

Will Zelensky Take Back Crimea?

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Seventeen months ago the US State Department officially [declared](#) the US will "NEVER" recognize Crimea as part of Russia. Three months ago Ukrainian President Zelensky [vowed](#) to "take back" Crimea. Is this possible?

In June 2016 I visited Crimea with a delegation from the [Center for Citizen Initiatives](#) (CCI). This is a US organization which has conducted people to people exchanges with Russia for decades. They have never received financial support from Russia but did receive some grants from USAID in the 1990's. CCI especially promotes exchanges with Rotary clubs.

In Crimea, we were based in Yalta, a small city on the Black Sea. From Yalta we did trips to the capitol Simferopol, the naval port at Sebastopol, the ["valley of death"](#) and many other destinations.

Crimea is beautiful and the people were very friendly and happy to see us. At that time, they had been under Western sanctions for two years because of their decision to secede from Ukraine in March 2014. Tourist ships that previously visited their ports no longer stopped because of sanctions. Students who graduated from Crimean universities no longer had their academic achievements recognized in the Europe. Visa and Mastercard could not be used. The sanctions caused a myriad of problems.

We met with many groups including the elected city council of the capital Simferopol, college students, high school students, Armenian and Tatar ethnic groups, a Rotary business group and more. They all said the decision to secede from Ukraine was overwhelmingly popular. The official [referendum results](#) confirmed what they said: with 83% of the voting public participating, 97% of voters said they wanted to "re-unify" with the Russian Federation.

When we asked why they preferred to be part of Russia, there were various explanations. Everyone referred to the [Feb 2014 coup](#) which overthrew President Yanukovich. [Over 75%](#) of the Crimean population voted for Yanukovich in the 2010 election which was deemed to

[free and fair](#) by European monitors. They did not like the violent coup which ousted their elected president.

Another reason was because the coup government immediately [repealed](#) legislation that the Russian language could be used in schools and institutions. The majority of the population in eastern Ukraine and Crimea have Russian as their native language. The hostility of the coup government was unmistakable.

A third reason was because of the violence and thuggery of the forces which drove the coup. Over a few days almost 100 people were killed on the Maidan plaza. There is overwhelming [evidence](#) the killing was done by snipers shooting from rooms and the roofs of opposition controlled buildings. The fact that BOTH protesters and police were killed indicates purposeful intent to exacerbate and ignite the crisis which is exactly what happened.

A fourth reason for the Crimean decision was because of an incident on the night of Feb 20. Hundreds of Crimeans had gone to Kyiv to peacefully demonstrate in favor of the government and against the increasingly violent mob. When the killing peaked on Feb 20, they realized it was too dangerous and peaceful protests were hopeless. They headed home in an 8 bus convoy. One hundred miles south of Kyiv the [bus convoy](#) was stopped by ultra-nationalist thugs. All the passengers were terrorized, many were beaten and seven killed. News of this violence rapidly spread and shocked the people of Crimea. The referendum was quickly organized and held without violence on March 16. Turnout was huge and the results decisive. Two days later, Russia welcomed Crimea into the Russian Federation.

When we visited, just two years after the coup, we learned there were no regrets about the decision to leave Ukraine despite the problems caused by western sanctions. People told us that Crimea had been neglected under Ukraine. Now, as part of the Russian Federation, all sorts of infrastructure improvements were being made. We saw this first hand at the new Simferopol airport. We heard about the coming Kerch Straight bridge, which was completed a few years later. We saw the remodeling and rebuilding of the famous [Artek](#) youth summer camp.

It was very interesting to meet with young Tatars. This is an Muslim indigenous ethnic group in Crimea. When asked if western NGOs were active in promoting opposition, they smiled and said "YesSoros". Looking it up later, I learned that the US billionaire gave grants of \$230 million to influence Ukraine.

On our trip we also learned about Crimea's long history as part of Russia. The Crimea peninsula and naval port at Sebastopol has been Russian ever since 1783. It has been the Russian Navy's only southern freshwater port for 240 years.

In 1954 Crimea was designated to the Ukrainian republic by Soviet Premier Krushchev. There was no consultation but it was not critical because they were all part of a centralized Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union broke up, 94% of [Crimean voters](#) wanted to leave Ukraine and re-establish the Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic. Those wishes were ignored by Kyiv.

The 2014 coup was the last straw. The Maidan violence, coup government decisions on language, and attacks on civilians made it imperative to quickly secede. Russia already had soldiers in Crimea at the leased naval base at Sebastopol. The referendum proceeded quickly and peacefully.

Western hypocrisy and double standards are breathtaking. The West actively promoted the breakup of Yugoslavia, the secession of Kosovo from Serbia and South Sudan from Sudan. The right and popular will of Crimeans to secede from Ukraine and re-unify with Russia is clear. Yet the West continues to falsely claim that Russia “occupies” Crimea.

In November 2021 the US signed a [“Charter on Strategic Partnership”](#) with Ukraine. It declares, *“The United States does not and will never recognize Russia’s attempted annexation of Crimea.”* Evidently it does not matter what the Crimeans think and want. What kind of “democracy” is this?

Any attempt by a Ukrainian government to “take back” Crimea would be met with firm opposition and resistance from the people who live there. The chance of this happening is near zero.

The misinformation about Crimea shows how distorted media coverage of the entire Ukraine conflict is.

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