

GLOBAL

Sanction Russian officials, provide defensive military equipment to Ukraine, feds told amid escalated tensions

By NEIL MOSS (/AUTHOR/NEIL-MOSS) APRIL 28, 2021

'Everyone's looking for a diplomatic solution out of this thing, and I think if Canada wants to play an active role today, that's where we should be,' says former DND analyst Andrew Rasiulis.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reaffirmed Canada's 'unwavering support' for 'Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity' in an April 6 call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade and photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

An influential group that represents the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada is asking the federal government to provide Kyiv with military equipment and further sanction Russian officials who are breaching human rights amid an escalation along the Ukrainian-Russian border.

Russia stationed more than 100,000 troops along the Russia-Ukraine border before Russian state media reported on April 22 that the troops would be repositioned back to bases away from the border.

The unannounced Russian build-up earlier this month sparked wide-spread condemnation from the West and the G7, which called on Moscow to stop the “provocations and to immediately de-escalate tensions in line with its international obligations.”

Russia said the build-up was for defensive reasons, a result of military exercises that pose no threat to Ukraine.

Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) executive director Ihor Michalchyshyn said Canada should be furthering its assistance to Ukraine with military equipment and sanctions on Russia.

“The most immediate thing that we are calling for as the UCC is for helping Ukraine to be able to purchase military equipment,” he said, such as air, naval, and coastal defensive systems. “Ukraine was placed on the automatic firearms list in previous years, which is a good sign, but there’s also other things that they might need to defend themselves, especially on the coast.”

He said if Russia is withdrawing forces, he doesn’t expect it will be in large numbers.

The Canadian government has been an ardent defender of Ukraine’s security, which intensified after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Canada has deployed about 200 military trainers to Ukraine as part of Operation Unifier to strengthen Ukrainian security forces. The mission is currently paused as it has been hit with an outbreak of COVID-19.

Mr. Michalchyshyn said Canada is in a unique situation where it is the “best placed friend” of the Ukrainian military in being able to support whatever training they do, given the experience of Operation Unifier.

He said sanctions could be imposed more immediately against those who are breaching human rights.

“Internationally, sanctions are a very strong and effective tool that countries can place relatively quickly,” he said. “It is very obvious who these people are in the Russian regime, so we think Canada’s role on sanctions could be something done a bit more immediately.”

Canada imposed sanctions on March 29 on two additional Russian officials and four entities tied with the annexation of Crimea.

Foreign Affairs Minister Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Westmount, Que.) told the House of Commons on April 26 that Canada is continuing to follow the developments along the Ukraine-Russia border “very carefully.”

“Canada will always remain a steadfast friend and ally of Ukraine,” he said, noting that Canada has provided more than \$800-



Conservative MP James Bezan says the government hasn't done enough to support Ukraine. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

million in assistance to Ukraine since 2014 and has sanctioned more than 440 Russian officials and entities.

The UCC met virtually with Mr. Garneau earlier this month.

Conservative MP James Bezan (Selkirk-Interlake-Eastman, Man.), his party's defence critic, echoed the UCC's call for greater use of sanctions and providing Ukraine with defensive military equipment.

"Putin is provoked by weakness," said Mr. Bezan, adding that he thinks the Canadian government has not done enough to support Ukraine.

He said those Russian officials who are responsible for the military build-up should be sanctioned. Along with defensive military weapons, he said radar satellite images should be shared to help facilitate Ukrainian intelligence gathering.

"There is a lot more that Canada can be doing, and that also includes increasing the tone of our statements," Mr. Bezan said.

Mr. Garneau has spoken with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba twice in the past month, during which he talked about Canada's concern over the Russian build-up, which he "unequivocally condemned."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) also spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on April 6. Mr. Trudeau told reporters that same day that during the call he reaffirmed Canada's "unwavering support" for "Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Mr. Zelensky urged Canada to pave the way for Ukraine joining NATO, with a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) needed to meet the requirements to join the military alliance, according to media reports.

Marcus Kolga, a fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, said Canada should be backing Ukraine's path to create a roadmap towards entry into NATO.

"I think that Canada has much to gain to demonstrate ... leadership, especially with the new Biden administration," Mr. Kolga said. "If we can demonstrate that we are ready to take on some of this load in so far as protecting and bolstering democracy and the sovereignty of our allies and NATO, it would go a long way to send a positive message to our allies, especially at a time when they need it."

Mr. Kolga said the effectiveness of Canadian sanctions on Russia can be measured by Russia President Vladimir Putin's reaction to them.

"Whenever new sanctions are announced, Vladimir Putin reacts quite aggressively. He lashes out," he said. "Judging by his reaction, we know that sanctions are hurting him, because they are targeting the individuals, the oligarchs, the officials, who are enabling [him] ... and keeping him in power."

Andrew Rasiulis, a former analyst at the Department of National Defence and a Canadian Global Affairs Institute fellow, said while Canada has done much on the deterrence side, it needs to do more to foster a diplomatic solution to the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

"What we have been doing is putting bricks on the wall, but we have not tried to create a situation where that wall may not be necessary in the future," he said. "What's missing in Canadian policy is the proactive diplomatic side that could try and facilitate a solution."

Mr. Zelensky said in an interview with *The Financial Times* (<https://www.ft.com/content/ed40d675-16b3-4a35-a157-b9bf0078b507>) that he hopes to restart the peace process to end the war in Donbass. He is hoping for the format of the Normandy peace talks to be enlarged to include Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rasiulis suggested Russia is not going to accept NATO membership for Ukraine.

"They are prepared to use force if necessary, [but] they don't want to," he said "Everyone's looking for a diplomatic solution out of this thing, and I think if Canada wants to play an active role today, that's where we should be."

But Canada's involvement in a diplomatic solution will depend on political will, Mr. Rasiulis said.

Mr. Michalchyshyn said he is looking to learn more about a role for Canada in expanded peace talks.

"It's very difficult to negotiate with Russia," he said, "because they are very clear on what they want, which is they want political control over Ukraine. They want to expand their territory. They've invaded Crimea. They've invaded eastern Ukraine. I don't know what success any negotiations would have with that kind of party to them."

Mr. Bezan said a peaceful resolution is where the situation should be headed, which means supporting Ukraine's calls for negotiations and dialogue.

"But we also need to realize that international treaties and memorandums signed by Putin mean nothing," he said. "We always need to deal with the Kremlin with eyes wide open, knowing that it's often just a delay tactic on their part and usually these types of resolutions are short lived."

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