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**POLICY PLANNING CASE STUDY
CEASEFIRE REFLECTIONS: AFGHANISTAN,
IRAQ, SOMALIA, AND SYRIA**

Prepared by

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and
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Ceasefire Agreement | 2 |
| <i>Ukraine's Interests in a Ceasefire Agreement</i> | 3 |
| <i>Russia's Interests in a Ceasefire Agreement</i> | 3 |
| <i>Balancing Ceasefire Interests</i> | 4 |
| Status of Forces Agreement | 5 |
| Strategic Alignment | 6 |
| Band of Acceptability | 6 |
| Exit Strategy | 7 |
| Looking Forward | 7 |

Introduction

This document has been developed out of a conversation with PILPG Senior Peace Fellow Brigadier General Robert S. Cooley, Jr., US Army (Ret.), and is one in a series of expert interviews on ceasefire processes and agreements with military and policy experts. These ceasefire case studies are part of a range of work products produced by the PILPG Ceasefire Policy Planning Ukraine Working Group. The full range of work product and more information about the Working Group is available [here](#).

Brigadier General Robert S. Cooley, Jr., US Army (Ret.) recently retired from his role as Chief of Staff of the Army Reserve Command located at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As a Civil Affairs Officer, Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) acted as the Army Reserve Civil Affairs lead for both Africa and Europe, concurrently, and led teams responsible for addressing infrastructure development, reconstruction, rule of law and economic development in host countries. Army Reserve Soldiers bring their diverse civilian skill sets, experience and background to address very complex and dynamic problem sets. They operate as the nexus between a host government and their military, and U.S. Government agencies including the U.S. Department of State, USAID, Department of Justice, and the U.S. Military.

Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) had teams in Ukraine for a number of years, and was also active in other Eastern European countries. In Africa, his teams were present primarily in Eastern Africa, with Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (“DDR”) efforts in Somalia.

Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) also previously served on assignments in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Iraq, he served as the Operations Officer for the 448th Civil Affairs Battalion, Fort Lewis, Washington. He later assumed the role of civil affairs planner in the Multinational Forces – Iraq Civil Military Operations Directorate in Baghdad, Iraq. In Afghanistan, Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) supported Operation Enduring Freedom as the Deputy Commander for the Provincial Reconstruction Team Khost, Afghanistan.

Set out below is a summary of the key points that emerged from a discussion with Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) on the work and ceasefire efforts he has contributed to in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria. Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) reflects on his experiences in order to explain what can be applied to the ceasefire process as it relates to Ukraine. The document is not a verbatim account but draws upon the insights of Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.)’s experiences to highlight important reflections and lessons learned.

Ceasefire Agreement

A ceasefire agreement is a temporary cessation of war in which both sides agree to suspend aggressive actions. This can also involve intervention from peacekeeping forces and other actors serving as monitors or observers. Ceasefires may attempt to encourage the parties to commit to continued future talks with the aim of establishing lasting peace. Ceasefires have changed in the last few decades given the technological advances and capabilities of militaries worldwide. For example, in Iraq and Afghanistan, the primary focus was to create a literal ceasefire of ammunition, which required a surgical separation of forces from specific areas and zip codes. In contrast, in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine, both Russia and Ukraine possess technologies that will mean that a ceasefire must also include cyberattacks, misinformation campaigns, and satellite warfare, as part of an agreement.

Ceasefire agreements typically occur in the context of: (i) stalemate; or (ii) the occurrence of an egregious event. This could manifest in the form of drained resources in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. Importantly, ceasefire agreements could be sought by Russia as a means to buy time to strategize - as is arguably Russia's *modus operandi* - and to reconnect supply lines or replenish their forces.

Ceasefire agreements are typically amended multiple times as both sides continue to negotiate and better understand the ongoing conflict. For example, clear plans may need to be in place such that Ukraine could keep military equipment in certain areas for defensive capabilities and to act as a deterrent for future conflict. One recurring issue with initial ceasefire agreements is that they may not take into consideration everything that is happening on the ground. This may result in some interests being poorly represented at the negotiating table. This is important to note in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine, if there is to be a stable, lasting ceasefire agreement.

Ukraine's Interests in a Ceasefire Agreement

Ever since Russian forces invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Ukraine, led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has held steadfast in its defense. Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) notes that as things currently stand, Ukraine may not be interested in a ceasefire. One motive for this stance is that Ukraine is politically driven to keep internal morale high. Another motive could also be that President Putin views Ukraine as fundamentally part of Russia, culturally and historically, and also views the prospect of Ukraine joining forces with

NATO as a significant threat to Russia. Therefore, there may be the perception in Ukraine that no compelling ceasefire offer will be made. A compelling ceasefire offer, in this case, refers to one in which Ukraine is able to continue to operate as an independent, sovereign state.

A valuable approach is considering the clear, absolute must-haves for Ukraine in a ceasefire agreement. This includes considering the priority areas for Ukraine, as well as the points on which Ukraine is willing to negotiate. It is also important to consider the interests of parties not directly involved in Russia's war in Ukraine, such as the United States. For example, how will the upcoming 2024 United States' presidential election affect the country's ability to focus on a potential ceasefire agreement in Ukraine?

Russia's Interests in a Ceasefire Agreement

President Putin has long lamented the loss of Ukraine, in addition to other republics, following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Before invading Ukraine, Russia established a list of demands, including but not limited to: (i) the prohibition of Ukraine from entering NATO; (ii) limiting the deployment of NATO troops and weapons to NATO's eastern flank, in effect returning NATO forces to where they were stationed in 1997 (which would involve removing NATO troops and weapons from much of eastern Europe, including Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and the Balkan countries); and (iii) providing Russia with "legal guarantees" of its security. Once NATO and the United States rejected Russia's proposal, Russia moved forward with its invasion of Ukraine.

It remains unclear whether Russia would agree to a ceasefire agreement that allows Ukraine to operate as an independent, sovereign state and leaves the possibility of Ukraine becoming a member of NATO open. Russia is generally undeterred from violating a ceasefire agreement, therefore, it is important to understand the Russian mindset if and when a serious ceasefire proposal is out forward. Russia may also feel temporally emboldened by its engagements in Georgia and Crimea in recent years. In addition, a key Russian interest is to exit the conflict without being labeled as the aggressor, in order to avoid liability for reintegration and reconstruction costs in Ukraine.

Balancing Ceasefire Interests

While drafting a ceasefire proposal and balancing the interests of all involved parties, it is important to establish clear repercussions for violating the ceasefire, especially considering Russia's potential for breaching the agreement. Russia typically strives to create the narrative that they came to the negotiating

table first, in order to gain leverage in proposing terms. In reality, Russia may use a ceasefire agreement as a means of preparing itself for the reinstatement of conflict. In contrast, for a number of political reasons and a hypersensitivity to the geopolitical narrative, the United States will not violate a ceasefire agreement. This knowledge provides Russia with ample space to decide if, and when, to breach any potential ceasefire agreements.

Another important factor to consider is China's role in influencing Russia in ceasefire negotiations. China and Russia may have a much longer timeframe in mind when considering this conflict, and China may be willing to invest more into Russia's war in Ukraine than the West. Thus, no ceasefire agreement may ever be truly permanent. Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) cautions that it is important to note that the ceasefire agreement will likely occur in a series of steps. Therefore, the West should not consider the process "over" too quickly.

Given Russia's propensity for violating ceasefire agreements, negotiators must consider what viable and enforceable repercussions would curtail such behavior. For example, this could include further restrictions on Russian access to capital in open markets. Any considerations must ask: what would be feasible without materially escalating tensions? If proposed repercussions are too severe and Russia feels backed into a corner, what is Russia capable of in retaliation? All of these factors should be considered during the process of proposing a ceasefire agreement.

Overall, it is important to consider and track the parties involved in a ceasefire agreement and their interests. Who are the parties with the most influence in ceasefire discussions? Who are the enablers and enactors of a potential ceasefire? Considering the development of a peace enforcement and peacekeeping structure, which parties should have which capabilities and responsibilities? Should there be armed guards or mediators that parties can all agree on? To what extent will a Russian presence be acceptable in Ukraine? All of these factors should be considered during the process of negotiating a ceasefire agreement.

Status of Forces Agreement

A Status of Forces Agreement ("SOFA") is an agreement that establishes the framework in which military personnel operate in a foreign country. It also refers to how domestic laws of a foreign jurisdiction should apply to the various personnel in that country.

Thus, each party involved in Russia's war in Ukraine needs to provide a clear reason for being involved in the conflict. Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) notes the importance of cataloging the differing nations and organizations that are party to Russia's war in Ukraine, as there will be differing demands, perspectives, and desires for each nation and organization involved in the war. Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) notes that if this is not articulated as clearly as possible, there will inevitably be a "gray space" that will not be maintained or monitored from a ceasefire security perspective. This could lead nefarious groups to fill those voids, and this is especially important in a country like Ukraine where such groups will likely attempt to take advantage of the availability of rare minerals and valuable commodities.

In contrast to engagements in Afghanistan or Somalia, there is constant intelligence available on the ground in Ukraine. This means that it is a much easier endeavor to identify the actors involved in the war. However, Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) stresses that it is of utmost importance to also identify and recognize the thousands of foreign fighters involved in the conflict. Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) recognizes that the SOFA is a very complex agreement which requires clear rules of engagement, and the defining of a purpose for such engagement in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Strategic Alignment

Strategic alignment between Ukraine's allies will remain crucial as ceasefire negotiations take place. The United States and its leadership may need to shore up its strategic communications with Ukraine, and its communications with the media. Should the United States and the West publicly state that Ukraine should sue for peace, Ukraine will benefit from using strategic flexibility at the negotiating table. Communications between Ukraine and its allies should remain private in order to ensure strategic flexibility.

Shoring up strategic alliances and communications is always important in international conflicts. This is especially the case in the context of an opponent such as Russia, that typically excels in negotiations, strategic communications, and driving wedges between countries through confusion and misdirection. A prime example of Russia's influence is the Kremlin's recent involvement with the Italian election,¹ in which the right-wing coalition emerged victorious amidst claims from the United States that Russia had given at least \$300 million to various political parties throughout the world. It also cannot be ignored that

¹ Hannah Roberts, *Russian interference dossier wreaks havoc in Italian election*, POLITICO, (Sep. 15, 2022), available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/russian-interference-dossier-wreaks-havoc-in-italian-election/>

Russia controls significant energy stockpiles that European countries rely on. This could create stress points that Russia can lean on in an effort to fracture European countries and their support for Ukraine, should the Russia Ukraine War continue.

In contrast, China and Russia are closely aligned in their communication strategies, and both countries will ensure that their message is exact before it reaches the public. Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) further notes that this is in large part due to China's ability to dictate terms. China will likely set the conditions for the economic components of any ceasefire agreement, and will determine the value of any ceasefire proposal. Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) also notes that China has a strategic interest in safeguarding against Russia's collapse, due to its reliance on Russia as a de facto export capability and a means of moving money internationally.

Band of Acceptability

Especially important in any ceasefire agreement is the notion of the "band of acceptability." Any ceasefire agreement needs to consider a range in which certain infractions are, more or less, allowed to occur. This is strategic, as the wider goals and achievements of an overall ceasefire should not be derailed by isolated actions of unaffiliated, local militias. Intelligence and patience should also be emphasized, and parties should take time to understand how infractions occurred before reacting. In order to limit issues in this area, Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) notes that local law enforcement must also be part of the ceasefire agreement, as it is impossible to have soldiers maintaining peace everywhere at all times.

Exit Strategy

Critically, Brig. Gen. Cooley (R.) notes that the context of the ceasefire process must take into consideration an exit strategy to avoid the mistakes made in other contexts.

Afghanistan is an example of this. In August 2021, the United States withdrew its remaining forces from Afghanistan without a robust exit strategy, concluding its military presence there after almost twenty years and ending arguably one of the most counterproductive interventions in the history of the United States. According to some commentators, the results of this intervention

may have been a catalyst for Russia to invade Ukraine less than six months later, on February 24, 2022.²

A successful ceasefire agreement will incorporate peacekeeping initiatives. However, a key difference between Afghanistan and Russia's war in Ukraine is that the fighting has generally been limited to soldiers from Russia and Ukraine. In comparison, United States soldiers were a constant presence throughout the war in Afghanistan. Therefore, the deployment of neutral peacekeeping forces, and monitoring and observance by the United Nations Military, may be one way to assist in a lasting ceasefire arrangement.

Looking Forward and Lessons Learned

The Russian war in Ukraine is an ongoing international war that began in February 2014 with Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. In the context of ceasefires, the war in Donbas of 2014-2022 provides important background information and insight into the potential process for enacting a successful ceasefire agreement in the future. During the war, there were 29 failed ceasefires, and even as the Minsk agreements³ were enacted, they failed to bring an end to the fighting. On February 22, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that the Minsk agreements "no longer existed", and that Ukraine was to blame for their collapse. This recent history of failed ceasefire attempts enables Ukraine, and the international community, to better understand the risks and challenges of engaging in ceasefire negotiations with Russia, and may enable the identification of lessons learned that can be applied in future ceasefire discussions.

A ceasefire agreement in Russia's war in Ukraine will emerge at some stage. However, as this case study outlines, there are a number of open questions that must be answered before an agreement is established. For example, what are the interests of the various nations involved in Russia's war in Ukraine? How will domestic issues affect the ability of Ukraine's allies to continue prioritizing support for Ukraine? What are the economic impacts of a sustained conflict? What is the timeframe in which pro-Ukrainian countries want to enact a ceasefire compared to pro-Russian countries? What penalties or repercussions are available to limit Russia's ability to violate a ceasefire agreement? How will peacekeeping be developed and enforced? All of these questions must be considered during the process of negotiating a ceasefire.

² Carl Bildt, Did the Afghan Failure Lead to the Ukraine War?, PROJECT SYNDICATE, (Aug. 16, 2022), *available at* <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/afghanistan-us-failure-set-stage-for-russia-invasion-ukraine-by-carl-bildt-2022-08>

³ The Minsk Agreements were a series of international agreements which sought to end the War in Donbas.