

Crimea, Russia, and the Background to the Current Crisis in Ukraine.

(Note: this is not a term paper. There are about 11 different sources involved. Most of the words are mine but I lifted some sentences in their entirety when they fit to save time; also to preserve links that people might be interested in. Also, this is not from Russian media outlets or Russian “propaganda”. It is all well-documented and from Western sources)

- Crimea as Sevastopol were regions of Ukraine officially known as the [Autonomous Republic of Crimea](#), established in the 1992 Ukrainian constitution with certain-self-governing rights, ***including full sovereign powers to establish relations with other states***. Remember this when reading about the referendum below.
- The vast majority of the population in the region are Russian speaking, and identify themselves as ethnically Russian. Not surprisingly they are overwhelmingly pro-Russian politically and culturally. The most striking example of that is the vote for the pro-Russian Yanukovych for president of all of Ukraine in 2010. About 80% of those in Crimea and now-contested regions of Donetsk in Eastern Ukraine voted for him in 2010. The election was judged free and fair by international observers. (Yanukovich actually received formal congratulations from the leaders of Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Libya, Lithuania, Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, the Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, Turkey the United Kingdom, the United States, Uzbekistan, NATO and the European Union)]
- Y was eventually accused of corruption and incompetence (probably true) , and divisions between populations and politicians from Eastern vs Western parts of Ukraine came to a boil in 2013. Growing dissatisfaction with the Yanukovych (Y) government led to violent protests in Kyiv in 2014 and Y was essentially forced to flee (I believe he initially welcomed and actually sought refuge in Donetsk) . Pro-western elements in Ukraine, the U.S., and Western European and NATO leaders regarded the change in regime as a democratic “revolution” ; the Pro-Russian population in Eastern Ukraine characterized it as a “coup”.
- The U.S. openly supported the “coup”, or “revolution” in progress; some suspect that it helped instigate it; certainly it was at odds the European Union which was in favor of promoting a more balanced, negotiated resolution to the conflict, presumably because it saw the writing on the wall; that is, that a pro-Russian to pro Western regime change might inflame the pro-Russian/ pro-West divisions in the country. In an embarrassing ‘hot-mike’ incident in 2014 during the crises Victoria **Nuland** (now Biden’s Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs; formerly advisor to none other than VP Dick Cheney) was heard saying “fuck the EU”, and appeared to be maneuvering to undermine Yanukovych. Surprise! The U.S. interferes with other country’s elections...
- This is an oversimplification of a very complicated series of events. But basically, all hell broke loose in Donetsk, [Autonomous Republic of Crimea](#), and the local government of [Sevastopol](#) in the Crimean peninsula following the events in 2014. Ukrainian nationalist elements who helped oust Y were unequivocally in favor of a united Ukraine and vehemently opposed to separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. While the latter appeared concerned about losing minority (Russian) language rights, autonomy, and even expulsion from Ukraine. (though the possibility of expulsion may have been just rumors, possibly spread by more radical separatist elements-- and perhaps in part, even Russian propaganda)

- In Sevastopol, Crimea, Russia already had a *legal* Naval military base, leased from Ukraine, a lease renewed and extended to them until 2042, following a very fractious debate in the Ukrainian Parliament.
- The answer to the question of “who fired first” in the region when fighting eventually broke out is a difficult and controversial one. In any event, Ukrainian pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian military forces engaged in what could arguably be called a nascent civil war.

By one account from Western sources “Heavy [shelling](#) by the [Ukrainian Army](#) and paramilitary units have caused civilian fatalities in Donetsk. [Human Rights Watch](#) has called on both warring factions to cease using the unguided [BM-21 Grad](#) missiles in populated areas, and has said the use of these weapons systems was a violation of international humanitarian laws and could constitute a [war crime](#). It also called on the insurgents to avoid their deployment in densely populated areas.”^[34]

- Undoubtedly, In the midst of the fighting between Ukrainian military and separatists, Russian forces moved from their base in Sevastopol, reportedly “disguised” as civilian Ukrainian separatists (to avoid appearances of Russian military involvement), and began sealing off access points and assisting separatist with logistics and supplies. . As the fighting intensified Russia also mobilized and moved troops and equipment to their own border; and, no doubt, though denying it, later sent in special operations-type personnel as well military hardware to assist the Ukrainian separatists.
- The pentagon has admitted that, prior to the events beginning in 2014 there were no unusual military exercises or activity along Ukrainian borders with Russia. That is an extremely important point, since it undermines the argument that Russia had always intended to “invade and takeover” Ukraine—including sections where the population is ethnic Russian and would likely support it. It also pinpoints the timing when the uneasy relationship between pro-Russian and pro Western Ukrainians disintegrated, broke into armed conflict, and perhaps paved the way for Russian military involvement. See below. (would seem to highlight the importance of actually exploring the extent to which the US did influence the political events in Kyiv in 2013-14, does it not?)
- Most relevant is that the Crimean peninsula and [Sevastopol](#) in particular has always been regarded by Russia as being a strategic military base, and its presence there as NON-NEGOTIABLE, a counterweight to US/NATO land, sea, and air military capabilities and exercises in and around the Black Sea.
- Equally important, in March of 2016 officials in in the [Autonomous Republic of Crimea](#) and the local government of [Sevastopol](#) called for local populations to express their desire to either join [Russia](#) as a [federal subject](#), or if they wanted to restore the [1992 Crimean constitution](#) and Crimea’s status as a part of [Ukraine](#). Overall, about 85% of the population voted; and about 95% of Crimeans and residents of [Sevastopol](#) voted for integration as part of a Russian Federation.
- Not surprisingly the referendum was regarded as illegitimate by the Ukrainian national government in Kyiv; and most western countries, including the U.S., refused to recognize the referendum as valid “because of the Russian military presence”. However, results from **numerous** post-referendum polls and surveys conducted by Pew, Gallop International, and several independent European survey institutes unequivocally confirm that the official results of the referendum accurately reflected popular sentiment in those areas. (For those who want more details; see references below***).

- Following the referendum results, Russia formally seized Crimea, and declared it part of Ukraine. And for many overlapping reasons (not the same as justification): Putin and Russia were concerned about losing or having to later defend, at much greater cost, Crimea and the Sevastopol naval base under a pro-western regime in Kyiv; the political gains involved for him, given that Russian citizens overwhelmingly see the contested areas with Eastern Ukraine as Russian and “deserving” of becoming part of Russia; and, possibly Putin’s on personal influence and fortunes. Surprise, again, politicians seek power and fortune --- in Russia, Ukraine, and the U.S. (Ironically Poroshenko, the pro -Western guy the US apparently help shoehorn into office to replace Y was recently returned to the Ukraine, facing charges of corruption and high treason)
 - So did Russia “invade Ukraine”? Technically I guess you would have to say ‘Yes’.
 - Was it an “act of aggression”? Yes. Was taking Crimea “OK”, as my friend Bob Moritz asked me. Well, No, it wasn’t “OK”
 - Was it some kind of massive mobilization of troops overrunning the local population in order to dominate, subjugate and ravage territory; part of some larger grand scheme to take over Europe orchestrated by the madman Putin in order to “restore the Soviet Union as the once great power it was?”. Bull Shit. In Spades
 - Is it important to understand the difference?. Unequivocally YES
 - Does the above suggest there are convenient and massive “sins of omission”, amounting to yet another “big lie” on the part of the US. (And to some extent its European allies; who, nevertheless, are becoming increasingly wary of US intentions, rhetoric and response). I think so, and I think we should not be at all surprised. Remember the synchronized media/government drumbeat for war in Iraq, as Condoleezza Rice, dick Cheney and even Colin Powell went on TV and proceeded to tell a series of uncontested lies and half-truths about impending mushroom clouds, aluminum tubes for mobile nuclear weapons developments, shipments of enriched uranium, Al-Qaeda operatives, etc.
 - Is the media therefore again complicit in failing to challenge and in fact conveniently echoing a dangerous and misleading narrative; lazy, and fearful of government push-back, and thinly-veiled accusations of being “unpatriotic” during “times of great crises”. A big fat YES to that too. Otherwise how could any of you (if there is actually anyone reading this) NOT KNOW ABOUT THIS STUFF?. IS IT IRRELEVANT? Don’t you think you SHOULD have heard about it – at least much of it as some basis for an informed opinion. ?
 - If I am even half-right, is ALL OF THIS DANGEROUS?. You better believe it is. Big wars often start with little ones. Russia has no intention of “invading Ukraine” in any true sense of the phrase; nor does the U.S. intend to send troops -ala Afghanistan, etc, etc -- and suffer yet another humiliating defeat. But each mobilization of forces, each deployment of highly sophisticated weapons, each ramping-up of rhetorical, hyperbolic exchanges between two countries with enough nuclear weapons to destroy the other in about ten minutes HIGHTens THE RISK of misunderstanding, miscalculation, a computer glitch that could -- well, you know, fill in the rest.
1. STOP THE MADNESS, PLEASE.

***The results of the survey by the US government [Broadcasting Board of Governors](#), conducted April 21–29, 2014, showed that 83% of Crimeans felt that the results of the March 16 referendum on Crimea's status likely reflected the views of most people there. Whereas, this view is shared only by 30% in the rest of Ukraine.^[148]

According to the [Gallup's](#) survey performed on April 21–27, 82.8% of Crimean people consider the referendum results reflecting most Crimeans' views,^[149] and 73.9% of Crimeans say Crimea's becoming part of Russia will make life better for themselves and their families, while 5.5% disagree.^[149]

According to survey carried out by [Pew Research Center](#) in April 2014, majority of Crimean residents say the referendum was free and fair (91%) and that the government in Kyiv ought to recognize the results of the vote (88%).^[150]

A [poll of the Crimean public](#) was taken by the Ukrainian branch of Germany's biggest market research organization, GfK, on January 16–22, 2015. According to its results: "Eighty-two percent of those polled said they fully supported Crimea's inclusion in Russia, and another 11 percent expressed partial support. Only 4 percent spoke out against it. ... Fifty-one percent reported their well-being had improved in the past year."^[151]

Gallup conducted an immediate post-referendum survey of Ukraine and Crimea and published their results in April 2014. Gallup reported that, among the population of Crimea, 93.6% of ethnic Russians and 68.4% of ethnic Ukrainians believed the referendum result accurately represents the will of the Crimean people. Only 1.7% of ethnic Russians and 14.5% of ethnic Ukrainians living in Crimea thought that the referendum results didn't accurately reflect the views of the Crimean people.^[38]

In May 2014, Washington, D.C., pollster Pew Research published results of a survey that encompassed Crimea, Ukraine, and Russia, in which it was reported that 88% of Crimeans believed the government of Kyiv should officially recognize the result of Crimea's referendum.^[39]