

# Russia-Ukraine Crisis: The Meandering Roadmap to Ultimate Peaceful Settlement

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*At the beginning, it was referred to, in a decree signed by President Vladimir Putin, as "special military operation" aimed largely at "demilitarization" and "denazification" in neighboring Ukraine. We know from history that both Russia and Ukraine were part of the Soviet Union. After the Soviet's collapse in 1991, all the Soviet republics became independent states, and have legal claims to their individual territorial integrity and political sovereignty within the international law recognised by the United Nations.*

As time moves the military situation between Russia and Ukraine have been described differently in media reports. We read descriptions such as "crisis" or "conflict" or "war" in reports. Whatever be the standard case, the situation is seen and understood from different perspectives. There are, of course, several undermining factors or reasons for Russia's action in Ukraine.

While Putin during his first speech announcing the operation, he added explicitly that Russia would not "occupy" the territory of Ukraine. But seemingly, among Russia's main goals is to take "full control" over the Southern Region as well as the Eastern Donbas region off Ukraine. Some other officials say Russia wanted simply to protect its Russian-language speaking population in Eastern Ukraine, while other cite political factors.

In mid-June, talking to seven African countries in St. Petersburg, Putin interrupted the presentations to explain the the concept and the reasons behind the action in Ukraine.

He reiterated that

"all the problems in Ukraine were conceived after a state non-constitutional armed and bloody coup in Ukraine in 2014. This coup was supported by Western sponsors. As a matter of fact, they even specified the amount they spent on the preparation and

execution of the coup. And this coup is the source of power of the current leaders in Kiev. That is the first thing.”

Second, afterwards, part of Ukraine’s population did not support the coup and declared that the population of these areas would not submit to the people who came to power following the event. Russia was forced to support these people, bearing in mind the historic ties with the areas, and the cultural-language bonds with the people living in these areas.

“For a long time, we tried to restore the situation in Ukraine via peaceful means. If you have heard, you must have heard something about this, corresponding agreements were signed between the opposing parties in the capital of Belarus – Minsk. In this way, the so-called Minsk settlement process was launched,” he stressed in his explanation.

As it turned out, the western countries and the Kiev government authorities, then declared practically and publicly that they would not adhere to the peaceful agreements, and actually withdrew from that peaceful process. It was after this, that Russia was forced to recognise the independent states that had been formed in Ukraine, which we had not recognised for eight years: the Lugansk People’s Republic and the Donetsk People’s Republic.

On the international-legal aspect of this case, Putin said that Russia had the right to recognise the independence of these territories. And it did, in full compliance with the UN Charter, because pursuant to the corresponding articles of the UN Charter these areas were entitled to declare their independence.

According to Putin, after signing the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation, Russia had the right to render assistance to them in full compliance with the UN Charter. Because the Kiev regime made numerous attempts to resolve the issue using arms and, in fact, launched military actions in 2014 using aviation, tanks and artillery against civilians. It was the Kiev regime that sparked this war in 2014. And in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, Russia had the right to render aid to them citing the self-defence clause.

At first, Putin really appreciated the fact that the African leaders have a balanced approach towards the Ukrainian crisis and accepted the proposal to hold talks regarding the situation around Ukraine. That the African leaders have a clear and deep understanding of the situation between Russia and Ukraine.

Under the headline – Kremlin decides that goal to “demilitarise” Ukraine has largely been achieved – the Ukrainskaya Pravda reported that Kremlin’s Press Secretary, Dmitry Peskov, had said that the task of the aggressor country on the so-called “demilitarisation” of Ukraine has largely been fulfilled.

In an interview with RT Arabic mid-June, Peskov said “Indeed, Ukraine was heavily militarised at the time of the beginning of the special military operation, as the Russian Federation calls the war against Ukraine. And, as Russian President Vladimir Putin put it, one of the tasks was to demilitarise Ukraine. In fact, this task is largely completed. Ukraine is using less and less of its weapons. And more and more it uses the weapons systems, that Western countries supply it with.”

“The countries of the West, namely the North Atlantic alliance under the leadership of Washington, are increasingly – directly and indirectly – getting involved in this conflict. They intervene in this conflict and become a party to the conflict. Of course, this leads

to the fact that the conflict is delayed in time. This leads to the fact that the situation in Europe becomes more tense and unpredictable. And, of course, this obliges Russia to apply more decisive measures to ensure the safety of people in Donbas and the security of the Russian Federation.”

Peskov, in another interview to Russia Today (RT) this mid-June also stated that the “special military operation” has transformed into “war” between Russia and the West. Russia’s special military operation started to defend the Donbass region and now it has virtually turned into a war with the collective West, Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in the interview.

“In fact, the special military operation against Ukraine, against the Kiev regime, was launched to ensure the safety of the people of Donbass. This is correct. Now it is practically a war between Moscow and the collective West,” the Kremlin spokesman said.

Recalling Putin’s statement about establishing a “cordon sanitaire” on the territory of Ukraine if the shelling of Russian regions continues, Peskov said that as the range of weapons delivered to Ukraine expands, so will the buffer zone, “that is, the distance that we will have to move Ukrainians away from our territories.”

During this one and half years inside special military operation (to use the official Russian phrase), Russian officials have given several reasons for its current action in Ukraine. One typical interesting reason came from Maj. Gen. Rustam Minnekaev, who’s the acting commander of Russia’s Central Military District, when in April 2022 he announced that Russia was fighting to establish a land corridor through Ukrainian territory connecting Russia to Crimea, the peninsula it annexed in 2014.

“Since the beginning of the second phase of the special operation, one of the tasks of the Russian Army is to establish full control over Donbas and Southern Ukraine. This will provide a land corridor to Crimea,” he said, according to TASS news agency.

According to him, if Russia could get control over Ukraine’s South, that would give the country’s forces access to Transnistria, a separatist statelet in Moldova, where a contingent of Russian forces has been stationed since the early 1990s. The tension between the neighbours has been bubbling for a while. The protracted conflict first brewed over in 2014 after the widespread Euromaidan protest in Ukraine forced the parliament to remove President Viktor Yanukovich from office.

The removal of Yanukovich, who was regarded as pro-Russia, vexed the leadership in Moscow, and they thought the best way to strike back was to reclaim Ukraine’s region of Crimea, which used to be under Russia’s control from 1783 to 1954. The Kremlin then kicked off operation “Returning Crimea” and it engineered a series of pro-Russia campaigns across several areas in the city. The invasion of Crimea followed as the “little green men” – masked soldiers without insignia but with distinctly Russian weaponry and equipment – took to the city.

Russia then launched a referendum in the city, and in the infamously skewed plebiscite, a staggering 97 percent of the population voted for the integration of Crimea into the Russian Federation. The annexation of Crimea by Russia was a blow to Ukraine. But the onslaught had not reached an end for Ukraine as Russia began to secretly provide weaponry support for separatists in the country’s eastern region.

This violation of Ukraine's sovereignty helped the rebels claim control of the eastern city of Donbas with over 14,000 lives lost in the region. To end the bloody crisis, an agreement was hammered out in Minsk, Belarus, in February 2015.

The resolution tagged the 'Minsk agreement' was monitored by United Nations, and it proposed a cease-fire with all parties signing to power down their machinery of war. Despite a ceasefire agreement, both parties have not been at peace, and the Russia-backed rebels have claimed further swathes of land in the east of Ukraine.

At least between January and June this year, Deputy Russian Security Council Chairman Dmitry Medvedev has interchangeably, that at different times, used the words such as military operation, crisis, conflicts and war in his speeches. The most recent statement, Medvedev said that Russia's conflict with "Nazi Ukraine" would be permanent and if regime changed occurs in Kiev, new authorities would not ask to join NATO.

"What does this mean from a practical point of view? We don't need Ukraine in NATO. In any case, until any remnant of this country remains in its present state. Therefore, for Nazi Ukraine the conflict will be permanent. And a new political regime in Kiev (if there is one) will definitely not ask for NATO membership," Medvedev asserted.

According to Medvedev, negotiations are possible only on the subject of "post-conflict world order" and sees no point in conducting negotiations on the situation in Ukraine and around it at the moment. "This is certainly so. How can you engage in equal talks with a half-decayed neo-Nazi country, which is under external governance? Talks are possible only with its masters, namely with Washington. There is no one else to talk to. However, it is too early to speak about it," the Russian official added. "That is why there is no need at all for any negotiations," Medvedev wrote.

Any future Russian political leader that will try to change the discourse on the country's development that emerged in 2022, will be perceived as a traitor, so there will be no return to the "pre-war" past, Medvedev opined on his Telegram channel commenting on "sweet dreams" of Russians who left the country about the return to previous times.

"As for peace plans being proposed, all of them should be considered," Medvedev said during his May visit to Vietnam, commenting on peace initiatives put forward by China and other countries. On the eve of the first anniversary of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the Chinese Foreign Ministry published a document containing proposals for a political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis.

The conflict in Ukraine may continue for decades if the very essence of its neo-Nazi government is not eliminated, Medvedev, told reporters during a visit to Vietnam. "This conflict is for a long time, for decades, maybe. It is a new reality, new living conditions," he said, and was convinced that if the incumbent Kiev regime remains in power, "there will be, say three years of truce, two years of conflict and then everything will go over again. The very essence of the neo-Nazi rule in Kiev needs to be eliminated," he added.

The Chinese 12-point plan included calls for a ceasefire, respect for the legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries, settlement of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, a prisoner swap between Moscow and Kiev, and refusal to impose unilateral sanctions without a relevant decision of the United Nations Security Council.

Details about the African delegation's proposals were thin, to description given by several media reports. On the other side, Russian officials have also reacted different, some expressed signs of pessimism. For instance, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said after the three-hour meeting that the Africans' peace plan consisted of ten (10) elements, but "was not formulated on paper."

"The main conclusion, in my opinion, from today's conversation is that our partners from the African Union have shown an understanding of the true causes of the crisis that was created by the West, and have shown an understanding that it is necessary to get out of this situation on the basis of addressing the underlying causes," Lavrov said, but the African delegation had not brought the Russian leader any message from Zelenskyy.

"The peace initiative proposed by African countries is very difficult to implement, difficult to compare positions," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"But, President Putin has shown interest in considering it. He spoke concisely about our position. Not all provisions can be correlated with the main elements of our position, but this does not mean that we do not need to continue working."

On June 17, President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa; the current Chairperson of the African Union and Comoros president, Ghazali Othman; President of Senegal, Macky Sall; President of Zambia, Hakainde Hichilema and Prime Minister of Egypt, Mostafa Madbouly arrived in St. Petersburg to discuss "the African peace initiative" regarding the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine. In addition, the delegation included representatives of Uganda and Congo.

The key aim of the African peace mission primarily to propose "confidence-building measures" in order to facilitate peace between the two countries. It was to seek a peaceful settlement of the conflict which began February 24, 2022.

Ramaphosa made the proposal hoping to convince Russia and Ukraine to opt for dialogue, find a solution to the conflict.

"We would like to propose that this war must be settled through negotiations and through diplomatic means. The war cannot go on forever. All wars have to be settled and come to an end at some stage. And we are here to communicate this very clear message because the war is having a negative impact on the African continent, and indeed on many other countries around the world," said Ramaphosa.

The day before, on 16 June, the African delegation visited Kyiv, where it took part in negotiations with President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Reports say Zelenskyy criticised the rhetoric of African leaders who call Russia's war against Ukraine a "conflict" or a "crisis". The president was also surprised that representatives of African countries emphasised their own grain and fertiliser crises, while avoiding to comment on the war in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian leader, speaking during a press conference in Kyiv, "I am grateful to the participants of our meeting for their support of the principle of territorial integrity of states and the protection of nations from aggression," Zelenskyy said.

"Today, I saw the potential of our collaborative efforts on specific aspects of the peace

formula. Naturally, I have extended an invitation to African countries to participate in the upcoming Global Peace Summit, for which we are diligently preparing,” Zelenskyy said, and further expressed his determination to attract as many countries as possible to the Global Peace Summit.

During the G20 Summit in November 2022, Zelenskyy presented a comprehensive “peace formula” consisting of ten key points. These points encompass the restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the release of all detainees, the establishment of a tribunal to hold those responsible for the aggression accountable, as well as guarantees of security for Ukraine. Zelenskyy’s office also emphasized that Ukraine is open to considering all peace formulas proposed by other countries, but only the Ukrainian formula can actually be implemented.

On the other side from St. Petersburg discussions, Putin assured African leaders his logic of war is flawless and consistent with United Nations Charter. But in fact, the United Nations reports categorically indicated that Russia violated international law when it invaded Ukraine’s Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts in 2014 and followed up with a much larger invasion of the entire country in 2022. Russia has primarily violated Ukraine’s territorial integrity and its political sovereignty which it attained in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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