

## Russia - Ukraine Conflict [UPSC Notes]

The tensions on Ukraine's border with Russia are at their highest in years. Fearing a potential invasion by Russia, the US and NATO are stepping up support for Ukraine. In this article, we explain the reason for tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the latest developments, the stand of various stakeholders in the region, and the way forward for the [UPSC exam](#) IR segment.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/b2MWwXeF3SI>

### Russia – Ukraine Conflict Background

Post the [disintegration of the Soviet Union](#), Ukraine gained independence in 1991.

- Ukraine was a member of the Soviet Union until 1991 when it disintegrated, and Russia has tried to maintain the country in its orbit since then.
- In 2014, a separatist insurgency started in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, **Donetsk Basin**, also known as,
- Russia further gained a maritime advantage in the region due to its invasion and annexation of Crimea.
- As a result, both the US and the EU have pledged to safeguard the integrity of Ukraine's borders.

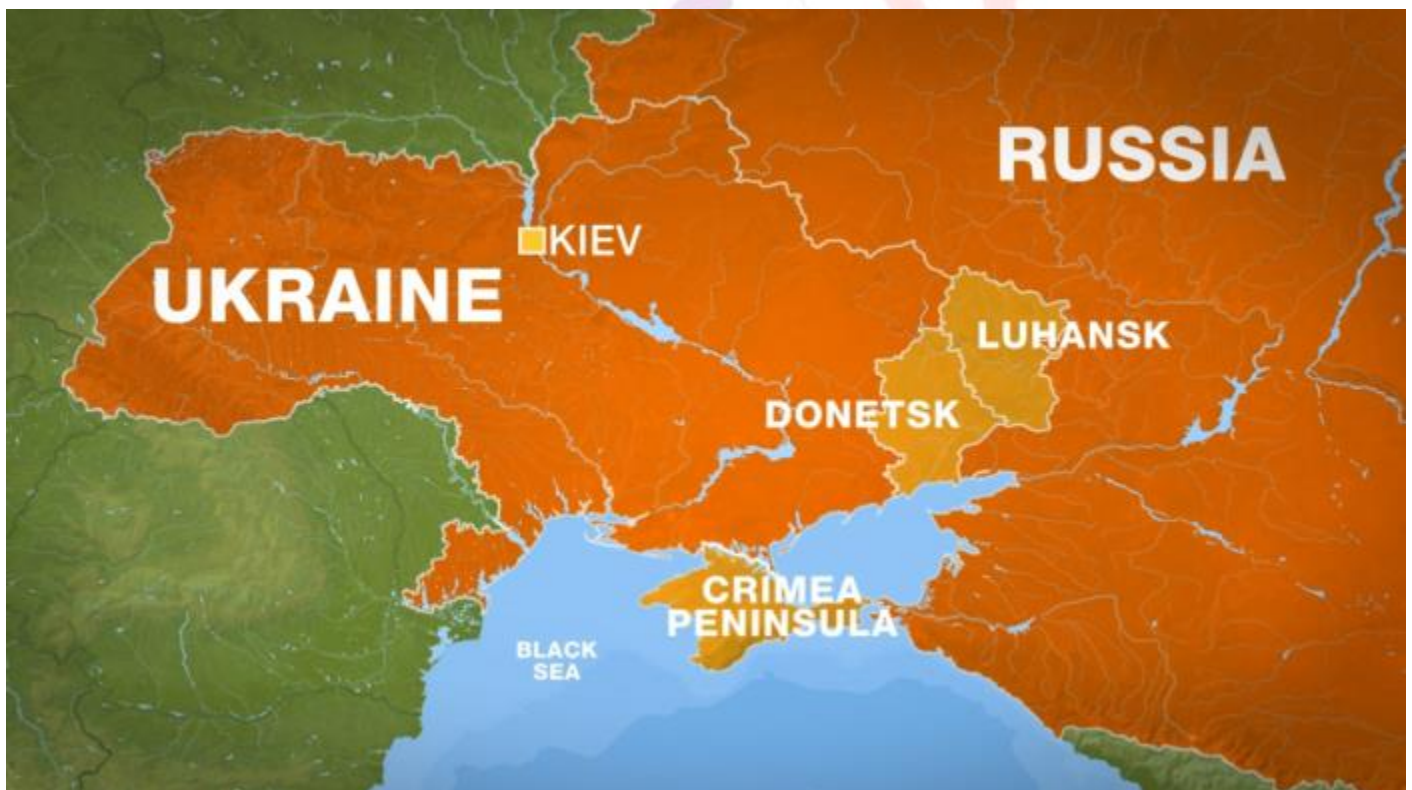


Image Source: Al Jazeera

#### Importance of Ukraine to Russia

- Ukraine and Russia have shared cultural and linguistic ties for hundreds of years.

- Ukraine was the most powerful country in the Soviet Union after Russia.
- Ukraine has been a hub for commercial industries, factories and defence manufacturing.
- Ukraine also provides Russia with access to the Black Sea and crucial connectivity to the Mediterranean Sea.

## Reasons for Russian Aggression

The chief reasons for Russian aggression are discussed below.

- **Economic Factors**
  - Russia, considering the economic significance of Ukraine, sought Ukraine's membership in the **Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC)**, which is a free trade agreement that came into being in 2015.
  - With its huge market and advanced agriculture and industrial output, Ukraine was supposed to play an important role. But Ukraine refused to join the agreement.
- **Geo-Political and Strategic Factors**
  - Russia claims that the eastward expansion by the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** which they call "**enlargement**", has threatened Russia's interests and has asked for written security guarantees from NATO.
  - NATO, led by the U.S., has planned to install missile defence systems in eastern Europe in countries like Poland and the Czech Republic to counter Russia's intercontinental-range missiles.

### **Enlargement of NATO**

- NATO is a military alliance of twenty-eight European and two North American countries that constitutes a system of collective defense.
- Enlargement of NATO is the process of including new member states in NATO.
- Since the German unification in 1990, NATO has added new members five times.
- The alliance had 12 founding members in 1949, which currently has 30 members.
- Members include three Baltic countries of **Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania** that share borders with Russia.
- Members also include **Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria**, all of them were a part of the former Soviet-led **Warsaw Pact**.

## Russia – Ukraine Latest Developments

Russia has been indulging in military build-up along its border with Ukraine, an aspiring NATO member. Russia has stated that its troop deployment is in response to NATO's steady eastward expansion. Russia argues that its moves are aimed at protecting its own security considerations.

- Russia has mobilised around 1,00,000 troops on its border with Ukraine.
- Russia seeks assurance from the US that Ukraine shall not be inducted into NATO.

- This has resulted in tensions between Russia and the West which have been supportive of Ukraine. The U.S. has assured Ukraine that it will “respond decisively” in case of an invasion by Russia.



Image Source: The Hindu

**Russia’s demands**

- Russia has demanded a ban on further expansion of NATO that includes countries like Ukraine and Georgia that share Russia’s borders.
- Russia asked NATO to pull back its military deployments to the 1990s level and prohibit the deployment of intermediate-range missiles in the bordering areas.
- Further, Russia asked NATO to curb its military cooperation with Ukraine and other former Soviet republics.

**The response from the West**

- The U.S. has ruled out changing NATO's "open-door policy" which means, NATO would continue to induct more members.
- The U.S. also says it would continue to offer training and weapons to Ukraine.
- The U.S. is said to be open to a discussion regarding missile deployment and a mutual reduction in military exercises in Eastern Europe.
- Germany has also warned Russia that the **Nord Stream 2** pipeline would be stopped if Russia were to invade Ukraine.
- The U.S. threatens Russia by imposing new economic sanctions in case of attempts of invasion against Ukraine.

## Russia – Ukraine Crisis: Implications on India

What implications does the Russia – Ukraine crisis have on India? This is discussed in this section.

- An invasion by Russia would put pressure on India to choose between the Western alliance and Russia.
  - Maintaining strong relations with Russia serves India's national interests. India has to retain a strong strategic alliance with Russia as a result, India cannot join any Western strategy aimed at isolating Russia.
- There is a possibility of [CAATSA](#) sanctions on India by the U.S. as a result of the **S-400**
- A pact between the US and Russia might affect Russia's relations with China. This might allow India to expand on its efforts to re-establish ties with Russia.
- The issue with Ukraine is that the world is becoming increasingly economically and geopolitically interconnected. Any improvement in Russia-China ties has ramifications for India.
- There is also an impact on the strong Indian diaspora present in the region, threatening the lives of thousands of Indian students.

Also read: [India – Russia relations](#)

### India's stand

- India called for "a peaceful resolution of the situation through sustained diplomatic efforts for long-term peace and stability in the region and beyond".
- Immediately after the annexation, India abstained from voting in the [UN General Assembly](#) on a resolution that sought to condemn Russia.
- In 2020, India voted against a Ukraine-sponsored resolution in the UN General Assembly that sought to condemn alleged human rights violations in Crimea.
- India's position is largely rooted in neutrality and has adapted itself to the post-2014 status quo on Ukraine.

### Way forward

- The US along with other western countries is expected to revive the peace process through diplomatic channels in mitigating the tensions between Ukraine and Russia which would be a time-consuming process.
- Experts recommend more dialogues between the west and Russia that exert emphasis on the issue surrounding Ukraine.



- Ukraine should approach and focus on working with its **Normandy Format** allies, France and Germany, to persuade the Russian government to withdraw assistance for its proxies and allow for the region's gradual safe reintegration into Ukraine.
- The Russian military expansion in Ukraine can be prevented on the geoeconomic grounds that will hamper its trade in the region especially with the Nord Stream pipeline that can carve out a way of resolving the ongoing crisis as pointed out by an expert.
- Ukraine's internal disturbances need to be addressed to revive the **Minsk II agreement** for the development of peace in the region and dissolve the ongoing tensions.

### **Minsk II Agreement:**

- This was a 13 point agreement that involved representatives from Russia, Ukraine, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and was signed in 2015.
- The major aim of the agreement was to end the war in the Donbas region of Ukraine.
- The agreement intended to take a series of steps with regards to military and political reforms to establish peace in the disputed areas of Donetsk and Luhansk of Ukraine.

### **Normandy Format**

- The Normandy Format is a diplomatic grouping created in June 2014 to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Ukraine due to Russia's military aggression.
- It is an informal forum that was set up by France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine.
- It takes its name from the Normandy landings in the [Second World War](#).

### **Frequently Asked Questions about the Russia – Ukraine Conflict**

#### **What is the relation between Russia and Ukraine?**

Ukraine was a member of the Soviet Union until its disintegration in 1991. Post the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Ukraine gained independence in 1991 and Russia has tried to maintain its influence on the country in its orbit since then.

#### **Why did Ukraine not join NATO?**

Although Ukraine has no membership offer from NATO, it has been closer to the alliance since its establishment in 1997. Plans for NATO membership were dropped by Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich, who preferred to keep the country non-aligned.

#### **Is Crimea a part of Russia?**

The majority of the world considers Crimea to be a part of Ukraine. Geographically, it is a peninsula in the Black Sea that has been battled over for ages due to its strategic importance. In 2014, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea which was a part of Ukraine due to its declining influence over the region and emerging insecurities.