

Timeline: The Crimean Referendum

Brutal act of military conquest, or peaceful (and popular) transition of power?
Here are the facts to help you decide.

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Today, the dangers of military escalation are beyond description.

What is now happening in Ukraine has serious geopolitical implications. It could lead us into a World War III scenario.

It is important that a peace process be initiated with a view to preventing escalation.

Global Research condemns Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

A Bilateral Peace Agreement is required.

In part one of our recap on the recent history of Ukraine, we looked at the chain of events that lead to the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich from power.

You can read that [here](#).

In this second part, we will be focusing on Crimea, how the peninsula came to be a part of the nation of Ukraine, whether or not this was ever popular with the public, and how the transition back to being a part of Russia was handled.

1954

Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev signs a decree [transferring Crimea from the Russian SSR to the Ukrainian SSR](#). His motivation for doing so is a matter of historical debate, as is the constitutionality of the decision. However, as they were all one nation at that time, the administrative decision is more of a [“symbolic gesture”](#) than anything else.

Prior to this, Crimea had been a part of Russia since 1783 when the Russian Empire took

control of the Crimean Khanate following the decline in power of the Ottoman Empire.

1965

Sevastopol, Crimea's major port city, is officially named a ["Hero City" of the USSR](#), an honour given to 12 cities across the country to mark the 20th Victory Day. Sevastopol held against major assaults from the Axis powers in October and December of 1941, before holding out for a six month siege and finally falling to the Nazis in June of 1942.

1990

As the USSR begins to crumble, Ukraine declares itself an independent republic, beginning the process of leaving the union and taking Crimea with it.

1991

January: The Crimean government hold a referendum asking if Crimea should declare its independence from Ukraine, reform itself as the Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic (as it had been prior to 1945), and rejoin the USSR. The vote [passes with 94% support](#), and Crimea declares independence.

February: The Ukrainian parliament recognises this independence, passing the *"Law On Restoration of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialistic Republic as part of USSR"*.

September: Ukrainian parliament reverses their February decision and declares Crimea a part of Ukraine once again. There is historical debate over the legality of this decision.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and official Ukrainian independence, Crimea is no longer politically unified with Russia for the first time in over 200 years.

1992

Crimean parliament again declares itself independent as "The Republic of Crimea", they [draft their own constitution](#) and plan a referendum on secession from Ukraine. The Ukrainian parliament refuses to acknowledge the declaration and forces the cancellation of the referendum.

As a compromise, Crimea is granted special status as an "Autonomous Republic", and given control over its own budget and other devolved powers, as long as they add a line to their constitution designating Crimea a part of Ukraine.

1994

Newly-elected President Yuriy Meshkov of Crimea [holds a referendum](#), asking the population of Crimea three questions, most notably:

1. Do you support a return to the May 1992 constitution that didn't guarantee Crimea was part of Ukraine?
2. Do you support establishing that all Crimean citizens were entitled to dual citizenship with Russia?

All three parts of the referendum pass with at least 77% of the vote, and President Meshkov

restores the old constitution. The Ukrainian government declares the referendum illegal and refuses to recognise either the results or the new constitution.

1995

Ukrainian government abolishes the post of President of Crimea, and cuts the powers of their parliament. For the rest of the year the President of Ukraine governs the peninsula by decree.

2001

The [2001 Ukrainian census](#) records that over 60% of the population of Crimea describe themselves as ethnically Russian. In total 77% of Crimeans, and over 94% of the people of Sevastopol, reported being native Russian speakers.

2004

Following the “Orange Revolution”, and over-turning of Viktor Yanukovych’s victory in the Presidential election, leaders of Eastern Ukrainian oblasts – including Crimea – raise the issue of increased autonomy and even secession from the country. A conference of politicians from the Donbas region [call for a referendum on federalization](#), but are ignored.

2006

A US Navy ship docks at the Crimean port of Feodosiya, leading to mass protests on the peninsula and a peaceful blockade of the port. Then-leader of the opposition Viktor Yanukovych claims that allowing foreign military units onto Crimea’s soil without consulting the regional parliament is a violation of both the Ukrainian and Crimean constitutions. A [contemporary Radio Free Europe article](#) notes that 55-60% of *all* Ukrainians [oppose joining NATO](#).

2008

Following the Russo-Georgian war, and on the back of increased calls for Ukraine to join NATO, the BBC sends a reporter to Crimea. Their article details the [strong pro-Russian feeling](#) on the peninsula, the key part Sevastopol has played in Russia’s history, and warnings from Crimeans that “*nationalists in Kiev*” are trying to “*force Russians out*”.

A 2008 poll by the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies found 64% of Crimeans favored secession from from Ukraine to rejoin Russia, and 55% favored increased autonomy from Kiev.

2009-2011

Between 2009 and 2011 the United Nations Development Program conducts [a series of polls](#) in Crimea on the question of Russian reunification. Every single poll returns 65-70% positive response, with another 16-25% undecided and only 9-14% favoring staying with Ukraine.

2013

A poll done by the [US-based Gallup agency](#) finds 82% of Crimeans speak only Russian at home, and further 6% speak Russian and one other language. Only 2% report speaking only

Ukrainian.

The pro-EU/pro-NATO Maidan protests begin, violence erupts in Kiev.

2014

January

27/1 – As protests intensify in Kiev and Ukraine becomes increasingly unstable, local officials in Simferopol and Sevastopol propose Crimea become a federal state, and prepare legal groundwork:

to use its right to self-determination and to exit Ukraine's legal space in the event of a state coup, or seizure of power by force."

28/1 – An open letter [from the Sevastopol city council](#) calls on President Yanukovich to outlaw the "extremist group" Svoboda, and invites the people of the city to form "People's Squads" as described under Ukrainian law, and defend the border of Crimea:

It is impossible to allow specially trained and armed militants of the "Right Sector" and other pro-fascist and extremist organizations to penetrate our city and dictate their terms. We will provide reliable defense of Sevastopol. Extremism, lawlessness, banditry will not pass in the hero city.

February

14/2 – Yahoo News [reports](#) "*Ukraine's autonomous Crimea region leans towards Moscow*". The article notes that the Crimean parliament amended the constitution to describe Russia as a "guarantor of Crimea's safety", and that elected officials have asked Russia for help if the Maidan protesters should attempt to move into Crimea.

18/2 – Radio Free Europe [reports](#) on the "*rise of pro-Russian separatism in Crimea*". They interview Crimean MP Sergei Shuvainikov, who claims the Ukrainian nationalists want to ban the Russian language and kill Russian culture in Ukraine.

20/2 – Crimean MP and Speaker of Parliament tells an [international meeting in Moscow](#) that Crimea "*may secede from Ukraine, if the country splits*".

22/2 – Less than 24 hours after signing a peace deal, Maidan protesters storm government buildings in Kiev and take control of the country. President Yanukovich flees to Kharkiv.

In a vote that violates the constitution of Ukraine, the Rada removes Yanukovich from office for being "unable to carry out his duties".

The same day, The Washington Post publishes [this article](#):

"The battle for Kiev is over, is the battle for Crimea about to begin?"

23/2 – One of the first bills passed by the new government [repeals the law making Russian an official state language](#). Neo-Nazi leaders Oleh Tyahovchyk and Dimitri Yarosh propose going further and banning both the Party of the Regions and the Ukrainian Communist Party, both traditionally political parties representing Eastern Ukraine, including Crimea.

The same day, thousands of Crimeans attend a protest in Sevastopol, chanting about re-uniting with Russia. The Guardian headlines "[Ukraine crisis fuels secession calls in pro-Russian south](#)", reporting that when the Crimean Prime Minister ruled out secession in his speech he was booed by the crowd.

26/2 – Crimean parliament meets in a special session to discuss the crisis and situation in Kiev. Thousands rally outside the building as the meeting is taking place, chanting "*Russia! Russia!*" and "*Crimea Rise Up!*"

The Parliamentary speaker emerges from the session [to address the crowd](#), saying:

I share your alarm and worry over Crimea's fate...We will fight for our autonomous republic to the end...Today Kiev doesn't want to solve our problems, therefore we must unite and act decisively. The people of Crimea have enough strength. Neo-Nazism will not work in Crimea. We will not betray Crimea."

The [Irish Times](#) reports "*Many Russian-speakers worry that Ukraine's new government will be pulled to the right by ultra-nationalist groups that played a major role in the protests*".

28/2 – In the early hours of Friday 28th February, men in fatigues bearing no insignia [take control](#) of every airport, seaport, train station and border crossing on the Crimean peninsula. They also secure all government buildings in Simferopol. These men are later revealed to be Russian troops from the bases at Sevastopol.

Kiev and their NATO backers call the troops' presence an invasion, but Russia defends their deployment, claiming the troops are there at the invitation of both the local Crimean authorities and Viktor Yanukovich, whom they still recognise as the legitimate President of Ukraine.

Further, the Russians claim [their lease agreement allowed up to 25,000 Russian military personnel](#) to be stationed in Crimea, and they did not exceed that number.

With the peninsula effectively cut off from mainland Ukraine, a second special session of Parliament is held, during which they vote to terminate the current government and choose a new Prime Minister. They also established plans for an independence referendum to be held in May.

March

11/3 – Crimean parliament, along with the Sevastopol city council, issue a decree [declaring Crimea independent](#).

The new Autonomous Republic of Crimea brings forward the planned referendum from May to March 16th, changing the question from one of independence to a choice between re-joining Russia or re-joining Ukraine.

12/3 – The Crimean government formally [invite members from the OSCE](#) to observe the referendum and make sure its fair. The OSCE describes the vote as "illegal", and [refuses to attend](#).

16/3 – The referendum goes ahead, with the ballot papers asking:

- Do you support the reunification of Crimea with Russia with all the rights of the federal subject of the Russian Federation?
- Do you support the restoration of the Constitution of the Republic of Crimea in 1992 and the status of the Crimea as part of Ukraine?

Though official observers from both the OSCE and UN refused to take part, the Crimean authorities claimed to have invited 190 independent observers from 23 different countries, including the majority of the nations of the EU.

Kiev, along with most western governments, claim the vote is illegitimate because it took place “at the barrel of a gun”.

The reported results are massively in favour of joining Russia, 97% vs 3% against, on an estimated turnout of 83%.

21/3 – President Vladimir Putin of Russia officially signs the law recognising Crimea as part of the Russian Federation. [Street parties](#) are held in Sevastopol and Simferopol, and all across Russia.

April

Claiming they are owed money, the Ukrainian government [closes dam on North Crimea Canal](#), reducing flow of fresh water to the peninsula. Access to water is protected by article 29 of the Geneva convention, and its use to punish a civilian population could be a warcrime.

2015

Forbes publishes [this article](#), headlined “*One Year After Russia Annexed Crimea, Locals Prefer Moscow*”, it details all the polling done by Western polling agencies since the referendum:

- A Gallup study from [June 2014](#) found 83% Crimeans agreed with the result of the referendum, including 94% of ethnic Russians. 74% said being part of Russia would make life better [for them and their families](#).
- In January 2015, a [joint German-Canadian study](#) done by GfK for “Free Crimea”, found 82% of Crimeans fully supported the referendum and thought Crimea had made the right choice, with another 11% partially supporting it and only 4% opposing it.
- A [Pew Research study from 2014](#) found 91% of Crimeans thought the vote was free and fair, and 88% thought Kiev should recognise the results.
- A US government-funded study published on the Soros-backed [OpenDemocracy website](#) found 84% of Crimeans “absolutely” supported the Crimean referendum, and 88% thought Crimea was moving in the right direction.

So, there it is, a timeline of the key events leading to Crimea’s separation from, and eventual reunification with, Russia. Military occupation and annexation, or a referendum supported by the majority of the population? You decide.

We previously catalogued Ukraine’s Maidan revolution and eventual fall of Viktor Yanukovich in part 1 of this series [here](#). In part three we will be going into Kiev’s “anti-

terror” operations in Donetsk and Luhansk and the collapse into chaos and civil war.

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