

Centennial MiniMUN: UNSC Background guide

Topic: Russian Annexation of the Crimean Peninsula

Description of Committee

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six main organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security. Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states. The Security Council held its first session on 17 January 1946.

The Security Council consists of fifteen members. The great powers that were the victors of World War II— Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States — along with France and China, serve as the body's five permanent members. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General. The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body's presidency rotates monthly between its members. Security Council resolutions are typically enforced by UN peacekeepers, military forces voluntarily provided by member states and funded independently of the main UN budget. As of 2013, 116,837 peacekeeping soldiers and other personnel are deployed on 15 missions around the world.

Introduction

Crimea is a peninsula located in the southern region of Ukraine, narrowly separated from the Russian Federation by the Kerch Strait. While the area has a Russian-speaking majority among its population, the territory is officially part of Ukraine. In 2014, this small peninsula became the focal point of the worst East and West confrontation since the Cold War.

Crimea was a part of the Russian Federation until 1954, when it was transferred to Ukraine under the administration of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. While Crimea is home to a majority ethnically-Russian and Russian-speaking population, it still houses significant Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar minorities, who often clash with the Russian majority. Many of those with Russian roots claim allegiance to the Russian Federation, and frequently oppose rulings by the official Ukrainian government in favor of Russian policies and practices. In addition to this majority among the civilian population, Russia also maintains a significant military presence in the region. The port city of Sevastopol, in particular, has housed the Russian Federation's Black Sea naval fleet since the height of the Soviet Union, allowing for Russian troops to stay in the Crimean region side by side with the Ukrainian navy. This friction, both internally among the civilian population and between the Russian and Ukrainian governments, has led to significant strife among the region and has made room for the Russian federation to attempt to exert both military and political control over the peninsula.

Russian Involvement

In February of 2014, unmarked professional soldiers began seizing territory on the Crimean Peninsula. These “little green men”, a term coined by Ukrainians, carried Russian weapons and wore Russian combat fatigues, but wore no other official identifying markers. By early March, these soldiers had gained control of the entire peninsula. On March 16, Crimean officials proposed a referendum, in which voters were given two options: either vote to join the Russian Federation, or restore Crimea’s 1992 constitution, which would have burned almost all ties the region had with Kyiv and the Ukrainian government. Reported results from this vote expressed overwhelming support for joining Russia, with 97 percent of voters voting to join Russia and an overall 83 percent voter turnout.

Russian Annexation

This referendum was not only illegal under Ukrainian law, but also held under strict Russian observation, with polling places monitored by armed guards, no credible international observers, and reports from Russian journalists that they were allowed to vote. A report later revealed that the turnout for the referendum was only 30 percent, and that only half of those voters had voted to join Russia. Using only the reported results as justification, Crimean and Russian officials signed a treaty of accession on March 18, signing the peninsula into Russian control.

Since Crimea’s annexation, the United Nations attempted in several instances to side with Ukrainian sovereignty. While a similar United Nations Security Council declaration was vetoed by Russia, the United Nations General Assembly voted with an overwhelming majority to affirm Ukraine’s territorial integrity and rule the Crimean referendum invalid. However, despite this ruling, Russia still maintains a significant military and political presence in the region, and dissent among the region still festers and grows.

Current Situation

In Crimea, the region finds itself at a standstill, caught halfway between Russian and Ukrainian control and a key player in a much larger battle between Eastern and Western powers. Russia launched a proxy conflict in Donbas, another disputed Eastern European territory technically belonging to Ukraine, which has escalated into a violent clash between Russian, Ukrainian, and separatist forces. This conflict led to severe economic and visa sanctions on Russia from both the United States and the European Union, but no outside military forces have been introduced. However, this focus on finding a resolution to Donbas has left Crimea in political limbo. While the United Nations still maintains its affirmation of Ukrainian territorial integrity, Russian forces are in full control of the region. This lack of focus on the region from Kyiv, Moscow, and their respective allies has not only led to an increasingly stagnant regional economy, but also ignited a resistance movement among civilians.

While the ethnically Russian majority still largely seems to be in support of Russian control, many Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars in the region have increasingly expressed support for separation from Russian control. While the majority of the resistance seems based in civilian protests and demonstrations, the uncertainty in the region has also made room for more extremist

forces to take root. One such movement, the Azov Battalion, finds its home among alt-right groups and is assigned a neo-Nazi label, and has now become an official regiment of Ukraine's National Guard. This group, among others, prides itself on vigilante-style aggression and street violence and has even established its own political party that is gaining traction in the region. The presence, and growing popularity, of such forces in the region places pressure on the Ukrainian government and international powers to find a solution to the instability, at the risk of the region falling completely into violent disarray

Guiding Questions

How can the UN avoid escalating the conflict without ignoring Ukrainian territory claims?

Can the situation be rectified without international military intervention?

Would peacekeepers serve to help or exacerbate the situation? Carefully consider the effects of employing peacekeepers.

How can the UN protect Crimean civilians from physical harm?

Would a fair referendum in Crimea be possible, legal, or necessary?

What effect do different nations' and blocs' viewpoints have on the outcome?