

# ON THE BRINK: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON RUSSIA-UKRAINE BORDER CONFLICT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The [massive mobilisation of Russian troops on the Ukraine border](#) and occasional outbreak of violence along the line of contact between the Russia-backed rebels in the contested Donbass region and Ukrainian troops have pushed both countries to the brink of an open conflict. There were similar scenes earlier this year, but Moscow, after U.S. diplomatic intervention, pulled back. This time, however, the more emphatic Russian moves appear to be part of a larger strategy of force-projection across Russia's western perimeter, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. On the EU's Polish border, Belarus, a Russian ally, was blamed for orchestrating a migration crisis. Amid tensions, Russia flew bombers near Poland's borders earlier this month. In the Black Sea, Russian President Vladimir Putin dispatched vessels to shadow U.S. warships. The U.S. has warned its allies of a possible Russian attack on Ukraine. Russia's aggressiveness could have partly been driven by Mr. Putin's assessment that the U.S. was strategically weakened after its Afghan withdrawal and its preoccupation with China's rise in East Asia. This gives him a window of opportunity to reassert Russian primacy in its backyard which has seen significant NATO advances. This makes Ukraine, which Russia sees, according to scholars at Carnegie, "as a Western aircraft carrier parked just across southern Russia", at the centre of Russia's geopolitical tussle with the West.

In 2015, an open conflict was averted after the 'Minsk II' peace agreement was signed, under the mediation of France and Germany. It was designed to end the fighting in the rebel regions and hand over the border to Ukraine's national troops. Ukraine was required to delegate more power to the breakaway regions and introduce constitutional reforms, codifying their special status. Russia's nod for the agreement was possibly because it thought that delegation of power to the rebels would enhance Moscow's leverage that it could use to prevent Ukraine's full integration with the West. But Kiev's reluctance to implement the agreement and its growing military, economic and political ties with the West seem to have prompted Mr. Putin to change his approach — to putting Kiev under direct military pressure. Kiev is now in a tough spot. It lacks the military resources to deter its giant neighbour. While it gets military supplies from the West, there is no guarantee that the West would come to its help in the event of a Russian invasion. On the other side, Russia might make tactical gains from an invasion, like it did from the annexation of Crimea in 2014, but such a move could further deteriorate its already ruptured ties with the West. So a practical solution is to revive the Minsk peace process. The West 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.

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