The Annexation of Crimea: “What’s Yours is Mine . . .”

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Summary

In March of 2014, Russia broke international laws and took a part of a sovereign country. Since this annexation, it has faced international backlash, including economic sanctions and a tarnished image. For Russia to truly gain from this policy choice, it needs to weigh two key policy options available to it: rescinding Crimea, or using its position in the Syrian civil war to its advantage. If Russia plays the game of power politics correctly, it may be able to restore its international image, relieve the burden of sanctions, and keep Crimea.

Current Policy

- **February 28, 2014**
  During political unrest in Ukraine, Russian troops began to occupy vital structures of Crimea to “stabilize” the situation.

- **March 11, 2014**
  In order to be annexed, Crimea had to first become “independent.” A declaration of independence by the Republic of Crimea was issued without the authorization of Ukraine’s central government.

- **March 16, 2014**
  The unlawful referendum for independence is held. 96.77% of Crimea’s vote for the reunification of Crimea with Russia, with an 83.1% voter turnout.

- **March 17, 2014**
  Crimea asks Russia to admit the newly independent state into the Russian Federation.

- **March 21, 2014**
  Upper house of Russia’s parliament ratifies the Republic of Crimea’s request for unification with Russia.

Analysis of the Current Policy

**Motivations:**
- Ethnic Russians in Crimea
- Diversionary Theory: Public opinion skyrockets after annexation

**Crimea by ethnic identity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tatar</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Advantages:**
- Right the “injustice” of the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine
- Address the rising threat from an expanding EU and NATO

**Disadvantages:**
- Economic sanctions totaling $26.7 billion in 2014, alone
- Tarnished international image

Alternative Policy Options for Russia

**Alternative 1: Russia Rescinds its Claim**

**Advantages:**
- Relieve economic burden of sanctions
- Disperse the administrative burden of Crimea ($18 billion)

**Disadvantages:**
- Political suicide – Public approval would plummet
- Naval base in Sevastopol would be lost
- Russian image will likely remain tarnished – cannot forget Russia’s actions

**Background:**
- Russia is a key backer of the Bashar al-Assad regime
- Western powers have struggled for a solution to the Syrian civil war
- Policy option: Russia agrees to get Bashar al-Assad to the negotiating table in return for the lifting of economic sanctions

**Advantages:**
- Renew status as a world power
- Get on more favorable terms with the West over sanctions
- Keep Crimea, since Syria weighs more heavily to the West

**Disadvantages:**
- Hinges on the belief that the West care more about Syria than it does about punishing President Putin
- May overestimate partnership with Assad

Alternative 2: Russia Uses Syria

**Advantages:**
- Russia would benefit most by maintaining the policy decision made in 2014, in combination with the option to use its position in the Syrian civil war to its greatest advantage. Russia stands to achieve ethnic reunification with Crimea, rectification of the injustice of 1954, retention of its naval base, negotiations on Western sanctions, and reassertion as a world power...if Russia plays the game right.

Legality: It Depends on Who You Ask

**Russia: Yes, it Was Legal**
- Russia and the Kosovo Precedent
- Black Sea Fleet Accords: Allowed up to 25,000 troops in Sevastopol

**International Community: No, it Was Illegal**
- Budapest Memorandum: Russia promised peace with Ukraine in return for Ukraine agreeing to give up nuclear pursuits
- UN Charter: Respect for state sovereignty

For references, please see paper.