



## **Ukraine inside a Black Tunnel**

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The political turmoil in Ukraine has become a potential flashpoint for the world with the heightened tension reaching to the dangerous level among the conflicting parties--Russia, the interim government in Kiev, the US and the EU. On April 17 the parties met in Geneva for negotiation, agreeing on specific steps such as to de-escalate tensions and restore security of all Ukrainian nationals, the armed groups to refrain from any violence, intimidation or provocative actions and strongly condemned and rejected all expressions of extremism, racism and religious intolerance, including anti-semitism. The Agreement called for all illegal armed groups be disarmed, all illegally seized buildings be returned to legitimate owners, all illegally occupied streets, squares and other public places in Ukrainian cities and towns be vacated, and amnesty be granted to all protestors, with the exception of those found guilty of capital crimes.

The success of the Agreement has become questionable as the pro-Russians separatists in eastern Ukraine continue to occupy government buildings in defiance of the agreement and have not shown any inclination to abide by the 'call to surrender weapons'. Rather the pro-Russia demonstrators have defied the agreement with increasingly aggressive behaviour. On April 25, the separatists detained a group of European security monitors as 'spies'. This group were a part of a German-led military observer mission under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The provocative moves of the pro-Russian separatists has further increased the tension between the West and Russia as the G-7 are contemplating further

sanctions on Russia, targeting the oligarchs and advisers of the Russian President Vladimir Putin in case the armed groups do not disarm. Russia has called these sanctions ‘unacceptable’ and that it is not the only entity responsible for implementing deal to de-escalate situation in Ukraine. Russia and the pro-Russian elements in Ukraine have made it clear that the separatists have no intention of leaving government buildings unless the pro-West interim government in Kiev vacates the government buildings. Russia and the pro-Russian separatists feel that the interim government in Kiev has illegally occupied the centre of power since February.

The interim government in Kiev, the US and the EU are blaming Russia for fomenting unrest in eastern Ukraine, which was dismissed by President Putin on April 17. He noted that the unrest in Donestak, Kharkiv and Luhmans after Crimea is the culmination of people’s grievances against the authorities in Kiev who ignored their rights and legitimate demands. Russia is demanding a loose federation that guarantees Ukraine's promised constitutional reforms, giving pro-Russian separatists a say in the distribution of government power.

A conventional military confrontation is not envisaged as claimed by the conflicting parties; however the stepping up of their defences near and around Ukraine is itself raising tension amongst the parties. Ukrainian Defense Minister Mikhail Koval on April 26 noted that the Russian troops have moved to within 2-3 kilometers (1.2-1.8 miles) of the Ukrainian border. Ukraine fears that Russia is capable of attacking by land and air at a very short notice, given its military might, and has asked the West for military assistance. On April 17 Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen said that the military alliance with the pro-West government in Ukraine would increase its presence in Eastern Europe, including flying more sorties over the Baltic region west of Ukraine and deploying allied warships to the Baltic Sea and the eastern Mediterranean.

Russia has assured the West that there are no plans to invade eastern Ukraine and that the deployment of 40,000 troops were a part of military exercises. However, on April 3 NATO’s foreign ministers ordered an end to civilian and military cooperation with Russia, accusing the later of amplifying the unrest in Ukraine, with the presence of its troops. Responding to these

accusations, Putin said that it was the US hypocrisy as ‘the United States can act in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya but Russia is not allowed to defend its interests.’

The Ukrainian crisis is becoming tense because Russia’s strategic interests in its neighbourhood are being threatened by the West. Although Russia would not like to be embroiled in a military confrontation with the West, if situation arises it won’t retreat. On economic side, Russia is not yet affected by the sanctions because of Europe’s dependency on Russian energy. The West understands the repercussions the sanctions will have on the US dollar if oil prices are soared.

The West may attempt to thwart Russia by improving ties with Iran for energy; however the potential success of this alternative is low because Russia and Iran have strong bilateral relations. Tehran may not disturb them. It is sceptical of the West, given the history of diplomatic tensions between them. Russia will try to strengthen its relationship with Iran and also maintain its energy deals with the West as it does not want to lose out on the revenue that it receives through exporting oil and gas.

The Ukrainian crisis is becoming dangerous. An amicable solution is needed to stop the problem from becoming a domino effect on the other areas of the region. With the withdrawal process of the International Security Force from Afghanistan to be started at the end of 2014, the West needs Russia for the transit routes to safely deport the troops of the ISAF. The West also would not like to engage the already fatigued military to get involved in another armed confrontation with Russia. In this gamble, the loser is Ukraine as a civil war kind of situation is prevailing and peace has been disrupted in the region.

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