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Disarmament and International Security (DISEC)



Topic 3: Strengthening International Security in light of the Annexation of Crimea



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# Introduction

The illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 has built up longstanding tensions between Russia and the West, and as of 17th December 2021 remains a volatile and unstable situation. As Russia continues to amass a military offensive at the border of Ukraine, the attempts to diffuse the situation continue, in order to strengthen international security.

# Definitions of Key Terms

**Annexation**: a formal act whereby a state proclaims its sovereignty over territory hitherto outside its domain. Unlike cession, whereby territory is given or sold through treaty annexation is a unilateral act made effective by actual possession and legitimized by general recognition.[[1]](#footnote-0)

**Autonomous:** having the right or power of self-government [[2]](#footnote-1)

**Sovereignty:** supreme power especially over a political body, freedom from external control, autonomy [[3]](#footnote-2)

**Destabilisation:** the action of making a government, area, or political group lose power or control

**Federal State:** is a political entity characterized by a union of partially self-governing provinces, states, or other regions under a central federal government[[4]](#footnote-3)

# Background Information

The Annexation of the autonomous Crimean Peninsula is part of the larger Russo-Ukrainian War, the ongoing and protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine gained their independence from the Russian Federation, with Russian social and cultural influences still prominent. Ukraine was an extremely valuable Soviet republic, with cultural, economic, and historical ties running deep. Since Ukraine borders both the EU and Russia, Ukraine began to align itself with European Institutions shortly after its independence. The Russian Federation has the intention of restabilising Russian influence in the former soviet state.

In 2014, the Maidan revolution occurred with the Ukrainian protesters driving out the Pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych. This event was a turning point for the Ukrainian government, with a new pro-western government with the aim of building ties with the west signified by signing an association agreement with the EU. Vladimir Putin saw this event as a coup orchestrated by American with the purpose of driving Ukraine from Russia. On 27th February 2014 2,000 Russian troops entered the Crimean Peninsula, with no identifying insignia and occupied checkpoints and key facilities. Here they took over the entire peninsula, unbothered by the Ukrainian military who did not engage.[[5]](#footnote-4) Additionally, the military seizure of eastern Ukraine has claimed more than 14,000 Ukrainian lives, despite the fact that Crimea’s annexation was not achieved through gunfire.

The Crimean Supreme Council shortly after scheduled a referendum, deciding whether to surrender their sovereignty to the Russian Federation. This vote was heavily influenced by an unsafe voting environment, Russian gunmen threatening voters, and According to the Human Rights council there was a 30% voting turnout, in comparison to the 83% Russia originally stated.[[6]](#footnote-5) The vote did not involve any international observers and was deemed illegal. However, the referendum supported the joining of Russia and the Treaty of Accession of the Republic of Crimea to Russia was signed on March 18, 2014. The idea that the Crimea’s population voluntarily acceded to Russia overlooks Crimea’s multiethnic minorities, and the dynamic political situation Russia created. Ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars account for a significant percent of the population, not represented in the heavily biased vote. This period from February 27th to March 18th signalled the illegal Annexation of Crimea to Russia. [[7]](#footnote-6)

In March 2021, the president of Ukraine adopted more aggressive anti-Russian policies, discussing the idea of joining NATO and other western military alliances. This solid alliance with the west, ‘crossed Russia’s red lines’ according to Putin, resulting in the current reaction.[[8]](#footnote-7) According to US intelligence, more than 100,000 Russian troops gathered on the border of Ukraine. These military movements, according to experts, seem to be the preparation of large-scale military action. The threat of a military offensive is imminent and should be considered a destabilising force for all of Europe. This goal may just be a pressure to diplomacy, to make an agreement with the US to pledge to keep Ukraine out of NATO and keep western military out of Ukraine. [[9]](#footnote-8)

# Major Countries and Organisations Involved

**Russia**

Vladimir Putin believes that Ukraine is being pulled from him by western (US) forces and the claim to Ukraine is both legitimate and the will of the Ukrainian people, which polling has consistently proven otherwise. Analysts state that Russia’s main fear with Ukraine is them joining NATO. Since Ukraine is a direct threat, sharing a border with a NATO allied country would be very dangerous.[[10]](#footnote-9)

**United States**

The Cold-war, and historical tensions between Russia and the United states remain a strong influence on both NATO and Ukraine. Biden has communicated that unless national security is directly threatened, the United States will not dispatch soldiers in Ukraine’s defence. However, sanctions have been threatened against Russia, if they were to go ahead with a full-fledged attack.[[11]](#footnote-10)

**NATO**

Ukraine is not a member of the NATO alliance and although some support has been given to them in light of the annexation, NATO has made it clear they will not come to Ukraine’s defence if a war were to break out.[[12]](#footnote-11)

**European Union**

“The EU does not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation and continues to condemn this violation of international law”.[[13]](#footnote-12) In support of this notion, an enormous number of sanctions were imposed on the import of Russian goods to the EU and EU goods to Russia. However to not much avail since Russia’s economy has been made mostly self-sufficient and the diversification of trade deals with China their economy has not been overwhelmingly affected by sanctions. However ties with the EU run deeper than that, with European countries having a heavy reliance on Russian oil, with many pipelines going through Ukraine. Supplies of oil from Russia, Norway and Algeria account for 80% of EU supply.[[14]](#footnote-13)

# Relevant UN Resolutions

On 27th March 2014 following the illegal annexation of Crimea the non-binding United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262 was adopted with the support of 100 nations. The resolution titled, “*Territorial integrity of Ukraine*” called upon, ‘member states, international organizations and specialized agencies not to recognize any change in the status of Crimea or the Black Sea port city of Sevastopol, and to refrain from actions or dealings that might be interpreted as such’.[[15]](#footnote-14)

While many resolutions on the issue of the annexation and consequent destabilisation of Ukraine have been adopted, the following are relevant follow-ups to the initial resolution 68/262.

The resolutions 73/194 of 17 December 2018 and 74/17 of 9 December 2019 on the problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Further, the resolutions 71/205 of 19 December 2016, 72/190 of 19 December 2017, 73/263 of 22 December 2018 and 74/168 of 18 December 2019 on the situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine.[[16]](#footnote-15)

Additionally, the resolutions consistently recalled resolution 3314 (XXIX) and 2625 (XXV). Whereby resolution 3314 (XXIX) of 14 December 1974, in the annex to which it was stated, inter alia, that no territorial acquisition or special advantage resulting from aggression is or shall be recognized as lawful. Additionally, resolution 2625 (XXV) of 24 October 1970, in which it approved the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and the principles contained therein.[[17]](#footnote-16)

One of the most relevant resolutions was the 2018 resolution [A/RES/73/194](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1661591?ln=en) titled,

”*Problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov*”. Which, in short, urged the Russian Federation to ’completely and unconditionally withdraw its military forced from Crimea’ as well as, ’Reiterates its grave concern over the progressive militarization of Crimea … and expresses concern over the continuing destabilization of Crimea owing to transfers by the Russian Federation of advanced weapon systems, including nuclear-capable aircraft’.[[18]](#footnote-17)

# Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

While this issue is one of extreme importance, it is also one of great sensitivity, the reason for which direct action has not been taken as of December 2021. Many UN resolutions that were adopted have greatly urged Russia to demilitarise Ukraine and remove itself from Crimea however the UN cannot hold Russia to these demands. Sanctions against Russia, and applying economic pressure is the only direct path that has been taken to resolve this conflict. A more diplomatic approach was taken on the 7th of December, where Putin-Biden talks attempted to diffuse the gravity of military interference.[[19]](#footnote-18) However, since the escalation of this issue is so recent, attempts to solve this issue are occurring right now.

# Possible Solutions

After the illegal annexation, even if UN resolutions apply and Russia withdraws its military and political influence from Crimea, Ukraine does not have a sovereignty power to govern the state again.[[20]](#footnote-19) However, rather than debating territory, the most important purpose at the current moment is stabilising the region by demilitarising Russian forces to prevent the possibility of war. The threat is imminent and given Ukraine’s involvement in the West it is likely if war broke out. In line with the resolution, some possible options are stabilising, by diffusing the threat or counter striking by strengthening military support in Ukraine. Should another, internationally observed and uninfluenced, referendum be orchestrated to reflect the wishes of the Ukrainian people? In this way, independent states could be formed once again, this time far more loyal to Russia after it’s inhabitancy. Would Russia forming a Federal State in Ukraine stabilise relations or further agitate minorities protesting for the removal of Russian influence. ‘A looser, federalized structure, some Russian officials have argued, can give each region the power to choose resolutions to such issues for itself, expediting legislation affecting local populaces and helping to preserve the rights of Ukraine’s many minorities.’[[21]](#footnote-20)

How should the UN go about stabilising the situation, preventing war and respecting the wishes of the inhabitants of both Crimea and Ukraine?

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1. (Duignan, 2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. (Duignan, 2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. (Duignan, 2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. (Ramson, 2004) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. (The White House, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. (Pifer, 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. (Pifer, 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. (Kirby, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. (Kirby, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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11. (The White House, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. (Kirby, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. (Council of the European Union, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. (Shiryaevskaya & Mazneva, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. (UN, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. (UN General Assembly, 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. (UN General Assembly, 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. (UN General Assembly, 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. (Marcus, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. (Kaspe, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. (Wilson, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)