



The Sovereignty of the Crimean Peninsula



The Crimean Peninsula has been contested for between Russia and many other countries such as the Ottoman Empire and most recently, in 2014, the Russian Federation annexed the Crimean Peninsula. Before the fall of the USSR, Crimea had been Russian along with Ukraine, but on the 24th of August 1991, Ukraine declared independence and the Crimean Peninsula was officially Ukrainian. The peninsula has been and continues to stay an important area of land allowing Ukraine further access to the Black Sea. However, Ukraine is in a situation of ethnic divide causing instability in the government's control. On the Eastern side, the population is Russian to a large majority as Russian people were moved there during the 1920s to harvest the rich agricultural lands there. The Western side is predominantly of Ukrainian ethnicity. During 2014, this ethnic divide caused the Russian funded rebel attacks, which has escalated to a full war with Ukraine's state-funded forces in the region. The annexation of Crimea was undoubtedly Putin's attempt to protect Russian people from far-right wing attacks on President Yanukovich that overthrew his political status. The turmoil began after the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014, and that sparked the rebels to advance west into Ukraine. Rebels captured many areas including the Donetsk International Airport. Clearly, the divide in the ethnic groups in Ukraine is one of the reasons Russian backed rebel attacked in Ukraine. This is also a reason that Russian President Vladimir Putin used for the annexation.

Since then, tensions have been building between the two forces stationed on each side of the de facto border. There have been light skirmishes which have result in more troops being placed on either side of the border. On the 7th of August 2016, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated that in a night clash between Ukrainian 'saboteurs' and Russian border forces, two Russians - a soldier and a federal agent - were killed by explosive terror-based attacks. However, in Kiev, the Ukrainian President state that the accusations were preposterous, and some officials even stated that the incident was due to the alcoholic intoxication of the Russian troops. Many politicians in Ukraine believe that this is the pre-context of something much more serious. Russian military exercises have aggravated the situation at the de facto border. Military exercises on the Crimean Peninsula, happening since 2016, including the S-400 air defence systems and ballistic missiles which oppose a threat to passing ships and neighbouring countries. In response, the Ukrainian Government put border troops on red alert since.

Ukraine has also received help from many countries such as the US and the UK who have sent units to Ukraine to train the forces and offer other assistance against Russian presence. The Pentagon released a \$200 million-dollar defence aid to Ukraine to help the Crimean situation and oppose Russian aggression, which Vladimir Putin has used a further reason for the annexation. But as a non-NATO member of the world, it's expected Ukraine would receive little support if a full Russian attack were to take place, which would allow Putin to grow in strength and look to other post-Soviet states to occupy much like Hitler's aggressive foreign policies during the 1930s. The situation in the Crimean Peninsula is somewhat dire with reservoirs used to supply the peninsula with water been shut off from the canals that feed them, which has plunged the area into havoc with a shortage of water, a basic need to humans. Furthermore, the time after the annexation saw the area deprived of power as the stations in Ukraine that powered the peninsula had been cut off. This clearly raises some

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issues of the basic living standards of the people in the area that are only just being tackled after the completion of the Kerch Strait Bridge.

Recently, the Russian Black Sea Fleet has made a series of aggressive actions in the region around the peninsula. The first one of these actions was the sinking of a decommissioned ship into one of the bays in Crimea, the Donuzlav Bay, to block the movement of ships into and out of the bay. This ship however was originally Russian and was towed into the bay. Many Ukrainian battleships were stationed there, and the Russian fleet scuttled the ship to stop this movement and prevent the Ukrainian battleships from fleeing, which further agitated the situation between the two countries and led to the Russian detainment of the Ukrainian sailors captured and an unfair trial saw these people sent to Siberian Detention Centres.

In conclusion, the sovereignty of the Crimean Peninsula has been under contention after the Russian annexation and, although the citizens there are for the Russian movement, there has been a clear breach of not only international laws but the sovereignty of Ukraine. This, therefore, creates other issues that need to be solved such as rebel actions and bringing lasting peace to this 5-year long proxy war.

Points to Consider:

- How will the UN aim to tackle the issue of maintaining peace in the area? Will a peace-keeping body be set up to do this?
- Will sanctions be placed on either side to condemn the aggressive actions of either side? Or will troops be ordered away from the de facto border and a peace treaty be signed?
- Will the peninsula even remain Russian or will there be an immediate recollection of Crimea by Ukraine supported by the UN?

Useful links:

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-25182123>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFILN9E2kcY>