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Crisis in Crimea: A Case Study in Geopolitics

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Fall 2019

International Studies and Multilateral Diplomacy  
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## **Abstract**

This research project conducts an analysis of the current situation in Crimea and attempts to contribute to the literature around a possible solution. Done so with the help of geopolitical analysis, the history of the region of Crimea is examined in-depth in an attempt to shed light on strategies for a resolution and provide background information. Geopolitical analysis as a form of study is then briefly explained and its relevancy for looking at global events and predicting outcomes explained. Next, three possible strategies for a solution are then presented and their viability analyzed through a geopolitical lens. These three strategies are: unilateral pressure and sanctions, multilateral incorporation, and a shared sovereignty approach. This project concludes by arguing that the best way to proceed towards a solution in Crimea is through a synthesis of all three strategies, with an emphasis on multilateral incorporation.

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## Table of Contents

<i>Title Page</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<i>Abstract</i> .....	<i>2</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>3</i>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	<i>5</i>
<i>Literature Review</i> .....	<i>7</i>
<i>Research Methodology</i> .....	<i>8</i>
<i>Analysis</i>	
<i>Section I</i> .....	<i>9</i>
<i>Section II</i> .....	<i>19</i>
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	<i>27</i>
<i>References</i> .....	<i>29</i>
<i>Abbreviation List</i> .....	<i>31</i>
<i>Work Journal</i> .....	<i>32</i>
<i>Interactive Log</i> .....	<i>35</i>
<i>Interview Summaries</i> .....	<i>36</i>

## **Introduction**

The 2014 Annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation is one of the most important events in modern international relations. Not just for the international precedents and laws that it broke, but for the ways in which it unfolded. As a zone that is claimed in right by both Ukraine and Russia, while physically claimed solely by Russia, Crimea serves as an extremely interesting case study to analyze for potential solutions. The importance of a resolution in this case is seen in the truly international response to the conflict in the region, and because of Russia's position on the world stage. As the global political landscape continues to shift from unipolar to multipolar, and from west to east, the position of a vital military power like Russia will be crucial. The stability of both the domestic region of Crimea as well as the international arena is greatly influenced by Russia, so it is necessary for the sake of peace and stability that relations with global powers are good. Currently, the situation in Crimea has caused international outcry, which underscores the importance of a solution being worked towards soon. While it may not be that simple, these ideas beg the question: how can the contestation of Crimea be solved in the most stable and peaceful way possible?

In order to provide an informed view of potential solutions, this study first examines the history of Russian-Ukrainian relations and how it eventually led to the 2014 annexation. This historical background is extremely vital when looking at the modern perceptions of Russia and Ukraine by their own citizens as well as how they view one another. If one wants to propose a resolution, these perceptions must be taken into consideration. On a similar note, this project attempts to explain actions of various actors using the tools of geopolitics. Geopolitics is a form of study that looks at political events

in a broader way by evaluating the importance of factors such as geography, economics, history, and others that are often forgot about in monocausal academic theories. Viewing the case of Crimea in this way can provide a much more holistic view of the issue, which in turn helps inform a possible solution. This study then examines three key proposed resolution strategies: unilateral action, multilateral incorporation, and shared sovereignty. After illustrating positive and negative aspects of each, this project concludes by arguing that the best route towards a solution is a synthesis of all three, but with an emphasis on multilateral incorporation. Based on the tools of geopolitical analysis, this is the most realistic strategy for a resolution in Crimea and would lead to the most peace and stability. The expected outcome of this study is to provide the reader with a more in-depth understanding of contemporary Russian-Ukrainian relations through the lens of Crimea, and to contribute to the dialogue surrounding how this contestation will be resolved.

## Literature Review

Much of the English language literature surrounding Crimea, Russian-Ukrainian relations, and Russian foreign policy is highly critical of Russia. This makes sense as the west, namely the United States, has historically been hostile towards Russia. The correctness of those with this view can be debated about at length, but a single perspective is not beneficial for the sake of quality research. To attempt to balance the western bias against Russia, this study sought out Russian and eastern European authors who would have a different perspective. This helped to an extent, but overall the most important aspect for diversity of opinion was finding sources with differing viewpoints, regardless of the nationality of the author.

Overall, the literature found for this study served to illustrate the most popular sentiments about how Crimea could be solved. These made their way into the paper as the three ideas for a solution (unilateral, multilateral, and shared sovereignty). This served as an important guiding tool for understanding what a realistic solution to the conflict might look like. Along these lines, the sources highlighting specific international law were greatly important for learning about the legality of the annexation. In addition, the journals detailing the struggles of the Crimean Tatars and Ukraine's idea of nationalism were vital for understanding many of the underlying geopolitical issues that caused tensions and led up to the annexation.

## **Research Methodology**

The research for this study was conducted mainly through a synthesis of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consisted of 5 in-person interviews with various experts on the topic throughout Europe. These experts ranged from employees at think tanks and government institutions to tenured professors at universities. The only thing that tied them together was their experience on the topic at hand, and they served to provide a wide array of perspectives that were crucial for my research. The backbone of the research for this paper was made up of scholarly and peer-reviewed journals. Topics varied from historical analyses, to arguments for a solution, to more objective recounts of an event. All of the sources cited and referenced played a part in the conclusions of this research.

The methods used to collect the data were mainly qualitative, with a few quantitative graphs from the sources being used to support arguments or shed light on an issue. For the topic of ethical considerations, the anonymity of interviewees was respected if they requested it. Also, care was taken to not include any information or quotes that jeopardize the job or safety of anyone involved, as many of the conflicts discussed in this paper are ongoing.

## **Analysis: Section I**

### **“Between Russia and the West”**

As a nation, Ukraine has always had a complicated identity. Only an independent state since 1991, Ukrainian history is filled with ethnic and nationalistic ambiguities fraught with intervention from their eastern neighbors. Knowledge of this complicated national identity is vital for understanding how Crimea and conflicts in eastern Ukraine can be solved, so it is first necessary to go back to the old history that led to the creation of modern Ukraine.

Tracing back to the origin of Ukraine, even its name is a great example of the confusing national identity of Ukrainians. It stems from the Russian word “okraina”, which means periphery as seen from Moscow, and appeared only for the first time near the end of the nineteenth century (Rykwin, 2014). Even this small linguistic etymology serves to show the complicated nature of Ukraine’s identity, and has influenced attitudes towards Russia since the nation’s inception. Another problem that exists at the heart of Ukrainian identity is the wildly varied history of the lands that belong to modern Ukraine. For example, Ukraine is made up of a multitude of different ethnic groups and peoples. The west of the country has Austro-Hungarian and Polish roots and is often regarded as the most nationalistic part of the country, “Russian is rarely spoken there” (Rykwin, 2014, pg. 120). The political capital of Ukraine, Kiev, is the historical capital of the Kievan Rus’ and vital to the nation’s self-identity. Another example of such a place is Crimea itself, which has historically been occupied by the Tatars, a Turkic ethnic group native to the surrounding area. The Tatars see themselves as the only people truly native to the region, and even the word for Crimea comes from the Tatar word “krym”, which

means rock fortress (Wydra, 2003). After being a protectorate of the Ottoman empire for a time, Crimea was conquered by Russia during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and existed as an autonomous republic of Crimean Tatars within Russia all the way into the time of the Soviet Union. It then stayed as part of Russia until Nikita Khrushchev offered the peninsula to Ukraine in 1954 as a token of appreciation for the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ukrainian union with Russia (Rykwin, 2014).

The complicated background of Crimea's ownership and Ukraine's identity has made the current situation all the more understandable. Their history of a wide variety of nations and peoples with vastly different cultures being amalgamated into one nation has led to an extremely complex sense of nationalism. This is felt all throughout Ukraine, but especially so in Crimea. Another crucial piece of the history of Crimea is the expulsion of the Crimean Tatars by Joseph Stalin. Deported en masse by Stalin, and suspected by him as German collaborators, the Crimean Tatars made up a sizable portion of the Ukrainian population. Not allowed to return to Crimea until 1956, the Tatars have been slowly attempting to reintegrate with the help of the Ukrainian government. In modern times Crimean Tatars make up only about 10% of the population of Crimea, with ethnic Ukrainians and Russians making up the rest (Chase, 1995). This abrupt loss of a major ethnic group in Crimea brought about by Stalin's policies has only further muddied the ethnic identity of the region and gives another interesting perspective to its modern dynamics. All of these factors in conjunction has caused Ukraine and Crimea to exist in a confusing state "between Russia and the West" (Rykwin, 2014) with its identity uncertain. With the foundations of the conception of Ukraine and Crimea addressed, it is

then important to shift to the crucial period that acts as a stepping stone from the ancient to the modern notions of Crimea: The Soviet era.

### **Soviet Relations & the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The Soviet era was an extremely important time for Crimea, and it underpins many of the policies and justifications given for the 2014 annexation of the region by Russia. In order to understand the contemporary period of Russian-Ukrainian relations, it is vital to learn about this period. The first important point to note is regarding the way in which Crimea and Ukraine existed within the Soviet Union. During this time, “designations of both borders and regional status within the former Soviet Union was largely arbitrary and, where it was not arbitrary, it was deliberately designed to dilute the power of local populations” (Chase, 1995, pg. 222). This sort of jumbling of ethnic and national identities into the Soviet sphere caused a confusion of identity in many countries in the eastern bloc, especially Ukraine. Also notable in this period was the briefly mentioned above rise of the Stalinist line of thinking, which led to the deportation of the indigenous Crimean Tatars from their homeland. This thinking was extremely pervasive during the time of the Soviet Union and has become very difficult to root out in the region even to this day.

Another important development during the Soviet period was Russia’s promotion of the *Russkii Mir*, or Russian World, in Ukraine. The goal of this investment was to provide “a group identity to Russian speakers and peoples who associate with Russian culture and language” (Kuzio, 2015, pg. 159). This promotion of Russian culture and identity was crucial to creating the divided ethnic and cultural climate that exists within modern Ukraine. In addition to this, other Russian policies during the Soviet period also

contributed to hostility between the nations. Most notably, the 1933 artificial famine in the Soviet Union which most Ukrainians view as a genocide and are extremely bitter towards (Kuzio, 2015). This is another example of one of the many policies that has led to hostilities from both countries and goes to show how the 2014 annexation was anything but a random fluke. Around this time period Ukraine was also briefly occupied by the Nazis beginning in 1941. During this time the Ukrainians were initially even friendly towards the Germans due to their distaste for Stalin's policies in the 20's and 30's (Rykwin, 2014). This showcases a tangible, historical example of the dissonance between Russia and Ukraine and how often this difference of opinion manifested itself politically.

This leads to the discussion of an oft-overlooked aspect of Ukraine's self-conception. Simply, the way in which the country won its independence. Having not ever been a country with a uniform identity that answered to no one, Ukraine as a nation was historically always subject to a greater power. Whether this was the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empire, or more recently with the Soviet Union, Ukraine has almost always existed as a subject state. When its independence was finally won in 1991, it happened not because of a violent revolution or overthrow of its masters like many countries which gained their independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But rather, it was thrust upon them due to "the deterioration of government infrastructure in Moscow and the sapping of the strength of the will to rule" (Rykwin, 2014, pg. 122), alongside the other factors such as gross mismanagement and economic failure that led to the Soviet Union's collapse. 'Winning' their independence in this way was very important to the national psyche of Ukraine. Instead of being a united front following their independence, Ukraine was a

muddled mix of ethnic and national identities due to its diverse history and had never truly ruled itself in the modern sense. These factors together left Ukraine and Crimea vulnerable to intervention in the post-Soviet era and provide a clearer image to how the lead-up to the 2014 annexation of Crimea happened.

### **Lead-up to the 2014 Annexation**

From the time of Ukraine's independence in 1991 to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a great number of crucial policies and actions took place. When taken with the background knowledge of the history of the region, they provide a holistic view of the crisis in Crimea and eastern Ukraine that can hopefully inform how to approach a solution.

The first example of such a development was the talk of retaking Crimea for Russia that began as early as the 1990's. Even though Ukraine had very recently gained its independence, conservative politicians in Russia were already ready to "argue for the forceful restoration of Crimea to Russian control" (Hopf, 2016, pg. 230). However, at the time, this was not the commonly held belief within Russia. Centrist discourse seemed to be prevailing for a time, riding on the pro-democratic wave felt throughout Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But, by the early 2000's this was already beginning to fade as Russian conservatism began to rise again. One of the catalysts that has been argued to be the reason for this was the United States' withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty (ABM) in 2001 and subsequent NATO expansion eastward. Marc Finaud, head of Arms Proliferation at the Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP), describes this treaty as "a means of deterring second-strike capability". Many viewed the signing of this treaty as a sign of future cooperation between the United States and Russia in the

post-Soviet era, and Finaud also argues that the withdrawal from this treaty contributed to the modern climate of mistrust that exists between the nations. Those with rose-colored glasses hoping for an extended union between Russia and the west soon realized that these factors “demonstrated that an alliance with the United States was impossible” and that “Russians who expected a sense of shared vulnerability were quickly disabused of this possibility” (Hopf, 2016, pg. 232). This was in line with the idea that NATO-Russia relations were built on the false premise that “Russia was on a path toward sharing and integrating Western values fundamental to the post–Cold War Alliance transformation” (François, 2012, pg. 5). It has been argued that these actions which caused Russia to feel spurned by the West were the main reason discourse in Russia shifted from the Centrist view of collaboration with the West to manage global affairs, to the Conservative view of working with powers like China to balance the United States and the West (Hopf, 2016). When seen from this perspective, Russia’s attempts to level the playing field and project influence begin to make more sense.

Another vital development that happened shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was attempts by the newly created Russian Federation to keep former Soviet countries in line with political and institutional tools. The backbone of this tactic was the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which was meant to check the power of foreign-policy decisions in the former Soviet states. This is best seen in Article One of the CIS Charter, which stated “participating states will not enter into military alliances or participate in any groupings of states, nor in actions directed against another participating state” (Götz, 2016, pg. 307). Tensions quickly rose as Ukraine only agreed to the deal after making a multitude of amendments and refusing to allow Russia basing

rights on the Crimean Peninsula. Russia would not budge, however, and by 1997 agreements were in place for Russia to lease a group of naval facilities on Crimea in return for Russia reducing Ukraine's crippling energy debt by roughly \$500 million USD (Götz, 2016). Although seen as a minor victory for Russia at the time, this was a massive step for their power projection in Crimea that would eventually pave the way for the ruthlessly efficient annexation of the peninsula in 2014.

As relations between Ukraine, Russia, and the West continued to evolve into the 2000's, so too did Russia's tactics for influencing the region. Using cutting-edge technological advancements, the bulk of these tactics were about Russia exerting soft power techniques in the region. Most notably, a digital disinformation campaign meant to sow discord and divide the people of Ukraine. Thinking such as this is in line with historical Russian tactics of 'plausible deniability' that seeks to not seem responsible for a usually illegal action and "where the result is to influence decision-making in a direction favourable or at least not harmful to the Kremlin" (Cormac & Aldrich, 2018, pg. 484). This was mainly used in the aftermath of the 2014 annexation in order to attempt to control the narrative (Golovchenko, et. al, 2018), but it was also seen in the lead up to the annexation. Dialogue in this manner goes back to the views of Russian ultranationalists in the 1990's, who attempted to argue that Ukraine has no right to even exist as a sovereign state (Kuße, 2018). Although admittedly an extreme example, it still goes to show how contentious and belittling the relationship between the two nations is. Something even as simple as the mere existence of the country of Ukraine is questioned by those in Russia and informs why so many there see it as a natural step to eventually retake Crimea.

Arguably the most important event that happened in region during this time was the Euromaidan protests of 2013, and it was truly then that things quickly spiraled into the situation that exists today. Briefly, although it could easily be multiple papers on its own, Euromaidan needs to be explained in order to understand contemporary ideas of nationalism and identity in Ukraine. In November of 2013, then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich announced Ukraine would not be signing an association agreement with the EU that had been negotiated for years and was seen as a steppingstone to full-fledged EU membership. This move was wildly unpopular with the people of Ukraine who desperately wanted closer ties with Europe rather than Russia, and it did not help public sentiment that the decision not to sign came with a \$15 billion loan from Russia (Biersack & O’Lear, 2014). Soon protests and demonstrations began to grow in Kiev around the popular square of Maidan and very quickly ramped up in size and intensity. This, along with the pro-EU sentiment of the protests led to the movement gaining its namesake (Diuk, 2014). What started as a protest of a few hundred and eventually thousands of students, became a nationwide movement after Yanukovich ordered the use of extreme force on protestors unlike anything the country had seen before. It is estimated that nearly 700,000 Ukrainians took to the streets on December 1<sup>st</sup> of that year, and by the end of February 2014 Yanukovich had fled the country and a new government had been installed. Spurned by the loss of a friendly government, Russia soon put the soft-power techniques on the back burner and began preparations for “setting events in motion that led to the annexation of Crimea” (Biersack & O’Lear, 2014, pg. 248). Tensions in the region had reached a boiling point, and it was now time for Russia act in the way they know best: military force.

## Annexation

Once preparations were made and action was taken, things began to move very quickly. Following the expulsion of President Yanukovich from Ukraine, pro-Russian demonstrations began in the Crimean city of Sevastopol on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. By the 27<sup>th</sup> of the same month, masked Russian troops with no insignia took over the Crimean parliament (Weaver, 2015), and began to take over strategic sites all over Crimea. This led to an eventual referendum of the Crimean people on March 16<sup>th</sup> simply asking the choice between 2 options: “Do you support the reunification of the Crimea with Russia as a subject of the Russian federation?” and “Do you support the restoration of the Constitution of the Republic of Crimea of 1992 and the status of the Crimea as part of Ukraine?” (Grant, 2015, pg. 68-69). However, a declaration of independence for Crimea was already adopted on March 11<sup>th</sup>. Following the referendum, the Russian Federation Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights posted an analysis on their website estimating between 50-60% in favor of the first option on the referendum, and that at least 30% but no more than 50% of eligible people voted (Grant, 2015). However, the official tally that was reported ended up saying 96.77% were in favor of the first option, and that 83% of eligible voters voted. There is a clear disconnect here, but in any case by this point Crimea was already clearly in Russia’s hands militarily. The “referendum” that was conducted contains many questions regarding its validity, but it is much more important as a tool for understanding how Russia attempted to justify its annexation of Crimea on the world stage.

Russia was able to take Crimea so quickly and successfully due to a plethora of reasons. Many of which can be seen when looking at the history of relations between

Russia and Ukraine, and the groundwork that was laid long ago. First, and arguably most importantly, was the military aspect. The 1997 deal that allowed Russia to have bases in Crimea gave them the advantage of already having an active military force in the region. This, coupled with the geography of Crimea being very far away from Ukraine's capital alongside their already weak military, allowed for Russia to take Crimea in an extremely quick and efficient manner with basically no resistance. The aspect of receiving little resistance is a result of the complicated ethnic identity of Crimea, which contains a large number of ethnic Russians. Also of note here is Crimea's former history as a Russian subject, and the neo-Stalinist policies of Russia in the 2000's that brought about nostalgia for these times among many people in Crimea. The sham referendum of March 2014 was not for Russia, but to attempt to provide some legal basis for the annexation to the West. Russia already controlled the region politically, militarily, and to a large extent, culturally. This, in tandem with all the rich history of the region mentioned above, shows why a purely legal approach to solving Crimea is "blind to many important (non-legal) aspects of a conflict" (Feldbrugge, 2014, pg. 96). For this reason, it is vital that when approaching suggestions for a solution in Crimea we take into account the history and non-conventional aspects that led to the crisis, which is best done by viewing it through a geopolitical lens.

## **Analysis: Section II**

### **A Geopolitical Lens**

In the modern, hyper-globalized world states with vastly different sets of values interact more than ever before. To be able to properly understand how and why states interact in the way that they do, and hopefully reach solutions to international crises, it is crucial to adopt a more holistic perspective. One field of study that is useful for this is Geopolitics. Geopolitics can be defined as “the examination of interactions between political processes and geographic spaces in which these processes take place” (Csurgai, 2019, pg. 4). Rather than being understood as a separate social science, geopolitics aims to incorporate various methods of analysis that exist within multiple fields of social science. These can include factors such as history, culture, economics, geography, human geography, and others. Whereas popular monocausal theories such as realism and Marxism view problems through the lens of generally one issue, in this case military strength and economics respectively, geopolitics aims to take a step back and view issues from a wider angle.

In order to attempt to solve a dispute with the rich history and contention of the crisis in Crimea, this type of geopolitical perspective is necessary. The reason for this is that it gives a more nuanced look at the goals of the actors involved. Another main aspect of geopolitics is its focus on understanding the ‘strategy of actors’ (Csurgai, 2019). By broadening one’s perspective to see the issue from a multitude of viewpoints, it can be much easier to begin to propose viable solutions. This is felt particularly in the case study of Crimea, where realistic solutions coupled with the requisite historical background are vital for moving towards a resolution.

In the following three subsections, three possible solutions will be presented for solving the situation in Crimea. Positive and negative aspects of each solution will be weighed, and their viability seen through a geopolitical lens. This section will serve to illuminate the varied possibilities for a resolution, and lead to a conclusion that suggests the best path forward.

### **Proposed Solution I: Unilateral Action**

The first possible resolution to the situation in Crimea would mean going down the current path that is being taken and at the same time doubling down on it as the only option. This path is one of unilateral pressure on Russia to cede Crimea back to Ukraine through international pressure, sanctions, and non-recognition of Crimea as Russian.. This tactic is currently the most popular, but its effectiveness for a peaceful solution in the long run is questionable.

The positive aspect of this strategy is sanctions without a doubt hurt Russia. It is argued by some that sanctions themselves are not enough, and while that can be debated at length, Dr. Karel Svoboda of Charles University in Prague notes that sanctions make things legitimately difficult for Russia, and that they have consequences. When asked how he sees the view that sanctions mean little to Russia, Dr. Svoboda says, “it’s nonsense”. This view has proven to be true, as history shows that sanctions are always extremely harmful for the GDP of the target country (Giumelli, 2017). This fact has led many scholars to argue that continued sanctions and unrelenting pressure on Russia are the best way to move forward towards a resolution. One of these scholars is Dr. Jan Šír, also of Charles University. Dr. Šír argues that unilateral sanctions towards Russia is the best policy, as well as the important factor of non-recognition. The policy of non-

recognition means that states refuse to recognize Crimea as belonging to the Russian Federation. This makes it very difficult for Russia to coordinate things in Crimea and allow people to live normally there because of the state of 'legal limbo' it is perpetually in. The logic behind this thinking is that with continued, unrelenting pressure through these mediums Russia will eventually have to relent and give up. However, it is naïve to think it will be this easy, so it is necessary to examine the drawbacks of such a plan.

First and foremost, sanctions are never as cut and dry or one-sided as much of current political discourse suggests. Sanctions are basically war but in an economic sense, and war both militarily and economically is harmful for all parties involved (Giumelli, 2017). Russia is a major trade partner with the EU especially in the field of oil, so exerting sanctions on a major partner is likely to hurt both parties. Studies found that in the time since EU sanctions on Russia began after the annexation of Crimea, imports and exports to and from Russia unsurprisingly decreased (Giumelli, 2017). By losing out on a solid chunk of trade with an important power, these statistics provide an argument for why sanctions are not the long-term answer for a solution. However, it is important to note that this same study also found that overall exports for EU countries has increased during this same time period due to an increase in exports to other countries (Giumelli, 2017). So, while for now the EU seems to not have been hurt as bad in comparison by their imposition of sanctions, the very nature of Russia as a crucial trading partner brings into question the viability of unilateral sanctions in the long term.

After analyzing the pros and cons of exerting unilateral sanctions and policies such as non-recognition as a possible solution, it is also vital to view the likelihood of this strategy's success through a geopolitical lens. Geopolitically, the view that unilateral

action towards Russia is the only option is a very Western view that does not take into account the Russian perspective. This is because geopolitics focuses on taking a broader view that incorporates a multitude of perspectives. Regardless of who is “right” in a conflict, if a solution is ever to be reached there must be compromise and understanding from both sides. Going back to the Russian perception of being spurned by NATO and the United States after the withdrawal from the ABM treaty and eastern encroachment by NATO, it is unlikely that continued actions like this will lead to any sort of a solution. The geopolitical background of section I gave insight to the Russian mindset, and with this in mind, it is hard to imagine them ever conceding Crimea if there are no concessions from the other side. When seen from this view, another type of solution for Crimea is brought to mind that focuses more on cooperation.

### **Proposed Solution II: Multilateral Incorporation**

After examining the positives and negatives of a unilateral pressure focused strategy, it is important to highlight a perspective that is more cooperation based. This method is one of multilateral incorporation. As a potential resolution strategy, multilateralism suggests a broader incorporation of Russia in European and international treaties and discussions. This is done in the hope that easing the tensions this way will lead to Crimea being resolved in a much less hostile way. However, as with any potential solution strategy, this comes with benefits and drawbacks.

First, an undoubtedly positive aspect of multilateral incorporation is it is much more understanding of the Russian perspective. As discussed above, compromise is absolutely vital for an international agreement and multilateral incorporation leaves room for the softening of tensions in the region. A Europe that attempts to coexist with Russia

is likely to be much more prosperous than one that attempts to shut out a major power in the region. Even ignoring the economic aspect, European security and stability is influenced by Russia in a major way. Based on their history, a spurned and unhappy Russia is likely to lash out in a military capacity. It has even been argued that these exact “liberal delusions” of the success of unilateral policies are what provoked Putin and Russia to annex Crimea in the first place (Mearsheimer, 2014). Therefore, a multilateral approach that involves including Russia in Western security and economic treaties is likely to boost both the stability and economy of both parties, as well as ease tensions when approaching the topic of Crimea. Under this umbrella of multilateral cooperation from a security standpoint, Dr. Marc Finaud also has some suggestions for how this could play out. First, he suggests a restoring of military to military communication between Russia and EU member states. Also, adoption of measures to share information about troop movements. Legislation such as this promotes a healthy amount of discourse between Russia and the West as well as working to avoid another similar type of annexation due to the rapid troop movements used when taking Crimea. It would also serve to mitigate this “climate of mistrust” that Dr. Finaud discussed earlier. However, it may be this exact climate that makes the dream of multilateralism involving Russia an unlikely one.

The main drawback of attempting a multilateral approach when resolving Crimea is that it assumes Russia wants to act in their own best interest and solve the situation. This is a problem with many political science theories: that they assume actors act rationally. A multilateral approach would also assume that Russia respects the rules of the game and the international system, but it can be argued the annexation of Crimea is all

the proof one needs to say that they do not respect the system. If Russia is suddenly incorporated into a wide array of multilateral treaties, who is to say that they do not jump ship the second they see something they do not like? Dr. Šír states that “Russia is unhappy with the rules” of the current system, and that their military-focused mindset is simply incompatible with the current make up of international relations. For this reason, he and many other scholars are extremely pessimistic about the prospects of a successful long-term union between Russia and the West. In the same vein Amanda Paul, leader of the Ukraine Forum at the European Policy Centre (EPC) in Brussels, has even gone so far as to say, “Crimea will never be resolved”. This pessimism about Russia’s place in the modern international system is very common, and it makes it that much more complicated to predict what will happen next.

Overall, multilateral incorporation is a resolution strategy that drastically differs from its unilateral counterpart. Focusing on cooperation rather than isolationist pressure, multilateralism seeks to bring about a solution via the easing of tensions between Russia and the West. When examined through a geopolitical lens, multilateralism’s viability is held up by the fact that it is more understanding of Russia’s perspective than unilateralism. History and geopolitics show us that diplomatic solutions cannot be reached without compromise, and multilateralism accounts for this. However, geopolitics also cautions one to view an issue in a realistic way that takes into account historical precedent and cultural attitudes. If multilateralism as a solution is viewed in this way, it would be easy for one to argue that there is no precedent that Russia would be cooperative in the current international system. For this reason, it is important to consider an additional possible resolution for Crimea: a shared sovereignty approach.

### **Proposed Solution III: Shared Sovereignty**

With both a unilateral and multilateral approach leaving something to be desired, it is necessary to examine the viability of a more unconventional resolution strategy. In this case, shared sovereignty. This would entail a system in which political responsibilities would be shared amongst multiple parties and allow for some sort of clarity to an essentially-contested zone.

In the case of Crimea, a shared sovereignty approach would involve a sit down of both parties from Russia and Ukraine, and a hashing out of terms on what they each can control. These types of systems are predicated on the idea that both parties have something to gain from sitting down with one another, and in this case it would be the stability of the region. Both parties also believe they have an intrinsic right to the region, whether that is based on sociopolitical or historical grounds (Núñez, 2017), which makes the possibility of dialogue legitimate in this scenario. It is feasible to imagine a “one state, two systems” type of agreement if viewed through this lens, similar to what exists between China and Hong Kong. A concession of this sort would likely reduce hostility towards Russia in the international community and allow for the people of Crimea to stop living in this confusing legal in-between state.

However, the prospects of this proposition happening are quickly shot down when the situation is viewed through a geopolitical lens. There is no compelling reason for Russia to concede to Ukraine in such a way, because as of right now they hold all of Crimea militarily. A dialogue such as the one proposed above is mostly a fanciful utopian ideal that does not seem to be in line with the way Russia operates. Unless this

hypothetical dialogue comes with an extra bargaining chip from Ukraine, it is unlikely that Russia would see any reason to sit down at the table.

In summary, the proposition of egalitarian shared sovereignty is an unconventional suggestion for a resolution in Crimea and is important to the discussion surrounding the issue for this reason. If a real solution is to be reached, innovative and different ideas must be considered. While a geopolitical analysis would say that Russia would probably never agree to a system like this, it provides an important example of a different type of solution to Crimea. The 2014 annexation of Crimea was unlike any event that has been seen recently in the world of modern international relations, and the last 5 years have shown that simply unilateral pressure has not been enough to solve the crisis in the region. If one wants to resolve a truly unprecedented event, then a unique solution is required as well. In the case of Crimea, this would mean a synthesis of all three proposed solutions, as well as the viewpoint of a geopolitical analyst.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the crisis in Crimea is an extremely complicated issue, and one that is largely unprecedented in the contemporary world of international relations. In order to adequately examine the issue and work towards a solution, it is necessary to research the topic in-depth and gain new perspectives. An extremely valuable tool for doing this can be done through geopolitical analysis. An interdisciplinary method of research combining multiple fields of study, geopolitics seeks to gain a wider understanding of international affairs. Notably among these fields are the ideas of culture and history. By examining the history of Ukraine, Crimea, and Russian-Ukrainian relations as a whole, geopolitics tells us that one can have a much more informed view of a problem when approaching resolution strategies from different perspectives. Three main strategies for a solution are at the forefront of this research: unilateral pressure, multilateral incorporation, and shared sovereignty. Based on the findings of this research, the best path forward is an incorporation of all three, with an emphasis on multilateral incorporation. Any single attempt to solve Crimea will be futile, because geopolitics shows that global political issues are complex and nuanced. Therefore, by incorporating the best aspects of the above three resolution strategies with an emphasis on multilateral incorporation, then the crisis in Crimea may eventually cease.

Geopolitically, multilateral incorporation has the least amount of glaring flaws. This stems from the idea that the background information provided in Section I allows for a more nuanced look at the Russian perspective. For example, the idea that Russia's perception of being betrayed by NATO and Western powers has led to their closed off approach and antagonistic behavior. Much of contemporary Western literature is

immediately critical of anything Russia does (Kropatcheva, 2012), and while this may be fair in some instances, if a solution is to be reached then all perspectives must be understood. An approach with an emphasis on multilateral incorporation would likely work best for making headway on a real solution because it is the friendliest to Russia. It can be debated ad nauseum whether or not Russia deserves to be invited back to the table because of their behavior, of if they would even come were they offered. But, this research is meant to offer an answer for the best route to an actual solution rather than say who is morally right and wrong. It cannot be denied that Russia broke a large number of international laws and precedents with their annexation of the Crimean Peninsula (Burke White, 2014). For this reason, unilateral sanctions should still be instituted to a certain extent because this research shows that they definitely impact Russia. However, they should not be the only strategy. In addition, an attempt to find some sort of common ground between Russia and Ukraine, potentially rooted in cultural heritage, in a sort of quasi-shared system may be fanciful but not off the table. Overall, this paper is meant to showcase that there is no one single answer to an issue as complicated as Crimea. With the help of geopolitical analysis and a thorough understanding of the conflict, a solution can be proposed that may provide stability to the region. In this case, a solution that promotes understanding and cooperation through multilateral incorporation, as well as features of unilateral sanctions and shared sovereignty.

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### **Abbreviation List**

**ABM** – Anti-ballistic missile

**CIS** – Commonwealth of Independent States

**EPC** – European Policy Centre

**EU** – European Union

**GCSP**- Geneva Centre for Security Policy

**GDP** – Gross Domestic Product

**NATO** – North Atlantic Treaty Organization