1. What is your past Model UN experience?

I have participated in Model United Nations since my freshman year, during which I attended three college-hosted conferences. The next year, my sophomore year, I attended four college conferences and one high school conference, at which I wont four Outstanding Delegate awards and one Best Delegate award. At the conclusion of the Model UN season, I was appointed to serve as an Under-Secretary-General, the highest Junior Officer position in the club. I look forward to continuing my participation in Model UN as an upperclassman this year, and to helping mentor and develop younger delegates to experience the same level of success, intellectual fulfillment, and entertainment that I have achieved so far.

1. What interests you about the Ukrainian crisis?

My interests in the Ukrainian crisis stem from my general passion for international relations. As a sophomore, I wrote two opinion articles for my school’s foreign affairs magazine and debated the future of the countries in the former Soviet Union at Cornell’s Model United Nations conference in April. Through these experiences, I have developed a keen interest in the relationship between Russia, an economic and military superpower in the modern world, and the smaller surrounding nations, which depend on its political and financial support in order to survive. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the crisis is the Ukrainian government’s response to Russia’s aggression; while most countries would request assistance from other world powers and fight back with military force, much of Ukraine’s population, especially the people of Crimea, has simply sided with Russia in the matter. For that reason, finding a fair and practicable resolution promises to be difficult.

1. What are some of the major factors that influence Ukraine’s relationship with both the West and with Russia?

While the divide between Ukraine and Russia has been growing for several years, three major factors stand out to me in considering the causes of the current turmoil. Firstly, it is clear that historical instances of both hostility and friendship have contributed to the standoff. For centuries, the Slavic peoples of present-day Russia and Eastern Europe have felt strong ties to each other, regardless of national borders or political differences. For example, at the onset of the First World War, Russia came to the aid of Serbia, whose people are ethnically similar to Russia’s, even though it was in the midst of what would soon become a full-scale (and successful, of course) communist revolution. Later, during World War II, millions of Russians were deported to the Ukrainian Territory by Josef Stalin, which played a huge role in Crimea’s pro-independence vote in its 2014 referendum. Even following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia has attempted to play a role in Ukrainian affairs, and in doing so has pushed the embattled nation closer to the West. Though Ukraine clearly wishes to continue bettering its ties with economic powers such as the United States and United Kingdom, it is evident that Russia has no interest in allowing that to happen. Ukraine’s efforts to ratify trade agreements and other such treaties with the West were in fact one of the main causes for Russia’s encroachment on Crimea. Since the Eurasian superpower clearly does not wish to lose a major trading partner, especially in the lucrative markets of energy and foodstuffs, the prospect of Ukraine’s creating a balance between its preexistent ties to Russia and desired connections with the West without upsetting one party to the point of aggression seems almost impossible.

1. The annexation of Crimea—justifiable or a crime?

The Russian annexation of Crimea is without true justification. Admittedly, much of Crimea’s population is Russian by ethnicity, and its economy suggests that the region could benefit from being under Russian control. However, there is no excuse for seizing the territory of another nation simply because the people of a certain area are discontented at the time, or because the attacking nation has a clear advantage in military power. The current situation is a clear example of international bullying, on a scale that has not been seen in the United States since the “Carrot-and-Stick” approach to diplomacy utilized in the early 20th Century. Other examples of similarly illegal and reprehensible seizures of nearby foreign territory by stronger nations include the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1991 and the attack of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany in 1938-9. Although, obviously, Russia’s actions in Ukraine are not the same as those taken by Adolf Hitler during World War II, they have contributed to massive loss of life in the area. Instead of taking land it feels benefits it most, Russia should concentrate on protecting its borders and increasing cooperation with other countries. Only then will it be able to fully rejoin the global economy, participate more fully in international diplomatic discourse, and truly garner respect on the international stage.