



BULLETIN

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Possibilities for Supporting Ukraine against Russian Aggression

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*The intensity of Russian activity in Ukraine raises concerns that the agenda behind its support for the separatists could be to establish a sense of *faits accomplis* by progressively gaining control of even larger areas of eastern and southern Ukraine. NATO and the EU should go beyond its ad hoc response to Russia's actions. Military and political support, combined with genuine economic pressure on Russia from the West, will deter Russia from venturing further into Ukraine's territory.*

The intensification of Russian activities on Ukrainian territory demonstrates Moscow's readiness to further escalate the ongoing crisis. Russia not only has increased support for the separatists by providing them with heavy weaponry such as tanks, armoured personnel carriers and artillery but also by shelling Ukraine forces from Russian territory and engaging in other direct military operations. Unmarked combat troops (Russian) operating in Ukraine have given momentum to counteroffensive operations by the separatists of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republic, turning the military situation on the ground against Ukraine. According to data provided by NATO, Russia has in Ukraine at least one thousand troops. Unofficial sources claim that the number is at least several times higher.

Russia's Goals. By increasing its military engagement in Ukraine, Russia is indicating that military means will not enable the Ukrainians to regain territories controlled by the separatists. The more Ukrainian combat forces are put to the operation in the east, the greater Russia's support for separatists will be, leaving Ukraine with only temporary successes. Simultaneously, the counter-offensive in Nowoazovsk, in southeastern Ukraine, which opened a new front, is a demonstration to Ukraine that a continuation of the fighting risks losing new territory. With Donetsk, Luhansk and Nowoazovsk serving as logistical bases for further operations with support by regular Russian troops, the separatists could carve out a land corridor between Russia and the annexed Crimea. Further expansion by the separatists towards Kharkiv and Odessa also could not be excluded.

As long as Russia deems it necessary, it will continue to hide its direct engagement in the region and will try to negate any proof of its military presence in Ukraine. This approach is intended to make international responses to Russia's aggression more difficult to formulate. It is also essential for maintaining the public discourse in Russia created by Kremlin-controlled mass media outlets about the conflict in Ukraine. Russia's concentration of combat troops next to the Ukrainian border has served as an ongoing warning that if the separatists' situation dramatically deteriorates, Russia is prepared for an open-ended, large-scale invasion.

Russia's actions seem to provide Ukraine with a choice between, on the one hand, a political agreement on Moscow's conditions, including the decentralisation of the country and recognition of the separatists as a legitimate political power or, on the other hand, the loss of control of significant parts of its territory and a "freezing" of the conflict. In both cases, Russia will attempt to further destabilise Ukraine, hamper its economic recovery and attempt to block European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

NATO and EU Support. Russia's actions create the need for the EU and NATO to revise the means taken so far in support of Ukraine. Russia's politics to create a sense of *fait accompli* in the short term can be stopped only with a significant increase to Moscow in military, economic and political costs. Such an approach may be the only means of pressuring Russia to compromise in a way that enables the termination of the ongoing conflict on conditions also acceptable to Ukraine.

NATO and EU countries have ruled out direct military intervention in Ukraine. Their military support so far has been limited mostly to non-lethal military equipment. NATO has also agreed to create a special trust fund to support the long-term modernisation of the Ukrainian armed forces. However, a change in the tactical situation on the ground that goes against Ukraine poses the need for help that would relatively promptly enhance the real combat capabilities of the Ukrainian forces. Such support would be aimed at convincing Russia that by further escalating the conflict, even including all-out-war, it would bear substantial losses. Without the prospect of consecutive, relatively low-cost successes, Russia may be more inclined to compromise.

Apart from supporting Ukraine with intelligence-sharing and reconnaissance data, enabling more rapid reaction and better planning of defensive operations, NATO and the EU countries can provide Kyiv with offensive capabilities, although the scope of such support would depend on Ukraine's actual needs. Direct training and planning support for Ukrainian forces could be provided by civilian and military advisors. The trust fund created by NATO could be used not only for long-term support but also for measures aimed at quickly strengthening Ukraine's armed forces' command-and-control, logistical and cyber-security capabilities. To help the Ukrainian army enhance its defensive capabilities, NATO members could make use of the Rapid Trident exercises planned for this month in western Ukraine with the participation of 1,300 soldiers from 15 countries.

The EU Member States and the U.S. should back up the credibility of these exercises by being prepared to tighten economic sanctions even further, primarily by including measures targeting the Russian financial and energy sectors. This can be done with a new round of sanctions pre-announced at the conclusion of the European Council meeting of 30 August. Russia may still be calculating that with some EU Member States still offering criticism of the imposition of further sanctions, there will be no consensus within the EU on more serious sanctions.

Russia's increasing image as an aggressor and its growing international isolation are political costs the Kremlin is probably ready to take on. Political pressure of this sort is unlikely to have a decisive bearing on Russia's decisions, though without them it would be even easier for Kremlin to compel Ukraine to agree a solution to the crisis more beneficial for Russia.

International Stabilisation Mission. NATO and the EU countries may also seek unique avenues to support Ukraine that are aimed at stopping the separatists, who have been increasingly buttressed more explicitly by Russia. This could be achieved by establishing an international mission in Ukraine, deployed outside areas where the fighting is taking place. The mission would be of a stabilising and humanitarian nature and would not engage in combat on Ukraine's part. The troops that would form the mission would come from a broad spectrum of countries and would have the ability to use force in response to a direct attack. Such a mission would deter further separatists advances, strongly indicating that any attack against Ukraine would be an attack against the entire international community. Such a mission would lend credibility to the international community's determination to support Ukraine. It would also offer a compromise between a total lack of commitment to Ukraine and direct military support for it, the latter a solution so far rejected.

The mission could be activated with an invitation from the Ukrainian government to the EU and NATO members (and NATO partner countries). It could be issued at a special international summit modelled after the Berlin meetings held to discuss the future of Afghanistan. Another mechanism that could lead to the establishment of such a mission could be for the UN General Assembly to adopt a "uniting for peace" resolution. Adopted for the first time during the Korean crisis in 1950, the resolution defers to the GA the possibility to recommend measures to restore international peace and security when there is a lack of unanimity among the P5. Such a resolution, even if it eventually does not lead to the establishment of an international mission in Ukraine, could still serve to internationalise the crisis. An alternative signal of political support could be to seek a SC resolution under Chapter VI of the Charter (dealing with peaceful settlements of disputes) with the prior procedural exclusion of Russia. According to Article 27(3) of the Charter, parties to the dispute shall abstain from voting. However, as long as Russia maintains that it is not a party to the conflict, such efforts will not be successful.

Conclusions. Support from NATO and the EU should not be regarded only as aiding Ukraine but also as a response to Russia's actions, which explicitly question the basic principles of the international order. Possible further, pre-announced sanctions by the European Council and the NATO summit in Wales provide yet another opportunity to take steps tailored at increasing the costs to Russia in connection with the crisis in Ukraine. In order to prevent the crisis from escalating and in order to eventually reach a solution, the European states and the U.S. should consider novel avenues for responding to Russia's aggression. These should include strengthening Ukraine's potential for self-defence, imposing further economic sanctions, as well as the readiness to participate in an international stabilisation mission. The difficulty in taking decisive steps stems from the concern that tightening the pressure, instead of changing Russia's calculations may only exacerbate the situation and result in further aggression. On the other hand, Russia's intensification of direct military involvement seems to indicate that the too-cautious attitude of the West has not brought about the expected results.