

Crimeans Keep Saying No to Ukraine

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A central piece of the West's false narrative on the Ukraine crisis has been that Russian President Vladimir Putin "invaded" Crimea and then staged a "sham" referendum purporting to show 96 percent support for leaving Ukraine and rejoining Russia. More recently, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland claimed that Putin has subjected Crimea to a "reign of terror."

Both elements have been part of the "group think" that dominates U.S. political and media circles, but this propagandistic storyline simply isn't true, especially the part about the Crimeans being subjugated by Russia.

Consistently, over the past year, polls conducted by major Western firms have revealed that the people of Crimea by overwhelming numbers prefer being part of Russia over Ukraine, an embarrassing reality that Forbes business magazine has now acknowledged.

An [article](#) by Kenneth Rapoza, a Forbes specialist on developing markets, cited these polls as showing that the Crimeans do not want the United States and the European Union to force them back into an unhappy marriage with Ukraine. "The Crimeans are happy right where they are" with Russia, Rapoza wrote.

"One year after the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula in the Black Sea, poll after poll shows that the locals there — be they Ukrainians, ethnic Russians or Tartars are all in agreement: life with Russia is better than life with Ukraine," he wrote, adding that "the bulk of humanity living on the Black Sea peninsula believe the referendum to secede from Ukraine was legit."



Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses a crowd on May 9, 2014, celebrating the 69th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany

and the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Crimean port city of Sevastopol from the Nazis. (Russian government photo)

Rapoza noted that a June 2014 [Gallup poll](#), which was sponsored by the U.S. government's Broadcasting Board of Governors, found that 82.8 percent of Crimeans said the March 16 referendum on secession reflected the views of the Crimean people. In the poll, when asked if joining Russia would improve their lives, 73.9 percent said yes and only 5.5 percent said no.

A February 2015 [poll by German polling firm GfK](#) found similar results. When Crimeans were asked "do you endorse Russia's annexation of Crimea," 93 percent gave a positive response, with 82 percent saying, "yes, definitely." Only 2 percent said no, with the remainder unsure or not answering.

In other words, the West's insistence that Russia must return Crimea to Ukraine would mean violating the age-old U.S. principle of a people's right of self-determination. It would force the largely ethnic Russian population of Crimea to submit to a Ukrainian government that many Crimeans view as illegitimate, the result of a violent U.S.-backed coup on Feb. 22, 2014, that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovych.

The coup touched off a brutal civil war in which the right-wing regime in Kiev dispatched neo-Nazi and other extremist militias to spearhead a fierce "anti-terrorism operation" against resistance from the ethnic Russian population in the east, which – like Crimea – had supported Yanukovych. More than 6,000 Ukrainians, most of them ethnic Russians, have been killed in the fighting.

Despite this reality, the mainstream U.S. news media has misreported the crisis and distorted the facts to conform to U.S. State Department propaganda. Thus, many Americans believe the false narrative about Russian troops crushing the popular will of the Crimean people, much as the U.S. public was misled about the Iraq situation in 2002-03 by many of the same news outlets.

Or, as Forbes' Rapoza put it: "At some point, the West will have to recognize Crimea's right to self rule. Unless we are all to believe that the locals polled by Gallup and GfK were done so with FSB bogey men standing by with guns in their hands." The FSB is a Russian intelligence agency.

The GfK survey also found that Crimeans considered the Ukrainian media, which has been wildly anti-Russian, unreliable. Only 1 percent said the Ukrainian media "provides entirely truthful information" and only 4 percent said it was "more often truthful than deceitful."

So, the people at the frontline of this conflict, where Assistant Secretary Nuland, detected a "reign of terror," say they are not only satisfied with being restored to Russia, which controlled Crimea since the 1700s, but don't trust the distorted version of events that they see on Ukrainian TV.

Practical Reasons

Some of the reasons for the Crimean attitudes are simply pragmatic. Russian pensions were

three times larger than what the Ukrainian government paid – and now the Ukrainian pensions are being slashed further in compliance with austerity demands from the International Monetary Fund.

This month, Nuland boasted about those pension cuts in praising the Kiev regime's steps toward becoming a "free-market state." She also hailed "reforms" that will force Ukrainians to work harder and into old age and that slashed gas subsidies which helped the poor pay their heating bills.

Last year, the New York Times and other U.S. news outlets also tossed around the word "invasion" quite promiscuously in discussing Crimea. But you may recall that you saw no images of Russian tanks crashing into the Crimean peninsula or an amphibious landing or paratroops descending from the skies. The reason was simple: Russian troops were already in Crimea.

The Russians had a lease agreement with Ukraine permitting up to 25,000 military personnel in Crimea to protect the Russian naval base at Sevastopol. About 16,000 Russian troops were on the ground when the Feb. 22, 2014 putsch occurred in Kiev – and after a crisis meeting at the Kremlin, they were dispatched to prevent the coup regime from imposing its control on Crimea's people.

That Russian intervention set the stage for the March 16 referendum in which the voters of Crimea turned out in large numbers and voted overwhelmingly for secession from Ukraine and reintegration with Russia, a move that the Russian parliament and President Putin then approved.

Yet, as another part of its false reporting, the New York Times claimed that Putin denied that Russian troops had operated inside Crimea – when, in fact, he was quite open about it. For instance, on March 4, 2014, almost two weeks before the referendum, Putin discussed at a Moscow [press conference](#) the role of Russian troops in preventing the violence from spreading from Kiev to Crimea. Putin said:

"You should note that, thank God, not a single gunshot has been fired there. ... Thus the tension in Crimea that was linked to the possibility of using our Armed Forces simply died down and there was no need to use them. The only thing we had to do, and we did it, was to enhance the defense of our military facilities because they were constantly receiving threats and we were aware of the armed nationalists moving in. We did this, it was the right thing to do and very timely."

Two days after the referendum, which recorded the 96 percent vote in favor of seceding from Ukraine and rejoining Russia, Putin returned to the issue of Russian involvement in Crimea. In a formal [speech](#) to the Russian Federation, Putin justified Crimea's desire to escape the grasp of the coup regime in Kiev, saying:

"Those who opposed the [Feb. 22] coup were immediately threatened with repression. Naturally, the first in line here was Crimea, the Russian-speaking Crimea. In view of this, the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol turned to Russia for help in defending their rights and lives, in preventing the events that were unfolding and are still underway in Kiev, Donetsk, Kharkov and other Ukrainian cities.

“Naturally, we could not leave this plea unheeded; we could not abandon Crimea and its residents in distress. This would have been betrayal on our part.”

But to make it appear that Putin was denying a military intervention, the Times and other U.S. news outlets truncated Putin’s statement when he said, “Russia’s Armed Forces never entered Crimea.” The Western press stopped there, ignoring what he said next: “they were there already in line with an international agreement.”

Putin’s point was that Russian troops based in Crimea took actions that diffused a possibly violent situation and gave the people of Crimea a chance to express their wishes through the ballot. But that version of events didn’t fit with the desired narrative pushed by the U.S. State Department and the New York Times. So the problem was solved by misrepresenting what Putin said.

But the larger issue now is whether the Obama administration and the European Union will insist on forcing the Crimean people – against their will – to rejoin Ukraine, a country that is rapidly sliding into the status of a failed state and a remarkably cruel one at that.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, America’s Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America’s Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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