

Trend Analysis and Assessment Report

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Report Topic: Developments in the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics

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CMC Director: Amy Yeagley

Report Author(s): Amy Yeagley

Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics show minimal progression towards recognition

Key Takeaway

On February 21, Russia recognized the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) as independent states. Since the Russian-invasion on Ukraine, only five nations, other than Russia, have recognized the independence and sovereignty of the LPR and DPR. [01] It is highly likely that the LPR and DPR will not be developing more robust international relations due to the ongoing support for Ukraine throughout this war. The DPR has majority control of the region and continues to make advancements, while the LPR is proposing a referendum to join the Russian Federation. [02] The government within the DPR could continue to stabilize with support from Russia, but it is likely that the LPR will focus on joining Russia, if Ukrainian forces continue their attacks on the Donbass region.

Trend Pattern

A series of recent events indicate that Russia is continuing to support the independence and recognition of the LPR and DPR, despite sanctions being placed on their economy and funding, and equipment being supplied to Ukraine.

- On February 24, officials in the LPR and DPR requested help from Russia to repel Ukrainian troops, as well as additional funding to stabilize their governments. Also on that day, Kazakhstan officials stated that they will not recognize the DPR and LPR as independent, despite being close allies of Russia. [03]
- On February 25, a meeting was held between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, LPR Foreign Minister Vladislav Deinego, and DPR Foreign Minister Sergey Peresada, in Moscow. They discussed the future of Russian influence in the region as well as economic support and humanitarian aid being supplied to the region from Russia. Lavrov stated that Russia was not attempting to occupy Ukraine. [04] With countries still placing sanctions on Russia, it is likely that the sanctions could affect the volume of support supplied to the Donbass region.
- On March 11, Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu stated that there are 16,000 volunteers from the Middle East preparing to fight on behalf of the LPR and DPR. While Shoigu did not state which country these fighters were coming from, the Pentagon reported that Russia was attempting to recruit Syrians to join the fight alongside Russia. Syrian fighters would be offered a monthly salary of up to \$300, medical care and travel expenses. [05]
- Three Ukrainian mayors and one deputy have been abducted during this invasion and were being held in the LPR. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy deemed these abductions war crimes and crimes against democracy. The government officials have since been released without details being provided. [06]

- On March 17, Russian-backed separatists in the LPR captured a government building in the city of Rubizhne. A video posted by the LPR's militia Telegram account shows a soldier placing the LPR and former Soviet Union Banner of Victory flag on the roof, as well as him walking through the mayor's office. This soldier also stated that the war was in its final stages because the capturing of Ukrainian government facilities could prove to be the end of conflict within the LPR. [07]
- As of March 25, the DPR claimed to have seized 132 towns from Ukrainian control and that these towns were taken without resistance. [08] On the same day it was also reported that the DPR had eliminated 58 Ukrainian troops and nine pieces of Ukrainian military equipment as well as captured five pieces of equipment and six Ukrainian troops. [09] It is highly likely that there are still anti-Russian troops in the region, because attacks are still occurring.
- The LPR announced on March 27 that it may hold a referendum to join the Russian Federation. This referendum would allow citizens in the region to vote to become independent or join Russia. Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oleg Nikolenko, rejected this proposal saying that it would be void with no legal validity, and that it would face a strong response from the international community. Most of the citizens in the LPR are of Russian descent. [02]

Assessment

Countries in support of Ukraine continue to place sanctions on Russia in hopes of slowing the invasion. Despite the sanctions, Russia is still providing financial and military support, as well as humanitarian aid, to the LPR and DPR. Ukrainian forces are still claiming attacks in the Donbass region so we can assess that there is still strong anti-Russian resistance in the region. While no other countries are physically getting involved in the war, many countries are providing funding and equipment in support of Ukraine. With this, we can assess with high confidence that the LPR and DPR will not be recognized by other nations as independent without a deal made between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. To support this assessment, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has stated that Russia's attempt at liberating the LPR and DPR is unrealistic. [10]

We assess with high confidence that the LPR will continue to propose a referendum to join the Russian Federation although it has been rejected by Ukraine. It is likely that the LPR will not focus on stabilization if the goal is to join Russia. The DPR has not made any statements regarding joining Russia, and with its continued advancements and more Russian support, we estimate that the DPR will continue to stabilize.

Broader Implications

Russia could resort to the use of nuclear weapons if advancements are not swiftly made in the Donbass region. If nuclear weapons are used, it is possible they could cause damages in neighboring nations. The United States has stated that if Russia were to use nuclear weapons, there would be interference due to the proximity of Ukraine to NATO member states. Troops from the United States and other NATO countries have been deployed closer to the region in case the Russia-Ukraine War requires interference or if efforts to supply aid to Ukraine are stopped in NATO regions. [11] It is imperative to follow China's reactions to the war and focus on any potential of involvement. While China has shown support for Russia, the United States relies heavily on China for trade and if sanctions were to be placed, it could hurt the economy of the US.

Indicators

We will be watching the Russian retreat in the capital region of Ukraine, as Russia moves its focus to the Donbass region. Russia has stated that its advancements have been a lot slower than planned. It is possible that the retreat is a distraction to redirect Ukrainian troops to Eastern Ukraine so the defense around Kyiv would be weaker and

a seizure of the capital would be easier. We will also be focusing on the amount of chemical gear being transported into Russia, as this could be a sign of impending nuclear attacks on Ukraine, especially in the Donbass region. With consistent peace talks between Ukraine and Russia, and no deals being successful, we estimate that this war will continue until the Donbass region is independent.

Sources

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