



ANALYSIS

THE RUSSIAN WAY OF CEASEFIRES AND THE TRAPS IT SETS FOR EUROPE

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Cover page photo: A Georgian woman and her baby in the reflection of a shot-out window on 15 August 2008, in the main square of Gori. AFP Photo / Dmitry Kostyukov / Scanpix

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANF	Al-Nusra Front (also known as Jabhat al-Nusra)
DPR	so-called Donetsk People's Republic (Ukraine)
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission (Georgia)
FSB	Federal Security Service (<i>Федеральная служба безопасности</i> , Russia)
FSK	Federal Counterintelligence Service (<i>Федеральная служба контрразведки</i> , Russia)
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JIC	Joint Implementation Mechanism (Syria)
LPR	so-called Lugansk People's Republic (Ukraine)
SMM	Special Monitoring Mission (Ukraine)
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle

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as part of the special military operation.”² This is consistent with descriptions of consistent Russian negotiation approaches not as a means to reach a mutually beneficial settlement, but as “a strategic tool in [Russia’s] arsenal of war to delay, deceive, and destabilise its opponents.”³

Western counterparties want to end the fighting immediately, but Russia wants to win the war in the long term

INTRODUCTION

The Russian term ‘недоговороспособность’ (*nedogovorospobnost’*) describes chronic wilful inability to negotiate in good faith or keep to any agreements once reached. The term is often used by Russia to accuse others of intransigence when they refuse Moscow’s demands.¹ But consistent empirical evidence argues that an assumption of Russian ‘недоговороспособность’ should be the basis of any plan to reach conflict-ending agreements with Moscow, whether in Ukraine now or elsewhere in the future.

Russia seeks a ceasefire when it assesses that it can gain greater advantage from freezing the fighting than from continuing it

Being able to reach an agreement with Moscow on pausing a conflict is an indication of Russia’s relative weakness or lack of confidence; in other words, Russia seeks a ceasefire when it assesses that it can gain greater advantage from freezing the fighting than from continuing it. However, it is vital that this is not confused with a desire by Moscow to end the war, or a renunciation of war aims. As stated directly by Russian spokesperson Dmitry Peskov in December 2025 in the context of potential negotiations for a ceasefire in Ukraine, “Russia remains open to peace talks, but through peace talks we must achieve our objectives set

This is key to how Russia achieves success in the framing of ceasefire agreements, and how these agreements provide a further means of achieving Russian objectives. Western counterparties brokering a ceasefire between Russia and the victim of its aggression have habitually prioritised bringing fighting to an end as soon as possible over achieving a sustainable peace, and this mismatch of objectives allows Russia repeatedly to set terms which do not bind or constrain Russian actions in any meaningful manner. Western counterparties want to end the fighting immediately, but Russia wants to win the war in the long term: being allowed to use a ceasefire agreement as a means of doing so provides both endorsement of its decision to go to war and encouragement to do so again in the future.⁴

This paper examines Russia’s structuring of ceasefire terms and agreements on verification and monitoring mechanisms, and the manner in which both of these facilitate persistent breaches of what the counterparties believe to have been agreed. To do so, it presents four primary case studies to illustrate patterns of Russian post-conflict behaviour: Chechnya in 1999, Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014–22, and Syria in the period from 2015.

In each of the four case studies, patterns in the nature of Russian agreement violations are summarised and brief examples given.

¹ An example is available at “[Недоговороспособность Украины](#) [Ukraine’s inability to negotiate],” *Monokl*, 31 March 2025.

² Vitaliy Shevchenko, “[Russia says talks must achieve its war objectives](#),” *BBC News*, 2 December 2025.

³ Roman Bezsmertny, “[How to Negotiate with Moscow Based on Experience of a Ukrainian Diplomat](#),” *Jamestown Perspectives*, undated.

⁴ “[Ceasefire: Military Action Works](#),” *Chatham House*, 3 March 2016.

Supporting material is available in a set of annexes to the paper, including, where useful, the original texts (translated) of ceasefire agreements or their relevant portions, together with a collection of supporting evidence and details of Russian violations (including the accompanying patterns of information exploitation obscuring or justifying them).

A concluding section measures the findings of the paper against the current situation in negotiations for ending the war in Ukraine, and considers the implications in terms of probable Russian actions.

1. CEASEFIRE AS A VICTORY, ENDORSEMENT, AND ENCOURAGEMENT

This pattern of Russia using ceasefire agreements to further its war aims underlies the suspension of every conflict between itself and its neighbours since the end of the USSR. It also echoes examples from earlier in history, such as the Soviet exertion of control over central and eastern Europe in the early Cold War period on fundamentally different terms to those which the western Allies, primarily the United States, believed had been agreed with Stalin. After the Second World War, the US and UK protested vigorously at the way Soviet power was extended into Central Europe and the Balkans, saying that this was in violation of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements of 1945 – not to mention the earlier Moscow Declaration which stated that:

“After the termination of hostilities [the Allies] will not employ their military forces within the territories of other states except for the purposes envisaged in this declaration and after joint consultation.”⁵

Although Soviet actions may have been in breach of the Anglo-American interpretation of these ambiguous and imprecise arrangements, what mattered was their interpretation in Moscow and the inability or unwillingness of the western allies to force the issue.

Russia’s setting of conditions for ceasefires to fail also includes ensuring that any ceasefire monitoring regime is compromised from the start. This can be through seeing that the monitoring and verification mechanism is created such that it may document Russian transgressions, but has no means of interdicting or countering them, and reporting them does not lead to consequences for Moscow. Violations can extend from initiating provocative exchanges of fire and then blaming the other side, to direct or proxy harassment or attacks on the international monitoring staff themselves. Examples of Russian success in this field include the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine.⁶

The common element to Russia’s approach to post-conflict agreements is thus the successful shaping of the terms of those agreements to facilitate their violation by Russia with impunity. Russia has repeatedly set terms of ceasefires, with the active facilitation of western partners, that ensure Russia can violate the ceasefire at will but the victim of Russia’s aggression is constrained.

The common element to Russia's approach is the shaping of the terms to facilitate their violation by Russia with impunity

As a result, common forms of Russian violation have consistently been enabled by the way ceasefire terms are drafted, when Russian persistence combines with western expediency and the perceived need to reach an agreement at almost all costs to produce agreements which can be implemented entirely in Moscow’s favour. This leads to western counterparties complaining about Russia’s disregarding the spirit of a post-conflict agreement, even when it may remain in technical accordance with what it allows. A simple example comes from the case of the August 2008 ceasefire agreement with Georgia allowing freedom of movement for ‘peace-keeping forces,’ followed by Russia rebadging

⁵ “[The Moscow Declaration by the U.S., U.K., U.S.S.R., China](#),” Inside The Cold War, 30 October 1943.

⁶ “[European Union External Action](#),” EUMM website, accessed in March 2026; “[OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine \(closed\)](#),” OSCE, undated.

its troops already in place as those ‘peace-keeping forces,’ and thus enjoying unconstrained operations across and beyond the conflict zone while remaining in compliance with the letter of the agreement.

It is important to note that of the four conflicts considered, three began in the form of a failure or breach of an existing ceasefire agreement.

- In **Chechnya**, following an abortive raid in force by Russia’s Federal Counterintelligence Service (*Федеральная служба контрразведки*, FSK; later, the Federal Security Service, FSB) in November 1994, President Dzhokhar Dudayev and Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev had declared publicly that no military action would ensue.⁷
- The Sochi agreement, also known as the Dagomys Accords, was a ceasefire agreement designed to end both the South Ossetia War and the Abkhazian War. Signed in Sochi on 24 June 1992 between **Georgia** and Russia, it marked a suspension of fighting between Georgia and its two regions backed by Russian troops.⁸ Hostilities between Abkhazia and Georgia subsequently resumed, before the 1994 Moscow Agreement established a ceasefire and separation of forces.⁹ Despite subsequent adjustments, the basic format of these agreements (especially the presence of Russian ‘peacekeepers’ in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia) set the conditions for open conflict between Georgia and Russia a decade and a half later.
- In 1997, Russia and **Ukraine** signed two key agreements: the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership (the Big Treaty) establishing strategic ties, mutual respect for borders and territorial integrity, and the Partition Treaty on the Black Sea Fleet, which divided the Soviet Black Sea

Fleet and leased naval bases to Russia in Crimea. While these agreements were signed at a time of relative weakness for Russia, over time, the respect they expressed for Ukraine’s territorial integrity was progressively abandoned as Russia grew in relative military strength, until it eventually became clear that Russia had no intention of honouring the agreements or acknowledging Ukraine’s territorial integrity as an independent state.¹⁰

This illustrates two key points: (1) conditions for conflict can be set years or decades earlier; and (2) Russia is willing and able to exploit successive iterations of ceasefire agreements over such periods. Both cases also demonstrate a pattern whereby Russia will conclude peace agreements when it is not in a position to force the outcome of a conflict, but will breach them when it feels confident that it is strong enough to do so.

Russia will conclude peace agreements when it is not in a position to force the outcome of a conflict, but will breach them when it feels confident that it is strong enough to do so

2. CHECHNYA 1999

Following Chechnya’s attempted secession from the Russian Federation at the end of the Soviet Union, Russian forces entered Chechnya in December 1994 in a large-scale military offensive intended to restore control.

Two days after the agreement on “no military force” between President Dudayev and Russian Defence Minister Grachev referred to above, Russian President Boris Yeltsin issued Decree No. 2166, “On Measures to End the Activity of Illegal Armed Formations on the Territory of the Chechen Republic.” The decree authorised an operation “to use all available state means to ensure the security of the state, the rule of law, civil rights and liberties, the defence of public order, the fight against crime and the disarming of all illegal formations.” Yeltsin kept this decree secret from the public, the

⁷ Alessandra Stanley, “[War Threat in Caucasus Is Averted](#),” *The New York Times*, 12 December 1994.

⁸ Dennis Sammut and Cvetkovski, Nikola, [Confidence Building Matters: The Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict](#) (Verification Technology Information Centre, March 2006).

⁹ “[Georgia - UNOMIG - Background](#),” United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia, United Nations, 2009.

¹⁰ Kataryna Wolczuk and Rilka Dragneva, “[Russia’s longstanding problem with Ukraine’s borders](#),” *Chatham House*, 24 August 2022.

parliament and most of his own advisers. On 11 December 1994, the Russian armed forces commenced an attack and invaded Chechnya from the north, east, and west.¹¹

What became known as the First Chechen War ended with a comprehensive defeat for the Russian army in 1996, when a successful Chechen counterattack on Grozny retook control of the city that had been held by the Russian forces since early 1995. Officially, the war ended as a result of the Khasavyurt Accords signed on 30 August 1996. The accords ended major combat operations, but did not resolve the non-recognition of Chechnya by the Russian Federation. Chechnya's *de facto* independence lasted until 1999, when then Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin declared a "counter-terrorism operation" as a response to an incursion by Chechen guerrillas into the neighbouring region of Dagestan, and a wave of purported terrorist attacks against apartment buildings across Russia. The Second Chechen War ended Chechnya's *de facto* independence, and Chechnya remains part of the Russian Federation.¹²

The 1996 agreement brought an end to full-scale conflict but solved none of the political problems

The "Rules for Clarifying the Basis for Mutual Relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic," agreed in August 1996, brought an end to full-scale conflict but solved none of the political problems that caused the war. The agreement consisted of four provisions. The first section stated that a treaty regulating the relations between Russia and Chechnya, to be governed by the norms and principles of international law, must be reached prior to 31 December 2001. The second section, the most relevant to the cessation of hostilities, created a Joint Commission composed of Russian and Chechen officials in order, in particular, to facilitate the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechen territory. The third provision enshrined the "right of nations towards self-determination" and the "principles of equal rights of nations."

¹¹ David Remnick, "Letter From Chechnya: In Stalin's Wake," *The New Yorker*, 24 July 1995.

¹² "Russia vs. Chechnya 1996-1999," Peace Research Center Prague, undated.

Finally, the fourth provision established the framework for the Joint Commission.¹³

The treaty was both extremely brief and extremely vague (in one version, the text on the Joint Commission read only that it would "complete its work by mutual agreement"). Undefined terms and key omissions allowed each side to subjectively interpret its effect. The five-year moratorium on deciding Chechnya's status made no reference to Russia's territorial integrity. By contrast, President Yeltsin's primary justification for the war had been to preserve Russia's territorial integrity (and thus conform to the Russian Constitution, which implicitly prohibits secession). Chechnya, meanwhile, was determined to achieve full independence.¹⁴

A peace treaty concluded on 12 May 1997 was presented as a more substantial and permanent resolution to the conflict, but was itself also short and ambiguous. While referring to a "complete rejection of use of force" on both sides, and their desire to end their "centuries-long" antagonism and strive to establish "firm, equal and mutually beneficial relations," the key issue of Chechnya's status remained unresolved.¹⁵

The precursors to resumed hostilities between Russia and Chechnya in 1999 have been the subject of debate and intense speculation both in Russia and abroad. The renewal of Russian operations against the territory coincided with the unexpected rise to power of Vladimir Putin as Boris Yeltsin's handpicked successor, and led to widespread speculation that the Kremlin engineered the war to ensure support for Putin as president, or at least influence the 26 March presidential election.¹⁶

¹³ "Khasavyurt [sic] Joint Declaration and Principles for Mutual Relations," UN Mediation Support Unit, 31 August 1996.

¹⁴ Wendy Turnoff Atrokhov, "The Khasavyurt Accords: Maintaining the Rule of Law and Legitimacy of Democracy in the Russian Federation Amidst the Chechen Crisis," *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol. 32: Iss. 2, Article 3, 1999.

¹⁵ Salome Asatiani, "Chechnya: Why Did 1997 Peace Agreement Fail?," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 11 May 2007.

¹⁶ Mike Eckel, "Two Decades On, Smoldering Questions About The Russian President's Vault To Power," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 7 August 2019.

On 7 August 1999, a group of guerrillas attacked the Russian province of Dagestan from Chechnya. Local security forces and elements of the Russian armed forces engaged the group and had largely repelled the incursion by the end of September. Meanwhile, in Moscow, Vladimir Putin had been appointed prime minister and promised a firm response to the assault.¹⁷ Shortly afterwards, a series of apartment bombings across Russia killed approximately 300 people. While Moscow officially blamed Chechen terrorists, allegations have persisted that this was a false flag operation to provide a pretext for the second invasion of Chechnya, and that the incursion into Dagestan itself had been encouraged or incited as a pretext for Russia to resume the war.¹⁸ (On 22 September 1999, FSB agents were caught by local police planting explosives at an apartment complex in the city of Ryazan. They were later released on orders from Moscow, with FSB chief Nikolay Patrushev announcing that the incident had been part of a “training exercise”.¹⁹) On 30 September 1999, Russian troops launched a full ground offensive into northern Chechnya.²⁰ At the end of the year, Putin was appointed acting president on the surprise resignation of Boris Yeltsin, and less than three months later, was confirmed in office following a strong election victory.

Russia described its invasion and the subsequent exertion of control over Chechnya as a “counter-terrorist operation.” Despite widespread instances of atrocities and war crimes by Russian forces, Russia later achieved limited success in legitimising its renewed invasion after 2001 by casting it as its contribution to the global campaign against terrorism.²¹

The case of Chechnya illustrates how a peace accord with Russia may be considered only temporary in Moscow, especially if it does not address underlying political contradictions or provide for a means of enforcement; and that it is possible to achieve a ceasefire with Russia by means of defeating Russian forces in the field, but the ceasefire may not hold once Russia feels itself sufficiently strong and confident to breach it. These two key principles will be found to be common to the other case studies provided in this analysis.

The case of Chechnya illustrates how a peace accord with Russia may be considered only temporary

3. GEORGIA 2008

As noted above, the situation before the armed conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, including the presence of Russian forces on territory internationally recognised as part of Georgia, itself resulted from ceasefire agreements concluded in the early 1990s. Prior to the resumption of open conflict in 2008, Russia had for several years pursued increasingly aggressive and interventionist policies in Georgia, and had employed a variety of instruments, including military confrontation on a limited scale. In the months immediately preceding the conflict, Moscow’s provocations against Georgia grew increasingly overt and were eventually accompanied by troop movements into Abkhazia and North Ossetia, which resembled preparation for military operations.²² Yet western reactions to this behaviour – including to previous preparations for invasion in the form of the annual *Kavkaz* exercises – remained declaratory and cautious in nature, and failed to attach costs to Russia for its behaviour.²³

¹⁷ Paolo Calzini, “[Vladimir Putin and the Chechen War](#),” *The International Spectator* 2 (2005).

¹⁸ Yuri Felshinsky and Alexander Litvinenko, *ФСБ взрывает Россию* [FSB blowing up Russia] (1st ed.) (Liberty Publishing House, Inc., 2002); in English: *Blowing Up Russia*, translated from Russian by Geoffrey Andrews and Co. (2nd ed.) (Gibson Square Books, 2007).

¹⁹ Amy Knight, “[Finally we Know About the Moscow Bombings](#),” *New York Review*, 22 November 2012.

²⁰ David Hoffman, “[Miscalculations Paved Path to Chechen War](#),” *The Washington Post*, 20 March 2000.

²¹ Rachel Denber, “[‘Glad to be Deceived’: the International Community and Chechnya](#),” *Human Rights Watch*, 2004.

²² Charles Blandy, [Georgia and Russia: A Further Deterioration in Relations](#) (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, July 2008); Charles Blandy, *Provocation, Deception, Entrapment: The Russo-Georgian Five Day War* (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, March 2009).

²³ Svante E. Cornell, Johanna Popjanevski and Niklas Nilsson, [Russia’s War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World](#) (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, August 2008).

Following brief but intense fighting between 8 and 12 August 2008, a ceasefire agreement was drafted in Moscow and conveyed by then French President Nicolas Sarkozy to then Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili (see Annex A for text and commentary). The six

The armed conflict between Russia and Georgia followed from ceasefire agreements concluded in the early 1990s

“principles” of the ceasefire agreement were largely unchanged from Russia’s previously stated demands on Georgia and did not show any signs of having been negotiated or even discussed by Sarkozy in Moscow.²⁴ In particular, they allowed “Russian peacekeeping forces [to] effectuate additional security measures” across an area which, Sarkozy clarified, was not limited to South Ossetia but to its “vicinity.”

This ambiguity effectively immobilised Georgian forces, but gave Russian forces free rein. Russia declared that the presence of its troops in Georgia was no more than a re-inforcement of its already existing ‘peace-keeping’ presence there (the subsequent Russian description of the 58th Army units and others, which entered Georgia through Ossetia, was ‘enhanced peacekeeping contingent’).²⁵ Almost immediate painting of blue and yellow “MC” roundels, denoting the Russian abbreviation for ‘peacemaking forces’ (*миротворческие силы*), on vehicles throughout operational areas suggested that this was a preconsidered step. Russia was free to interpret “implementing security measures in the vicinity of South Ossetia” as a right to maintain a buffer zone of unspecified depth into Georgia, which also equated to *carte blanche* to Russian forces to operate on Georgian territory.²⁶

Russia claimed its intervention in Georgia was on the basis of humanitarian concerns, including formulaic accusations of ‘genocide’ by Georgian forces.²⁷ Subsequent Russian disclosures made it plain that the invasion of Georgia was a premeditated action;²⁸ but Russia achieved considerable success in deflecting blame for the conflict to Georgia.²⁹ This was the result not only of an intensive disinformation campaign accusing Georgian forces of widespread human rights violations in South Ossetia, but also of a flawed investigative report into the conflict’s origins and initial phases by the European Union (the “Tagliavini Report”).³⁰ Together, these factors contributed to the lack of a clear and coherent international response to the conflict. In addition, no provision was made in the original ceasefire agreement for monitoring or enforcement; a subsequent monitoring mission mounted by the EU could document Russian violations, but could only operate on Georgian territory and had no powers to take any further action.³¹

Overall, the text of the agreement left a loophole for unrestrained military activity by Russia. It also confirmed and legitimised the Russian presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which remain to this day occupied territories making up approximately one-fifth of Georgia overall. Russia subsequently

The text of the agreement left a loophole for unrestrained military activity and legitimised the Russian presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia

declared these territories to be independent states and incentivised a number of small countries to recognise this status. The Pacific island state of Nauru maintains this recognition

²⁴ “The Nature of the Georgian Ceasefire,” Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 13 August 2008.

²⁵ Keir Giles, *Understanding the Georgia Conflict, Two Years On: Reviews and Commentaries – Part 2: Making Sense in Russia and the West* (NATO Defense College, September 2010).

²⁶ “The war between Georgia and Russia: one year after,” Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe, 14 September 2009.

²⁷ “Amnesty’s Conclusions about 2008 Georgia-Russia Conflict Supported by New EU Report,” Amnesty International, 1 October 2009.

²⁸ Pavel Felgenhauer, “Putin Confirms the Invasion of Georgia Was Preplanned,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 8 September 2012.

²⁹ “Georgia started war with Russia: EU-backed report,” *Reuters*, 30 September 2009.

³⁰ “Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia,” Council of Europe, September 2009.

³¹ “Our Mandate,” EU Monitoring Mission, undated.

to this day.³² Over a decade later, states like the UK and Canada were calling on Russia to “fulfil its obligations” under the August 2008 ceasefire agreement, whereas in fact Russia had done precisely what that agreement – written in Moscow – had said it could.³³

4. UKRAINE 2014–22

In early 2014, Russia’s seizure of Crimea was followed by the start of offensive operations against eastern Ukraine, first covertly in the guise of “separatists,” and then overtly with a cross-border movement of regular Russian forces. Western efforts to end the ensuing fighting led to two ceasefires, agreed on 5 September 2014 and 12 February 2015, known respectively as Minsk-1 (the Minsk Protocol) and Minsk-2 (the Package of Measures). French President François Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel provided the figureheads for these agreements, in negotiations hosted by Belarus.

The search for a diplomatic solution to Russia’s military challenge, and the drive to end the fighting on whatever terms Russia would agree to rather than pressuring Russia into ending its aggression, led to the peace agreements once again failing to address the underlying political contradictions. The texts of the agreements acquiesced in the fiction that the war in Ukraine was an internal matter to which Russia was not a party, demanded that Ukraine surrender key aspects of its national sovereignty, and entirely ignored Russia’s occupation and annexation of Crimea; nevertheless, these agreements were repeatedly insisted on by western European leaders as the only possible resolution to the conflict.³⁴

Treating Russia as a partner in settling the conflict rather than as the aggressor, together with a lack of political impetus to find alternative mechanisms, led to the signatories to the Minsk Protocol accepting the OSCE as

the entity to carry out permanent monitoring and verification on the Ukrainian-Russian state border and line of contact. This was despite the fact that OSCE actions were already widely seen as fatally compromised by Russia remaining a member of the organisation and thus playing a role in constraining its activities. The OSCE did, in fact, possess the “legal instrument to remove the aggressor state from its conflict resolution activities – a ‘consensus minus one’ principle,” but this was not employed,³⁵ with the result that Russia eventually contributed actual members of mission teams assigned to Ukraine (amid persistent suspicions that these members were embedded on behalf of Russian intelligence services).³⁶

The Minsk Protocol names the OSCE as an intermediary, in the second and fourth points of the document, its task to monitor and verify the ceasefire (outlined in the first point of the document) and the buffer zone on the Russian–Ukrainian border. Minsk-2 mentions the OSCE in its second, third and tenth points, its role to facilitate, monitor, and verify the withdrawal of heavy weapons from, a ceasefire in, and the demilitarisation of the conflict zone. Crucially, there is no mention in either document of how the agreement is to be enforced. Accordingly, the OSCE established an SMM, with a mandate “to observe and report in an impartial and objective manner on the security situation in Ukraine; and to facilitate dialogue among all parties to the conflict.”³⁷ This remained a purely civilian mission that monitored the conflict but could not intervene, as it was entirely lacking either a mandate or resources and equipment for peacekeeping or peace-enforcing.

With no ability to challenge Russian obstructionism, OSCE movements outside Ukrainian government-controlled areas were severely restricted. SMM unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were routinely subjected to GPS signal interference and gunfire, which limited the

³² Bruce Hill, “[What’s the deal with Nauru backing the disputed territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia?](#)” *ABC News*, 12 May 2018.

³³ “[Geneva International Discussions on the conflict in Georgia: UK-Canada statement](#),” UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 9 July 2021.

³⁴ Volodymyr Vasylenko, “[The West must not force a Russian “peace” on Ukraine](#),” *Atlantic Council*, 15 August 2021.

³⁵ Andreas Umland, “[Achievements and Limitations of the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine](#),” SCEEUS Reports on Human Rights and Security No. 3, *Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS) at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs* (March 2021).

³⁶ Paul Niland, “[Russia has no place in the OSCE special monitoring mission in Ukraine](#),” *Atlantic Council*, 23 July 2018.

³⁷ “[OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine](#),” OSCE.

SMM's monitoring and put mission members and assets at risk. SMM freedom of movement was also restricted by minelaying, and monitors were repeatedly threatened or attacked while conducting their patrols, their cars fired on, and parked vehicles and monitoring equipment deliberately destroyed.³⁸ Nevertheless, the SMM was limited to recording its observations in neutral language, not designating the perpetrator of ceasefire violations. This led to its referring obliquely to direct Russian obstruction of its mission without naming Russia and stating only that it occurred in "non-government-controlled areas."³⁹ Thus, while almost the entirety of interference with and attacks on SMM teams were by Russian troops and affiliated groups in the occupied territories of Ukraine, it was only possible to deduce this from OSCE reports through close reading of neutralised language and cross-checking of incidents.

The result was that the SMM's reports conveyed an entirely misleading picture of the ongoing violations of the ceasefire regime, up to and including being interpreted in authoritative sources as "the OSCE had not seen direct evidence of Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine."⁴⁰ The level of obfuscation at times reached the ridiculous: while watching Russia's preparations immediately before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the mission could only comment that it had "observed a dramatic increase in kinetic activity along the contact line."⁴¹

With monitoring rendered ineffective, and no mechanism for enforcement, the Minsk agreements allowed Russia to violate the notional ceasefire at will, including continued use of nominally banned heavy weapons and continued military transit across the sections of the Ukrainian–Russian state border which were under Russian control and notional

OSCE observation. Violations were constant: between 15 February and 20 April 2015 alone, Ukraine reported 2 555 ceasefire violations, 'many' confirmed by the OSCE SMM.⁴² The SMM recorded 312 554 violations over the whole of 2018, a number that was almost 25% lower than in 2017 but largely similar to the number of violations recorded in 2016.⁴³

With monitoring rendered ineffective, and no mechanism for enforcement, the Minsk agreements allowed Russia to violate the notional ceasefire at will

The Minsk agreements also provided a political tool for exploitation by Russia. Vladislav Surkov, one of the chief designers of Putin's current system of government, has been credited with key roles in the annexation of Crimea and the initiation of the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Surkov has described explicitly how the intent of the Minsk agreements, rather than to find a path to peace, was to break up Ukraine.⁴⁴ In practical terms, this primarily took the form of exploiting some provisions in both documents to sabotage the implementation of others, with the overall intent of formalising the pulling away of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions from Ukraine.⁴⁵ For example, Point 9 in the Package of Measures stipulated "re-instatement of full control of the state border by the government of Ukraine throughout the conflict area" – but providing that Point 11 has been implemented. That required Ukraine to implement constitutional reform and award "special status" to "certain areas in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions," i.e., those outside Ukrainian government control. The ethos of both documents implied the simultaneous or 'package' implementation of all points contained in each of the documents. Russia, however, demanded that Ukraine first implement Point 11, effectively compromising its own territorial integrity in favour of Russian

³⁸ Umland, "Achievements and Limitations."

³⁹ For example, see "[Status Report as of 10 January 2022](#)," OSCE, 20 January 2022.

⁴⁰ André Härtel, Anton Pisarenko, and Andreas Umland, "[The OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine: The SMM's Work in the Donbas and Its Ukrainian Critique in 2014–2019](#)," *Security and Human Rights*, 7 June 2021.

⁴¹ "[Statement from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine](#)," OSCE, 19 February 2022.

⁴² Interfax-Ukraine, 21 Apr 2015 (accessed through [BBC Monitoring](#)).

⁴³ "[Trends and observations from the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine](#)," OSCE, accessed in March 2026.

⁴⁴ Henry Foy, "[Vladislav Surkov: 'An overdose of freedom is lethal to a state'](#)," *The Financial Times*, 18 June 2021.

⁴⁵ Alexander Hug, "[Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification and the Use of Technology: Insights from Ukraine 2014–2022](#)" (Center for Security Studies, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, ETH, 2024).

objectives. Without this, Russia claimed it was under no obligation to honour Point 9 of the Package of Measures (reinstatement of full control of the state border by the government

Lack of control by Ukraine over the state border facilitated ongoing violations, as well as preparations for the full-scale invasion

of Ukraine), which in any case would have been practically impossible to implement once Point 11 was in force. Meanwhile, lack of control by Ukraine over the state border in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions facilitated ongoing ceasefire and agreement violations by Russia, as well as preparations for the full-scale invasion in February 2022.

On 22 February 2022, two days before ordering the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Putin declared the Minsk agreements null and void – “non-existent” – following the Russian recognition of the ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ and ‘Lugansk People’s Republic’ as independent.⁴⁶ Two days later, the invasion was launched.

Subsequent analysis by a senior OSCE observer identified further key deficiencies in the ceasefire accords:

- The agreements defined the ceasefire requirements only vaguely, referring primarily to the “cessation of the use of weapons.”
- The agreements used the terms ‘monitoring’ and ‘verification’ – i.e., broadly, observation and attribution – without defining them. No specific and formal verification process had been agreed.
- The agreements did not contain detailed maps and lacked baseline information on, for example, the course of agreed lines of control (the ‘contact line’).
- There was no detailed schedule or sequencing of the different phases of the steps to be taken to implement the

⁴⁶ “Minsk agreements cease to exist – Putin,” TASS, 22 February 2022.

agreements. Thus, while the Russian Federation consistently asserted that the political measures (e.g., constitutional changes, special status laws, elections) were to be complied with first, Ukraine maintained that a sustainable ceasefire and control over the state border with the Russian Federation were the precondition for the implementation of any other measures contained in the agreements.

- The fundamental flaw in efforts to seek peace was the lack of political will to enforce it.⁴⁷

The existence of a theoretical ceasefire agreement allowed western powers to maintain the fiction that the problem of Russia’s aggression had been resolved

For a number of years, the existence of a theoretical ceasefire agreement allowed France, Germany and other western powers to maintain the fiction that the problem of Russia’s aggression had been resolved – and to continue suggesting that if it had not, the best way of ending the war in Ukraine would be for Ukraine to surrender to Russian demands, rather than for Russia to cease its attacks.⁴⁸ In reality, the fact that neither France nor Germany had the will or the capacity to actually enforce the ceasefire – or to negotiate viable terms for it in the first place – meant that their insistence on Minsk as a resolution to the war gave Russia no incentive at all to stop fighting it.⁴⁹

Insistence on Minsk as a resolution to the war gave Russia no incentive at all to stop fighting

⁴⁷ Hug, *Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification*.

⁴⁸ “[Flawed peace plan for Ukraine doesn’t pass muster](#),” *Atlantic Council*, 14 February 2020.

⁴⁹ Mark Galeotti, “[The Minsk Accords: Should Britain declare them dead?](#),” *Council on Geostrategy*, 24 May 2021.

5. SYRIA 2015–19

The Syrian civil war began in 2011 as a wave of popular protests swept across Syria and culminated in calls for the overthrow of the Assad regime. In the process, a variety of local, regional, and international actors, including Russia, Türkiye, and Iran, sought to exploit the opportunities provided by the violence to gain influence. Various attempts were made by different actors towards a negotiated political solution. These included both local-level ceasefire negotiations and international peace processes under the auspices of the Arab League, the United States, and the United Nations (the Geneva peace process), as well as Russia (the Astana–Sochi peace process).⁵⁰

Russia's military involvement in the Syrian civil war began in September 2015, when the Syrian government invited Russia to assist with its war effort following a succession of military setbacks against the armed opposition. Russia's intervention, primarily an air campaign but also including forces and assets on the ground, turned the tide in the war. Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city and a key economic hub, was retaken in December 2016. As battlefield dynamics once again began to favour the Syrian government, a UN-led Geneva peace process stalled. Coupled with Russia's dominance on the ground, this allowed Moscow to assert control over both the military dynamics and the politics of the peace process. This was manifested in a parallel Astana–Sochi peace process, which eventually sidelined the one in Geneva.

On 9 September 2016, the United States and Russia reached a Syria ceasefire agreement, one of several brokered between the Syrian government and opposition. Both parties decided to keep the text of the agreement confidential, in the face of objections from other powers such as France. The text was eventually disclosed on 23 September.⁵¹ Among its key provisions, which focused on Aleppo, demilitarised zones and a halt to aerial bombing, the sides recommitted to a ceasefire and agreed a pullback of heavy weapons from designated areas, prohibition of Syrian government aircraft from designated airspace,

to set up a Joint Implementation Mechanism (JIC) to monitor the ceasefire, humanitarian access, and joint action to target extremist groups.

Once again, no provision was made for enforcement or liability for violations. In addition, Russia exploited ambiguity in ceasefire documents regarding the treatment of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Jabhat Al-Nusra, both of which were explicitly identified as organisations against which action could continue to be taken. Russia maintained it was entitled to carry on with military operations against 'terrorists' and, therefore, proceeded to designate any group they wanted to attack as Jabhat Al-Nusra or simply 'terrorists', including parts of the US-backed opposition. Russian claims that opposition groups were in reality Jabhat al-Nusra were repeatedly used to excuse violations of the ceasefire.

Unlike the other case studies presented here, negotiations over ceasefires in Syria repeatedly involved direct US participation. This exposed US interlocutors directly to Russian ceasefire tactics, for which at least one participant in the negotiations in Geneva in 2016 believes the US side was underprepared. State Department specialists on Syria, seeking a working peace settlement that ensured humanitarian issues such as access to water and medical care, were reportedly confronted with Russian negotiators who were primarily military officers focused on entirely different issues, and found it hard to manage standard Russian negotiating tactics such as willingness to deny that statements had been made or agreements reached when they were already on the record.⁵²

The final result of the negotiations, though, was clear enough. A ceasefire agreement overseen by former US Secretary of State John Kerry met limited short-term US goals of easing the fighting and allowing delivery of humanitarian aid, and much broader and longer-term Russian aims of cementing its influence in the Middle East and forcing the US to back down on its previous commitment

⁵⁰ A selection of these attempts is outlined in Annex C.

⁵¹ "AP EXCLUSIVE: Text of Syria ceasefire deal," *The Associated Press*, 23 September 2016.

⁵² Author interview with former US negotiator, August 2020.

to removing Bashar al-Assad from power.⁵³ In effect, because of the very different aims of each side entering the negotiations, both sides got what they wanted – but Russia wanted far more than the US to start with. And once again, western European countries were willing to endorse the fiction that the Russian ceasefire was a positive result for the victim country.⁵⁴

Just as in the preceding case studies, it was not possible to reconcile the aims of any ceasefire as pursued by the international community on the one hand and the Syrian regime, backed by Russia, on the other. The former sought to end bloodshed and re-establish peace while attempting to support human rights and security. The latter aimed to use any available means to end the challenge to its political monopoly over Syria.⁵⁵ It was irrational for the international community to expect the regime and Russia to respect ceasefires normalising the presence of opposition groups in crucial territory unless those ceasefires were imposed and maintained by force. By engaging in negotiations, Russia tied the hands of western governments, which hoped that diplomatic initiatives would achieve western objectives, while in reality, they bought time for the regime to exert greater control. Once again, the key enabling factor was the unwillingness of the US and European powers either to enforce previous ceasefires or punish violations by Assad, Russia, and Iran.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

The persistent patterns of Russian behaviour and western facilitation described above suggest several principles for consideration in any future attempt to reach a conflict-ending agreement with Moscow.

First, if an interlocutor does not devote substantial effort to understanding Russia's

⁵³ Keir Giles, "[What Russia Learns From the Syria Ceasefire: Military Action Works](#)," *Chatham House*, 3 March 2016.

⁵⁴ Patrick Wintour and Julian Borger, "[Syria Faces Perpetual War unless Russia Extends Ceasefire, France Warns](#)," *The Guardian*, 24 September 2018.

⁵⁵ Faysal Itani, "[A Trail of Broken Ceasefires in Syria](#)," *Atlantic Council*, 9 March 9, 2018.

⁵⁶ Jennifer Cafarella with Jason Zhou, "[Russia's Dead-End Diplomacy in Syria](#)" (Institute for the Study of War, November 2019).

long-term objectives and how an agreement concluded today can set conditions for achieving them years or decades in the future, they are likely to reach an agreement with Moscow that facilitates Russia's aims and is highly detrimental to the security interests of all other parties involved.

Second, a ceasefire with no means of enforcement, or of imposing meaningful consequences for violations, is of no value in deterring Russia from breaching it at will. Consequently, an international organisation within which Russia holds a veto is not going to be an effective monitor or enforcer of a conflict resolution agreement concluded with Russia. Nevertheless, Russia will attempt to position itself as a peace broker, intermediary, or enforcer in a conflict despite being a party to it.

Monitoring missions need to be protected and equipped in anticipation of hostile action from Russian forces

Third, any terms accepted by Russia must also be scrutinised intently for longer-term political traps, following the pattern of the Minsk Accords being used to cement Russian control over the occupied territories of eastern Ukraine. Russia will take any action not explicitly prohibited by the terms of a ceasefire agreement. Therefore, monitoring missions need to be protected and equipped in anticipation of hostile action from Russian forces up to and including direct attack. Technological advances that would enhance the capabilities of monitoring authorities over those employed by the OSCE a decade ago could include greatly more sophisticated unmanned air and surface systems, and AI-assisted processing of surveillance data from more advanced networks of sensors. But none of this would be of use without accompanying political will to act on violations, as well as realistic enforcement mechanisms built into the ceasefire agreement itself.

Fourth, any security guarantee underwriting a ceasefire or peace agreement is only meaningful if the guarantor has demonstrated both the will and the capability to inflict costs on Russia for violations of those agreements. These costs must be meaningful to Russia. Direct impact on Russia's forces in the operational area, or

substantial economic penalties, have the potential to be considered meaningful in Moscow; diplomatic protests do not.

Russian information campaigns, however, will continue to be effective at exploiting western vulnerabilities, assumptions, and psychological triggers. These include sowing

Direct impact on Russia's forces or substantial economic penalties have the potential to be considered meaningful in Moscow

the perception of inevitability of Russian victory (and hence the importance of bringing the conflict to an end on Russia's terms sooner rather than later), capitalising on western prioritisation of ending the fighting over achieving a sustainable peace, and exploiting short attention spans and failure to realise longer patterns and longer-term implications.

Specifically in the case of the ongoing efforts to end Russia's war against Ukraine, this further implies that:

- The danger presented by any poorly-planned and poorly-enforced agreement in Ukraine has remained largely unchanged since the earliest days of the conflict.⁵⁷
- Any system of monitoring or enforcement of ceasefires to which Russia is a party is likely to be fatally compromised.
- It remains the case that an agreement to end the war that is poorly drafted, monitored and enforced has the potential to be a worse outcome for Ukraine and for any country with an interest in Ukraine's continued survival than no agreement at all.⁵⁸
- Consequently, external pressure on Ukraine to agree to Russian terms for ending the fighting, without consideration of the long-term implications for Ukrainian and European security, is likely to continue to be fruitless (meanwhile, however, any terms

that secure Ukraine's and Europe's long-term future will continue to be rejected by Moscow).⁵⁹

The survey of Russia's recent conflicts presented in this report should be sufficient to demonstrate a consistent pattern of Moscow using ceasefire and conflict-ending agreements to establish positive conditions for both violating the agreements while they are notionally in force, and discarding them altogether when Russia is ready to resume the conflict. But it also demonstrates how Russia is repeatedly assisted in achieving this by western interlocutors seeking to address the immediate problem of bringing the fighting to an end, and prioritising this over dealing with the longer-term issue of the root causes of the conflict.

This process has by now been repeated often enough that it should come as no surprise to western powers seeking 'peace'. In addition, the specific techniques that Russia (and before it, the USSR) use to intimidate, bewilder and outmanoeuvre their negotiating partners have been well documented.⁶⁰ It follows that for any third party that wishes to bring one of Russia's wars to an end, whether in Ukraine or beyond, there is little remaining excuse for once again being surprised by how Russia can manipulate or exploit this process. Taking into account all previous experience in this domain, but nevertheless once again enforcing terms drafted in Moscow on the victim of Russia's aggression in the guise of a negotiated settlement, would by this stage be indistinguishable from active and conscious assistance to the Kremlin.

⁵⁷ James Nixey, "[A negotiated peace with Russia is fraught with danger](#)," *Chatham House*, 17 March 2022.

⁵⁸ Sergey Radchenko, "[America's Magical Thinking About Ukraine: A Bad Deal Is Worse Than No Deal](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, 4 December 2025.

⁵⁹ Anchal Vohra, "[There's No Precedent for Ukraine's Proposed Peace Deal](#)," *Foreign Policy*, 19 December 2025.

⁶⁰ Including, most recently, by Donald N. Jensen and Iuliia Osmolovska, "[Negotiating with Putin's Russia](#)," *Atlantic Council*, 18 February 2026.

ANNEX A: GEORGIA

Ceasefire agreement as announced by President Dmitry Medvedev, 12 August 2008:⁶¹

“The President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, and President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy support the following principles for the settling of conflicts and urge other sides to undersign them. There will be six principles.

Number one, the sides shall refrain from the use of force.

Number two, the sides shall put an effective end to all hostilities.

Number three, the sides shall provide free access to humanitarian aid.

Number four, the Georgian Armed Forces shall return to the bases of permanent deployment.

Number five, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation shall withdraw to the line of deployment they occupied prior to the outbreak of the conflict. Until special international mechanisms are set up, the Russian peacekeeping forces shall effectuate additional security measures.

Number six, an international discussion should begin over the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the ways of ensuring reliable security for them.”

President Sarkozy subsequently commented on point five:⁶²

“[The fifth principle is that] the Russian military forces will have to withdraw to the lines in place prior to the outbreak of hostilities. I add that this concerns South Ossetia. This is an addition which President Saakashvili wanted me to make. I’m quite happy to make it. And pending an international mechanism, the Russian peace forces [changes thought] – why are we calling them Russian peace forces? Because that’s the designation of the Russian military forces deployed under an international mandate in South Ossetia prior to the crisis. That’s why we are talking about the withdrawal of Russian military forces, in other words those who arrived after the outbreak of the crisis, and we are specifying that the Russian peace forces, in other words those in South Ossetia prior to the crisis, will, in a provisional manner, implement additional security measures. This paragraph, I mean the additional security measures, only concerns the immediate vicinity of South Ossetia. This is in no way about additional security measures concerning the whole Georgian territory.”

A.1. INDICATIVE INCIDENTS AND VIOLATIONS

After the ceasefire agreement was signed on 12 August, attacks against Georgian villages close to the South Ossetian conflict zone continued. On 13–14 August, Russian troops moved from Gori towards Tbilisi, but rerouted east before reaching the capital; Russian troops continued to destroy military infrastructure in Senaki, Zugdidi, and Poti; the city of Gori remained under Russian control; all contrary to the ceasefire agreement already signed.⁶³

Throughout much of the second half of August, Russia continued to delay its forces’ withdrawal from Georgia. On 22 August, Russia claimed it had withdrawn its forces in accordance with the ceasefire agreement, but stated it intended to maintain troops and checkpoints within zones of responsibility of Russian peacekeepers outside Abkhazian and South Ossetian territory. These zones included Senaki, containing a Georgian military base and an airfield, the port of Poti, and areas outside South Ossetia. Russia also stated its intention to maintain 2 142 soldiers and a large amount of heavy equipment in Abkhazia, in addition to its ‘peacekeeping’ contingent.⁶⁴

Finally, on 25–26 August 2008, the Russian upper house of parliament passed an appeal to President Medvedev to recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. The following day, President Medvedev stated he intended to recognise the two territories.

⁶¹ BBC Monitoring: Moscow ITAR-TASS in English 1516 GMT 12 August 2008.

⁶² BBC Monitoring: La Chaine Info, Paris, in French 2114 GMT 12 August 2008.

⁶³ Cornell et al., *Russia’s War in Georgia*.

⁶⁴ Cornell et al., *Russia’s War in Georgia*.

ANNEX B: UKRAINE

Texts of ceasefire agreements concluded on 5 September 2014 and 12 February 2015, known respectively as Minsk-1 (the Minsk Protocol) and Minsk-2 (the Package of Measures):

Minsk-1 (the Minsk Protocol)⁶⁵:

1. Ensure the immediate bilateral cessation of the use of weapons.
2. Ensure monitoring and verification by OSCE of the regime of non-use of weapons
3. Implement decentralization of power, including by enacting the Law of Ukraine on the interim status of local self-government in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Law on Special Status).
4. Ensure permanent monitoring on the Ukrainian-Russian State border and verification by OSCE, along with the establishment of a security area in the border regions of Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

[Points 5-12 of the 12-point Protocol omitted for brevity]

Minsk-2 (the Package of Measures)⁶⁶:

1. Immediate and comprehensive ceasefire in certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine and its strict implementation starting from 00.00 AM (Kyiv time) on the 15th of February, 2015.
2. Withdrawal of heavy weapons by both sides on equal distances in order to create a security zone at least 50 km wide from each other for the artillery systems with caliber greater than 100mm and more, a security zone of 70 km wide for MLRS and 140 km wide for MLRS “Tornado-C”, “Uragan”, “Smerch” and Tactical missile systems “Tochka” (“Tochka U”) [...] The process shall be facilitated by the OSCE and supported by the Trilateral Contact Group.
3. Ensure effective monitoring and verification of the ceasefire regime and the withdrawal of heavy weapons by the OSCE from the day 1 of the withdrawal, using all technical equipment necessary, including satellites, drones, radar equipment, etc.
4. Launch a dialogue, on day 1 of the withdrawal on modalities of local elections in accordance with Ukrainian legislation and the Law of Ukraine “On interim local self-government order in certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions” as well as on the future regime of these areas based on this Law.

[Points 5-8 and 12-13 of the 13-point ‘Package of Measures’ are excerpted for brevity]

- 9: “Reinstatement of full control of the state border by the government of Ukraine throughout the conflict area, starting on day 1 after the local elections and ending after the comprehensive political settlement (local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions) [...] provided that paragraph 11 has been implemented” [emphasis added].
- 10: “Withdrawal of all foreign armed formations, military equipment, as well as mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine under monitoring of the OSCE. Disarmament of all illegal groups.”
- 11: “Carrying out constitutional reform in Ukraine with a new Constitution entering into force by the end of 2015, providing for decentralization as a key element.”

B.1. SELECTED INDICATIVE INCIDENTS

In May 2014, four international OSCE observers were detained by pro-Russian separatists on the border between the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The four – a Dane, a Turk, a Swiss, and an Estonian – were part of an SMM team.⁶⁷

On 19 November 2014, an SMM patrol was shot at Maryinka (controlled by Ukrainian government forces) in the Donetsk region, the OSCE reported.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Participants of the Trilateral Contact Group, [Annex I to the letter dated 24 February 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2015/135](#) (Trilateral Contact Group, 24 February 2015).

⁶⁶ A.V. Zakharchenko and I.V. Plotnitskiy, [Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk agreements](#) (Minsk, 12 February 2015).

⁶⁷ Politiken website (Copenhagen), Denmark, 27 May 2014 (accessed through [BBC Monitoring](#)).

⁶⁸ Interfax-Ukraine news agency, Kyiv, in Russian 0921 gmt 20 Nov 14 (accessed through [BBC Monitoring](#)).

On 26 November 2014, an SSM patrol of three monitors escorted by Ukrainian military personnel was fired on near Kirove and Shumy (at the time, Ukrainian government-controlled territory) in the Donetsk region. A rocket-propelled grenade detonated 150 metres from the vehicle, followed by multiple rounds of anti-aircraft ammunition fired, with impact within a few metres from the vehicle.⁶⁹

In 2015, the SMM reported that despite claims by all sides of heavy weapons withdrawal, there were daily cases of the presence and/or use of such weapons (main battle tanks, howitzers, and anti-aircraft systems).⁷⁰

In April 2016, “DPR” [“Donetsk People’s Republic”] personnel fired on and destroyed an SMM vehicle near Snizhne, a population centre in the region, Alexander Hug, first deputy head of the OSCE SMM, reported. Separately, SMM observers were stopped and had guns pointed at them in the “LPR” [“Lugansk People’s Republic”].⁷¹

In 2017, the SMM medic Joseph Stone was killed while on patrol “when an SMM armoured vehicle was struck by an explosion, most likely caused by an anti-tank mine in a non-government-controlled area near Pryshyb in the Luhansk region”.⁷²

Throughout the period described, Russia’s counter-narrative consistently sought to blame Ukraine for these incidents, among other aggressions against the population of the Donbas region.

The OSCE SMM was either able to confirm, however, that at least in some of the cases, as alleged by Russia, these allegations were false, or unable to confirm they were true, based on what it observed on the ground. In December 2014, for instance, it disputed allegations (by Human Rights Watch) that the Ukrainian military had used cluster munitions.⁷³ In February 2015, the SMM reported it had found no proof Ukraine had used Tochka-U ballistic missiles against Luhansk.⁷⁴

The total lack of independent control over the state border enabled Russia to transfer undocumented materiel and personnel into the breakaway territories. Typically, the suspected transfer of weapons and manpower would be presented as a ‘humanitarian convoy’, with the added benefit of fitting in with the Russian narrative that its role in the ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’ was humanitarian, rather than that of a combatant. The practice recurred repeatedly from 2014 onwards.⁷⁵

One of the earliest and most prominent Russian ‘humanitarian aid’ convoys comprised 280 Kamaz heavy goods vehicles, moving through Russia toward the Ukrainian border over the course of several days in August 2014. Suspicion over what the convoy was carrying fuelled intense international media coverage, which succeeded in diverting attention from Russia’s simultaneous move of regular military forces across the border into Ukraine to join the fighting.⁷⁶

The surge of personnel and materiel by Russia into eastern Ukraine turned the tide quickly against Ukrainian troops, with a series of defeats, notably near Ilovaisk, with the direct involvement of regular Russian combat forces.

⁶⁹ 5 Kanal TV, Kyiv, in Ukrainian 0600 gmt 27 Nov 14 (accessed through [BBC Monitoring](#)).

⁷⁰ “OSCE SMM Status Report,” OSCE, 3 June 2015.

⁷¹ UNIAN news agency, Kyiv, in Ukrainian 1139 gmt 8 Apr 16 (accessed through [BBC Monitoring](#)).

⁷² “OSCE SMM Chief Monitor Çevik pays tribute to SMM medic who died in the cause of peace,” OSCE, 23 April 2020.

⁷³ Interfax-Ukraine news agency, Kyiv, in Russian 1214 gmt 4 Dec 14 16 (accessed through [BBC Monitoring](#)).

⁷⁴ Interfax-Ukraine news agency, Kyiv, in Russian 1916 gmt 3 Feb 15 (accessed through [BBC Monitoring](#)).

⁷⁵ “Russian humanitarian aid convoy from Chechnya arrives in Ukraine,” TASS, 8 August 2014 (accessed through BBC Monitoring); “Putin says Russia to send ‘humanitarian convoy’ to southeast Ukraine,” Interfax, 11 August 2014 (accessed through BBC Monitoring).

⁷⁶ “Bloggers suspect Russian ‘humanitarian convoy’ is Trojan horse,” Twitter, 12 August 2014 (accessed through BBC Monitoring); “Russian editorial slams lack of transparency over Ukraine aid convoy,” Vedomosti, 13 August 2014 (accessed through BBC Monitoring); “Red Cross lacks information about Russia’s ‘humanitarian convoy’ - official,” Ekho Moskvyy, 13 August 2014 (accessed through BBC Monitoring).

ANNEX C: SYRIA

C.1. INDICATIVE INCIDENTS AND VIOLATIONS

On 22 February 2016, the US and Russia announced a ceasefire and established a Ceasefire Task Force to “develop effective mechanisms to promote and monitor compliance with the ceasefire” by the regime “and other forces supporting [it],” as well as the armed opposition.⁷⁷ Russia went on to violate the ceasefire repeatedly with air strikes, several of which targeted the headquarters of a US-backed opposition group.⁷⁸ Russia later announced a military withdrawal from Syria that drew praise from the UN. Yet the aim of its ‘withdrawal’ was a troop rotation to gear up for a major pro-regime offensive to retake opposition-held eastern Aleppo City.⁷⁹

After the ceasefire came into force on 27 February 2016, a ‘significant’ number of violations were reported, including the continued use of barrel bombs. After a lull in the level of airstrikes immediately after the beginning of the cessation of hostilities, they grew steadily. The assessment at the time was that Russian airstrikes were again at the same level as they had been before the cessation of hostilities.⁸⁰ By July 2016, this ceasefire had mostly unravelled and violence had again escalated.⁸¹

The Obama administration continued to try to work with Russia even as it ramped up the offensive on Aleppo. In July 2016, the US offered Russia cooperation against ISIL and Al Qaeda in exchange for a cessation of pro-regime airstrikes on Aleppo.⁸² Assad and Russia quickly violated this agreement, with Syrian government aircraft conducting airstrikes within hours of the start of the ceasefire on 12 September.⁸³ Russia similarly continued its airstrikes, including a strike against a humanitarian aid convoy headed to Aleppo City on 19 September.⁸⁴ The US withdrew from the agreement on 3 October, yet in doing so, did not cite Russia’s own violations.

On 6 May 2017, Russia, Iran and Türkiye agreed to establish four de-escalation zones in parts of opposition-held western Syria at a new set of Astana Talks. The agreement called for an indefinite ceasefire in these zones. The opposition delegation refused to attend the Astana Talks and condemned the agreement for its failure to cover all parts of Syria, its lack of constraints on Assad, and its inclusion of Iran. Assad did not negotiate or sign the agreement, and his forces would violate its provisions repeatedly despite his public claims to support the results reached in Astana. In July 2017, Russia, Jordan, and the US agreed to implement a separate ceasefire in Southern Syria to augment the original deal reached by Russia, Iran, and Türkiye at Astana.⁸⁵ The new deal called for a military de-escalation zone in southern Syria that Russia had already agreed to in principle with Türkiye.⁸⁶ Moscow also agreed to exclude Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah from the Golan Heights.

⁷⁷ [“Joint Statement of the United States and the Russian Federation, as Co-Chairs of the ISSG, on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria,”](#) U.S. Department of State, 22 February 2016.

⁷⁸ Genevieve Casagrande and Jodi Brignola, [“Russian Airstrikes from February 17 - 28, 2016: Pre and Post Cessation of Hostilities,”](#) *Institute for the Study of War*, 29 February 2016; Genevieve Casagrande, [“Russian Airstrikes in Syria: February 27 - March 7, 2016,”](#) *Institute for the Study of War*, 10 March 2016.

⁷⁹ Christopher Kozak, [“Russian-Syrian-Iranian Coalition Seizes ISIS-Held Palmyra,”](#) *Institute for the Study of War*, 27 March 2016; Jodi Brignola and Genevieve Casagrande, [“Russian Military Activity in Syria: March 15 - April 18, 2016,”](#) *Institute for the Study of War*, 19 April 2016.

⁸⁰ Hansard, [“Syria: Russian Redeployment and the Peace Process,”](#) UK Parliament, debated on Tuesday 15 March 2016.

⁸¹ [“Syrian army, rebels agree to 72-hour Eid truce, but fighting continues,”](#) *Reuters*, 6 July 2016.

⁸² Karen DeYoung, [“U.S., Russia Reach Deal on Ceasefire in Syria,”](#) *Washington Post*, 9 September 2016.

⁸³ Liz Sly and Karen DeYoung, [“Syrian Ceasefire Backed by U.S. and Russia Gets Off to Rocky Start,”](#) *The Washington Post*, 12 September 2016; Bill Neely, [“No Sign of Syria Ceasefire or Humanitarian Aid in Aleppo,”](#) *NBC News*, 19 September 2016.

⁸⁴ Genevieve Casagrande, [“Russian Airstrikes in Syria: Pre- and Post Cessation of Hostilities,”](#) *Institute for the Study of War*, 21 September 2016; Denis Dyomkin and Angus McDowall, [“Russian Aircraft Believed to Hit Syria Convoy, U.S. Officials Say,”](#) *Reuters*, 20 September 2016.

⁸⁵ [“Press Briefing on the President’s Meetings at the G20,”](#) *White House*, 7 July 2017.

⁸⁶ [“Russia, Iran, Turkey Set Up Syria De-escalation Zones for at Least Six Months: Memorandum,”](#) *Reuters*, 6 May 2017; Gardiner Harris, [“U.S., Russia and Jordan Reach Deal for Ceasefire in Part of Syria,”](#) *The New York Times*, 7 July 2017; [“Final De-Escalation Zones Agreed on in Astana,”](#) *Al-Jazeera*, 15 September 2017.

Politically, this agreement helped establish Russia's role as a notional mediator and guarantor in Syria, despite its involvement as a belligerent fighting on behalf of Assad.

Ultimately, Russia, Iran, and Assad exploited the de-escalation zones to mitigate their military risk in western Syria as they shifted forces east to seize lucrative oil and natural gas infrastructure from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and block further gains by the US Anti-ISIL Coalition in eastern Syria in May 2017.⁸⁷

In 2018, Russia redirected its attempts to broker a favourable diplomatic settlement away from major international conferences toward local reconciliation arrangements designed to neutralise opposition strongholds. It used its Russian Reconciliation Centres to execute a new phase of local reconciliation agreements in the de-escalation zones in western Syria. In essence, each successful offer of reconciliation reduced the required military cost to capture opposition centres of resistance.⁸⁸

Russia's strategy enabled pro-regime forces to seize three of the four de-escalation zones in quick succession from February 2018 to July 2018. Assad, Russia, and Iran first prioritised the retaking of the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus in order to solidify their military and political stranglehold over the capital. They then targeted the de-escalation zone in Northern Homs Province to secure the strategic M5 Highway between Damascus and Hama City. Finally, they forced the surrender of opposition-held Southern Syria, which held symbolic value as the birthplace of the Syrian Revolution and economic value due to the Syrian-Jordanian Border. However, they failed to repeat this success in the final, Turkish-backed de-escalation zone in Greater Idlib Province.

On 26 February 2018, the most recent ceasefire attempted at the time collapsed "in less than two hours."⁸⁹ This was a Russian-supported 'humanitarian pause', intended to last five hours and allow aid to reach the besieged inhabitants of the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus. Earlier, the UN Security Council had approved a longer, more ambitious 30-day ceasefire after the offensive by regime forces on Eastern Ghouta. That ceasefire never took hold. In Syria's Damascus province alone, no fewer than 18 attempted ceasefires failed between 2012–18. The repeated pattern was that through pretence at mediation, Moscow was able to draw both the US and the UN into multiple ceasefire arrangements that were subsequently not observed by the Assad regime or by Russia itself, but which stymied genuine diplomatic efforts and bought time for Russian and Syrian government preparations for renewed military operations.⁹⁰

C.2. SELECTED ADDITIONAL CEASEFIRES AND IMPLICATIONS

On 18 December 2015, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2254, which emphasised a political solution to the conflict, including a nationwide ceasefire and an end to attacks on civilians; support for refugees' return; and, in parallel, support for a Syrian-led political transition, including elections. On the subject of a ceasefire, the resolution emphasised the need for a "ce ceasefire monitoring, verification and reporting" mechanism. The resolution, further, specifically excluded Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh), Al-Nusra Front (ANF, also known as Jabhat al-Nusra), and "all other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with Al Qaeda or ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the Security Council" from the provisions of a ceasefire. The ceasefire, it said, "will not apply to offensive or defensive actions against these individuals, groups, undertakings and entities."⁹¹

⁸⁷ Cafarella, *Russia's Dead-End Diplomacy in Syria*.

⁸⁸ Cafarella, *Russia's Dead-End Diplomacy in Syria*.

⁸⁹ Faysal Itani, "A Trail of Broken Ceasefires in Syria," *Atlantic Council*, 9 March 2018.

⁹⁰ Cafarella, *Russia's Dead-End Diplomacy in Syria*.

⁹¹ Security Council, [United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254](#) (Security Council, 2015), adopted by the Security Council at its 7588th meeting, on 18 December 2015.

On 22 February 2016, the United States and Russia announced the “Terms for a Cessation of Hostilities in Syria,” on the basis “that the cessation of hostilities will be monitored in an impartial and transparent manner and with broad media coverage.”⁹²

On 10 September 2016, the second such ceasefire attempt, the US and Russia reached a deal to establish a ceasefire between the Syrian Assad government and a US-supported coalition of “mainstream Syrian opposition rebel groups.” The September 2016 US-Russia-brokered ceasefire focused on Aleppo, demilitarised zones and a halt to aerial bombing.

As part of the Astana process, first in December 2016 and then in May 2017, two further attempts at a ceasefire were made. On 28 December 2016, talks between Türkiye and Russia in Astana, Kazakhstan, resulted in a nationwide ceasefire brokered by the two states.⁹³ But it was on 4 May 2017 that Russia, Iran, and Türkiye signed an agreement in Astana to create the four ‘de-escalation zones’ in Syria.

Yet another ceasefire attempt came on 9 July 2017, with an open-ended ceasefire in southern Syria brokered by the United States, Russia, and Jordan.

Other, more local ceasefires both preceded and followed these examples. Each of these collapsed or suffered numerous setbacks.

The internationally negotiated ceasefire to emerge from the Russian-led Astana peace process became synonymous with ‘de-escalation zones’ – four territorially bounded ceasefire locations. One zone was in the southwest around Dara’a and Quinetra; one in Eastern Ghouta; one in Northern Homs; and one in Idlib.⁹⁴

As in the case of Minsk-1/-2, Russia was able to dictate the terms of the agreement, along with other power brokers in the region. Although talks supposedly centred around the primacy of the Syrian government, the Syrian government was neither a signatory to nor directly involved in the de-escalation zone agreement that emerged from the Astana peace process in May 2017. Instead, Russia, Türkiye, and Iran made the agreement on behalf of the Syrian government, and essentially negotiated and agreed the conditions.⁹⁵

Through the terms related to the establishment and functioning of checkpoints and observation posts on the perimeter of the de-escalation zones, Russia particularly deployed and augmented the presence of Military Police on the ground, which allowed it to exercise a more granular level of control over local dynamics. The Russian Military Police were overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims from Russian regions in the North Caucasus, such as Ingushetia and Chechnya.

As per the text of the ceasefire agreement, the Military Police operated checkpoints and observation posts on the perimeters of the de-escalation zones, such as Dar al-Kabira in the Northern Homs de-escalation zone, around the southern zone and in the northern zone of Idlib. As such, the police were able to facilitate the flow of goods into de-escalation zones, which promoted a rapport with local armed groups and populations. A member of the Russian military operating out of Hmeimim airbase in Latakia said Russia had “in some cases better relations with them than the [Syrian] regime.”⁹⁶

⁹² [“Joint Statement of the United States and the Russian Federation, as Co-Chairs of the ISSG, on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria,”](#) U.S. Department of State, 22 February 2016.

⁹³ [“Turkey and Russia ‘broker ceasefire deal for all of Syria,’”](#) *Agence France-Presse*, 28 December 2016.

⁹⁴ M. Sosnowski, [“Negotiating statehood through ceasefires: Syria’s de-escalation zones,”](#) *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 31 (7–8) (2020): 1395–1414.

⁹⁵ Sosnowski, “Negotiating statehood through ceasefires.”

⁹⁶ Sosnowski, “Negotiating statehood through ceasefires.”

Ultimately, the ceasefire agreement augmented the control of external actors, particularly Russia, over the diplomatic and security arena, as well as Turkish control over the territory of northern Syria. Combined with local reconciliation agreements with rebel groups designed to bring about the defection of opposition leaders, they consolidated the Syrian government's control over rebel populations, including through empowering local pro-government militias.

On the ground, local reconciliation deals, which went hand in hand with the internationally negotiated ceasefire, came in two broad types – 'hard' and 'soft'. Both were more akin to a forced surrender than any sort of negotiated settlement. Overall, whether in the short or longer term, the primary aim of these local agreements was to gain control over territory and citizenry.

The reconciliation process for three of the four de-escalation zones was completed between March and July 2018; the fourth, Idlib, was an exception, controlled by Turkey.

Soft reconciliations were envisaged by the Syrian government to be temporary, and government transgressions of the terms of reconciliation agreements were prevalent. For example, rebel leaders in some soft reconciled areas were sent to fight for the Syrian government in other areas anyway, when they failed to provide more volunteers for the Fifth Corps. Some disappeared or were murdered despite the agreements supposedly giving them the opportunity to transition to life back under government control without penalty. Life in all reconciled areas remained highly securitised, service provision minimal, and restrictions on movement commonplace.

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