

Forum: United Nations Peacebuilding Commission

Issue #25-01: Measures to establish peace between Ukraine and Russia regarding tensions in Crimea

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Introduction

On December 26th, 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved and 15 independent republics were created. Among these two, are Russia and Ukraine. Despite this incident happening decades ago, Russia still constantly insists on demonstrating that specific Ukrainian territories belong to them and this has led to conflicts between the two nations. In November 2013, Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovich rejected a trade deal from the European Union (EU) and took one with Russia's president Vladimir Putin. This decision by Yanukovich was widely regarded as controversial, especially by Ukraine's own citizens who began protests against this decision. This was because they thought a lot of economic prosperity for the nation would come from accepting the deal with the EU, nevertheless, we can not know if this was truthful or not.

While Ukrainians began to protest against this decision, things got out of hand and severe conflict between the government and the civilians arose. It is estimated the government killed about 70 Protestants and injured several more, according to Oleh Musiy, who is the head doctor for the opposition movement. Yanukovich was eventually removed from power by Ukrainian politicians and then Petro Poroshenko became the next Ukrainian president, who was an active supporter of the protests. The only downside to these protests is that it brought to light the already present division in Ukraine. The eastern side of the country has more cultural ties with Russia and some parts of it even speak Russian as their language. On the other hand, there is the western part of Ukraine which identifies more as local Ukrainians and part of Europe.

The main reason for the conflict is Russia's unwillingness to give up its influential power in Ukraine. A big example of this is the city of Crimea, located in Ukraine. Crimea is filled with oil and gas, which explains Russia's interest in it. Due to this, Crimea has become a battleground between Ukraine and Russia. 77% of Crimeans speak Russian as their native language, this is a small statistic revealing the influence Russia holds in this area. Putin's government officially made Crimea a battleground when they started sending in soldiers who took over airports and buildings in the area, which Ukraine deemed as an invasion. A referendum in Crimea was then held to analyze the separation from Ukraine. It was reported that more than 90% of the Crimean population voted to leave Ukraine, and Vladimir Putin, Russia's President, declared Crimea part of Russia.

Following this, Ukrainian politicians and international figures such as the European Union and the US began putting sanctions on Russia to demonstrate their disagreement with this referendum. NATO also condemned Russia's declaration and deemed it invalid due to Russia's previous forceful invasion of Crimea. Despite it appearing to be that the rest of Ukrainians wanted Crimea to remain part of Ukraine, several rebels in the country referred to as "Pro-Russian Separatists", took control of multiple government buildings in eastern Ukraine. These rebels were reportedly supported by Russian nationals with war experience. Nevertheless, Ukraine forces fought back, which resulted in a battle resulting in over 1000 deaths, including civilians.

In the same year, 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, flying over the Russia-Ukraine conflict zone was shot down by a Russian military missile. There were 298 deaths reported when this flight was "mistakenly shot down by rebels." Despite these statements, the EU believed a Russian military missile was the one that hit the MH17 flight and therefore hit the nation with even more sanctions than before. Another reason for the EU and US sanctions on Russia is the fact that the Russian government repeatedly denied any sort of invasion and sending of troops or weapons across the Ukrainian border, yet there were multiple pieces of evidence like videos and witnesses who claimed the contrary.

To this day, Crimea remains a part of Russia. The recent Russian elections in March of 2018

coincided with the 4 year anniversary of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, something many people did not believe to be a coincidence. After this annexation was put in place, it was also stated that anyone who questioned Russian control in the peninsula can face up to 5 years of incarceration. In the year 2018, some sanctions against Russia have been lifted, others have not, nevertheless, Ukraine is still pushing for sanctions to be imposed on Russia and the Ukrainian President claims this is the only way to change Vladimir Putin's behaviour and allow Ukraine to restore possession of Crimea, which they still claim to be their own.

Definition of Key Terms

Annexation

Annexation is the act of appending or adding something as an extra part, especially a territory. The term tends to be utilized when a country forcefully takes control of a territory. In this case, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, taking it from Ukraine and making it their own territory.

Battleground

A battleground is a place or piece of ground in which conflict takes place or battles are fought.

Rebel Forces

A group of people who refuse allegiance to the ruler of their country. These people refuse authority, control, and tradition from others imposed on them.

Buffer Zone

A neutral area that separates two nation's hostile forces while at war. Buffer zones in Ukraine and Russia are setup to protect civilians against the violence they face from the Crimean conflict.

Conflict Zone

An area or space in a nation in which there is extreme violence and rights of neutrals are not

respected

General Overview

Ever since the beginning of this conflict, a lot of controversies have come up regarding who is in the right and what is the correct way to approach the issue. Many believe that Ukraine is completely in the right, which is what most UN resolutions to date demonstrate. On the other hand, about 10 members of the UN have made public statements about recognizing Crimea as a part of Russia. Russia's position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council has made it tough for the committee to pass any resolutions on the topic as Russia has exercised its veto power when the resolution presented does not favor their views completely.

Major Roadblocks

The main goal of the United Nations in this issue, similarly to others, is to find a solution that promotes peace, the safety of all individuals, and follows international laws regarding sovereignty and country's rights. Of course, this is easier said than done. The UN has been attempting to pass resolutions that do not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea. Only recently did they pass a resolution in which they consider Russia an "occupying power" in Crimea. It has been tough to find a solution to the problem because there are several roadblocks which are impeding nations to fix it.

First off, Russia is refusing to cooperate with the resolutions passed by the UN; they still claim that Crimea is part of Russia because of the referendum, even though the UN and a majority of nations consider this Crimean Referendum invalid. One of the bigger roadblocks in finding a solution for this topic is the Pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. Not only Crimea but a number of cities in eastern Ukraine near the Russian border are also filled with these Pro-Russian separatists. In these cities, a majority of citizens speak Russian fluently and many are nationalistic towards Russia, considering themselves more Russian than Ukrainian. This is a major problem for finding solutions to this conflict because even though Ukraine is fighting to maintain Crimea, it is observed that a lot of its citizens might be in favor of joining Russia and do not cooperate with the Ukrainian government. This would mean that if Crimea would be in

Ukrainian control, a majority of citizens might feel uncomfortable and this would lead them to rebel and cause even greater problems in the nation of Ukraine. Nevertheless, this might not be the majority of people since it is speculated that the Referendum held in Crimea is not reliable.

Sanctions on Russia

Since the start of this conflict, Ukraine has constantly called for other nations to impose sanctions on Russia for them to start cooperating with Ukraine in regards to Crimea. Russia has been hit with countless sanctions from the US and the European Union from 2014 to this day, yet they still refuse to cooperate with the sanction-imposing nations. The United Nations has voted several times to extend these sanctions in 6 month periods, and everytime the sanctions expire, a new vote is held where they are put back in place because of Russia's failure to cooperate. The most recent example was in July of 2018 when the UN voted to extend these sanctions to February 2019.

Despite the sanctions still being in place and Russia refusing to give Ukraine specifically what they want, which is control of the Crimean Peninsula, Ukraine claims that these sanctions have been highly effective towards helping them in this crisis. These sanctions consist of not only placing tariffs on the Russian government but also on Russian businesses, which has lead to the Russian economy taking a massive hit. They reported that Russia has been obligated to change the way they approach their military interventions. These sanctions do not only affect the Russian nation but also individuals who own businesses in the area regarding exports and imports in Russia and in the Crimea region.

Ukraine has stated that by any means it will not lift the sanctions on Russia until they fulfill the Minsk II agreements, which consist of ceasefires and the pullout of heavy weapons and machinery from both sides in conflicted areas. These agreements were held during a summit in which the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany spoke about resolving an issue in the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, specifically in the Donbass region which is part of Ukraine suffering from acts of the previously mentioned rebels.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Russia

Regarded as the nation that initiated the conflict. Up to the year 2014, Crimea was considered to be part of Ukraine. Russia invaded and held Crimea and regarded it as their own. A referendum was later held in which crimeans voted to leave Ukraine and become part of Russia. The legitimacy of this referendum is controversial because many consider it to be a “referendum held at gunpoint”. Nevertheless, it is factual that a large majority of people who live in Crimea speak Russian and consider themselves Russian citizens. Russia is also one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council. This means it holds veto power which is one of the biggest reasons that the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is stalled, if there is any resolution that doesn't favor Russia, it is vetoed.

Ukraine

Despite Crimea's vote to leave Ukraine and join Russia, Ukraine considers this invalid and still regards Crimea as their own. They have urged other countries to sanction Russia and are extremely passionate about regaining control of the disputed land. They have received support from the EU and the US in sanctioning Russia but nevertheless, Crimea remains in Russian control.

United States

The United States is a strong supporter of Ukraine in this issue. It has accused Russia numerous times of unrighteously invading Ukrainian land and holding Crimea forcefully and illegally. The US has imposed several sanctions on the Kremlin in Russia since 2014 and it has been presumed that the United States' end goal is to turn Russia into a Pariah State, also known as a state regarded as an outcast in the globe.

European Union

The European Union holds a stance similar to that of the United States. It has publicly

condemned Russia's actions in Crimea and imposed sanctions upon it for these reasons. Russia's actions regarding Crimea go strictly against the renowned EU policies about international law and respecting the right of any sovereign country.

Timeline

Date	Description of event
May 11, 2014	Pro-Russian separatists declare independence in the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk after claiming that their referendum attempts were unrecognized by the government.
May 25, 2014	The Ukrainian people elect a new president, Petro Poroshenko, in an election that supposedly was not held as much in eastern pro-Russian cities.
June 14, 2014	Pro-Russian Separatists in the east shoot down a military plane flying over their airspace, resulting in the death of 49 people.
July 17, 2014	Flight MH17 from Malaysian Airlines is shot down near a Pro-Russian rebel controlled area, leading to the death of 298 people.
July 30, 2014	The European Union and the US announce new sanctions against Russia.
August 22, 2014	Russian convoy delivers humanitarian aid to the rebel-controlled city of Luhansk without the Ukrainian government's permission.
October 31, 2014	Russia agrees to continue delivering gas to Ukraine after making a deal with the European Union.
November 12, 2014	NATO Commander says Russian troops have been seen entering Ukraine in

columns for several days.

- February 10, 2015 A preliminary ceasefire agreement is reached between Ukraine and the Pro-Russian Rebels in eastern Ukraine.
- February 19, 2015 Ukrainian President Poroshenko calls for the UN peacekeepers to overlook the fighting and ceasefires in eastern Ukraine.
- March 19, 2015 Ukrainian Prime Minister urges European nations to continue to pressure Russia with the sanctions that are being imposed.
- April 18, 2015 Putin calls out Israel on the sale of weapons to Ukraine and stated that doing this will “cause more harm than good” and therefore Israel should rethink their actions.
- April 24, 2015 Russia is shown to be increasing the amount of troops present in the Russia-Ukraine border.
- April 26, 2015 Putin claims the act of annexation of Crimea was “an act of historical justice”, and that he has “no regrets” in Russia’s actions on the topic.
- June 19, 2015 Putin claims that the Ukraine Crisis has the US to blame and that they are interfering with internal political processes of a nation.
- September 13, 2015 Russia claims that a deal with Ukraine on removing the heavy weaponry from Ukraine is very close and is estimated to be around 90% complete.
- October 23, 2015 Russia and Ukraine close their national airspace from each other, affecting several commercial flight passengers.

- December 14, 2015 EU further extends sanctions on Russia.
- February 6, 2016 More ceasefire violations reported in Eastern Ukraine as an attack is seen in the city of Donetsk.
- May 30, 2016 Military reports an increase in fights along eastern Ukraine against the Pro-Russian separatists.
- June 21, 2016 The EU has once again agreed to extend sanctions on Russia for an additional 6 months until January 2017.
- December 1, 2016 Ukraine conducts missile tests near Crimea, worrying Russian officials on the reasons behind these tests.
- December 15, 2016 The EU votes to extend sanctions on Russia for an additional 6 months.
- January 31, 2017 A surge in violence continues in Eastern Ukraine in what seems like a conflict that will not be dying down anytime soon.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations has addressed this issue several times and has passed resolutions on the topic, mostly in support of Ukraine and their sovereign rights, and trying to address the human rights in Crimea. In general, these solutions consist of evacuation of troops from the area and attempting to create ceasefires.

- On March 27th of 2014, The United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution of **(A/RES/68/262)**, which was titled "Territorial integrity of Ukraine". This was the first

resolution regarding the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia and was highly sided towards Ukraine. It also stated that the Crimean Referendum was invalid.

- Before the adoption of resolution 68/262, the UN Security Council had taken part in several unsuccessful attempts to adopt draft resolution (S/2014/189). The resolution was sponsored by 42 countries but was then not adopted due to a veto by Russia.
- In December of 2016, the UN adopted a second resolution on the crisis in Crimea (A/RES/71/205), which was titled “Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)”. This resolution recognized Russia as an “occupying power” in Ukraine. It also called for an end to the illegal imprisonment of Ukrainians and for Russia to stop imposing its justice system on Crimea. Furthermore, it addresses the discrimination against a Turkish ethnic group in Crimea referred to as Crimean Tatars.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

After analyzing the previously stated resolutions on the crisis in Ukraine and the dispute between Ukraine and Russia over the Crimean peninsula, we can learn a lot about the rest of the world's stance on the issue. Firstly, most countries are in support of Ukraine's sovereign rights and as a result, we can see they insist Russia evacuate the Crimean peninsula and return the land to Ukraine. One would expect this to mean that Ukraine will have no problems regaining control of Crimea. Nevertheless, Russia's status as a P5 member of the UN Security Council allows it to be basically invulnerable as it can utilize its veto power when a resolution doesn't meet their needs. It is important to state that it is clear that Russia is insistent on maintaining control of Crimea and does not plan on returning the territory to Ukraine anytime soon. We can see this as an example in the draft of resolution (S/2014/189) in the Security Council in which a lot of nations sponsored the resolution but Russia imposed its veto power.

The rest of the resolutions are all along the same lines. Most of them want Russia to give up the territory they took over of the Ukrainian peninsula and to return rights to the Ukrainians

that they imprisoned. Russia, nevertheless, is refusing to do this. Several of the agreements to ceasefire has been broken in the past as well. Given this information, it can be clearly observed that UN resolutions up to now have not been successful. They appear to be favoring only Ukraine's side on the issue and therefore Russia is not willing to cooperate. In order for change to be made and justice to be served to both sides, the UN must change its approach to the issue seeing as clearly, with what they are doing now, Russia will not cooperate, even more so since they have veto power in the Security Council. Nevertheless, the UN is persistent in their approach to the issue even though it might not be effective, or so it seems not be as of now. The UN must find a way to work with both sides of the issue in a balanced manner that benefits both parties in order to find a way that will help Russia become more willing to cooperate.

Possible Solutions

As noticed in the evaluation of previous attempts to resolve it, this issue is highly controversial and therefore finding a solution is a challenging task. Despite this, it is still possible to find a solution to the problem. Initially, it would have to be acknowledged that a ceasefire might not be possible unless there are incentives for Russia and its military to suspend operations. Offering the Russian government specific advantages or trade deals that they did not have before in exchange for a ceasefire could possibly be the first step towards finding a solution to this problem.

Another possibility that could be taken into account as a solution would be involving UN Peacekeepers in areas of Crimea once a new ceasefire is agreed to, therefore pushing in an extra attempt to stop the breaking of agreement from Russia. An interesting aspect to analyze would be to see if Russia's intervention in Crimea was truly wrong since it is reported most people that live in Crimea agree with the annexation and consider themselves Russian. With this in mind, another solution could be finding a way to compensate Ukraine for their loss, but help them come to an agreement that will benefit them.

Additionally, since the UN and most countries around the world consider the referendum held in Crimea to be "invalid", having another referendum with UN supervision to assure the honesty

of the vote would be a viable idea. In this way, nations can make sure Crimean citizens are truly making the decision they want, whether that be joining Russia or remain with Ukraine. Nevertheless, it is agreed that the first and foremost concern is to stop the violence in the areas being affected by this crisis and get justice for the people in the area who have had their human rights violated.

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Appendix

- A great video to understand the conflict as a whole

<http://www.un.org/en/events/environmentconflictday/>

- A great read to understand the historical context of the issue.

[https://www.vox.com/cards/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know/so-should-crimea-be-p
art-of-russia-or-ukraine](https://www.vox.com/cards/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know/so-should-crimea-be-part-of-russia-or-ukraine)

- A nice article to see more perspectives and specific cases on the issue

[https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/17/ukraine-sues-russia-crimea-annexation-on-
going-war/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/17/ukraine-sues-russia-crimea-annexation-on-going-war/)

- A short summary on the different events that have lead up to this conflict

<https://www.thebalance.com/ukraine-crisis-summary-and-explanation-3970462>

