

An Unending Stalemate: Assessing the Failure of Peace Negotiations in the Donbas War

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The Donbas Conflict

- The Donbas Conflict in eastern Ukraine began in April 2014 when Russian-backed separatist rebels seized some towns in predominantly Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine.
- Violence in eastern Ukraine has killed more than 10,300 people and injured nearly 24,000 civilians
- Although various peace agreements have attempted to end the violence in the Donbas, the area remains one of the most militarized regions in the world.



The 2008 August War



- Since its independence, Georgia has struggled to stabilize major separatist movements located in three regions: Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
- Both the South Ossetian and Abkhazian separatist movements are backed by Russia.
- Five days of heavy fighting occurred between the two sides.
- Georgian forces were defeated in most battles and retreated on 11 August, enabling the Russians to occupy several Georgian cities.
- A ceasefire was reached on August 12th, ending violence along the neutral zone. Russia remains in South Ossetia and Abkhazia but fighting has not resurged.

Research Puzzle:

Why have the Minsk Accords failed to end violence in Eastern Ukraine when a similar ceasefire agreement was successful in the August Russo-Georgian War?



Claim: Three theories on why the Minsk Accords continue to fail while the August War Ceasefire Agreement was successful:

1. The August War negotiations were carried out with a bottom-up approach and better at considering local issues.
2. On the other hand, the Donbas war negotiations focused more on an ineffective top-down approach to peacebuilding, leading to continued failure to stop the violent conflict.
3. The August War negotiations were carried out in a less challenging environment than the Donbas War allowing for a sustainable end to violence.

Why do Peace Negotiations Fail?

The Wrong Strategy:

The Crisis of Peacekeeping – Professor Séverine Autesserre

■ “The problem is bigger than mandates and resources. Above all, it has to do with two strategic choices peacekeeping organizations frequently make: first, to work with national elites to stop violence from the top down and, second, to push for quick elections as a way to consolidate the peace.”

Environmental Factors:

Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements - Stephen John Stedman

- “Incentive compatibility” argues that “...strategies must be in the self-interest of critical actors in order to be implemented.”
- “The difficulty of an environment is thought to depend on three variables: spoilers, neighboring states that oppose peace, and valuable spoils.”

Findings

■ Both Russia and Ukraine have incentives to violate the ceasefire due to the strength of the Ukrainian militias and the involvement of Western powers

–Both in peace negotiations and in unilateral military agreements (NATO).

■ Moscow has the capability to end the conflict, but does not want more economic sanctions or an international conflict with Western allies.

■ The Donbas conflict will remain at a stalemate until there is a change of incentives and increasing inclusion of local actors.

Compromise is not an option, but on a long enough timeline, something has to give