

**United States Mission to
the United Nations**

Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on Ukraine

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Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you to our briefers.

Two weeks ago, the President of Poland convened a very important debate in the Security Council on upholding international law. Many of us talked about the purposes and goals of the United Nations. It was an opportunity to ask ourselves why we are here and what we hope to accomplish. Today's debate effectively answers these questions.

The conflict in Ukraine is a textbook example of the direct violation of the sovereignty of one Member State by another Member State. It is precisely the kind of flagrant misconduct this body was created to address.

When Russian forces entered the Crimean capital in 2014, it was a direct violation of the UN Charter. Russian forces seized the parliament building and imposed an illegitimate referendum on the people. Since then, Russia has pushed into eastern Ukraine, creating a humanitarian crisis that threatens millions. In response to the resulting outcry, Russia signed the Minsk agreements; committed to a ceasefire; committed to countless truces; committed to a withdrawal of heavy weapons; and committed to monitors to guarantee all of its commitments.

Unsurprisingly, Russia has serially disregarded all of these promises. And it has permitted – if not instructed – its forces to detain, threaten, and even shoot at monitors, their vehicles, cameras, and observation drones. In short, Russia has created a catastrophe of suffering in Ukraine.

This is not a frozen conflict – the month of May has seen security conditions worsen with increased ceasefire violations, higher civilian casualties, and growing military casualties. Adding to its complicity, the Kremlin has neglected every one of the dozens of previous ceasefire agreements.

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Russia insults our intelligence by telling us that this is a home-grown, internal conflict. But everyone in this room knows better.

The militants in eastern Ukraine report directly to the Russian military, which arms them, trains them, leads them, and fights alongside them. Russia's combined forces in eastern Ukraine include thousands of tanks, armored vehicles, and heavy artillery.

Despite its transparent denials, there is no doubt Russia is driving the Ukrainian conflict. How do we know? Because the Russian forces work hard to conceal who's directing their actions and paying their wages. They strip patches and insignia off of their uniforms and equipment. They hide their identities behind facemasks. But we know why they're there, and we know who sent them. Russian soldiers have been captured by Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Journalists have identified numerous examples of Russian military equipment being used by Russian-led forces in eastern Ukraine.

Tragically, this includes the Russia-supplied missile system that shot down the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July of 2014, a civilian aircraft flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, killing all 298 onboard. The victims include nationals of our Security Council colleagues – 193 citizens of the Netherlands, 10 British citizens, and a dual national American, among others. The families of these victims deserve answers, and we welcome last week's update from the international investigative team. They have handled this case with professionalism and independence.

We strongly support Australia's and Netherlands' call on Russia to acknowledge its role in the tragedy and cooperate in bringing to account those responsible for shooting down MH-17.

And like its role in the MH-17 tragedy, we ask Russia to acknowledge another reality that everyone here knows to be true: Russian soldiers are in Ukraine. Not to "protect" Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationals, but to impose Russian control on the country.

And let me emphasize that there is an urgent reason for making this request. The Russian government holds the key to solving the crisis in Ukraine. Resolution of this conflict is not only possible, it is profoundly straightforward. Russia needs to withdraw its military forces and equipment, call on its proxies to honor the ceasefire, and fulfill its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

In Crimea, Russia needs to withdraw from the peninsula and restore it to Ukrainian control in line with Moscow's multilateral and bilateral commitments.

Russia can unilaterally fix this wrong. And the first step is acknowledging it.

Until Russia ends its outrageous actions in Ukraine, the position of the United States will not waver. We condemn, in the strongest terms, Russia's involvement in eastern Ukraine and its purported annexation of Crimea. Until Russia returns the Crimean Peninsula to Ukrainian control, U.S. sanctions related to the invasion of Crimea will continue. And until Russia pulls its forces out of eastern Ukraine and honors its Minsk commitments, our sanctions in response to its flagrant misconduct in the eastern part of the country will stay in place.

The United States – in close partnership with France, Germany, and Ukraine – are weighing options to bring peace to eastern Ukraine. However, Russia has refused to engage meaningfully, and our efforts have been stalled since January.

On April 23, 2017, Joseph Stone, an American, was working as a paramedic in eastern Ukraine. He was serving with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in an area under Russian control. His vehicle was hit by an anti-tank mine. Joseph was killed. The tragedy of Joseph is joined by many others in Ukraine. We will not forget his sacrifice, just as Ukrainians will not forget the death and suffering of so many of their people. All those who respect and are committed to defend the United Nations and its Charter must join us in demanding justice for Joseph and for all of the victims in Ukraine.

Thank you.

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