

GREAT DECISIONS

Special Update on War in Ukraine

We at the Foreign Policy Association would like to provide you with a special update on the war in Ukraine. At the moment, Russian forces are making slow advances as they are met with bitter Ukrainian resistance. High-level talks have yet to yield any progress toward bringing the conflict to an end. In this update, we will lay out the background to this crisis. From the breakup of the Soviet Union to the beginning of the current war. We hope to make the reader better informed on what has led to the current war, in order to best understand what foreign policy options are now available to the United States, and where we may go from here.

- **Independence from the Soviet Union- July 16, 1990-** The Ukrainian parliament, the Rada, votes to declare independence from the Soviet Union.
- **August 24, 1991-** The Ukrainian parliament officially declares independence from the Soviet Union a second time, having been delayed by a coup attempt in Moscow. The declaration is approved by 92% of Ukrainian voters. The Soviet Union officially dissolves on December 26, 1991.
- **1992-** Ukraine formally establishes relations with NATO.
- **December 1994-** In a treaty known as the “Budapest Memorandum,” Ukraine agrees to give away its missiles, in exchange for a guarantee that the other signatories- the US, the UK, and Russia will “respect the existence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine.”
- **1994-2004-** Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma helps transition his country into a capitalist society, privatizing and linking Ukraine to the global economy.
- **2004-** The presidential election is between Kuchma’s successor Viktor Yanukovich and pro-democracy politician Viktor Yushchenko.
- Yushchenko is poisoned and Yanukovich wins the election amid accusations of fraud. Large protests, known as the “Orange Revolution” follow. Another vote is held and Yushchenko wins.
- **2008-** President Yushchenko requests a “membership action plan” to join NATO. The U.S. supports this move but France and Germany oppose it after Russia announces its opposition.

- NATO comes up with a compromise, it promises that Ukraine will one day be a part of the alliance but gives no specifics on when.
- **2010-** Viktor Yanukovich is elected president. He says Ukraine should be a neutral state, cooperating both with Russia and also the west and NATO.
- ***Maidan Revolution and Annexation of Crimea- November 2013-February 2014-*** Yanukovich decides not to sign a deal to bring Ukraine into a free trade agreement with the EU. The response consists of widescale protests and calls for Yanukovich to resign. In late February, violence leaves more than 100 dead.
- Before an impeachment vote can be held in late February, Yanukovich flees Ukraine for Russia and an interim government is set up.
- The new interim government announces that it will sign the deal with the EU, and also issues a warrant for the arrest of Yanukovich. Russia responds by saying the change in government is an illegal coup, and also sends soldiers to the Crimean Peninsula.
- ***March 2014-*** A public referendum is held in Crimea. The results show that 97% of the population are in favor of reunification with Russia, however these results are disputed. On March 18, Putin announces the annexation of Crimea to the Russian parliament. The U.S. and European allies respond with sanctions.
- ***April 2014-*** Inspired by the secession of Crimea, Russian-supported separatists in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk storm government buildings and declare independence from Ukraine. Russia denies that its troops were involved in this secession but Ukrainian officials say otherwise.
- ***May 2014-*** Petro Poroshenko is elected president of Ukraine. He makes efforts to bring the country in closer to the west and distance it from Russia.
- ***September 5, 2014-*** The Minsk agreement is signed, creating an agreement between Ukraine and Russia to enter a cease-fire in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. This cease-fire soon breaks.
- ***Increased Russian influence- February 2015-*** A second Minsk agreement is signed, which also results as being unsuccessful in stopping the violence. Since 2014, 14,000 have been killed in the violence and millions have been displaced.
- ***2016-2017-*** As fighting in eastern Ukraine continues, Russia carries out a series of cyberattacks against Ukraine.
- ***April 2019-*** Volodymyr Zelenskyy is elected president. He promises to make peace with Russia and end the war in Donetsk and Luhansk.

*The UPDATES take into account
events up to March 17, 2022.*

- **July 2019**- During a phone call with President Trump, Zelenskyy requests a visit to the White House to discuss potential U.S. backing of Ukraine’s efforts to push off Russia. Trump says that in order to fulfill this request, he would like Zelenskyy to investigate the energy company “Burisma” and its relation to the Bidens. This leads to Trump’s first impeachment in December 2019.
- **The crisis escalates- April 2021**- Russia positions 100,000 soldiers on Ukraine’s borders. Zelenskyy urges NATO to place Ukraine on a timeline for membership.
- **August 2021**- Zelenskyy visits President Biden at the White House. Biden emphasizes U.S. support for Ukrainian sovereignty but says Ukraine has not yet met the conditions necessary to join NATO.
- **December 2021**- In a phone call between Putin and Biden, Putin demands the following: NATO permanently bar Ukraine from joining, and the withdrawal of troops from countries in the alliance such as Romania and Balkan countries.
- **Russia invades- January 2022**- European, American, and Russian diplomats meet repeatedly to avoid a war. U.S. and NATO representatives respond to Putin’s demands by saying they cannot bar Ukraine from joining NATO but will negotiate on other issues such as arms control.
- **February 2022**- Biden deploys an additional 2,000 troops to Poland and Germany.
- Russia continues to increase its military presence on the border with Ukraine, estimates range from 150,000 to 190,000 troops.
- **February 24, 2022- Present**- Russian forces begin their assault on Ukrainian territory. Ukrainian forces attempt to hold them back on several fronts. The US, UK, and European Union enlist a broad set of sanctions targeting Russian banks and oligarchs. Full scale war ensues with heavy civilian losses in Ukraine.

*The UPDATES were written by Graham Nau,
assistant editor at FPA.*