

## **Maryland State Department of Education Content Standards and Indicators**

### Geography

- Analyze how various factors contribute to cooperation and conflict within and between countries, including resources, strategic locations, culture, and politics.
- Analyze how differing points of view and self-interests play a role in conflict over Territory

### **Student Materials**

1. Outline maps of the former Soviet Union and surrounding region
2. Research packet

### **On-line Resources Research Resources**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2nklduvThs> Understanding Ukraine: The Problems Today and Some Historical Context

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDwgJFrUfdo> What's happening in South Ossetia?

Post-Soviet Conflicts by Colonel Robert Hamilton, Parts 1 and 2

<https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/12/post-soviet-wars-part-i>

<https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/12/post-soviet-wars-part-ii>

Instructor Resources – Links for Maps

<https://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/eurasia.htm> - Outline map of Eurasia

<https://www.cfr.org/background/north-atlantic-treaty-organization-nato> - Map of NATO Expansion

Name:

Period:

Date:

### The Geography of Post-Soviet Conflicts

Objective – Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Russia and several other post-Soviet states have fought conflicts in the former empire’s borderlands. These conflicts have pitted the new states, rebel groups and Russia into conflict with each other. Over the last few years the United States and its NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies have been increasingly drawn into these conflicts creating the possibility of increased conflict between NATO and Russia.

- Students will be able to map the locations of regional conflicts in Eurasia.
- Students will determine the causes of the conflicts.
- Students will identify the nations involved.
- Students will evaluate which conflict has the greatest danger of drawing in other nations.

Conflicts: (A) Ukraine v. Russian supported separatists, (B) Russian seizure of the Crimea from Ukraine, (C) Armenia v. Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, (D) Moldova v. Trans-Dniestr Separatists, (E) Russia v. Chechen Separatists, (F) Revolution in Ukraine (G) South Ossetia Conflict (H) Abkhazia

Materials – Information sheet, outline map and colored pencils.

Mapping:

1. Mark Nations formerly belonging to the Soviet Union in red stripes
2. Mark Nations belonging to NATO before 1989 in blue
3. Mark Nations that joined NATO after 1989 with blue stripes

#### 1. Ukraine v. Russian backed Separatists

Where: Eastern Ukraine

When: April 2014 to Present

Causes of the Conflicts: Overthrow of pro-Russian president of the Ukraine in the Orange Revolution, tensions between Russian speakers in the East and Ukrainian speakers in the West, Russian efforts to destabilize the Ukrainian government.

Summary: Demonstrations by pro-Russian separatists in Donbass region of the Ukrainian was followed para-military forces seizing control of the Donbass and Luhansk regions of the Ukrainian and the establishment of separatist governments. The Ukrainian government counter-offensive that followed was checked by a large influx of Russian para-militaries and regular Russian forces. An initial ceasefire agreement was put in place in September of 2014, but then fell apart. As second round of heavy fighting occurred in the winter of 2015. In the Spring of 2015 leading a second ceasefire agreement went into effect and fighting has become sporadic since.

Has the conflict been resolved? No, although there is a ceasefire in effect.

## 2. Russian Invasion and Annexation of the Crimea

Where: The Crimea region of the Ukraine

When: February and March 2014

Causes of the Conflicts: Russian decision to seize control of the Ukrainian region of the Crimea after the pro-Russian government of the Ukraine was overthrown in the 2014 Revolution.

Summary: Following the Euromaidan Revolution Russian military forces without insignia began to infiltrate the Crimea and seized control of points of political and military importance. Ukrainian forces did not actively resist the invasion and were disarmed. The invasion was followed up by a vote to give after the fact support for a Russian annexation of the region.

Has the conflict been resolved? No, the Ukraine continues to maintain its legal claim to the territory and Russia faces international sanctions over the seizure of the region

## 3. Transnistria Conflict

Where: Tranistria region of Moldova

When: March-July 1992

Causes of the Conflict: Growing nationalist tensions between the Moldovan(Romanian) majority and the ethnic Russian/Ukrainian broke out between prior to the the collapse of the Soviet Union. This turned into open fighting between minorities concentrated in Tranistria and Moldovan nationalists.

Summary: After successful efforts by the new Moldovan government to suppress separatists movements elsewhere in the country. The Russian and Ukranian population of the region formed an armed volunteer force and sought volunteers from other regions of the former Soviet Union. Fighting ensued between secessionist forces and the Moldovan Governmen. The balance turned in favor of the secessionist forces when the former Soviet 18<sup>th</sup> army joined them in the fighting. This resulted in a ceasefire that allowed the secessionist forces to retain control of the region.

Has the conflict been resolved? The ceasefire has held, but the Moldovan government still claims the region. Subsequent agreements between the secessionists and the Moldovan Government have decreased tensions, but Russian forces remain in the region to support the Transnistria sucesionists

## 4. South Ossetia Conflict

Where: The South Ossetia Autonomous region of Georgia

When: 1991-1992 and 2008

Causes of the Conflict: The Ossetian population developed a strong movement to unify with Russian controlled North Ossetia.

Summary: After of period of growing tensions between the South Ossetian Autonomous Region and the Georgian Government South Ossetian separatists aided by former Soviet (Russian) troops seized control of part of the autonomous region. Tens of thousands of Ossetians and Georgians were displaced from the region. A ceasefire agreement was concluded that did not settle the issue of South Ossetian succession. However, the next few years so a notable decrease in tensions as the Georgian Government concluded a number of agreements with the separatist government. In the mid-2000s a number of incidents indicated that relations between the Georgian Government and the Separatists began to deteriorate. After serious clashes between Georgian and Ossetian forces in 2008, the Georgian government launched a full-scale invasion of the region which was soon defeated by Russian military intervention. The Russians soon invaded Georgia proper and forced the Government into a ceasefire that left all of South Ossetia in Separatist hands. Since this time Russian forces have repeatedly violated the ceasefire agreement by moving the South Ossetian boundary deeper into Georgian territory.

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Has the conflict been resolved? No. The while a shaky ceasefire continues the issues that caused the conflict to start have not been resolved

## **5. Abkhazian Conflict**

Where: The Abkhazia region of Georgia

When: 1992-1993, 1998, 2008

Causes of the Conflicts: A long running separatist movement among the Abkhazian minority of the region has long sought to sever the region of Georgia. The Georgian Government has resisted this movement in part due to the fact the largest population group in the area was ethnic Georgians.

Causes of the Conflict: After the collapse of the Soviet Union the separatists joined by Russian forces seized control of much of the region from government forces and ethnic Georgian militias. In 1998 Abkhazian forces engaged in an operation that forced more than 20,000 Georgian civilians out of the region. In 2001 Georgian and Chechen paramilitary forces launched an invasion of Abkhazia, but were defeated by local and Russian forces. In 2008 heavy fighting broke out again as Abkhazian and Russian forces attacked Georgian positions in support of the South Ossetians. Ethnic cleansing by the Abkhazians has forced hundreds of thousands of ethnic Georgians to leave the region.

Has the conflict been resolved? No, the current ceasefire is holding. The international community has generally supported Georgia, but Russia has continued to support Abkhazia and has recognized it as an independent country

## **6. Chechnya Conflict**

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

When: 1991 to 2009

Causes of the Conflict: Following the collapse of the Soviet Union the Chechen autonomous region attempted to establish itself as an independent republic. Russian forces attempted to reestablish control over the region

Summary: After an independence vote by the local legislature Russian forces attempted to reestablish control through military action. After much bloody fighting the Russian effort failed and a temporary peace was established, but the independence issue was not resolved. The peace broke down in late 1990s as Chechen nationalists launched a series of terrorist attacks within the Russian federation. Russia launched a second invasion which eventually overcame strong resistance. The Chechens then resorted to guerilla warfare and terrorism while the Russians turned to using brutal security forces and death squads to maintain control over the region. By 2009 fighting has more or less ended and the region was firmly under Russian government control. Internationally Chechens continue to engage in terrorist actions against Russian targets, but seem to present little direct threat to continued Russian control

Has the conflict been resolved? Maybe, Russian is solidly back in control of the region, but there is no reason to believe Chechen dissatisfaction for Russian rule has ended.

## **7. Revolution in the Ukraine (Euromaidan Revolution)**

Where: The Ukraine, primarily the capital, Kiev

When: February 2014

Causes of the Conflict: The Revolution was a reaction to massive government corruption, but was triggered by the Ukrainian President Yanukovich's decision to break off economic negotiations with the European Union and to instead seek an economic agreement with Russia.

Summary: Following the outbreak of protests against the Yanukovich government's decision to break off negotiations with the European Union riot police and snipers were used to suppress the demonstrations. The demonstrations became increasingly violent. As the security forces proved incapable of stopping the demonstrations, President Yanukovich fled to Russia. Subsequently a new Ukrainian government was established, negotiations with the EU were successfully renewed and the Russian Federation began military operations aimed at destabilizing the new Ukrainian government.

Has the conflict been resolved? Yes, the pro-Russian government of was overthrown and replaced by a new government that has reoriented the country towards closer relations with the European Union and NATO. However Russian has begun a series of aggressive actions against the Ukrainian Government in response

## **8. Nagorno-Karabakh**

Where: The Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan

When: Late 1980s to 1994

Causes of the Conflicts: Soviet era borders heavily inter-mixed Armenians and Azerbaijanis, groups with long-term tensions over a variety of issues including land and religion.

Summary: In 1988 Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian majority region in Azerbaijan attempted to succeed from Azerbaijan and unify with Armenia. Fighting broke out between Armenian and Azeri forces in 1992 and continued until 1994. The Armenians successfully held the region and captured much surrounding from Azerbaijan. The fighting ended with an Russian brokered ceasefire in 1994 and lead to the displacement of about a million civilians.

Has the conflict been resolved? No, although currently there is no active fighting in the region the issues that lead to Armenia's seizure of the region have not been resolved and both sides continue to build up their military forces. Peace negotiations have been on-going without success since 1994.

Evaluate – Which of the following conflicts seems to have the greatest possibility of drawing in other nations? Support your opinion with evidence based on your research.

Student Responses will vary, but should recognize Russia's efforts to regain or maintain

its's power and influence over its border regions

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