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Concrete Steps to Address the Crisis in Ukraine

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Introduction and summary

U.S., European, and Russian leaders have watched the political crisis in Ukraine with great concern since last fall when hundreds of thousands of protestors rallied in Kiev's Independence Square. The demonstrations were against then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to reject closer economic ties with the European Union. But what started as a domestic political crisis over the direction of Ukraine's economy has now escalated into an international military crisis with Russia's subsequent blatant violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Following the initial protests in November, an escalating spiral of violence between Ukrainian security services and the protestors eventually drove Russian-leaning President Yanukovich from power in February to be replaced by government officials who favor a stronger relationship with the European Union. Less than 10 days after Yanukovich's ouster, the Russian government deployed several thousand troops into the Ukrainian region of Crimea—a strategically important peninsula on the Black Sea with a majority ethnic Russian population and a Russian naval base in the port city of Sevastopol. Russian President Vladimir Putin has defended the military incursion into Ukrainian territory under the pretense of protecting Crimea's large Russian-speaking population from Ukrainian authorities and right-wing Ukrainian nationalists. The Russian government now appears to be preparing to annex Crimea and incorporate it into the Russian Federation, which would be a further escalation of the conflict and another significant violation of international law.

The Ukrainian political crisis and Russia's apparent willingness to annex Crimea has raised several important strategic questions for U.S. policymakers as they coordinate a response with allies in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO. When determining the most effective course of action, policymakers should assess ways to support various U.S. priorities in the crisis, including, but not limited to:

- Finding a nonviolent solution to the crisis that reestablishes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. This must include the withdrawal of unauthorized Russian military forces from Ukrainian territory and the return of authorized Black Sea Fleet forces to their base.
- Establishing a functioning and democratic Ukrainian government and economy that respect the rights of minorities and can manage a difficult period of transition, including new national elections.
- Maintaining the credibility and integrity of transatlantic alliances and treaty obligations.
- Upholding international rules, norms, and institutions that govern acceptable international behavior.

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