



Russia Recognises Rebel Regions of Ukraine as Independent

For Prelims: Location of Ukraine and the Neighbourhood, Ukraine Crisis, Russia, Donetsk, Luhansk, Minsk agreements, OSCE, NATO.

For Mains: Bilateral Groupings & Agreements, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Ukraine Crisis and its Geopolitical Implications.

Why in News?

Recently, Russia recognised the Ukraine rebel regions in eastern Ukraine - **Donetsk and Luhansk** - as independent areas despite calls from the west to put an end to the [tensions](#) driven by fears that Russia may attack Ukraine.

- This paved the way to provide them **military support** — a **direct challenge to the West** that will fuel fears that Russia could imminently invade Ukraine.
- Tensions have peaked over the last few weeks as Russia amassed over 1,50,000 troops at Ukraine borders in one of the worst crises since the [Cold War](#).
- The announcement shatters a **2015 peace deal signed in Minsk** requiring Ukrainian authorities to offer a broad self-rule to the rebel regions.

What is Russia's Stand?

- It blamed the [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation \(NATO\)](#) for the current crisis and called the US-led alliance an existential threat to Russia.
- Charged that **Ukraine had inherited Russia's historic lands** and after the Soviet collapse was used by the West to contain Russia.
- It **wants Western Countries to guarantee that NATO won't allow Ukraine** and other former Soviet countries to join as members.
- It has also **demande d the alliance halt weapons deployments to Ukraine** and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe.
 - The **western countries have rejected the demand**.

What is the Background of the Crisis?

- Ukraine and Russia **share hundreds of years of cultural, linguistic and familial links**.
 - For many in Russia and in the ethnically Russian parts of Ukraine, **the shared heritage of the countries is an emotional issue** that has been exploited for electoral and military purposes.
- As part of the Soviet Union, **Ukraine was the second-most powerful Soviet republic after Russia**, and was crucial strategically, economically and culturally. [//](#)



- The **Donbass region, comprising the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine, has been at the centre of the conflict** since March 2014 when Moscow (Russia) invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula.
 - In April, **pro-Russia rebels began seizing territory** (with Russia supporting them through hybrid warfare) in Eastern Ukraine and in May 2014, the **rebels in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions held a referendum to declare independence** from Ukraine.
- Since then, these **predominantly Russian speaking regions** (more than 70% speak Russian) within Ukraine have been **witnessing shelling and skirmishes between the rebels and Ukrainian forces** leading to the loss of over 14,000 lives by most estimates, creating around 1.5 million registered Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and destruction of the local economy.
- What has changed now is that the **shelling has intensified since last October 2021 when Russia began amassing troops along the borders with Ukraine.**
- If the situation in the Donbass escalates, the **possibility of a war cannot be dismissed.** One way to prevent the outbreak of a war would be to implement the Minsk agreements immediately, as Russia has suggested.

What are the Minsk Agreements?

- There are two Minsk agreements, Minsk 1 and Minsk 2, named after the **Belarussian capital Minsk** where the talks were held.
- **Minsk 1:**
 - **Minsk 1 was written in September 2014** by the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine, i.e. Ukraine, Russia, and the **Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** with mediation by France and Germany in the so-called Normandy Format.
 - Under Minsk 1, **Ukraine and the Russia-backed rebels agreed on a 12-point ceasefire deal**, which included prisoner exchanges, delivery of humanitarian assistance, and the withdrawal of heavy weapons.
 - However, **due to violations by both sides, the agreement did not last long.**
- **Minsk 2:**
 - As the rebels moved further into Ukraine, in February 2015, **representatives of Russia, Ukraine, the OSCE** and the leaders of Donetsk and Luhansk signed a 13-point agreement, now known as the **Minsk 2 accord**.
 - The new agreement had **provisions for an immediate cease-fire, withdrawal of heavy weaponry, OSCE monitoring, dialogue on interim self-government for Donetsk and Luhansk**, in accordance with Ukrainian law.
 - It also had provisions related to acknowledgement of special status by parliament, pardon and amnesty for fighters, exchange of hostages and prisoners, humanitarian aid etc.
 - However, these **provisions have not been implemented because of what is popularly known as the 'Minsk Conundrum'**. This essentially means that Ukraine and Russia have contradictory interpretations about the agreement.

What is the Stand of Different Nations on the Issue?

- The **United States has already announced sanctions** prohibiting “new investment, trade, and financing by US persons to, from, or in” the two breakaway regions.
- Japan is likely to **join the US-led sanctions** while **French officials have been quoted as saying in reports that the [European Union \(EU\)](#) is also in discussions for punitive actions** against Russia.
 - The EU has condemned Russia over “a blatant violation of international law as well as of the Minsk agreements.”
- The **United Kingdom has also warned of further sanctions. Australia** also called Russia’s actions **unacceptable, it's unprovoked, it's unwarranted.**

What is India’s Stand on the Issue?

- India did not join the Western powers’ condemnation of Russia’s intervention in Crimea and kept a low profile on the issue.
- In November 2020, India voted against a Ukraine-sponsored resolution in the **United Nations (UN)** that condemned alleged human rights violations in Crimea thereby backing old ally Russia on the issue.
- Recently, India also suggested at the UN Security Council that **“quiet and constructive diplomacy”** is the need of the hour and any step that could escalate the tension should be avoided.
 - India’s stand has been **welcomed by Russia.**

Way Forward

- A practical solution for the situation is to **revive the Minsk peace process**. Therefore the West (US and Other western Countries) should push both sides to resume talks and live up to their commitments as per the Minsk agreement to restore relative peace on the border.
- While the **Minsk agreement is far from ideal, it could be a baseline from which a diplomatic solution to the current crisis could be found** and reviving it could be the ‘only path on which peace can be built’ as French President Emmanuel Macron has said.
- For Ukraine, **it could help it gain control over its borders and end the threat of a Russian invasion** for the time being, while for Russia it could be a way to ensure that Ukraine never becomes a part of NATO and ensure that Russian language and culture are protected under a new federal Constitution in Ukraine.

[Source: TH](#)

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