



PUTIN'S POWER PLAY

Russia's president threatens Ukraine—and alarms the world

Little more than a month ago, Russia was basking in the glow of a successful Winter Olympics in Sochi. But now Russia and its president, Vladimir Putin, are in the news for another, more

WORD TO KNOW

- **Cold War** (*n*): a worldwide political and military rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and their allies (1945–1991)

troublesome reason: the role that they're playing in the political upheaval in Ukraine, one of its neighbors to the west.

Ukraine's turmoil began last November. President Viktor Yanukovich (*yah-noo-KOH-vich*) was all set to sign an agreement that would have drawn Ukraine closer to Europe. Instead, he suddenly backed out and signed a similar agreement with Russia.

Ukrainians who wanted closer

ties with Europe were furious. Tens of thousands of them took to the streets of Kiev, the capital, occupying the city's Independence Square and demanding Yanukovich's resignation. The protests turned into a three-month siege. More than 80 people were killed in clashes with police.

Then, in February, came a dizzying chain of events. First, Parliament stripped Yanukovich of his powers. The hated president

February 20



December 19

March 1

Top left: Violence erupts, with protesters storming police barricades in Kiev. **Inset:** Vladimir Putin. **Above:** Ukrainian students take part in an antigovernment protest in Kiev. **Left:** A soldier in an unmarked uniform mans a Russian military vehicle in Crimea.

with Europe. But in eastern Ukraine, a sizable minority of ethnic Russians have deep ties to Russia.

Through most of the 20th century, Ukraine was a part of the Soviet Union, the mammoth Communist country dominated by Russia (*see map*). Ukraine became independent at the end of the **Cold War** in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed and broke up into Russia and 14 other nations.

Countries in Eastern Europe that had been dominated by the Soviet Union, such as Poland and Hungary, also gained their freedom.

In many ways, Putin—and Russia—have never gotten over that loss of land and power. Many historians

say that the struggle over Ukraine is a replay of the Cold War for Putin. He is determined, they say, to keep Russian influence over Ukraine at almost any cost.

Is there anything the U.S. and Europe can do to stop Putin and Russia? Experts say that the options are limited.

In 2008, Russia sent troops into two provinces of the country of Georgia, claiming that Russians there were in danger. The U.S. and Europe protested, but Russian troops remain.

As *JS* went to press, Putin told the world that military force in Ukraine would be a last resort. “There is still a chance we can avoid war,” an Independence Square protester told the BBC in Kiev. “If we do not, we will be the second Georgia,” he said, “and many people will lose their lives. That could be me.” —**Bryan Brown**

fled the capital and the protesters celebrated. But ethnic Russians living in Ukraine who want closer ties with Russia were outraged. They started protesting in Crimea, a peninsula where the majority of people are Russian. Many of them want to secede from Ukraine.

The crisis escalated when Russian troops suddenly appeared in Crimea and occupied the peninsula. Alarm bells went off in Europe and the United States. President Barack Obama warned President Putin that “there will be costs for any military intervention

in Ukraine.” Putin replied that Ukraine’s Russians needed protection from “lawlessness” after an “unconstitutional coup.”

Ukraine’s new prime minister warned that his country was on the “brink of disaster.” He called the Russian troops in Ukraine “a declaration of war to my country.”

West or East?

The long-standing divide in Ukraine is in large part a story of west versus east. Most Ukrainians who live in the western part of the country want to be more connected