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United Nations Security Council

Addressing the Russian threat to Ukraine

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<u>Forum -</u>

United Nations Security Council.

<u>Issue -</u>

The ongoing Russian threat to the nation of Ukraine.

<u>Author -</u>

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Definition of Key Terms -

1. Eastern Bloc - The collection of eastern European countries that were under Soviet communist rule from the end of World War II until 1991.

2. Annex - To seize territory from a country and incorporate it into your own nation.

Timeline of Related Events -

- 19th February 1954 - Crimea was transferred from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

- 17th September 1991 - The Eastern Bloc collapsed and broke free from Soviet control.

- 25th December 1991 - The Soviet Union collapsed, breaking up into separate nation states, including Ukraine.

- 23rd February 2014 - Pro-Russian demonstrations erupted in Sevastopol, the capital of the Crimean region.

- 27th February 2014 - Russian troops took over the Supreme Council of Crimea and captured other strategic sites across the peninsula.

- 28th February 2014 - Checkpoints were established at Armyansk and Chongar, the main road crossing between Ukraine and Crimea.

- 16th March 2014 - A pro-Russian government was installed in Crimea, Crimea declared independence from Ukraine and a Crimean Status Referendum was held.

- 18th March 2014 - Russia formally incorporated Crimea into the Russian Federation as two federal states.

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- April 2014 - Pro-Russian separatist forces emerged and seized large amounts of territory in Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region, with support from Russian forces.

- May 2014 - Separatist forces held a referendum, declaring independence from the rest of Ukraine.

- July 2014 - A Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down over Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board. By September 2016, it had been concluded that the plane was destroyed by a Russian surface-to-air missile system that had been moved into separatist territory in Donbas before being moved back into Russia.

- December 2015 - A cyberattack caused 225,000 people in Ukraine to lose power.

- December 2016 - A Ukrainian utility company suffered a cyberattack, causing loss of power in multiple areas throughout Kiev.

- June 2017 - Computer systems belonging to the Ukrainian government and Ukrainian businesses were hit by a cyberattack that also spread to other systems across the world. The attack was attributed to Russia.

- 14th April 2021 - Up to 14,000 extra Russian troops began to move into Crimea and the areas around the Ukrainian border, leading to a buildup of Russian forces in the regions.

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Main Parties Involved -

Ukraine:

- Protests against the annexation of Crimea and still regards Crimea to be a part of Ukraine.

- Opposes the separatist movements and their objectives in the eastern parts of the country.

- Condemns the Russian military buildup as a threat to the nation of Ukraine.

Russian Federation:

- Believes their annexation of Crimea was legal and justified, based on the will of the people there.

- Supports the separatists in eastern Ukraine, believing the people there should be allowed to secede and create their own nation states.

- Justifies their military buildup near Ukraine as a response to hostility from Ukraine and NATO and as a means of carrying out exercises.

North Atlantic Treaty Association (NATO):

- Believes that Russia's annexation of Crimea was illegal.

- Considers Russia's military involvement in eastern Ukraine and their recent buildup to be unjustified and concerning acts.

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In 1991, the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc collapsed, ending communism throughout eastern Europe and leading to the newfound independence of multiple states in the region, including Ukraine.

In 1954, the Crimea had been transferred from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and when Ukraine gained independence upon the collapse of the Soviet Union Crimea remained a part of Ukraine, despite the majority of its population being ethnically Russian.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the borders of the former Soviet states in eastern Europe were largely respected by Russia. However, following the toppling of Ukraine's pro-Russian President in 2014, Russian forces invaded Crimea and used a local referendum to incorporate the region into the Russian Federation, annexing the territory from Ukraine. Pro-Russian separatist forces then rebelled against the Ukrainian government in Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, receiving support from Russia as well.

Violence has continued between Ukraine and the allied separatist and Russian forces since the annexation, with steady fighting sometimes punctured by more intense confrontations occurring in eastern Ukraine. The main concern recently, however, has been the buildup of Russian military personnel and equipment near the border with Ukraine and in Crimea, which has spiked fears of a Russian invasion or at least greater military involvement in the current conflict in Ukraine.

Overview of the Situation and Issues -

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1. <u>The Russian Annexation of Crimea:</u>

The Russian threat to Ukraine primarily began with the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014.

Trouble between Russia and Ukraine that ultimately led to the annexation started in November 2013, when protests erupted in Kiev against President Viktor Yanukovych as a result of his refusal to permit greater economic integration between Ukraine and the European Union. Such protests persisted and worsened, despite a crackdown from the President, until February 2014, when President Yanukovych fled the country after failing to calm the situation. Another set of protests also took place at this time in Crimea, however these protests were pro-Russian rather than anti-Yanukovych.

The protests against and expulsion of President Yanukovych deeply troubled Russia, who had been a supporter of the President, but the pro-Russian demonstrations in Crimea were also inviting for them. Taking advantage of the unrest in Ukraine, Russian troops invaded Crimea on 27th February 2014. They first targeted and seized strategic points across the peninsula, including the Supreme Council of Crimea, before establishing checkpoints at Armyansk and Chongar on 28th February that brought the main crossings between Crimea and Ukraine under Russian control.

Following the invasion and securing of the region by Russian troops, a Russian government was installed in Crimea and made to declare independence from Ukraine on 16th March 2014. This brought Crimea firmly under Russian control, though the process was formally completed on 18th March 2014 when a Crimean Status Referendum was held, the result of which favoured unification with Russia. As a result of this, Russia incorporated Crimea into the Russian Federation as two federal states, completing the annexation of the region and undermining the security of Ukraine and her borders.

2. <u>The War in Eastern Ukraine:</u>

Russian hostility towards Ukraine continued after the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 when rebels started a conflict against the Ukrainian government in the east of the country.

In April 2014, pro-Russian separatist forces seized large amounts of territory throughout Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine before holding a referendum to declare independence from the rest of Ukraine the following

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month. This started a war between Ukraine and the separatists, who were receiving support from the Russian Federation.

Throughout the conflict, the Russian threat to Ukraine heightened and was demonstrated in a number of incidents from 2014-2017. The first such incident occurred in July 2014, when a Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down over Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board. By September 2016, it had been concluded that the plane had been destroyed by a Russian surface-to-air missile system that had been moved into Donbas and then back into Russia after it had been fired.

A series of cyberattacks attributed to Russia also struck Ukraine throughout the conflict. The first occurred in December 2015, when 225,000 people throughout the country lost power, then a second attack in December 2016 caused the loss of power in most of Kiev after a utility company was targeted. Finally, in June 2017, the computer systems belonging to the Ukrainian government and key businesses in Ukraine were hit by a cyberattack that went on to spread to systems around the world.

Ultimately, the war between Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatists in Donbas has killed over 13,000 people and injured at least 24,000 since April 2014, whilst the cyberattacks have also caused massive amounts of damage and disruption to the government, businesses and people of Ukraine. Russia has been heavily involved in the conflict, supporting the separatist forces and launching cyberattacks, demonstrating their ongoing threat to Ukraine.

3. <u>The Russian Military Buildup on the Ukrainian Border:</u>

Though the conflict in Donbas has essentially become a stalemate without serious fighting since 2018, the threat to Ukraine from Russia was heightened recently by a military buildup along the Russo-Ukrainian border.

In April 2021, up to 14,000 Russian troops were deployed to Crimea and the border with Ukraine, leading to a buildup of Russian forces in the regions. By mid-April, it was believed that Russia had accumulated roughly 40,000 soldiers near the

Ukrainian border and another 40,000 in Crimea, as well as stationing military equipment such as artillery and vehicles alongside the troops.

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Such events spiked tensions between Russia and Ukraine and NATO, increasing fears of a Russian invasion or greater involvement in the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and the Donbas separatists, again demonstrating the threat posed to Ukraine by the Russian Federation.

Currently Existing Treaties, UN Involvement and/or UN Resolutions -

The Russian Federation and Ukraine are signatories to the 1997 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Despite this, the two states remain hostile towards each other following the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 and subsequent war in eastern Ukraine against separatist movements supported by the Russian Federation.

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There is not any UN involvement in the hostilities between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. There are also no UN resolutions relating to the situation between Ukraine and Russia.