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sc_atlanta@srmun.org

Security Council Update II: Situation in Ukraine

Introduction

Since February 2014, Russia and Ukraine have been engaged in a war fought on several different fronts. The war has been further complicated by the presence of pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine.[1] Shortly after Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity, Russia expressed support for the separatists and were focused on the political status of Crimea and the Donbas.[2] Russian troops soon moved into Crimea which resulted in the annexation of the region, and was followed shortly afterwards by the beginning of the war in Donbas between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian state forces.[3] Since the start of the war, the conflict has included naval incidents, cyberwarfare, and heightened political tensions.[4] Throughout 2021, tensions rose between Russia and Ukraine due to further military buildup by Russia near the border with Ukraine and on February 24th 2022, the conflict took a turn for the worst as Russian troops crossed the border into mainland Ukraine.[5]

Crimean War

On February 23rd, Russian troops and began moving into Crimea through Novorossiysk.[6] Russian troops eventually took strategic positions near the Crimean Peninsula and eventually raised the Russian flag at the Crimean Parliament.[7] In the following days, Russian soldiers secured key airports and a communications center.[8] Russian cyberattacks shut down websites associated with the Ukrainian government, news media, and social media.[9]

On March 1st, the Russian government approved the use of armed forces, leading to an influx of Russian troops and arms into the region.[10] Following this announcement, all remaining Ukrainian military bases and installations in the area were surrounded and sieged.[11] After Russia formally annexed the peninsula on March 18th, Ukrainian military bases and ships were stormed by Russian forces. On March 24th, Ukraine ordered a complete withdrawal of troops from the area; and by March 30th, all Ukrainian forces had left the peninsula.[12]

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[3] Snyder, Timothy (2018). *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America.*

[4] Snyder, Timothy (2018). *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America.*

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On April 15th, the Parliament of Ukraine officially declared Crimea a territory temporarily occupied by Russia.[13] After the annexation, the Russia further increased its military presence in the region.[14] President Vladimir Putin announced Russia's intention to establish a military task force in Crimea.[15] In November, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expressed concerns that Russia was deploying nuclear-capable weapons to Crimea.[16]

Recent Developments

Tensions reached an all-time high between the two Member States on February 24th, 2022 when Russian troops invaded Ukrainian territory, following an announcement by President Putin to begin a "special military operation" to "demilitarize and de-Nazify" Ukraine.[17] Shortly afterwards, Ukraine was besieged by missiles and airstrikes across the country, including the capital city of Kyiv, in addition to a large ground invasion along multiple fronts.[18] Martial law was declared by Ukrainian President Volodymr Zelenskyy along with general mobilization of all male Ukrainian citizens between 18 and 60, who were then banned from leaving the country.[19]

Initially, Russia launched attacks on multiple fronts specifically: a northern front from Belarus towards Kyiv, a north-eastern front towards Kharkiv (the second largest city in Ukraine), a southern front from Crimea, and a south-eastern front from Luhansk and Donetsk.[20] Russian advances in the north towards Ukraine were stalled in March amidst heavy losses and strong Ukrainian resistance surrounding the capital city which resulted in a retreat by Russian troops.[21] On April 19th, Russia launched a renewed attack across a 300 mile-long front extending from Kharkiv to Donetsk and Luhansk.[22] On May 13th, a Ukraine counter-offensive drove back Russian forces near Kharkiv however on May 20th, the city of Mariupol fell to Russian troops.[23] Later in August and September, Ukrainian forces launched counteroffensives in the south and in the northeast respectively.[24]

On March 2, 2022, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted Resolution ES-11/1 which called for a full withdrawal of Russian forces, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Russia to suspend military operations.[25] Meanwhile, UN Secretary General António Guterres called the annexation a "moment of peril" and a clear violation of international law that would "further jeopardize the prospects for peace."[26] Since the outbreak of the war, there has been a ripple effect on access to resources all around the world.[27] For example, in September, natural gas supply from Russian energy giant Gazprom to Italy was shut off.[28]

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Current Situation and Conclusion

As the conflict continues to rage on, the situation continues to become more dire. Currently, Russia has focused the bulk of its attacks on critical Ukrainian infrastructure including power plants, substations, and water facilities.[29] Due to ongoing missile strikes, 40 percent of Ukraine's energy grid has been damaged or destroyed.[30] As a result, Ukraine has instituted rolling blackouts to ensure what remains of the grid can operate efficiently.[31] There are major concerns from officials in Kyiv about the possibility of a total blackout, particularly since the city still has approximately three million residents within city limits.[32] Towards the south, Russian forces have also been targeting large civilian ships to prevent Ukrainian forces from using them.[33]

Additionally, Iranian Foreign Finister Hossein Amir Amirabdollahaian publicly acknowledged Iran sold military drones to Russia earlier this year, the same drones that have been instrumental in the repeated infrastructure attacks in Ukraine.[34] Iran contends these sales were made prior to the invasion of Ukraine, though there have been reports that Iran sent trainers to help Russian soldiers with drones since the invasion.[35] Iran maintains it will not provide military aid or equipment to Russia or Ukraine while the conflict continues. [36]

Russia has maintained serious casualties since the conflict began earlier this year.[37] Because of this, Russian has ramped up conscription efforts to get more soldiers to the front lines, particularly as Ukraine has made a series of advancements pushing back Russian troops.[38] Putin has amended legislation loosening the restrictions on reservists now allowing those convicted of serious crimes to serve in the Russian military.[39]

The ongoing conflict has resulted in over seven million Ukrainian refugees across Europe.[40] There are also millions of Ukrainians still residing within Ukraine, who face dangerous conditions each day. As the war continues to rage on with no end in sight, it is imperative the international community come together to create solutions to stop the ongoing violence.

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