

# Violation of Territorial Sovereignty: A Critical Point for Ukraine

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The stand-off between Kiev and Moscow over Russia's offer of humanitarian aid for civilians caught in the besieged cities of Donetsk and Luhansk is the latest episode in a slow-burning crisis that continues to threaten to erupt into a broader conflict. The Ukrainian government is understandably wary of allowing onto its territory a convoy of more than 260 trucks carrying uninspected cargoes provided by a neighboring power widely believed to have stoked the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Suspecting that the convoy could be a cover for armed assistance to the Russia-leaning separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk, Kiev has insisted that the convoy must be inspected by international monitors before it can be allowed to proceed.

Russia now faces a key decision in its progressively deteriorating relationship with the West. Any move to send its convoy into the contested cities without express Ukrainian consent would constitute a violation of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty. Should the Kremlin take this step, it risks further sanctions from the West.

On July 29, the U.S. and EU took coordinated steps to expand sanctions against the Russian financial services, energy and defense sectors. Those measures triggered Russian retaliation in the form of a ban on U.S. and EU agricultural imports. Moving the convoy into Ukraine will likely draw a further response from Washington and Brussels. The logical step in tightening the sanctions regime against Russia will be more stringent economic and financial measures that inflict further costs on the Russian economy and make it even more difficult for Western companies doing business in Russia.

President Putin's next move will tell us a lot about his ultimate game plan in Ukraine. If Russia is prepared to negotiate entry for its humanitarian convoy in a manner acceptable to Kiev, it may mean that Putin recognizes limitations on his actions in Ukraine. That in turn would give some cause for optimism that the broader crisis in relations between Ukraine and Russia can be managed, if not resolved, over the long term. Should Russia opt instead to force its convoy into Ukraine, Western policymakers will need to start planning for a much rougher ride.

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