



PEACE NEGOTIATIONS
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INCENTIVES FOR ACTOR ENGAGEMENT IN A FUTURE DDR PROCESS IN UKRAINE

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Executive Summary

This memorandum analyzes issues and challenges that will arise when determining when and how to initiate a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process following the end of Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine. This memorandum recognizes that the Ukrainian approach to DDR is firmly centered around an understanding of reconciliation as the symbolic demilitarization of Ukraine from Russian narratives in education, culture, and the media in Ukraine. Thus, it further recognizes that a process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration in the internationally recognized sense in Ukraine, discussed in this memorandum, must be preceded by a process to demilitarize and re-establish a coherent state informational, cultural and educational policy.

Part I of this memorandum analyzes the various stakeholders on the Ukrainian side, including both the official Ukrainian Armed Forces, as well as the various quasi-independent units that have joined the Ukrainian cause. Part I also provides suggestions for including these stakeholders in a post-war DDR process, focusing primarily on issues related to economic reconstruction, domestic security, and political reform.

Part II of this memorandum discusses the interests of pro-Russia separatists and militias that have been present in Ukraine since 2014 and have fought alongside the Russian military following Russia's 2022 invasion. Part II will then discuss how best to engage these pro-Russian forces into a Ukraine-wide DDR process, with a particular focus on demobilization, reconciliation, and integration.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement of Purpose	4
Approaching a Ukrainian DDR Process	4
Ukrainian Armed Forces, Including Absorbed Volunteer Battalions, Territorial Defense Forces, And Civilian Recruits	6
<i>Ukrainian Armed Forces</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions and Territorial Defense Forces</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The DDR Process</i>	<i>10</i>
Pro-Russian Separatist forces and Pro-Russian Citizens in Ukraine	13
<i>Pro-Russian Separatist Forces</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>The DDR Process</i>	<i>14</i>
Implementing DDR	17
Conclusion	19

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to identify the varied interests of armed actors in Ukraine who will eventually be disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated (“DDR”), and the ways these actors’ interests could be incorporated into a plan to incentivize engagement with the eventual DDR process in Ukraine.

Approaching a Ukrainian DDR Process

This memorandum recognizes that the Ukrainian approach to DDR is centered around reconciliation as the symbolic demilitarization from Russian narratives in education, culture, and the media in Ukraine. This Ukrainian approach to DDR identifies informational, educational, and cultural policy to be the initial starting point for a DDR process, prior to economic and military considerations. It is rooted in the determination by Ukrainians that Russian propaganda, systematic destruction of Ukrainian culture, and past efforts to distort historical narratives served as the groundwork for the current war and destabilization in Ukraine. Thus, an effective DDR process that reintegrates de-occupied territories and supports a peaceful post-war Ukraine requires that such components be addressed.

This memorandum does not provide specific suggestions on how to implement these cultural, informational and educational efforts, but instead focuses on the latter steps of DDR in accordance with international standards relating to the military and economic considerations Ukraine will face.

The general principles of DDR, according to the UN, are that it must be voluntary, people-centered, gender-responsive and inclusive, conflict-sensitive, context-specific, flexible, accountable and transparent, nationally and locally owned, regionally supported, integrated and well-planned.¹

A clear challenge presently in Ukraine is that no one knows when or under what circumstances hostilities will cease. Although Ukraine has halted and even

¹ United Nations, *Operational Guide To The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization And Reintegration Standards*, p. 4 (Oct. 18, 2017), available at <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/operational-guide-integrated-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-standards>.

partially reversed Russia's invasion to a degree few may have predicted even months ago, it is possible that Russia could mount new and more successful future offensives. Furthermore, it remains to be seen how much of Ukraine's territory can be reclaimed militarily, what Ukraine and its Western allies will be willing to bear to achieve that, and how long such a campaign could last. Finally, it is possible that the military situation will ultimately end in a stalemate with Russia continuing to occupy some of the territory that had belonged to Ukraine before 2014. The timing of when a DDR plan should be operationalized remains to be determined, and may have geographical nuances, particularly in relation to regional militias or separatist groups.

A threshold issue is when the preconditions to DDR have been satisfied, so that a DDR program can be put in place. Generally, such preconditions include, first, a negotiated ceasefire and or peace agreement, second, trust by all relevant parties in the peace process, third, willingness of the parties to engage in DDR and fourth, a minimum guarantee of security.² What these preconditions share as an underlying theme is that the military hostilities have terminated, and the combatant parties must be sufficiently confident in the termination of hostilities that they can meaningfully and reliably set aside their capacity to make war.

Even before a fully integrated DDR program is implemented, however, DDR-related tools, such as community violence reduction and transitional weapons and ammunition management,³ can and may need to be applied within certain contexts, such as in a city or region that has come back under Ukrainian control. It is important to consider how DDR tools might be applied at various stages post-war, and what incentives might secure the commitment and support of relevant parties to DDR tools or the wider DDR process.

² United Nations, *Operational Guide To The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization And Reintegration Standards*, p. 2 (Oct. 18, 2017), available at <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/operational-guide-integrated-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-standards>.

³ *The Integrated DDR Standards Module 2.10: The UN Approach to DDR*, United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre, p.3, available at <https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-2.10-The-UN-Approach-To-DDR.pdf>

Ukrainian Armed Forces, Including Absorbed Volunteer Battalions, Territorial Defense Forces, And Civilian Recruits

Ukrainian Armed Forces

The Ukrainian Armed Forces (the “UAF”) have played the central role in halting and repelling Russian advances in Ukraine. Since the 2022 Russian invasion, the UAF has displayed impressive battlefield prowess.⁴

The UAF owes this success to military reforms implemented between 2014 and 2022.⁵ Having suffered years of underinvestment and corruption, the UAF was ill-equipped to repel Russian forces in 2014, when Russian troops invaded and annexed Crimea and Russian-backed separatist groups fomented an insurgency in Ukraine’s eastern Oblasts.⁶ At the time of the Russian invasion in 2014, the Ukrainian military had only 6,000 combat-ready troops⁷ out of a total force of 130,000.⁸ Viktor Muzhenko, the UAF Chief of Staff at the time, described his military as “an army literally in ruins.”⁹ The Russian military and Russian-backed separatists easily defeated UAF units in the early stages of the 2014 conflict, leaving Ukraine to rely on volunteer battalions funded by private donations (discussed below in the Section on Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions and Territorial Defense Forces).¹⁰

⁴ Dan Sabbagh, *Ukraine Counterattack Takes Russia – And Everyone Else – By Surprise*, THE GUARDIAN, (Sept. 8, 2022), available at

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/08/ukraine-russia-war-military-success-kyiv-counterattack-strategy>.

⁵ Marc Champion, *Eight Years of Combat Hardened Ukraine’s Army Into a Fighting Force*, BLOOMBERG, (Oct. 9, 2022), available at

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-09/secrets-of-why-ukraine-s-army-is-better-than-vladimir-putin-s-russian-military>.

⁶ Valeriy Akimenko, *Ukraine’s Toughest Fight: The Challenge of Military Reform*, Carnegie Endowment, (Feb. 22, 2018), available at

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/02/22/ukraine-s-toughest-fight-challenge-of-military-reform-pub-75609>.

⁷ Marc Champion, *Eight Years of Combat Hardened Ukraine’s Army Into a Fighting Force*, BLOOMBERG, (Oct. 9, 2022), available at

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-09/secrets-of-why-ukraine-s-army-is-better-than-vladimir-putin-s-russian-military>.

⁸ BBC, *Ukraine Reinstates Conscription as Crisis Deepens*, (May 2, 2014), available at

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27247428>.

⁹ Liam Collins, *In 2014, the ‘Decrepit’ Ukrainian Army Hit the Refresh Button. Eight Years Later, It’s Paying Off*, THE CONVERSTAION, (Mar. 8, 2022), available at

<https://theconversation.com/in-2014-the-decrepit-ukrainian-army-hit-the-refresh-button-eight-years-later-its-paying-off-177881>.

¹⁰ Adrian Bonenberger, *Ukraine’s Military Pulled Itself Out of the Ruins of 2014*, FOREIGN POLICY, (May 9, 2022), available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/09/ukraine-military-2014-russia-us-training/>.

The UAF's failure in 2014 spurred military reforms. Ukraine expanded the size of the military to roughly 200,000 active-service personnel and 900,000 reservists, increased military spending, and implemented institutional reforms to follow the standard of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ("NATO").¹¹ In addition to these reforms, Ukraine received a large influx of military aid from the West—more than \$2 billion (USD) from the U.S. alone—and the UAF also received training from NATO militaries.¹² In anticipation of a possible Russian invasion, Ukraine also formed the Territorial Defense Force as a standalone branch of the military, incorporating roughly 100,000 civilians and volunteer battalion members from the 2014 conflict.¹³

Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions and Territorial Defense Forces

In addition to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, there are several volunteer battalions and territorial defense forces fighting alongside regular Ukrainian units. The legal foundation for such battalions originates in the 1991 Law "On the Defense of Ukraine," which allows individual oblasts to form Territorial Defense Battalions and National Guard Battalions.¹⁴

The battalions currently fighting in Ukraine trace their origin to the 2014 Russian aggression. Ukrainian government forces initially clashed with the Russian-backed separatists but had limited success in fending them off.¹⁵ After years of underinvestment, Ukrainian government forces were under-equipped in their fight against the separatist forces, which were receiving direct support from Russia.¹⁶

¹¹ Valeriy Akimenko, *Ukraine's Toughest Fight: The Challenge of Military Reform*, Carnegie Endowment, (Feb. 22, 2018), available at

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/02/22/ukraine-s-toughest-fight-challenge-of-military-reform-pub-75609>.

¹² Louis-Alexandre Berg and Andrew Radin, *The Ukrainian Military Has Defied Expectations: Here Is How U.S. Security Aid Contributed*, RAND, (Mar. 29, 2022), available at

<https://www.rand.org/blog/2022/03/the-ukrainian-military-has-defied-expectations-here.html>.

¹³ Phillip M. Breedlove, John E. Herbst and Jerry Macarthur Hultin, *Giving Ukraine a Fighting Chance: More Support Needed for the Territorial Defense Force*, THE HILL, (Aug. 22, 2022), available at

<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3610822-giving-ukraine-a-fighting-chance-more-support-needed-for-the-territorial-defense-force/>.

¹⁴ Про Оборону України, Відомості Верховної Ради України (ВВР), 1992, № 9, ст.106), available at <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1932-12>.

¹⁵ Rosaria Puglisi, *Heroes or Villains? Volunteer Battalions in Post-Maidan Ukraine* 4, Istituto Affari Internazionali Working Paper, (March, 2015), available at <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1523.pdf>.

¹⁶ Rosaria Puglisi, *Heroes or Villains? Volunteer Battalions in Post-Maidan Ukraine* 4, Istituto Affari Internazionali Working Paper, (March, 2015), available at <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1523.pdf>.

Lacking the resources to fight off the separatists, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior encouraged the formation of territorial defense and National Guard battalions in Ukraine's eastern Oblasts. In total, 32 territorial battalions and 33 National Guard battalions were established, with ten territorial units and three National Guard units being volunteer battalions.¹⁷ Among the most notable of these battalions were the Aidar, Azov, Donbas, Pravyi Sektor, and Dnipro-1 Battalions. According to conservative estimates, roughly 15,000 Ukrainian volunteers fought during the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Because the Ukrainian government lacked the resources to outfit the battalions, they largely relied on private donations from wealthy Ukrainian oligarchs for funding. Ihor Kolomoisky, Ukraine's third richest man at the time, was a major funder of the volunteer battalions, reportedly donating \$10 million (USD) per month to volunteer units.¹⁸

These battalions played a crucial role in the early phases of Russia's invasion in 2014. The territorial battalions were critical in defending several eastern cities from separatists and Russian regular formations at a time when the Ukrainian military was still weak and the government in Kyiv was still organizing. The important port city of Mariupol relied mainly on the protection of the Azov Battalion, while the industrial center of Dnipropetrovsk—governed at the time by Ihor Kolomoisky—relied mainly on the Dnipro-1 battalion to push back the separatists.

Despite success in repelling the initial separatist advance, the volunteer battalions proved difficult for the Ukrainian government to control. The Aidar battalion, for example, has been accused by Amnesty International of perpetrating “abuses and war crimes” in northern Luhansk, summarily arresting and beating anybody suspected of aiding separatist forces.¹⁹ In February 2015, when Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko was rumored to be considering disbanding the Aidar battalion, fighters marched on Kyiv, blocking the Ministry of Defense building

¹⁷ Rosaria Puglisi, *Heroes or Villains? Volunteer Battalions in Post-Maidan Ukraine* 6, Istituto Affari Internazionali Working Paper, (March, 2015), available at <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1523.pdf>.

¹⁸ Julie Mahfood, *5 Richest Ukrainians in 2014*, THE RICHEST, (May 25, 2014), available at <http://www.therichest.com/rich-list/nation/ukraines-5-richest-people-in-2014/?view=all>; see also Harriet Salem, *Ukraine's Oligarchs: A Who's Who Guide*, VICE NEWS, (Oct. 13, 2014), available at <https://news.vice.com/article/ukraines-oligarchs-a-whos-who-guide>; see also Amanda Taub, *We just got a glimpse of how oligarch-funded militias could bring chaos to Ukraine*, VOX, (Mar. 2015), available at <http://www.vox.com/2015/3/23/8279397/kolomoisky-oligarch-ukraine-militia>.

¹⁹ Amnesty International, *Ukraine: Abuses and war crimes by the Aidar Volunteer Battalion in the north Luhansk region*, Amnesty International Briefing, (Sept. 8 2014), available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR50/040/2014/en/>.

before Poroshenko backed down.²⁰ Members of the Pravyi Sektor battalion clashed with the government, killing two people and injuring two police officers in an altercation over a Pravyi Sektor cigarette smuggling operation. Oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky also reportedly sent armed men sourced from the Dnipro-1 battalion (which he funded) to occupy the offices of state-owned energy company UkrTransNafta to protect his business interests.²¹ In addition, some battalions have alleged ties to far-right and neo-Nazi elements on the Ukrainian political scene.²²

Ukraine has sought to address the challenges posed by volunteer battalions who are functionally independent from the government and controlled by individual politicians or oligarchs by folding battalions into the regular Ukrainian military. In 2014-2015, the Poroshenko administration pushed to integrate and professionalize the volunteer battalions into the army and national guard, bringing the volunteer units under regular military command, blending professional soldiers into the battalions, removing far-right battalions from the frontlines, and embedding intelligence officers to monitor for concerning behavior.²³

This effort had mixed success. Some battalions, like Azov, successfully integrated into the Ukrainian military.²⁴ Others refused. The Pravyi Sektor battalion, for example, repudiated the government's efforts, prompting a split in the organization, with the majority of battalion members following Pravyi Sektor leader Dmytro Yarosh to form the independent Ukrainian Volunteer Army.²⁵

However, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it appears that volunteer battalions, including Pravyi Sektor's Ukrainian Volunteer Army, have been integrated into the formal Ukrainian military structure. In January 2022, in anticipation of a possible Russian invasion, Ukraine formed the Territorial Defense Force ("TDF") as a standalone reserve branch of the Ukrainian military.²⁶ Territorial Defense Force units have played an important role in Ukraine's defense.

²⁰ Amanda Taub, *We just got a glimpse of how oligarch-funded militias could bring chaos to Ukraine*, VOX, (Mar. 2015), available at <http://www.vox.com/2015/3/23/8279397/kolomoisky-oligarch-ukraine-militia>.

²¹ Amanda Taub, *We just got a glimpse of how oligarch-funded militias could bring chaos to Ukraine*, VOX, (Mar. 2015), available at <http://www.vox.com/2015/3/23/8279397/kolomoisky-oligarch-ukraine-militia>.

²² Miriam Berger, *Putin Says He Will Denazify Ukraine: Here's the History Behind that Claim*, WASHINGTON POST, (Feb. 25, 2022), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/24/putin-denazify-ukraine/>.

²³ Adrian Karatnycky, *Kiev Gets a Grip on Ukraine's Internal Divisions*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, (Oct. 6, 2015), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/kyiv-gets-a-grip-on-ukraines-internal-divisions-1444157488>.

²⁴ Adrian Karatnycky, *Kiev Gets a Grip on Ukraine's Internal Divisions*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, (Oct. 6, 2015), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/kyiv-gets-a-grip-on-ukraines-internal-divisions-1444157488>.

²⁵ Adrian Karatnycky, *Kiev Gets a Grip on Ukraine's Internal Divisions*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, (Oct. 6, 2015), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/kyiv-gets-a-grip-on-ukraines-internal-divisions-1444157488>.

²⁶ Illia Ponomarenko, *Who Can and Can't Join Ukraine's Territorial Defense Force*, KYIV INDEPENDENT, (Jan. 7, 2022), available at <https://kyivindependent.com/national/who-can-and-cant-join-ukraines-new-territorial-defense-force>.

The Azov battalion, for example, was critical to the defense of Mariupol in March and April of 2022.²⁷

The DDR Process

According to the United Nations, the goal of DDR is to “increase security and stability in post-conflict situations so that recovery and development can begin.”²⁸ In the case of Ukraine, the dual projects of security and recovery will be deeply intertwined as economic reconstruction and state stability will be critical in setting the ground for effective reintegration through a DDR process.

The post-war stakeholders whose interests will have to be addressed in a DDR process include members of the professional military, fighters in veteran volunteer battalion units (for example, Azov), as well as new citizen-soldiers in the reserves and Territorial Defense Force (the standalone reserve branch). These interests will have to be balanced with those of Ukrainian citizen noncombatants who remained in the country during the war and also returning refugees who fled the Russian invasion.

It will be important to ensure that armed groups, the volunteer battalions in particular, do not become auxiliaries of political forces within the country as they did following 2014. The integration of volunteer battalions into the formal command structure of the Ukrainian Armed Forces is a positive development in this regard, although there remains the risk that volunteer battalions could break off post-war. The risk of this scenario is heightened if the post-war landscape is marked by economic or political instability. A lack of coherent state informational and educational reconciliation policy, economic opportunities, and poor governance structures may breed incentives to engage in illicit activities and corruption. These are serious concerns for Ukraine, which has had a history of unstable and fractious political infighting as well as destabilizing propaganda. Stabilizing Ukraine’s political and economic scene will thus be important for the DDR process.

On the economic front, Ukraine will need to engage deeply in reconstruction. The World Bank estimates that Ukrainian post-war reconstruction

²⁷ ABC, *The last remaining Ukrainian soldiers in Mariupol are holding out in the Azovstal steelworks. Here's what we know*, (Apr. 19, 2022), available at

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-19/what-we-know-about-the-azovstal-steelworks-siege/100998694>

²⁸ United Nations, *Operational Guide To The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization And Reintegration Standards*, (Oct. 18, 2017), available at

<https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/operational-guide-integrated-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-standards>.

could cost \$349 billion (USD), with the figure expected to rise as the war continues.²⁹ Failure to rebuild the Ukrainian economy and industrial base could leave Ukraine with deep economic woes, contributing to unemployment and general social instability.

However, post-war reconstruction will require a whole-of-society approach. The massive task of reconstruction could be an opportunity for coordinated DDR initiatives. Employment in reconstruction efforts could be a promising avenue for the reintegration component of DDR by providing immediate employment opportunities for demobilized veterans.

Political stability and trust in the Ukrainian state will also be crucial to ensuring a smooth DDR process. As the UN notes, “DDR is essentially a politically driven process.”³⁰ In order to lead DDR efforts, the government of Ukraine must have the trust of various stakeholders to demilitarize after the war. On the political end, Ukraine will have to engage in governance reforms, particularly in the field of corruption. Ukraine has been plagued by endemic corruption since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, with perennially low scores from Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index.³¹ Reforms since 2014 have had some success in improving the situation, although progress had largely stagnated in the past few years.³² High levels of corruption create problems for Ukraine on both the economic and political front. An increased corruption risk may make Western companies less likely to invest in Ukraine, further stymying reconstruction efforts. Additionally, public perceptions of rampant corruption saps trust in government and promotes cynicism about the democratic process, fueling political instability. Following the 2022 Russian invasion, the Ukrainian Government has made efforts to address the risk of corruption within the country. In March 2023, the Ukrainian Government adopted

²⁹ World Bank Group, *Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Estimated \$349 Billion*, Press Release, No. 2023/ECA/11 (Sept. 9, 2022), available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/09/09/ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-estimated-349-billion>

³⁰ United Nations, *Operational Guide To The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization And Reintegration Standards*, p. 25 (Oct. 18, 2017), available at <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/operational-guide-integrated-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-standards>.

³¹ Transparency International, *No Progress – Ukraine In The Corruption Perceptions Index*, (Jan. 25, 2022), available at <https://ti-ukraine.org/en/news/no-progress-ukraine-s-result-in-the-corruption-perceptions-index-2021/>.

³² Transparency International, *No Progress – Ukraine In The Corruption Perceptions Index*, (Jan. 25, 2022), available at <https://ti-ukraine.org/en/news/no-progress-ukraine-s-result-in-the-corruption-perceptions-index-2021/>.

a State Anti-Corruption Program for the Period of 2023 and 2025 and appointed a new Head of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine.³³

Strict anti-corruption measures will be important in the Ukrainian reconstruction effort. Although the war has reportedly damaged the wealth of Ukrainian oligarchs (prime suspects in Ukraine's corruption problem),³⁴ reconstruction will breed new opportunities for corruption and perhaps even incentives for utilizing armed groups as auxiliaries for economic interests as billions of dollars flood into Ukraine towards reconstruction efforts. Ukraine must thus ensure strict anti-corruption controls for the state institutions responsible for managing reconstruction.

On the military front, there are steps Ukraine can take in the near term to promote the likelihood of success for its DDR efforts. Ukraine has made admirable efforts towards centralizing the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) and strengthening the state's grip over the military and paramilitary groups. Ukraine can build on this success as the war wages on by continuing to further integrate battalions into the regular military chains of command, establish control over weapons, and promote operational and personnel integration between professional units and volunteer battalions. In addition, Ukrainian security ministries can begin to identify and inventory existing and incoming weapons and ammunition. Once again, the tracing and cataloging of weapons is made easier because Ukraine has already integrated volunteer battalions into the regular military. However, even before the 2022 invasion, Ukraine contained an estimated 5 million illegally-held small arms, a number that is likely to increase following the war.³⁵ In order to promote an orderly disarmament process after the war, Ukraine should begin to account for weapons and ammunition now.

³³ National Agency on Corruption Prevention, *Implementation of the State Anti-Corruption Program for 2023-2025 approved this afternoon will address the pending public demand for justice*, (Mar. 4, 2023), available at <https://nazk.gov.ua/en/news/implementation-of-the-state-anti-corruption-program-for-2023-2025-approved-this-afternoon-will-address-the-pending-public-demand-for-justice/>

³⁴ Nick Fenton and Andrew Lohsen, *Corruption and Private Sector Investment in Ukraine's Reconstruction*, CSIS (Nov. 8, 2022), available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/corruption-and-private-sector-investment-ukraines-reconstruction>.

³⁵ Adrian Karatnycky, *Kiev Gets a Grip on Ukraine's Internal Divisions*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, (Oct. 6, 2015), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/kyiv-gets-a-grip-on-ukraines-internal-divisions-1444157488>.

Pro-Russian Separatist forces and Pro-Russian Citizens in Ukraine

Pro-Russian Separatist Forces

Prior to Russia’s 2022 invasion, the Donbas region of Ukraine—the easternmost area, which borders Russia—was the seat of pro-Russian separatist sentiment. This culminated with the establishment of the Russian-backed separatist Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics in 2014. However, separatist support of and collaboration with Russia consisted primarily of “corrupt opportunists who opposed Kyiv to protect their [personal interests].”³⁶ The extent to which pro-Russian forces are engaged in any future Ukrainian DDR process will be entirely up to the Ukrainian government. If those forces are engaged, the following section outlines some considerations and challenges to keep in mind with the range of these actors.

The war has changed the political landscape in Ukraine. Russia’s 2022 war in Ukraine has “largely put an end to . . . [Ukrainian] pro-Russian sentiment.”³⁷ The local Donbas population has been “by and large unwilling to join anti-Ukrainian forces,”³⁸ forcing the People’s Republics to begin indiscriminate conscription.³⁹ Separatist forces therefore mainly consist of “Russians, Chechens, Ingush, [and]Armenians,” many of them fighting in Russian private military companies.⁴⁰ As of May 2022, large majorities of Ukrainian territory, including Donbas, hold negative views of Russia and support Ukraine’s NATO alignment.⁴¹ Furthermore, a number of high-level separatist officials have either left Ukraine or been killed.⁴² In their wake, Ukraine has “crack[ed] down on all former political

³⁶ Konstantin Skorkin, *What Next for Ukraine’s Formerly Pro-Russian Regions?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 1, (Feb. 12, 2022), available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88542>; see also David Klein, *Report: In Crimea and the Donbas, Organized Crime Reigns Supreme*, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, p. 1, (Jul. 15, 2022), available at <https://occrp.org/en/daily/16570-report-in-crimea-and-the-donbas-organized-crime-reigns-supreme>

³⁷ Konstantin Skorkin, *What Next for Ukraine’s Formerly Pro-Russian Regions?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1 (Feb. 12, 2022), available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88542>

³⁸ Sergey Sukhankin, *Russian Private Military Contractors in the Donbas Rehearsing Future Voyages*, in *The War in Ukraine’s Donbas* 181, p. 191, (David R. Marples, ed., 1st ed., 2022)

³⁹ Ihor Burdyga, *Ukraine Separatists Draft Anyone They Can*, p. 1, (April 27, 2022), available at <https://www.dw.com/en/how-ukraine-separatists-are-mass-conscripting-anyone-of-fighting-age/a-61608760>

⁴⁰ Ihor Burdyga, *Ukraine Separatists Draft Anyone They Can*, pp. 189–92, (April 27, 2022), available at <https://www.dw.com/en/how-ukraine-separatists-are-mass-conscripting-anyone-of-fighting-age/a-61608760>

⁴¹ Konstantin Skorkin, *What Next for Ukraine’s Formerly Pro-Russian Regions?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 1 (Feb. 12, 2022), available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88542>

⁴² Konstantin Skorkin, *What Next for Ukraine’s Formerly Pro-Russian Regions?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 1 (Feb. 12, 2022), available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88542>

projects [in the Donbas region],” disbanding and banning pro-Russian parties.⁴³ It has further vowed to prevent “the reemergence of pro-Russian political parties.”⁴⁴

For the number of remaining sincerely pro-Russian Ukrainians, incentivizing their reintegration ties back to their underlying motives for aligning with pro-Russian separatists. These incentives range from economic to political to social and relate both to individual factors as well as more broadly “socialization of a person in a particular social context.”⁴⁵ More specifically, incentives must address: “interruption of career growth,” “disappointment in education,” “injustice in distribution of opportunities,” lack of social mobility or social prospects, lack of bilingualism between Russian and Ukrainian, a focus on “Slavic character” as a cultural touchstone, and insufficient political representation.⁴⁶

The DDR Process

The DDR process for Ukraine with regard to pro-Russian separatist groups will, as an integrated component of the nation-wide effort, depend upon the factors aforementioned discussed. However, special factors will also have to be addressed that reflect the cultural, linguistic and political context of the recent history of those regions that have been primarily home to the pro-Russian separatist groups and, not coincidentally, have borne the brunt of Russia’s invasion, occupation, and attempted annexation.⁴⁷

Changes on the ground in Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as other regions with higher levels of pro-Russian sentiment and militia involvement, have been dynamic even prior to the full-fledged Russian invasion in February 2022. Studies prior to the 2022 invasion had profiled pro-Russian separatists as predominantly: young (in the range of 25-35 years old) volunteers that are typically single and childless. These individuals represent a mix of vocational and higher educational training, but frequently lacking in satisfying careers built out of their education.⁴⁸

⁴³ Konstantin Skorkin, *What Next for Ukraine’s Formerly Pro-Russian Regions?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 2 (Feb. 12, 2022), available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88542>

⁴⁴ Konstantin Skorkin, *What Next for Ukraine’s Formerly Pro-Russian Regions?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 2 (Feb. 12, 2022), available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88542>

⁴⁵ Oksana Mikheieva, *Motivations for Pro-Russian and Pro-Ukrainian Combatants in the Context of the Russian Military Intervention in the Donbas*, in *The War in Ukraine’s Donbas* 67, 68 (David R. Marples, ed., 1st ed., 2022)

⁴⁶ Oksana Mikheieva, *Motivations for Pro-Russian and Pro-Ukrainian Combatants in the Context of the Russian Military Intervention in the Donbas*, in *The War in Ukraine’s Donbas* pp. 73–75, 78 (David R. Marples, ed., 1st ed., 2022).

⁴⁷ Center for Preventive Action, *Conflict in Ukraine*, Global Conflict Tracker, (November 8, 2022), available at <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine>.

⁴⁸ Oksana Mikheieva, *Motivations of Pro-Russian and Pro-Ukrainian Combatants in the Context of the Russian Military Intervention in the Donbas*, pp. 71-73, 77-80 in *The War in Ukraine’s Donbas: Origins, Contexts, and the*

They were also predominantly Russian-speaking, Orthodox Christian (at least culturally), and hold an affinity towards the Moscow Patriarchate. Many of these individuals held a national identity not strictly tied to borders or geographical lines, but instead with an emphasis on a “Slavic” or “Rus” character anchored in their local geography (for example, Donetsk, rather than Ukraine or Russia). Such an identity often came with an opposition to Ukrainian ethnocultural or pro-European identity.⁴⁹

The disruption to these territories brought about by the Russian invasion could scarcely be overstated. Of course, those areas that faced immediate Russian attacks and occupations, and increasingly, have since been reclaimed through fierce fighting by Ukraine, have faced physical devastation to homes, industry, infrastructure, and land. The fleeing of staggering numbers of civilians (whether to other parts of Ukraine or other countries), the mass forced relocation of civilians to Russia,⁵⁰ and the virtual collapse of pre-war economic activity have brought about a baseline of devastation that in many cases has simply erased what was there before. In terms of combatant forces however, a transformational shift has been the widespread, forced conscription of men between the ages of 18 and 55 from every walk of life in the Russia-occupied regions, particularly the Donetsk and Luhansk.⁵¹ As a consequence, profiles that might have existed of pro-Russia fighters before the February 2022 Russian invasion are now nowhere nearly sufficient to grasp the interests and motivations of combatants, a great portion of whom have been coerced to fight.

Polling has shown a stark reversal in pro-Russian sentiment, even in those regions seen as pro-Russian before the invasion.⁵² The political upheavals brought about by Russian occupation and attempted annexation, on one hand, and in cities and areas reconquered by Ukraine, on the other hand, leaves a context radically different from before the invasion and highly dependent upon the further course of the war. Observers have noted that the changes in public opinion have dramatically

Future, (Ed., David R. Marples, Central European University Press, (2022)), available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctv26j68t.8>.

⁴⁹ Oksana Mikheieva, *Motivations of Pro-Russian and Pro-Ukrainian Combatants in the Context of the Russian Military Intervention in the Donbas*, p. 77 in *The War in Ukraine's Donbas: Origins, Contexts, and the Future*, (Ed., David R. Marples, Central European University Press, (2022)), available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctv26j68t.8>.

⁵⁰ United Nations Commission on Human Rights, *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.

⁵¹ Ihor Burdyga and Regina Gimalova, *Ukraine Separatists Draft Anyone They Can*, DW, (27 April 2022), available at <https://www.dw.com/en/how-ukraine-separatists-are-mass-conscripting-anyone-of-fighting-age/a-61608760>.

⁵² Konstantin Skorkin, *What Next for Ukraine's Formerly Pro-Russian Regions?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (12 February 2022), available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88542>

undermined political projects based on separatism or anything Russia-related, pointing also to the banning of at least a dozen political parties in Ukraine, the replacement of local governments in occupied or reconquered areas and the political violence and reprisals that has killed a number of former leaders.⁵³ It may be impossible to predict, therefore, what the political situation in south-eastern Ukraine will be after hostilities have ceased, therefore, but it is hard to imagine a resumption of the pre-invasion status of pro-Russian autonomous regions having special status as such within a united Ukraine.

These transformative changes imply a fundamentally different DDR process for pro-Russian regions and forces than might have been planned before the Russian invasion in February 2022. It is no longer a question of merely persuading volunteers and combatants to disarm and reintegrate into a society that, despite the effects of a near decade of fighting since 2014, largely resembled what had been there before. Currently, regardless of the outcome of the war, it can be expected that demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and reconciliation will be required on a mass scale. Achieving the economic security of former combatants will be but one aspect of an economy that needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. The reintegration of former combatants will be undertaken alongside the return (or failure to return) of staggering numbers of civilians and victims who have been displaced. Reconciliation will be an integral stage of the process to begin to overcome the consequences of divisive Russian propaganda: a clear reconciliatory stage as part of the DDR process can provide an opportunity to develop coherent information policy and education amongst reintegrating groups and the wider population. It can be expected that the temporarily occupied Russia-leaning regions of Ukraine will be re-absorbed either into a politically reconstructed Ukraine, that may well undertake the very alignment with Europe and the West that was so long opposed or annexed permanently into Russia and perhaps out of the reach of international DDR initiatives and resources.

The range of realities that may occur has consequences for the prospects of DDR. As noted previously in reference to the whole of Ukraine, the dual projects of security and recovery will be deeply intertwined as economic reconstruction and state stability will be critical in setting the ground for effective reintegration of varied interests through DDR, including those who had previously fought on the side of Russian forces, whether as volunteers or conscripts. Economic aid and investment will have to be seen as widely and equitably shared. Former combatants will have to be persuaded not only of the stability and equity of the peace process,

⁵³ Konstantin Skorkin, *What Next for Ukraine's Formerly Pro-Russian Regions?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (12 February 2022), available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88542>

but that they will have meaningful participation in the political process. Reconstruction of the economy may involve re-orientation away from Russia and towards Europe and other regions and new national economic alignments, such that what was there before may never be rebuilt as it was. In that context, training and re-training will be a critical component of long-term efforts to re-integrate former combatants into an inclusive economy that does not yield the same motivations and displacement as had previously been the case.

Implementing DDR

Before any of those details can be achieved, the sheer logistical magnitude of demobilizing a mass-conscripted society will need to be carefully planned, supported by national and international resources and cooperation.⁵⁴ Disarmament will extend beyond the customary tasks of collecting, documenting and controlling arms (and that on a massive scale) to transforming an intensely militarized theater of war including removal of landmines, military fortifications and installations, and disposal of abandoned or destroyed equipment as well as extensive environmental cleanup.⁵⁵ Demobilization will not only have to involve logistics and facilities (such as temporary massing centers and camps) needed to process combatants and ready them for reinsertion but may involve longer-term housing for reintegrated combatants (in addition to returning displaced persons) while reconstruction of critical infrastructure and housing proceeds. Vigilance will be needed to ensure that former combatants are not drawn into new militias, separatist groups or terrorist organizations that could disrupt the peace and political processes and relapse into conflict.⁵⁶

In all of these aspects, it will be vitally important to reconstruct local and regional governments and civil society in a way that is consistent with DDR principles favoring national and local ownership. Success in this regard also presents a key opportunity for establishing effective and inclusive institutions and practices that are more likely to secure the support of combatants who previously

⁵⁴ United Nations, *Operational Guide To The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization And Reintegration Standards*, pp. 10-12, (Oct. 18, 2017), available at <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/operational-guide-integrated-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-standards>.

⁵⁵ Sam Mednick, *Ukraine War's Environmental Toll to Take Years to Clean Up*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, (11 November 2022), available at <https://news.yahoo.com/ukraine-wars-environmental-toll-years-071707076.html>.

⁵⁶ United Nations, *Operational Guide To The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization And Reintegration Standards*, pp. 16-18, (Oct. 18, 2017), available at <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/operational-guide-integrated-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-standards>.

may have felt alienated from national life, while satisfying their pride and commitment to their home communities and regions.

In regard to the need and opportunity for attracting international investment and support, one way in which a successful DDR program can contribute to long-term development and reintegration into regional and international economies is by attracting the attention and investment of governments, NGOs, and companies through its alignment with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, these include: (1) significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere; (2) significantly reducing illicit financial and arms flows, strengthening the recovery and return of stolen assets, and combating all forms of organized crime; and (3) taking immediate steps to secure the prohibition of child labor, including recruitment and use of child soldiers.⁵⁷

An effective approach can include leveraging the various resources and programs dedicated to achieving synergetic goals that together, will better position Ukraine for more sustainable post-conflict development and long-term civil peace and stability. In particular, expertise in “conflict sensitivity,” where methods and programs for aid delivery (at a local, national, or international level) are developed with diligence to factors that contribute to or perpetuate violence⁵⁸ could fortify the impact of reducing the availability of weapons in society through a DDR program. Efforts to systematically fight corruption and attract investment⁵⁹ could have positive direct effects on reducing illicit financial and arms flows and combating organized crime, particularly if coordinated projects dedicated to those goals. As already noted, the unconditional and immediate release of children engaged in or supporting armed forces is imperative in any DDR context, but beyond necessary efforts to release and reintegrate child soldiers (reports of whose involvement date to at least 2014),⁶⁰ broader efforts in education and social services to reverse years

⁵⁷ United Nations, *Operational Guide To The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization And Reintegration Standards*, p. 8, (Oct. 18, 2017), available at <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/operational-guide-integrated-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-standards>.

⁵⁸ Alex Bellamy, *The 2030 Agenda Reducing All Forms of Violence*, UN Chronicle, (April 2015), available at <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/2030-agenda-reducing-all-forms-violence>.

⁵⁹ Nick Fenton and Andrew Lohsen, *Corruption and Private Sector Investment in Ukraine's Reconstruction*, CSIS, (November 2022) available at https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/221108_Lohsen_anti_corruption.pdf?b4Src1syzltAtGEWIAE8q7greJVVOxL9.

⁶⁰ Vitaly Shevchenko, *Ukraine conflict: Child soldiers join the fight*, BBC, (26 November 2014), available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30134421>.

of propaganda and policies aiming at the militarization of children⁶¹ will be an essential part of reducing the exploitation of children for military purposes in the short and long term.

Conclusion

As of March 2023, the Ukrainian military has proven effective in halting and even beating back the large-scale Russian invasion. This success has sustained hopes that Ukraine will emerge from the conflict as a strong and sovereign nation. Regardless of the precise outcome on the battlefield, DDR will be critical to cementing Ukraine's post-war stability.

The scale of Ukraine's whole-of-society mobilization coupled with the depth of destruction created by Russia's scorched-earth tactics will mean that the DDR process will be a difficult undertaking. Although the Ukrainian government's capacity to consolidate power in the formal state structures has been largely effective, it is unclear whether Ukraine's post-war landscape will see Ukrainian politics return to their perennially fractious form. The prospect of such politics against the backdrop of a population impatient for change and trained in military combat is potentially worrying.

This set of circumstances means that any Ukrainian DDR process will need to look beyond simply demobilizing the state military towards the underlying currents of Ukrainian society and politics. DDR will require the reintegration of stakeholders ranging from quasi-fascist nationalist volunteer battalions to former pro-Russian sympathizers, to patriotic Ukrainian citizens, and all those in between. Relative political and economic stability will be a core requirement to implement a successful DDR process. Economic reconstruction and political reform will be just as important as demobilization. Moreover, these DDR efforts will benefit from active consideration of the diverse actors involved in the war, taking into account the legitimate interests of Ukraine's Russia-sympathizing population. All of these requirements will make DDR a difficult endeavor. However, these steps will be necessary to ensure Ukraine's long-term stability and survival.

⁶¹ Iryna Matviyishyn, *Children as a tool: how Russia militarizes kids on the Donbas and Crimea*, Atlantic Council, (May 3, 2019), available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/children-as-a-tool-how-russia-militarizes-kids-in-the-donbas-and-crimea/>.