, the [Constitution of Ukraine](#) was amended, the norms on the strategic course of Ukraine for membership in the [European Union](#) and [NATO](#) are enshrined in the preamble of the Basic Law, three articles and transitional provisions.
- At the June [2021 Brussels Summit](#), NATO leaders reiterated the decision taken at the [2008 Bucharest Summit](#) that Ukraine would become a member of the Alliance with the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as an integral part of the process.

- Ukraine has done joint military exercises with NATO and delivered weapons including US anti-tank missiles.
- Russia opines that NATO's eastward expansion threatens its interests and sought written security guarantees from the West.
- Russia also asked NATO to roll back its military deployments to the 1990s level and ban the deployment of intermediate range missiles in areas that would allow NATO to reach Russia.
- Further, Moscow asked NATO to curb its military cooperation with Ukraine and other former Soviet republics.

### **Implications for India**

- **World War scenario:** Any conflict where the U.S. and its European allies are ranged against Russia will impact the whole world- economically and in terms of security, and India, as a partner to both Moscow and Washington will either have to take sides, or be prepared to deal with unhappiness from both sides.
- **S-400 delivery and US waiver:** The crisis comes precisely as India's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system is under way- and New Delhi hopes for a waiver of U.S. sanctions on this. Conflict will complicate both the delivery of the system, and the possibility of a presidential waiver.
- **Brings Russia China closer-** The Crisis will make Moscow more dependent on friends like China, and build a regional bloc of sorts that India is not a part of.
- **Energy crisis:** In any conflict, Europe worries Russia will turn down gas and oil supplies driving energy prices up.
- **Indians in Ukraine:** India has more than 20,000 nationals in Ukraine, mostly medical students, as well as business professionals in the field of pharma, IT and engineering and their safety is a concern.