

Hello. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Let's do it again! It's time to learn and improve your American English while learning about the world. Today we compare the Russian movement into Crimea with their Afghanistan experience 35 years ago. We'll hear what some experts have to say.

Then we turn to Mozambique, a country that hopes to finally be free of many landmines that were the result of its civil war.

International developments are on the program today. They are all a part of our world ...As It Is.

Recent events on the Crimean peninsula have led to a sharp change in relations between the United States and Russia. Some critics have compared the Russian takeover of Crimea to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan during the presidency of Jimmy Carter. But experts say there are important differences between what happened 35 years ago and the current situation. To help us understand better, here is Mario Ritter.

During Barack Obama's first term as president, his administration worked to "reset" relations with Russia. Ties had been damaged by Russia's military action in neighboring Georgia in 2008.

Stanislav Markus is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Chicago. He says President Obama's "reset" policy showed early signs of progress.

"Given that thaw in the background, I think there were hopes in the administration that the relations with Russia could get back on a more positive track."

But Professor Markus says relations cooled again in 2012, when Vladimir Putin was re-elected president. Any progress to improve relations, he says, ended with Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Republican Party lawmakers strongly criticized the administration's "reset" policy as Russia tightened its hold on Crimea. Senator John McCain described the president's earlier policy toward Russia as "naïve."

Former President Jimmy Carter would recognize some of the criticism. He faced a similar situation when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. President Carter describes his reaction to the invasion.

“I withdrew my ambassador. I broke diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. I declared a grain embargo against them. I supported the Congress and the Olympic Committee in withholding our contestants from the 1980 Olympics.”

But much has changed in the 35 years since Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. Russia has increased its economic ties with the rest of the world since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Mr. Carter notes that President Obama has fewer choices to deal with the Russian aggression than he had.

“Threatening an embargo, even threatening military action in my opinion, would not have deterred Putin from doing that.”

Stinislav Markus says ordering economic restrictions on Russia could increase support for President Putin.

“Crippling the economy by, say, imposing certain embargoes on Russian energy, which obviously a lot of Russian state revenue depends on energy exports, that would have an impact on the Russian people which automatically would be interpreted in Russia as actually confirming what Putin has been saying all along, that a lot of people in the West have not left the past behind, have not left the Cold War behind, they want Russia to be on its knees.”

Ukraine is currently preparing for a presidential election on May 25th. Mr. Carter says he believes President Putin will increase efforts to influence people living close to Russia and who support its policies. But the former president is not sure Mr. Putin plans further action in Ukraine.

“He announced that he would not take military action against eastern Ukraine, and I don’t think he will. The United States out to be very forceful along with its allies in telling Putin, ‘If you do that, there will be very serious consequences.’”

United States military commanders in Europe estimate an additional 40,000 Russian troops have been sent to the Ukrainian border. In 1979, President Carter threatened to use military force in Afghanistan. However, President Obama has said there is no military solution to the deepening Crisis in Ukraine. I'm Mario Ritter.

When Will Mozambique's Landmine Problem End?

The civil war in Mozambique ended 20 years ago. When peace finally came, a large number of landmines were still buried across the country. Now, Mozambique is hoping to be declared mine-free by the end of the year. But disputes between the two civil war enemies could delay any such declaration. The two sides are Frelimo, which controls the government, and Renamo, which is now the opposition. Caty Weaver tells us more.

Luis Wamusse was a young soldier fighting in the civil war when he stepped on a landmine.

He says his story is “no different from that of many Mozambicans.” He lost his leg in the fighting when he was 22 years old. He says he was forced to stop school because, as the son of a farmer, he could no longer work to finance his education.

Luis Wamusse did not give up. Instead, he launched an organization to help other land mine victims. There are about 20,000 mine victims across Mozambique. Many are poor people, who live in rural areas and have no medical treatment to help them heal. Some turn tree branches into sticks to help them walk. Some never get to visit a hospital at all.

Mr. Wamusse says his organization meets landmine victims who are living with pieces of metal in their bodies. Doctors never performed operations on them because they have no way to get to the city to get help.

Disarming mines presents a major test in a country where floodwaters can displace landmines. Some of the mines date back not just to the civil war, but to the war against Portuguese colonial rule.

Alberto Augusto is the director of Mozambique's national de-mining agency. He says the government does not have maps that show where the mines are hidden.

As time goes on, accidents are increasingly rare. Last year, there were only four. All the victims were de-mining specialists.

With the help of foreign donors, 200,000 landmines have been disarmed. Mozambique hopes to be declared free of known landmines by the end of the year.

But there is an unexpected problem. Most of the mines that still need to be cleared are in the central province of Sofala. That is where Renamo supporters have been leading a campaign against the government, as Mr. Augusto explains.

"We have challenges, of course. One of the challenges is Sofala and particularly Chibabava. Last year, we withdrew our people very early, I think around September. In fact, we had two people that were injured in that area where the conflict, in fact, is taking place."

He says that Renamo and the government must agree to a ceasefire by May if the de-miners are to finish their work by the end of the year. I'm Caty Weaver.

And I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. There are more Learning English program just moments away. Stay with us for a complete summary of events at the beginning of the hour. This is VOA in Washington.

