Introduction

Crimea has been a contentious issue for over five years now. Crimea is a small peninsula off the coast of Ukraine, in the Black Sea. Crimea has been a contentious point for both Ukraine and Russia due to ethnic and strategic factors. After the forced migration of ethnic minorities from the Crimean peninsula, many in Russia regarded Crimea as a part of Russia due to the ‘ethnic cleansing’ in Crimea. Crimea is also strategically significant due to its purpose as a launchpad for Russian naval forces in the Black Sea and into Eastern and Western Europe. Tensions flared after Ukraine began processes to join NATO in 2008 (which were abandoned in 2010 and then restarted in 2014) and Russia felt its interests to be threatened. Acting on these beliefs, Russia began a series of destabilization efforts in Crimea, which led to the current state of affairs today. While sanctions and condemnations by states and inter-governmental organizations alike have been undertaken, they have done little to dissuade Russian determination to remain in the Ukraine, nor combat Putin’s popularity in Russia. Currently Russia occupies over 7% of Ukraine’s land, and Russia is engaged in a war with Ukraine in which over 13,000 deaths have been recorded since 2014. Solutions will have to truly challenge Russia's strength and her global position.

Definition of Key Terms

Autonomous

Autonomy describes the right to self-governance. Autonomous regions have the power to deal with their affairs and make decisions independent from the larger state. Typically, autonomous regions possess a degree of geographical separation as Crimea does[1] . Crimea is officially an autonomous part of Ukraine. While the region has its own government and parliament, its legislation has to follow that of the Ukrainian constitution.

Annexation
Annexation describes the incorporation of a region or state into another country's territory to be governed under their sovereignty. Russia intends to annex the Crimean peninsula, asserting sovereignty over the region.

Deportation

Deportation is the act of expelling a person, or group of people, from a region. In 1954, several ethnic minorities were deported from the Crimean peninsula to Siberia and Uzbekistan. This sparked ethnic tensions between those in Crimea and those within Russia; Russians saw Crimeans as depriving their fellow humans of basic rights to property and others.

Ethnic Cleansing

The term ethnic cleansing refers to the removal of a minority group, ethnic, racial, or religious, by means of deportation or killing. The goal of ethnic cleansing is making a region more homogenous. The deportation of ethnic minorities from Crimea in 1954 by the Soviet Union is classified as ethnic cleansing. In this case, the aim was to establish Russian as the majority group. For a more recent example, Myanmar and its treatment of the Rohingya could be considered. It was labeled as a 'textbook case of ethnic cleansing' by the UNHCR.

Referendum

A referendum is a direct vote in which an entire electorate can participate. Crimea has held several referenda asking citizens about what the status of the region’s autonomy and citizenship rights should be in 1991, 1994, and 2014. There have been allegations that such referendums were tainted by Russian involvement and military presence.

Sanctions

Political and economic sanctions are penalties countries impose on other countries as consequences for disobeying laws or unethical behavior. Several Western countries have imposed sanctions on Russia in support of Ukraine in regards to the situation with the Russian occupied regions. One example is American President Obama's sanctions which he imposed on Russia prohibiting US exports to the country. The European Union (EU) has also imposed several sanctions on Russia. Sanctions can include, but are not limited to, trade bans and limitations, denial of development loans, withdrawal of companies etc.

Secession

A secession describes the withdrawal of a group, or region, from a larger political entity. Pro-Russia activists residing Crimea have advocated for the region’s secession from Ukraine.
often implies a degree of autonomy exercised on behalf of the state’s residents, who make a supposed ‘independent’ decision to withdraw from a state or its control.

**Sovereignty**

Sovereignty refers to the authority of a state to govern itself and other states. Sovereignty is traditionally defined as the ability of a state to maintain independence and control over its internal affairs as well as maintain border and territorial integrity. Since Crimea is an autonomous region, Ukraine has limited sovereignty over it. Russia is impeding on Crimea's (and by extension, Ukraine’s) sovereignty through its military takeover of the region.

**Background Information**

**Russia vs Ukraine 2014 Referendum**

In 2014, there was a referendum held in Crimea asking citizens whether they wanted to secede from Ukraine and join Russia. An overwhelming 96% of voters voted in favor of joining Russia. However, this figure is not representative of the general public’s opinions on the matter since many Russian paramilitary officers stationed in the region who are not residents also voted. Furthermore, intimidation tactics were used to suppress dissenting opinions. For this reason, the vote has not been recognized as legal by several nations. Additionally, the referendum violated Ukraine's constitution as it requires a referendum be held for the entire country to vote on before its territory be altered in any way.

**History of the Possession of Crimea**

In 1783, the Crimean peninsula, then known as the Crimean Khanate, went from being a part of the Ottoman Empire to becoming a part of Russia after Russia annexed it following their victory in the Battle of Kozludzha. It remained a part of Russia until 1954 when the Russian Soviet Federation of Socialist Republics (RSFSR) gave it over to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR). The much of the rationale for this choice was not made public knowledge, however, some public documents state the decision was made on account of the nation’s geographical proximity and economic similarity to Ukraine. In 2014, Russia commenced their efforts to illegally annex the Crimea peninsula. During the time of the USSR, Ukraine provided a quarter of Russia's agricultural imports, and was a major supplier of heavy industrial equipment and raw materials. Putin’s stand off with Ukraine boosted his popularity significantly in Russia to 80%, meaning that despite the escalating cost of the Russian Occupation of Ukraine, Putin will not let go of Ukraine without significant incentive.
Ethnic Groups in Crimea

Tatars are a Turkic group of Sunni Muslims. They have a long history of immigration and emigration, mostly forced, in the Crimea area but their first appearance in the region can be dated back to the 13th century. According to census data, in 1897 Crimean Tatars made up 34.1% of the population. This figure dropped to zero percent following the mass deportation of the ethnic group under Soviet leader Joseph Stalin who accused them of working with the Nazis to plot against the Soviet Union. Also as a part of the ethnic cleansing efforts, Stalin also forcibly deported groups of Armenians, Bulgarians, and Greeks though they made up a smaller portion of the population. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, many Tatars returned and in 2014 there were approximately 300,000 Tatars in Crimea making up 13% of the population. Discrimination against Tatars is ongoing in Crimea with hate crimes continuing till this day.

The Military Importance of Crimea

Historically, the Crimean peninsula has been important in the Ottoman and Russian empires’ struggle for control of the Black Sea. The sea was desirable for its trading ports and military vantage points. Presently, Russia is coveting control of the Black Sea to the end of establishing a military presence in the region in order to counteract NATO expansion eastward. Ukraine was leaning towards joining NATO in 2008, as it initiated a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). While these plans were shelved during Viktor Yanujovych (who came into power in 2010), Russia still saw NATO continuing it’s westward expansion and threatening Russian assets.

Natural Gas Transit Over Ukraine

Russian state-owned gas giant Gazprom negotiates with Ukraininan gas company Naftogaz to pipe Russian gas from Siberia to Europe. The agreement expires this year, and needs to be renegotiated and in place by the end of 2019, otherwise it threatens Europe’s gas needs. Breakdowns between Ukraine and Russia’s agreement to transport gas has disrupted Gas supplies to Europe twice already since 2006. The European bloc imports around 60% of its energy needs from Russia, making the EU dependent on Russian gas for its survival, and Russia exports around 33% of its gas to Europe, making the Russian economy dependent on the Ukraininan Pipeline. In order to protect its interests, Russia is now building another pipeline Nord Stream 2 under the sea to Germany, which is scheduled to be opened in 2020, despite unsuccessful US led efforts to sanction the pipeline. Russia has cut off supplies to Ukraine itself many times, resulting in Ukraine implementing many energy saving reforms to reduce their...
dependence on Russian gas. The economic and legal disputes over gas supplies are inextricably linked to the current occupation, and must be considered in any negotiations to resolve it.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**Russia**

Russia instigated the current conflict when it illegally seized Crimea in 2014. The port of Sevastopol, located in the southern part of the Crimean peninsula, contains the Black Sea fleet which is integral to Russian naval power and deployment in the Mediterranean. Additionally, its strategic location on the Black Sea and in proximity to the Mediterranean makes it extremely advantageous for military purposes. In addition to military motives, there are also cultural reasons why Russians want control of Crimea. Russian President Vladimir Putin has justified the country’s actions by pointing to Crimea’s Russian ethnic majority. According to Ukraine’s government census, 60% of the Crimean population speaks Russian. Furthermore, many Russians believe that the peninsula was wrongfully given up in 1954 and that it is rightfully a part of Russia. According to the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), Putin ordered a “takeover of regional political infrastructure” using special and military assets. Russian forces went into the region without any identifiable marks on their uniforms yet carrying Russian weapons, leading to suspicions of Spetsnaz involvement in Crimean destabilization efforts.

**Ukraine**

The Crimean peninsula, now illegally being annexed by Russia, is officially a part of Ukraine. Additionally, Russian rebels have seized Donbas, an eastern region of Ukraine. Pavlo Klimkin, Ukranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, has expressed hopes to regain control of both occupied regions. Ukraine is one of the major stakeholders in this conflict as its territorial sovereignty is being breached. It’s legitimacy on the global stage is also being undermined as it fails to maintain control over its territories and borders. Practically an invasion by Russian forces, Ukraine is under threat by Russian assets in the region. According to the ECFR, Ukraine has developed its military assets since 2014, preparing to defend the narrow strip of land that connections Ukraine to the Crimean Peninsula. Ukraine intends to retake the territories but for the time being, they have settled for defence of the mainland.

**European Union (EU)**

The European Union (EU) has a non-recognition policy towards the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. The EU regards Russia’s actions as a violation of international law and has imposed several sanctions on Russia. Some of the economic sanctions the EU has imposed include prohibiting the import of goods and services produced in Crimea and Sevastopol that do not have Ukrainian certificates,
prohibiting investment in Crimea and Sevastopol, and banning tourism services from operating in Crimea. The EU, in 2014, froze assets and banned visas for Russian citizens, while banning Russian membership to the International Energy Agency (IEA) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These have had mixed results as while these sanctions have hurt Russia, they have also hurt development in Crimea as it remains isolated from the global market and industries as a product of its political situation.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has also been involved in processing several accusations of human rights violations levelled against Russia by Ukraine- not as a territorial sovereign but as an occupying power. The main complaint is that Russia has implemented a blanket amnesty of Russian paramilitary forces in Ukraine, meaning that Russian soldiers are not held accountable for their intimidation, arbitrary detentions or indeed anything else. Separate cases are being taken to the ECHR by the Ukrainian government over the Russian occupation of the Donbass region in eastern Ukraine and the shooting down in 2014 of the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine that killed all 283 passengers onboard.

**World Trade Organization (WTO)**

The World Trade Organization is responsible for administering WTO agreements and resolving trade disputes among other duties. The WTO has gotten involved with trade disputes between Ukraine and Russia on the basis of Russia’s annexation of Ukrainian territories. In an April 5, 2019 ruling, the WTO ruled in favor of Russia granting them the first-ever exemption from global trade rules on the basis of national security. Russia placed a restriction on Ukrainian road and rail transport, banning it from entering Russia unless it passed through the neighboring country of Belarus, arguing that it was necessary to protect national security interests, an argument which the WTO agreed with.

**Black Sea Littoral and NATO Nations: Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey**

Three out of the six littoral Black Sea Nations, Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey, are a part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO was formed with the purpose of protecting its member states from communist Soviet Union take over, and consequently, Russia felt threatened by the loss of power it incurred when Bulgaria and Romania joined NATO. Many argue that Putin's actions are a means to an end against NATO and it's westward expansion. Putin believed that Ukraine was on the verge of joining with NATO, severely threatening Russian interests. In this way, it can be considered a ‘pre-emptive strike’ on NATO’s expansion through an attempt to bring Ukraine or part of it under its control. These other states are also anxious about the situation, as they monitor the situation closely for further Russian expansion.
# Timeline of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 18, 1921</td>
<td>The Soviet Union establishes the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18, 1944</td>
<td>Stalin begins deporting Tatars from Crimea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 30, 1945</td>
<td>On account of alleged collusion with Germans by the Tatar ethnic group, the Russia SFSR takes away the autonomous status of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 29, 1954</td>
<td>Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev relinquished Crimea to Ukraine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Ukraine gained control of the city Sevastopol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 16, 1990</td>
<td>The Ukranian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) declared its independence from the SFSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 15, 1991</td>
<td>The official end of the Soviet Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 20, 1991</td>
<td>A referendum held in Crimea restores autonomy to the region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 16, 2014</td>
<td>A referendum was held in Crimea asking local residents whether they wanted to secede from Ukraine. Upon 50% of the ballots being counted, 95.5% of voters supported joining Russia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- UN Charter, 26 June 1945
- The Right of Peoples and Nations to Self-determination 16 December 1952 (A/73/588)
- Territorial Integrity of Ukraine, 27 March 2014 (A/RES/68/262)

UNGA Resolution condemning Russian involvement in Crimea and territorial aggression, 17 December, 2019 (A/RES/73/L.47)

Minsk Agreement between Russia, separatists and Ukraine on the matter of separatist movements in Ukraine, September 2014.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Sanctions

The European Union (EU), the United States, and other countries and international organizations have imposed several different types of sanctions against Russia starting in February 2014 in response to their illegal annexation of Crimea. Economic sanctions have been imposed for goods coming out of Crimea and for Russian financial products, and diplomatic measures have been imposed have been imposed against Russia. Economic analysts have been unable to definitively concluded what the effect of the sanctions have been. Between 2014 and early 2016, oil prices in Russia fell dramatically and the country experienced its longest economic recession in almost twenty years. However, the economy seems to have recovered since then, although most of the economic growth has benefited the wealthy while much of the country lives in poverty. The International Monetary Fund[2] estimates 1.0 to 1.5 percent of Russia’s decrease in GDP can be attributed to sanctions. Crimean economy is also shrinking as it remains cutoff from the global market. Due to Russian administration of the region, the Crimean economy remains under the same sanctions that Russia is subject to. This has negative consequences for Crimean development as only state-owned (Russian) projects are in action while international development efforts, and thus some degree of control, have been stifled. This seems to be one of the only concrete actions taken by the international community regarding Crimea. Lack of other action has been attributed to hesitation to directly engage with the Russian military in a confrontation. While such sanctions have not been unanimously enforced by the whole world, they have been damaging to Russia’s (and Crimea’s) economy. Still, Putin enjoys popularity in Russia, accruing a high degree of approval with a narrative of strength in the face of western expansion.

Possible Solutions

Further Sanctions

While sanctions have been undertaken by various UN organizations and intergovernmental organizations and they have proven relatively ineffective thus far, even harsher sanctions and trade bans on Russia’s central economies and industries such as oil may be enough pressure to finally force it relent
on its control over Crimea. Attacking these core sectors of the Russian economy with hard economic power from the world’s eminent economic powers may damage its economic power enough to force it to remove its forces from Crimea due to the expenses associated with a military presence that Russia is maintaining in Crimea. However, this may also harm the average Russian and Crimean due to the effects of hard economic sanctions on daily life. Furthermore, since Crimea is administered by Russia, sanctions on Russia will also apply to Crimea, ultimately harming development in Crimea as well. Sanctions, if placed strategically on only Russian assets that are not linked to Crimea, can have a significant effect on Russia, potentially making it more amenable to negotiations.

**Peacekeeper Action in Ukraine**

It can be contested that Russia is taking advantage of a very weak Ukraine that wouldn’t be able to match the Russian military and war machine if Ukraine were to actually challenge the Russian forces. Building up the Ukrainian military with peacekeeper influx and observers can help to increase Ukraine’s hard power, which can act as a deterrent to Russian aggression. Adding peacekeepers also increases the stake other states have in the crisis, potentially drawing higher international involvement in the crisis and a more nuanced position from most states. This can potentially help to build up Ukraine as a state and help protect its state sovereignty by military means. The addition of observers can also help to mitigate war crimes and reduces human rights violations. However, this results in a grave escalation of the conflict, with potential room for significant NATO (NATO state troop donations) involvement, leading to Russian escalation who would view this as western aggression. Adding peacekeepers can make Ukraine a stronger state and help it assert its state sovereignty but can result in a serious escalation of the conflict and provoke Russia even further. This solution, while feasible, must be carefully considered and implemented to balance the line between Ukrainian development and Russian provocation.

**Guiding Questions**

1. Should the 2014 referendum on Crimea’s status be recognized as legitimate in the context of international law?
2. To what extent can Russia’s claim to sovereignty over the Crimean peninsula be considered legitimate?
3. Can this conflict be resolved without military escalation?

**Bibliography**


**Appendix or Appendices**

I: Map of Crimean Crisis
This map can be valuable due to its visualization of the Crimean crisis, with distinctions between all different parties involved. It can provide a clear idea of all stakeholders and their geographical significance to the crisis.