



THE ARMED CONFLICT IN EASTERN UKRAINE

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Russia and the “People’s Republics” in Eastern Ukraine

By Nikolaus von Twickel

Abstract

The “people’s republics” that appeared in eastern Ukraine in 2014 are often described as separatist, pro-Russian or even Russian-occupied. Their real status is probably best described as puppet states, a well-known phenomenon in the post-Soviet space. However, as long as Moscow continues to deny any direct involvement, its relations with the de-facto authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk can only be highly informal. While there is plenty of evidence describing heavy Russian influence, any comprehensive analysis of Moscow’s role is limited by the lack of official confirmation.

No “People’s Republics” without Russia?

Signs of direct Russian involvement have been observed since the earliest days of the conflict in the Donbass in spring 2014. When pro-Russian protests broke out in Donetsk and Luhansk in early March, local media reports suggested that many participants were Russian citizens. This view was shared by Serhiy Taruta, the then newly appointed governor of the Donetsk region (Taruta 2014). Other observers noted that the protests were highly synchronized, suggesting that they were directed from outside, i.e. Moscow.

The suspected Russian involvement became much more open one month later, when armed men led by former Russian intelligence officer Igor Girkin (also known as Strelkov) seized key administration buildings in Sloviansk on April 12 and Kramatorsk one day later. This daring commando operation fundamentally changed the conflict from largely peaceful protests to a violent struggle, first with local police and then with Ukrainian forces, who arrived in Kramatorsk on April 16.

A plausible theory is that Moscow had initially hoped to seize control of large swaths of eastern and southern Ukraine but decided to switch to a more violent approach after the initial protests did not take off as expected and the new government in Kiev promised to put down the separatist movement by force (Umland 2016).

Over the following months, numerous reports, both from the media and international observers, have confirmed the presence of Russian arms, military officers and sometimes regular troops, despite constant Russian denials (see e.g. Walker 2014). However, while there is evidence demonstrating the presence of sizable regular Russian forces during the battles of Ilovaik in 2014 and Debaltseve in 2015, most experts agree that the separatist militias are largely made up of locals and Russian volunteers—though this does not exclude the possibility that command and control lies in the hands of Russian officers (Bellingcat 2017 and Tsvetkova 2018).

The militarization of the separatist movement paved the way for independence referenda held in both

“people’s republics” on May 11 despite widespread condemnation by Ukraine and the West and a call from Russian President Vladimir Putin to postpone them. More interestingly, the votes with Soviet-style results (96 per cent in favor of independence in Luhansk, 89 per cent in Donetsk) were prepared and carried out in parallel, despite little evidence of coordination between the separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk. And a second round about joining the Russian Federation, planned one week later, was called off in both “republics”.

Subsequently, a number of Russian citizens assumed senior leadership posts among the separatists. On May 15, Girkin/Strelkov became the Donetsk “people’s republic’s” Defense Minister. One day later, Alexander Borodai, a hitherto little-known political consultant from Moscow, became its “Prime Minister”. In July, Vladimir Antyufeyev, a longtime state security “minister” in Moldova’s Russia-controlled separatist Transnistria region, became one of Borodai’s deputies.

In the Luhansk “people’s republic”, Marat Bashirov, a political consultant originally from Udmurtia, served as “Prime Minister” between July and August 2014. And Nikolai Kozitsyn, a Cossack leader from the neighboring Russian region of Rostov, functioned as a powerful field commander in the city of Antratsyt.

However, these Russians were all removed in August and September of the same year (Kozitsyn held out until November), as were some local leaders, first and foremost Valery Bolotov, the founding leader of the Luhansk “people’s republic”, who was replaced by another local, Igor Plotnitsky, on August 14.

Girkin later openly blamed the Kremlin for replacing him with more “flexible people” in order to conduct peace talks (the first Minsk agreement was signed in September). He also confirmed Russia’s role in supplying the separatists with arms, by saying that Moscow threatened to suspend supplies if he did not comply (Girkin 2014).

While it is plausible that Moscow found Girkin too stubborn to work with, it is striking that Russian political officials had mostly vanished from public view in Donetsk

and Luhansk by autumn 2014. Foreigners, including Russians, continue to be present as volunteer fighters in Donetsk, where a whole military brigade is reserved for the “internationalists” (“Pyatnashka”, commanded by the Abkhazian Akhra Avidzba). However, the most prominent Russian field commander, Arsen Pavlov (better known as “Motorola”), was assassinated in October 2016.

Russians made a political comeback in Donetsk in late 2016, when Alexander Kazakov, a consultant originally from Riga, became an advisor to local separatist leader Alexander Zakharchenko. Kazakov was joined by Zakhar Prilepin, one of Russia’s most prominent writers, who also assumed the position of political commissar in one of Zakharchenko’s special forces battalion.

In an interview with the Latvian Vesti.lv portal, Kazakov complained that the “people’s republic” suffers from a shortage of political experts and called for more Russians to work there temporarily (Kazakov 2017).

Undercover Relations

The case that Russia has massive leverage over the Donbass separatists is backed up by the fact that the “republics” can hardly be expected to generate enough income to cover their costs. According to Ukraine’s Security Service SBU, in the Luhansk “people’s republic’s” budget for the first quarter of 2017, 9 out of 11 billion rubles was paid by Russia (the Russian ruble has been in use in both “republics” since 2015). Moscow’s overall subsidies for the two “republics”, estimated to be at least 1 billion euros per year, are thought to be contained in the secret part of Russia’s state budget (von Twickel 2018).

Other indicators that key political events in Donetsk and Luhansk are being carefully orchestrated from outside are the “elections” of November 2014 and the “primaries” of October 2016. Both votes were held by the two “republics” in parallel, but no one explained why the same dates were chosen. The “primaries” were announced almost simultaneously, first by Zakharchenko on May 23 and three days later by Plotnitsky. The results were also similar in that candidates from each governing “movement” (de-facto parties) won comfortably.

Despite all this, no Russian government official has to this day acknowledged official ties with either “people’s republic”. Ukrainian media regularly speculate that Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin’s point man for eastern Ukraine, is visiting Donetsk and/or Luhansk, but Surkov has never confirmed that he traveled there. The closest he came to revealing ties to separatist leaders was in October 2017, when he took part in the unveiling of a monument for volunteer fighters killed in Donbass, together with Borodai and Zakharchenko in Rostov-on-Don.

When Russian parliamentarians occasionally show up in Donetsk or Luhansk, they tend to be Duma

backbenchers like Andrei Kozenko, a United Russia member from Crimea, Communist MP Kazbek Taisayev or celebrity MPs like Iosif Kobzon, the veteran singer turned United Russia deputy, who grew up in the Donetsk region. Kozenko, however, coordinates the “Donbass-Russia Integration Committee”, a body founded in Crimea last year with the stated aim to bring the “people’s republics” closer to Moscow.

Similarly, prominent separatists rarely make official appearances in Moscow. When Zakharchenko was spotted in the Kremlin for a concert marking Kobzon’s 80th birthday last autumn, Ukrainian media was awash with speculation that the Donetsk separatist leader was really in Moscow to receive instructions (TSN 2017).

The total lack of official ties between Moscow on the one hand and Donetsk and Luhansk on the other is obviously dictated by the Minsk agreement, which President Putin signed in February 2015 and which makes Russia an official arbiter in the conflict, which it claims to be an internal Ukrainian affair.

This policy, however, is creating growing difficulties for Moscow’s efforts to keep the “people’s republics” afloat, especially after their economic separation from the rest of Ukraine caused by the trade blockade initiated by Ukrainian activists last year and the subsequent nationalization of industries by the separatist leadership. For instance, while shops in Donetsk and Luhansk are largely stocked with products from Russia, the separatists cannot legally sell any products to Russia, because they cannot get their exports certified.

More seriously, plants and factories inside the people’s republics cannot establish the necessary cash flow to keep up production, because of the absence of banking links with Russia. In this situation, South Ossetia has become a last resort: Having established official relationships with both Moscow and Donetsk and Luhansk, the tiny Georgian breakaway republic in the Caucasus serves as a hub between the two, hosting the bank through which payments run from Russia to Donbass and the new holding company, Vneshtorgservis, that manages the Ukrainian-owned industry (von Twickel 2017).

How Much Sovereignty Does a Puppet State Have?

Given Moscow’s stubborn denials, any judgement about “people’s republics” status vis-à-vis Russia is bound to contain a lot of speculation.

It is clear, however, that the de-facto authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk today have significantly less sovereignty than any other separatist statelet in the former Soviet Union. In fact, the Donbass de-facto authorities do not really qualify as “separatists” at all, since their

stated goal has, from the onset, been accession to Russia rather than self-determination.

This can also be an explanation for the strong links with South Ossetia, which has from time to time declared that it would prefer to join the Russian Federation instead of being independent.

The idea of a puppet state, where independence is merely a masquerade for occupation, is not new to the region. The case has been made with regard to all other separatist statelets on the former Soviet Union's territory, ie Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh (Ivanel 2016).

What is new in Donbass are extremely low levels of sovereignty and democracy, together with very high population numbers. While Abkhazia, Transnistria and (to a lesser extent) South Ossetia (probably also Nagorno-Karabakh, whose sponsor state is Armenia rather than Russia) possess limited pluralism and some leeway over domestic affairs, the Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics" have so far displayed neither the ability nor the will to make sustainable independent decisions about domestic affairs, while their style of government can safely be described as military dictatorships.

Both "republics" are also significantly bigger than the "old" separatist entities, the biggest of whom, Transnistria, has a population of less than half a million. Luhansk and Donetsk are believed to have between 2.5 and 3 million inhabitants.

And there are clearly limitations to Moscow's control. A notable case was last year's "putsch" in Luhansk, where longtime separatist leader Plotnitsky was replaced by his security chief and bitter rival Leonid Pasechnik. While open violence was avoided, thanks to the appearance of unmarked troops from Donetsk who supported Pasechnik, the power change highlighted the fact that the Kremlin had for three years backed a leader who enjoyed almost zero support among the security forces and local elites.

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The events in Luhansk triggered fresh speculation that the "people's republics" are actually controlled by rival factions in Moscow: The security service FSB supported the putschists, while Surkov was seen behind Plotnitsky. The fact that Pasechnik succeeded is probably an indicator that the Kremlin switched sides after it became clear that the cost of further defending Plotnitsky exceeded the benefit.

Conclusion

As long as it feels bound by the Minsk agreement, Moscow is unlikely to change its policy of veiled control of the separatists. The coup in Luhansk actually proved that the Kremlin is not ready to openly defy that agreement, at least in letter, by merging the two "people's republics" (Minsk guarantees Ukraine's administrative structure, including the division between Luhansk and Donetsk).

However, the cost of this policy is likely to rise, as non-recognition creates multiple hurdles for Russia's growing economic and financial support, which became necessary after last year's trade blockade and the ensuing seizure of the "people's republics'" industrial assets.

If the West remains firm, Russia does not have many options for solving this dilemma. If the economic situation in the Donbass deteriorates, calls for recognizing the "people's republics" will only get louder. If President Putin heeds them, the fledging peace process would almost definitely be terminated, greatly increasing the risk of massive escalation, both locally and in the standoff between Russia and the West.

But a continuation of the present status quo is also no good news. By keeping up plausible deniability about the real power structures, Moscow can continue to ignore violations of human rights and international norms in the areas it controls. This is what makes finding a compromise all the more urgent.

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ANALYSIS

How Divided Is the Population of the Donbas Region?

By Gwendolyn Sasse (Centre for East European and International Studies – ZOIS, Berlin)

Abstract

Recent survey research conducted by the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS) asks whether the increasing physical and political distance between the Kyiv-controlled Donbas and the territories of the self-declared “people’s republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk (here abbreviated as DNR/LNR) is reflected in the identities and attitudes of the current and former local population. More generally, the research speaks to the as yet underexplored effects of war on identities. By covering the whole Donbas region rather than just the part controlled by Kyiv, and by including the internally and externally displaced, the survey data provide a rare glimpse of the perceptions across the four parts of the population that once made up the Donbas region.

Introduction

In December 2016 face-to-face interviews were conducted in the Kyiv-controlled Donbas (n=1,200 split evenly between Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts), among the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine (n=1000), and the displaced in Russia (n=1000). In the non-government controlled areas a telephone survey was conducted (n=1,200). The survey of IDPs covered six oblasts in Ukraine—among them those with the highest concentration of registered IDPs (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv oblast), Dnipro oblast as a further region bor-

dering the conflict, Kyiv city and Kyiv oblast, and Lviv oblast as a western oblast which has attracted a significant number of refugees. The survey of the displaced in Russia covered Moscow city and 11 western and central oblasts with known concentrations of the displaced.¹

¹ For more information on the surveys, including methodology, results and visualisations, see <https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_2_2017.pdf> and <https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_1_2017.pdf>

Personal Contacts across the Frontline

Crossing the current border is part of the daily routine of many people living close to the frontline. The intensity of contact between family members and friends across the frontline is a powerful counterpoint to the actions of the parties to this war. Of the respondents in the Kyiv-controlled Donbas 38 percent said that they have family members or friends in the DNR/LNR, and 57 percent of the respondents in the non-government controlled areas have family members or friends in the government-controlled Donbas.

Close to 50 percent of the respondents in the Kyiv-controlled Donbas are in touch with family members and friends in DNR/LNR on a daily basis or once/twice per week. Only about 3 percent report not being in touch. Similarly, close to 50 percent of the respondents in the DNR/LNR are in touch with family members or friends based in the Kyiv-controlled Donbas on a daily basis or once/twice a week. Here only about 4 percent has lost touch for the moment.

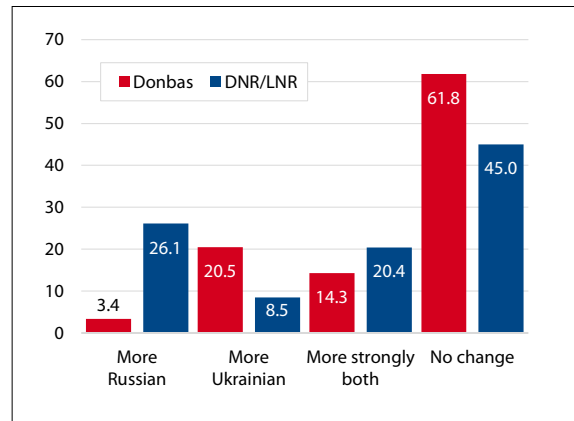
The displaced in both Russia and Ukraine also retain strong ties with family members and friends in both parts of the Donbas. Two thirds of the displaced in Russia have relatives or friends in Kyiv-controlled Donbas; and just under 90 percent have relatives or friends in the DNR/LNR. Among the IDPs, two thirds have friends or relatives in the DNR/LNR and the government-controlled Donbas respectively. About half of the displaced in Russia and Ukraine are in daily or weekly contact with relatives or friends in the DNR/LNR.

Self-Reported Identities

A one-off survey can only tap into self-reported identity changes. In response to a deliberately general question about a change in personal identity as a result of the events of 2013–16, a quarter of the respondents in the DNR/LNR said that they felt “more (like a) Russian” now—and a fifth of the respondents in the Kyiv-controlled Donbas reported that they felt “more (like a) Ukrainian” now. Interestingly, however, 14 percent and 20 percent in the Kyiv-controlled and non-government-controlled Donbas respectively said that they felt more strongly now that they are “both Ukrainian and Russian.” The majority in both parts of the Donbas reported no change in identity: 62 percent in the government-controlled Donbas and 45 percent in the self-declared republics. Thus, while there has been a greater shift in identities in the DNR/LNR, a significant number of respondents overall reported not only a stable identity but also a stronger mixed identity.

The face-to-face interviews allowed for more detailed follow-up questions on identity. 53 and 54 percent of

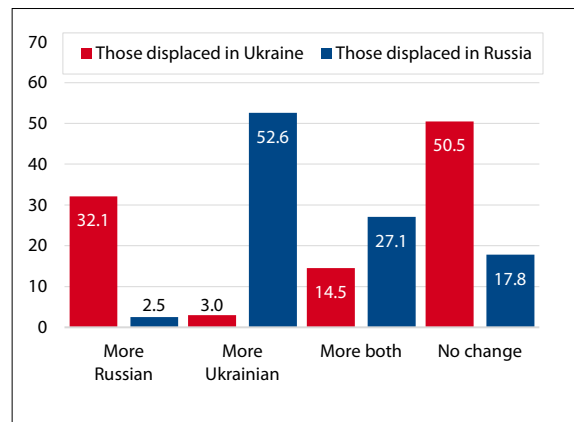
Figure 1: As a Result of the Events of 2013–2016, Do You Feel ...



Donbas: n= 995; DNR/LNR=1,141

Source: ZOiS surveys 2016. For more information on the surveys, including methodology, results and visualisations, see <https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_2_2017.pdf>

Figure 2: As a Result of the Events of 2013–2016, Do You Feel ...



Ukraine: n= 939; Russia=955

Source: ZOiS surveys 2016. For more information on the surveys, including methodology, results and visualisations, see <https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_1_2017.pdf>

the respondents picked Ukrainian citizenship as their primary self-reported identity now and five years ago. Only 7 percent and 4 percent chose “ethnic Ukrainian” and “ethnic Russian” as their main identity five years ago. These figures have risen now to 11 percent and 6 percent respectively. Similarly, self-identification as “mixed ethnic Russian and Ukrainian” has risen from 4 to 7 percent over the last five years. With regard to regional identity, the salience of a Donbas identity has gone up from 8 to 9 percent, while identification with the regional sub-units Donetsk and Luhansk oblast has

decreased from 7 to 5 percent and from 11 to 4 percent respectively.

Among the displaced, greater shifts in identity were recorded by the displaced in Russia (only about 18 percent of respondents reported “no change”). Asked whether their identity has changed as a result of the events 2013–16, about 50 percent said they felt “more Russian” now, but interestingly, close to 30 percent said they felt more strongly than before that they were “both Russian and Ukrainian.” Among the internally displaced, half the respondents reported an identity shift. Just over 30 percent of the IDPs stated that they now felt “more Ukrainian,” and 15 percent felt more strongly that they were “both Ukrainian and Russian.” Thus, mixed identities remain important or have become even more important among those who are most directly affected by the war.

Self-identification as a Ukrainian citizen marks an important difference between the Kyiv-controlled and the non-government-controlled areas. In the DNR/LNR, 54 percent reported that they felt less like Ukrainian citizens now compared to before 2013.

The share of the displaced in Russia self-identifying as “ethnic Russian” (18 percent compared to 14 percent five years ago) and “ethnic Ukrainian” has gone up (from 8 percent in 2011 to 10 percent in 2016). The category “mixed ethnic Ukrainian and Russian” has increased in salience from 15 percent to 18 percent. Looking back five years, 27 percent of the displaced in Russia said that their most salient identity was “Ukrainian citizen”—compared to only 7 percent choosing this identity marker as the primary one today. These figures amount to a retrospective illustration that the identification with the Ukrainian state was stronger in eastern Ukraine before the war than is commonly assumed today.

The IDPs in Ukraine report a much smaller change in their identities: “Ukrainian citizen” was and is their most important self-reported identity (about 52% now compared to 54% five years ago). The changes to the other identity categories are similarly small: respondents report a slight increase in the category “ethnic Ukrainian” (from about 11 to 15 percent) and “mixed ethnic Ukrainian and Russian” (from 8.9 to 9.4 percent), and a slight drop in various expressions of regional identity (now 2, 4 and 9 percent for Luhansk region, Donetsk region, and Donbas respectively). Thus, a degree of “ethnification” has taken place among the IDPs, but identification with the Ukrainian polity through citizenship has survived as the predominant primary identity.

Language

Survey questions about “native language” tap into sentiments about language as an identity marker rather

than actual day-to-day language practice. The majority of respondents in both the Kyiv-controlled Donbas (about 50 percent) and the DNR/LNR (about 60 percent) identify Russian as their native language. The surveys included the option “both Russian and Ukrainian” which was chosen by 34 percent and 36 percent in the government-controlled Donbas and in the DNR/LNR respectively.

A majority—53 percent of the respondents in the Kyiv-controlled Donbas and 70 percent in the DNR/LNR—listed Russian as the dominant language spoken at home. Furthermore, 18 and 10 percent in the Kyiv-controlled Donbas and the DNR/LNR respectively reported an equal language mix of Ukrainian and Russian at home. A further 21 and 17 percent respectively said that their main language at home is Russian but that they occasionally speak Ukrainian.

While a higher proportion of the displaced in Russia than in Ukraine considers Russian their native language (about 60 percent compared to 40 percent), there are interesting nuances. About a third to half of the displaced in Russia and Ukraine respectively describe both Russian and Ukrainian as their native languages and do not regard this as a change in recent years. The results show that bilingual identities have remained strong.

Views on the War and the Status of the Region

Views on the origins of the war are more similar across the two parts of the Donbas than one might have expected. In the Kyiv-controlled Donbas 37 percent of the respondents blame the war on Russia and 10 percent on Ukraine, while a surprising 30 percent think it was the result of Western intervention, and 23 percent see it as a local reaction against the Kyiv government. With the exception of the role of Russia, the views in the DNR/LNR are rather similar: 50 percent think the war resulted from Western intervention, 30 percent see it as a local reaction against the national government, 11 percent blame it on Ukraine and 9 percent on Russia.

While the majority of IDPs (50 percent) blame Russia for the war, 20 percent see it as a result of Western intervention. The political attitudes of the IDPs are more skeptical vis-à-vis the West than one might have assumed. By comparison, 66 percent of the respondents among the displaced in Russia blame the West and only 2 percent Russia. Across both displaced groups between 12 and 19 percent blame either Ukraine or local actors.

The preferences regarding the future status of the DNR/LNR diverge significantly. While in the Kyiv-controlled Donbas a clear majority (65 percent) wants the territories to be part of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast without a special status, 26 percent deem a special status

within Ukraine necessary, and about 9 percent see the future of these territories in Russia. In the DNR/LNR the views are highly diverse: 21 percent want this area to be part of Ukraine without a special status, and 35 percent prefer a special status for these territories inside Ukraine—i.e. overall, a majority came out in favour of remaining part of Ukraine. Conversely, 11 percent see these territories as part of Russia without a special status, and 33 percent would prefer a special status inside Russia.

Two thirds of the displaced in Russia see the territories as a part of Russia—with or without a special autonomy status—whereas for about 96 percent of the displaced in Ukraine, the territories are an integral part of Ukraine (about a third envisages a special autonomy status).

Foreign Policy Orientation

The two parts of the Donbas are rather similar in their foreign policy orientations: while NATO membership is rejected outright by the vast majority in both parts, negative views of the EU are widespread too: 72 percent of respondents in the government-controlled Donbas and 82 percent in the self-declared republics are against Ukraine joining the EU.

The majority of the displaced in Russia (85 percent) reported that they are against Ukraine's EU membership—as well as 45 percent of the internally displaced.

Current disappointment with the EU's inability to change their situation, a perceived link between displacement and the Euromaidan, and an association of the EU with closer links with NATO may jointly explain the latter result.

Conclusion

The survey has highlighted both a certain increase in the salience of ethnic identities in the context of war and displacement, but also the continued significance of mixed identities (“both Ukrainian and Russian,” “Ukrainian citizenship,” or bilingual identities). This is an important corrective to the widespread polarization hypothesis in the study of war.

The ZOiS survey illustrates that the gap in attitudes between the two parts of the Donbas is not as clear-cut as one might have expected, e.g. with regard to foreign policy orientations. The attitudes in the non-government controlled areas are also much more differentiated than the war-related political divisions suggest. The wide range of preferences regarding the status of the territories not currently under Kyiv's control and the mixed identities are something Ukrainian, Western and Russian policy-makers need to take into account. For Kyiv it would be premature to effectively give up on these territories; while Moscow cannot count on the unwavering loyalty of the population of the DNR/LNR.

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Does Peacekeeping Work in Ukraine?

By Mario Baumann (University of St. Andrews)

Abstract

The political feasibility of a peacekeeping mandate for eastern Ukraine has been widely discussed recently, but does peacekeeping constitute a viable option in the first place? In order to capture the causal relations of the conflict and to assess how peacekeeping could affect them, this analysis will build on insights from the theoretical peacekeeping literature and look at comparative cases. A multidimensional peacekeeping mandate comprising armed military and civilian components could contribute significantly to stop the ongoing violence and to address underlying political causes of the conflict. The inflow of Russian resources and fighters, however, is likely to undermine peacekeeping mechanisms by increasing private information and fostering insecurities.

Introduction

Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent proposal to send a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission to Ukraine has revived a debate about the role such a mission could play in eastern Ukraine where, according to UN estimates, more than 10,000 people have died since April 2014. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has been calling for UN peacekeepers already since early 2015. The fact, however, that the two men's proposals differ substantially both in scope and mandate shows that peacekeeping is by no means a panacea that, once deployed, guarantees stable ceasefires and a peaceful settlement of the conflict. During his visit to Ukraine in early January, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel reaffirmed the need for a "robust" peacekeeping mission to sustainably enforce the ceasefire and called for an agreement prior to the upcoming Russian presidential elections in March.

Political differences remain on various matters, including first and foremost Russia's role in the conflict and its resolution, the so-called "People's Republics" say in negotiations, and the composition of potential peacekeeping troops. Notwithstanding the widely discussed question of the political feasibility of such an agreement, it is worthwhile to fathom the impact peacekeeping forces could actually have in the Ukrainian setting. Therefore, this analysis will consult the theoretical peacekeeping literature and look at comparative cases in order to carve out the causal relations of the conflict and to evaluate where and how peacekeeping could influence them.

Mechanisms of Peacekeeping

It is only since the early 2000s that profound studies have established systematic causal explanations for whether and how peacekeeping works. Virginia Page Fortna's theoretical framework (2008) is an example of this literature, widely recognized for its comprehensiveness

and coherence. From her perspective, ceasefire violations are usually the outcome of *bargaining failures*. The bargaining model of war to which she refers builds on the assumption that parties to a conflict usually prefer a peaceful negotiated settlement to the costly and risky gamble of war. The decision to either agree to such a settlement or to continue fighting, however, is the outcome of cost-benefit considerations regarding the expected outcome of the conflict (Mason & Fett 1996). Violence can thus, according to James Fearon (1995), be explained either by disagreement on this outcome due to *private information* regarding other parties' military capabilities and resolve or by *problems of credible commitment* to adhere to negotiated agreements. Peacekeeping functions by influencing these two factors—reducing private information and facilitating credible commitment—in order to reduce incentives for aggression; lower uncertainty to forestall fear and mistrust; prevent and control accidents through mediation, exchange of information or buffer zones; and provide mechanisms to meet fears of political exclusion.

Bargaining Failures as Explanations for Recurring Violence

For Ukraine, in order to assess the potential impact of and requirements for peacekeeping troops, it is thus necessary to firstly identify sources of bargaining failures in the conflict. These constitute explanations for why the warring parties repeatedly resort to violence, thereby violating the ceasefire that had been agreed on formally in the September 2014 Minsk Protocol and Memorandum. Given the multi-layered nature of the conflict involving three warring parties—the Ukrainian government, the separatists, and Russia—dynamics of internal conflicts as well as the effects of external intervention must be considered. According to Barbara Walter (1997, 2009), problems of private information and credible commitment are more severe in civil conflicts than in classical interstate wars for several reasons.

Non-State Actors, Misrepresentation and External Resources

Non-state actors' capabilities and resolve, to begin with, are harder to estimate, leading to increased uncertainty. Opaque inflows of external resources from third parties such as Russia make precise estimates even harder. Assuming the separatists' motivation to obtain wide-ranging concessions in negotiations, they are likely to withhold or misrepresent information on their own capabilities. This also applies for the Ukrainian government which has incentives to present itself as adamant in countering attempts to create spaces of Russian influence on its territory. Moreover, financial shortages in both so-called People's Republics in 2016 followed by attempts to become economically less dependent on Russia (von Twickel 2017) suggest that the separatists themselves are not entirely sure about their future capabilities.

Power Asymmetries and Low Incentives for Russia

Two explanations in particular can be brought forward why the three parties cannot credibly commit to the de-escalating provisions of the Minsk Agreements, including the ceasefire, disengagement, and bans of certain weapons. The first explanation focusses on power asymmetries. Negotiated settlements normally require armed rebels to demobilize their forces. In the demobilization and reintegration period, once fighting has ended, rebels thus have few capabilities to deter the government from renegeing on the settlement's terms. Fears of oppression and political exclusion are therefore reasonable. Yanukovich's escape in February 2014 was accompanied by several exclusionary policy steps, including the marginalization of his pro-Russian Party of the Regions, which represented primarily the Russian and Russian-speaking Ukrainian population in the East. Fears of political exclusion were thus central to the secessionist violence that started in April 2014 (Strasheim 2016).

The Minsk documents address these fears by providing political steps to terminate the conflict. These include the Ukrainian concessions to undertake constitutional changes towards decentralization, granting more autonomy to the eastern regions including the creation of "people's police units", and local elections. The Minsk process, however, seems to be in a deadlock as Russia and Ukraine blame each other respectively for not implementing these political elements and for further fueling the conflict by keeping Russian fighters on Ukrainian territory.

This points towards a second set of commitment problems. Russian support of the separatists with financial, material and human resources has offset the bal-

ance of power significantly in their favor, safeguarding them from a recapture by Ukrainian government forces (Davis 2016). The Russian set of demands narrows the range of possible agreements in negotiations—reflected by the role of Russian interests in the Minsk agreements. At the same time, as an external state pursuing its own agenda in the conflict, Russia has few incentives to commit to the Minsk agreements whose implementation would ultimately deprive it of its influence on the separatists (von Twickel 2018). To sum up, uncertainty and and the belligerents' lack of commitment to agreed de-escalation measures thus leads to the current deadlock and constant ceasefire violations.

Peacekeeping in Ukraine

How can peacekeeping address these dynamics in Ukraine? Different types of peacekeeping missions have various mechanisms at their disposal to mitigate private information and problems of credible commitment. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), an unarmed observer mission issuing regular reports, has been established already in March 2014 on request of the Ukrainian government. The Minsk agreements have broadened its mandate to monitor the ceasefire regime as well as to monitor and verify the withdrawal of heavy weapons.

While such an unarmed information-driven mission's ability to deter is naturally limited, it nevertheless makes aggression costlier by complicating surprise attacks and functioning as a potential trip wire that might entail more serious outside intervention. It can also raise the benefits of peace by providing legitimacy to otherwise not recognized actors and by producing objective information that can differentiate aggression from legitimate retaliation. An observer mission's main function, after all, is the reduction of informational problems, thereby aiming to reduce fear and mistrust and to prevent accidents and involuntary defection. Monitoring also mitigates problems of credible commitment, especially in disarmament and demobilization processes (Fortna 2008).

Monitoring...

The SMM, however, faces major problems with the implementation of the agreements on the ground: both sides lack cooperation to unveil information on weapons withdrawals and to implement the de-escalating provisions of the Minsk documents; the ceasefire is constantly violated by heavy clashes, causing numerous casualties and injured until today; and the SMM's right to move securely throughout the country is frequently and increasingly restricted. The latter prevents regular observations of various sites, including a considera-

ble part of the Russian/Ukrainian border. This lack of cooperation deprives the mission of the ability to provide comprehensive and reliable information that would reassure the parties and alleviate informational asymmetries. Its capacities to raise the costs of ceasefire violations are limited given its unarmed and information-driven character. The constant ceasefire violations and lacking compliance to disengagement provisions until today thus point to the inability of the SMM to deter these violations and a lack of reliable security guarantees that would mitigate problems of credible commitment.

...Is Not Enough

What are the implications for a potential UN mission in Ukraine? The severe informational problems and credible commitment problems identified above reaffirm the necessity of monitoring and observation tasks to prevent recurring violence as a result of aggression, fear and mistrust, or accidents. Experience from the SMM suggests, however, that the costs for ceasefire violations and non-compliance are not high enough. Hilde Haug (2016), former employee of the SMM, finds that sanctions or mechanisms to hold actors responsible for ceasefire violations and lack of progress would be essential for belligerents to comply. This observation is in line with theoretical arguments which highlight that (lightly) armed peacekeeping troops, mandated to use these arms if necessary, could deter recurring outbreaks of violence more credibly (Walter 1997; Fortna 2008). Poroshenko's 2016 proposal to arm the SMM in order to increase security in eastern Ukraine seems legitimate from this perspective.

Apart from the violence on the ground, however, a sustainable peace calls for a resolution of the underlying commitment problems that initially contributed to the outbreak of violence. A peace process thus must address the separatists' fears of political exclusion. This suggests that the successful implementation of the political elements of the Minsk agreements—local elections, decentralization and autonomy rights—is fundamental for a long-term resolution. A peacekeeping mission can play various roles to facilitate steps of political inclusion, including military deterrence of intimidation by the stronger party and civilian measures such as monitoring of elections. The reciprocal blaming of Ukraine and Russia that currently paralyzes the implementation of the various Minsk provisions, however, points to the main challenge for a sustainable conflict resolution. The foreign dimension is likely to undermine any peacekeeping endeavors. The inflow of Russian resources and fighters, by increasing private information and fostering insecurities, would override peacekeeping mechanisms that aim at halting the ongoing violence and at facilitating a resolution of underlying problems.

Peacekeeping as Facilitator of De-internationalization

The fact that the interference into internal conflicts by foreign states with an independent agenda may constitute a major hurdle for conflict resolution is affirmed by David Cunningham's 2010 study. He consequently points to the possibility of a sequenced course of action whereby the foreign dimension of a conflict is addressed first to pave the way for further progress.

The first United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM I, 1988–91) is an example of how peacekeeping can be used to facilitate such a sequenced approach. In the Angolan civil war, the two warring parties, MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) and UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola), have been supported by Cuban and South African troops respectively. While Cuba assisted the MPLA for ideological reasons, South Africa sought to indirectly counter the MPLA-backed Namibian independence forces by supporting UNITA (Krska 1997).

A US negotiation team, committed to firstly address the external dimension, mediated talks between Angola, Cuba and South Africa that culminated in agreements leading to Namibian independence and the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. UNAVEM I's mandate was to verify the redeployment and withdrawal of Cuban troops. Despite many differences to Ukraine (e.g. Cuban troops supported the stronger party), the successfully completed UNAVEM I points out the role peacekeeping can play in facilitating a sequenced approach that aims at addressing the problem of foreign interference first. Peacekeeping discussions on Ukraine should therefore also consider whether or how peacekeeping could contribute to a resolution of the current deadlock situation by first addressing the commitment problems that prevent Russia from halting its support of the separatists.

Conclusion

The preceding considerations indicate the manifold challenges a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine would face. In order to stop the ongoing violence on the ground and to address the underlying commitment problems of the conflict, a peacekeeping mandate should go beyond mere observation and monitoring tasks and address political elements as provided by the Minsk agreements. A *multidimensional* peacekeeping mission—lightly armed troops that monitor and report on compliance, separate forces, facilitate disarmament, and perform civilian tasks to ensure political inclusion—could contribute to the resolution of the conflict by influencing the causal mechanisms that led to its outbreak and nourish daily ceasefire violations.

The analysis suggests, however, that the success of any peacekeeping effort is to a large extent dependent on the termination of Russian support and the withdrawal of its military personnel. This implies that the isolation of external players should constitute a priority when talking about peacekeeping endeavors. The Minsk agreements address this topic by demanding the “[w]ithdrawal of all foreign armed formations, military

equipment, as well as mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine”. The current paralysis of the Minsk process, however, can be traced to the reciprocal conditionality the parties respectively articulate for addressing the internal and external dimensions. Peacekeeping could contribute to a resolution of this deadlock situation by facilitating a sequenced approach following the example of the Angolan case.

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