

The war in Ukraine

I. Background Information

Ukraine is a former Soviet Socialist Republic that sits between the Russian Federation and the rest of Europe with the Black Sea to its south. In 2013, then-president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich suddenly decided against entering a free-trade agreement with the European Union in favor of pursuing closer ties with Russia. This sparked protests across Ukraine in early 2014 that are now referred to as the Revolution of Dignity, ultimately resulting in Yanukovich being removed from office. The Russian Federation claimed the new government to be illegitimate and responded by annexing Crimea. Pro-Russian separatist groups in Donetsk and Luhansk declared independence from Ukraine, and fighting between the separatist groups and the Ukrainian government has continued since.

On the 24th of February, 2022, Russian military forces entered Ukraine from Luhansk, Donetsk, Belarus, and Crimea. That same day, Russian president Vladimir Putin announced the beginning of a “special military operation” in Ukraine with the stated goals of demilitarizing and denazifying the former Soviet Socialist Republic. Missile strikes on major Ukrainian cities also began on the 24th. The Ukrainian government responded by declaring martial law and ordering the mobilization of all men ages 18-60.

Foreign volunteer fighters flocked to take part in the conflict on both sides, with an estimated 20,000 foreign volunteers fighting for Ukraine by March 2022 and an unknown number fighting for Russian-aligned forces. The conflict has also seen

extensive use of the Wagner PMC group, a Russian-aligned private military contracting agency known for its combat history in the Middle East and Africa.

Ongoing combat has generated a staggering number of casualties, with different sources providing varying numbers. Total Ukrainian military casualties are projected to range between 50,000-100,000 killed, wounded, or missing. Russian-aligned casualties are projected to be between 100,000-220,000 killed, wounded, or missing. Civilian losses are generally projected between 20,000-40,000 killed or wounded.

The war has taken a toll on the global economy, most notably with the prices of petroleum and agricultural products surging. Localized economic problems exist as well. Due to the massive sanctions and freezing of Russian international accounts, the value of the Russian Ruble plummeted by 30% in March 2022.

Social media proliferation has allowed incredibly quick information dissemination throughout the conflict. People around the world have been able to receive real-time updates about the situation on the ground. However, social media and the internet have also been used to spread propaganda and deliberate disinformation to both combatants and foreign citizens.

II. United Nations Involvement

The Russian Federation has faced severe international backlash for its actions in Ukraine. On the 2nd of March 2022, the UN General Assembly demanded a withdrawal of Russian military forces from Ukraine. Similarly, the International Court of Justice ordered the Russian Federation to cease all military operations in Ukraine.

There have been a large number of reports of war crimes and human rights violations committed by Russian-aligned forces. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has accused Russian-aligned forces of deliberately targeting civilian areas with cluster munitions, arbitrarily abducting and executing civilians, widespread rape and looting, and intentionally damaging infrastructure in the forms of schools, hospitals, and even nuclear power plants. Both sides have been accused by the Human Rights Watch of using civilians as human shields throughout the conflict.

The conflict has also generated a massive refugee crisis. The UNHCR estimates that 7.9 million refugees have fled Ukraine to other parts of Europe. The UNHCR's Refugee Response Plan has been put in place to support European governments' efforts in providing aid to the refugees within their borders. States not featured in the plan have also taken in a large number of refugees.

III. Bloc Positions and Possible Solutions

Western democracies have provided a flood of military, economic, and humanitarian support to Ukraine. The Kiel Institute for the World Economy estimates that 113.11 billion euros have been spent on assisting Ukraine. Of that number, 37.87 billion euros have been spent purely on military assistance for Ukraine, with the largest contributions coming from NATO-aligned states. Many NATO states have also recently agreed to deliver western-made armored vehicles to Ukraine, marking a new level of commitment to the nation's success. Despite these hefty contributions, NATO has not engaged in any direct operations on Ukraine's behalf, even refusing Ukrainian requests to establish a no-fly zone.

Furthermore, the United States, the European Union, and several others, have imposed sanctions on Russian products, most notably fossil fuels. The western approach

appears to be to isolate Russia economically and put Ukraine in the best position possible at the war's conclusion.

Russia has formally annexed both the Donbas and an ill-defined region in southern Ukraine. The Russian government seems unyielding in its goals, accepting nothing less than their full realization. The Russian government has also repeatedly warned the west that any interference in Russian military operations would lead to an escalation of the conflict, going as far as to float the idea of abandoning its "No First Strike" policy on nuclear weapons.

IV. Sources and Useful Links

CIA World Factbook - Ukraine

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ukraine/>

General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1

[https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/293/36/PDF/N2229336.pdf?](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/293/36/PDF/N2229336.pdf?OpenElement)

[OpenElement](#)

Timeline of Sanctions

<https://www.reuters.com/graphics/UKRAINE-CRISIS/SANCTIONS/byvrjenzmve/>

UNHCR Refugee Data

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

Foreign Aid Data (Requires Download)

<https://www.ifw-kiel.de/publications/data-sets/ukraine-support-tracker-data-17410/>

Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, Human Rights Monitoring Mission Ukraine

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/HRMMU_Update_2022-03-26_EN.pdf

Casualty figures vary, with commonly cited figures coming from the United Nations, the US office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the European Commission, the Ukrainian Government, and the Russian Government.

Relevant and interesting articles that are worth reading / videos to watch (not to be cited

as Policy Paper sources, as the sources are usually biased):

Vox - Putin's war on Ukraine, explained

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVu8QbxafJE>

BBC - A brief history of modern Ukraine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt1OXtxUBNo>