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**Russian Academics Examine Prospects of UN Peacekeeping Mission in Ukraine's Donets Basin**

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[Article by Academician Aleksey Arbatov, member of IMEMO [World Economy and International Relations Institute] Board; Fedor Voytlovskiy, corresponding member and Director of IMEMO; Academician Aleksandr Dynkin, President of Russian Academy of Sciences Ye.M. Primakov IMEMO; Andrey Zagorskiy, chief of IMEMO department; and General of Army Vyacheslav Trubnikov, member of IMEMO Board: "Peace for Donets Basin. Conflict in Southeastern Ukraine: How To Make Progress"]

Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposal to deploy a UN peacekeeping operation in the zone of conflict in Southeastern Ukraine has given a new boost to the discussion of the prospects of settling the Ukrainian crisis. This discussion is proceeding with difficulty. Moscow's and Kyiv's positions on key issues do not just differ but are directly opposed. But this does not have to mean that the actual settlement process has once again ended up in an impasse.

The fact that both Moscow and Kyiv agree, in principle, with the idea of deploying a UN peacekeeping mission, even though they understand its substance differently, increases the chances of making progress. Given

the political will, the approaches of Russia and Ukraine can lead to a common dominator.

### **Why a Peacekeeping Operation Is Needed**

First, it makes sense only if it helps to overcome the deadlock in the Minsk process. Russia's initiative in this direction makes it possible to switch the negotiating process away from an exchange of mutual accusations with regard to who is to blame for delaying fulfillment of the Minsk agreements toward a more concrete plane.

Second, a peacekeeping operation must lead not to a freezing of the conflict but to its settlement. Turning the Donets Basin into another Transnistria – only 10 times bigger – will not resolve the problem but shift it onto future generations. Freezing of the conflict is also a highly likely version of the development of events. But this scenario will inevitably lead to deformation of the socioeconomic development of the Donets Basin and also of the border oblasts of Ukraine and Russia. A peacekeeping operation will create guarantees of the gradual rebuilding of the region's socioeconomic ties and economy.

Third, the blocking of a political dialogue with Russia is today creating in Kyiv the illusion of the possibility of using the West to secure the conflict's settlement on its own terms. Therefore any steps that assist a settlement must, on the one hand, offer Kyiv a tangible alternative to the conflict's endless protraction and, on the other, prompt it to realize that it cannot endlessly count on the West's unconditional support. Ending the armed confrontation in Southeastern Ukraine will create just such boosts and will place on the agenda the fulfillment of political aspects of the conflict's settlement.

### **The Peacekeepers' Mandate**

As a first step, it strikes us as sensible to deploy peacekeepers on both sides of the line of contact between the sides in the so-called security zone, whose depth would guarantee the impossibility of sudden aggression against each other or of concealed preparations for this. The peacekeepers' tasks must consist in ensuring effective observance of the Minsk accords on a cease-fire and assisting the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in the fulfillment of its mandate. At the same time special attention must be devoted to separating the sides' military forces on sections where armed clashes occur most frequently and where vitally

important infrastructure facilities, whose decommissioning might exacerbate the humanitarian crisis still further, are located.

To resolve these tasks effectively, it is not enough to deploy military observers or dividing forces, which in the history of the United Nations have frequently been obliged to watch impotently as confrontations are exacerbated and, at best, to record them, as the OSCE mission is doing now. In addition to investigating armed incidents in the security zone and maintaining channels of communication with the parties to the conflict, for the purposes of preventing the escalation of dangerous military incidents, the mission must have the right to stop the cease-fire terms being breached by any side, to prevent the return of heavy arms to the security zone, to ensure, if necessary, the safety of the civilian population, and to stop attempts to prevent it from fulfilling its mandate.

From these tasks stems the nature of the peacekeepers' mandate as fulfilling essentially the functions of forces not only to "maintain peace" but also to "compel" it. Such an operation can be deployed only by the United Nations. Accordingly, its details must be worked out and the international military contingent be formed within the UN framework.

### **The Mission's Composition**

UN peacekeeping operations must conform to the principle of impartiality. They must not support one of the sides in a conflict "against the other," although they can and must stop attempts to wreck the cease-fire or actions that pose a threat to the safety and life of the civilian population.

Today the West, prompted by Kyiv, rejects the possibility of Russia's participation in a peacekeeping operation in Southeastern Ukraine. The inclusion of military contingents from the United States and other NATO countries in the peacekeeping mission is unacceptable to Russia. These issues must be resolved in talks on the peacekeeping operation's mandate, and it will be an exceptionally complex yet vitally important task to reach a compromise. Based on the premise that it would be desirable to man the mission with forces from the OSCE member countries, the choice is not a great one. Belarus, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Austria, Finland, and Sweden could primarily be perceived as impartial peacekeepers by all parties. If necessary, however, UN peacekeepers representing countries that have

experience of participating in the conduct of peacekeeping operations can be involved in the mission's activity.

If necessary, it will be possible to provide for additional measures that would ensure a sufficient level of transparency of the peacekeepers' activity and guarantees of their impartiality for all the parties involved. For example, it would be possible to include unarmed observers from Russia and Ukraine in the mission and to supplement the mandate of the OSCE mission with observation of the way in which the UN peacekeepers fulfill their tasks. It would also be possible to provide for the possibility of the peacekeepers' cooperation with the Russian-Ukrainian Joint Center for Control and Coordination, set up in the fall of 2014.

### **With Whom to Reach Agreement**

The positions of Russia and Ukraine are diametrically opposed on the matter of involving Donetsk and Luhansk in agreeing the parameters of the peacekeeping operation. If Moscow insists on involving them, Kyiv objects categorically, not viewing the DNR [Donetsk People's Republic] and LNR [Luhansk People's Republic] as parties in the conflict.

It seems to us that, given the political will, this problem can be resolved without waiting for a rapprochement of the positions of Russia and Ukraine in this matter. The peacekeeping mission's mandate is prepared by the UNSC (with Ukraine's involvement). Although the participation of representatives of the DNR and LNR is desirable at this stage, it is not compulsory. The Minsk Agreements, which provide for a cease-fire, are sufficient for the UNSC to adopt the decision to deploy the mission.

But the consent of the host country (Ukraine) alone is insufficient for the operation's practical deployment. The UN peacekeeping doctrine requires the consent of all the sides, and particularly of those on which the safety of the mission's personnel depends. Without a standard memorandum being signed with representatives of the DNR and LNR (and Ukraine) no state will just send its contingent to the conflict zone. Kyiv has no wish to understand this as yet, but it must be understood in the capitals of the UNSC permanent member countries. It is important that they help to explain the real possibilities of a settlement to the Ukrainian leadership.

At the same time, for the operation to be deployed, it will be sufficient for representatives of the United Nations to sign memorandums with the DNR and LNR (and Ukraine) that will record, inter alia, the agreement of

all the parties with the peacekeepers' mandate and contain the necessary guarantees. Otherwise, the DNR and LNR will not be tied by any obligations with regard to the peacekeepers. In accordance with established international practice, the signing of such memorandums will not signify recognition of the self-proclaimed republics.

### **Subsequent Steps**

The geographic coverage of the peacekeeping mission's activity could, if necessary, be widened as the cease-fire regime is consolidated and the situation in the security zone is stabilized. It would be sensible to synchronize this expansion with an international political and humanitarian presence mission, whose tasks would include assisting in the implementation of nonmilitary aspects of the Minsk accords. Only humanitarian and socioeconomic aspects of a settlement can be the basis for shaping the political process. Widening the zone of the peacekeeping operation, whose tasks would include ensuring the safety of the personnel of the international presence mission, would assist the holding of elections and the completion of the process of forming legitimate organs of power in Eastern Ukraine.

### **International Presence**

In addition to deploying a peacekeeping mission for the purpose of consolidating the cease-fire regime, we deem it expedient to deploy the presence of an international humanitarian mission in Eastern Ukraine to assist in resolving nonmilitary aspects of the Minsk accords (in addition to those that depend exclusively on Kyiv, including the adoption of appropriate laws and constitutional acts – something that has not yet been implemented).

From our viewpoint, such a presence will be required for the entire period for which the special status of areas of Eastern Ukraine will apply. This is necessary to coordinate the activities of various international structures aimed at resolving the tasks of postconflict rebuilding, including holding elections, forming legitimate institutions of power, returning refugees and internally displaced persons, maintaining law and order, ensuring an independent judiciary, rebuilding the economy, delivering humanitarian aid, and other tasks.

Unfortunately, the options for an international presence in Southeastern Ukraine that have been under discussion recently clearly have not

enhanced the attractiveness of this idea. Kyiv can hardly be inspired by the example of the UN Administration in Kosovo that ended in the latter's secession from Serbia. The representatives of the LNR and DNR are frightened by the example of Eastern Slavonia, where the international administration's activity failed to halt ethnic cleansing.

An international presence in Southeastern Ukraine is needed precisely to prevent a repetition of both the former and the latter versions of the development of events. In addition, it is necessary to make a realistic assessment of the decisions that are possible today in various international organizations.

Theoretically, an international presence can be deployed in Southeastern Ukraine by decision of the UNSC as a component or components of a comprehensive peace-building operation by the organization. In that case a peacekeeping operation could be one (the first) component of such a multicomponent mission.

The concentration of all aspects of international activity in one pair of hands would be the advantage of comprehensive multicomponent presences of the United Nations and the OSCE. However, taking into account the actual state of affairs, including the reluctance to revise the mandate of the present OSCE monitoring mission, the option of coordinating the activities of various organizations strikes us as being more realistic and, therefore, preferable from the political viewpoint. To ensure efficient coordination and rule out duplication in the activities of the various structures, it will be necessary and sufficient to arrange for close cooperation on the spot between the special representatives of the UN Secretary General and the current OSCE Chairman. This task can be resolved, *inter alia*, by appointing one and the same person as the special representative of both organizations. This will make it possible to concentrate management of the activities of both the United Nations and the OSCE in one pair of hands.

The proposals being advanced by our Western partners at the expert and diplomatic level to post UN peacekeepers, *inter alia*, on the Russian-Ukrainian border can be implemented after all sides fulfill the Minsk Agreements, as well as on condition of the successful implementation of a peacekeeping mission on the line of demarcation between the sides in the conflict and on contiguous sections.

Of course, other solutions to problems that today appear insoluble may emerge in the process of agreeing the parameters of a possible operation to maintain peace in Southeastern Ukraine. The most important thing is that such solutions are possible, and persistent efforts must be made to achieve them. The reaction to Vladimir Putin's breakthrough proposal will show the West's true aims – settlement of the conflict or the acquisition of new spheres of influence.

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