

In Ukraine, Russia Wants Political Control, Not Territory **Opinion**

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UBO: We recommend you read the Frolov op-ed in the *Moscow Times* but the headline above very correctly encapsulates the article's message. In his yearning for a return to departed days of empire for Russia, Vladimir Putin wants control but does not want the economic burden of the Donbas. We can only hope that Ukraine's leadership has the guts and brains to steadfastly oppose this extremely negative result.

Op-ed by [Vladimir Frolov](#) as published in the *Moscow Times*, Sep 1, 2017 Russia and the United States have re-opened behind-the-scenes diplomacy on the conflict in eastern Ukraine. On Aug. 21, U.S. special envoy to Ukraine Kurt Volker [on left in photo] met Vladislav Surkov, special assistant to President Vladimir Putin in Minsk. This is the special bilateral channel on Ukraine that has languished since U.S. President Donald Trump took office and which Russia has urged Trump to relaunch. Moscow doesn't value this format because it creates a flattering, but false, impression that two superpowers are deciding the fate of a smaller country. This channel matters to the Kremlin because it is a venue for building mutual trust. The format identifies areas of constructive cooperation between the countries that could be built upon. The Minsk meeting comes as the smoldering conflict in the Donbass has been in a military and diplomatic stalemate since early 2016, when the last Normandy Four summit in Berlin ended without a diplomatic breakthrough. Efforts to implement the Minsk agreements haven't yielded a stable cease-fire — Kyiv blames Moscow, but it shares part of the blame — never mind the constitutional and political reforms Kyiv is obligated to make as part of the settlement. Before he met with Surkov, Volker said the United States felt the conflict was backsliding and that new efforts were needed to make it a diplomatic priority. After, both special envoys emerged from their first meeting cautiously optimistic. "Both sides proposed fresh ideas," Surkov [said](#). "We have agreed that we will find a way out," Volker [told](#) Russia's opposition-leading Dozhd television channel. But Volker's subsequent public comments, particularly his stunning [interview](#) to the *Financial Times*, reveal a huge gap in how Moscow and Washington see an end to the conflict and the path towards it. [⋮] [https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/in ... ntrol-not-territory-58800](https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/in...ntrol-not-territory-58800)