



# HoMMUNC

Special Political and Decolonization  
Committee (SPECPOL)

Chair: Ikaasa Suri  
Moderator: Anna Kuritzkes

Dear Delegates,

My name is Ikaasa Suri, and I could not be more excited to be chairing SPECPOL for the second year in a row! Outside of Model UN, my interests for international relations and public policy extend to my work on *The Review*, Horace Mann's political and opinions magazine. As Editor-in-Chief of the publication, you can always find me in the StuPub working on layouts or dozing off near a computer.

Anna and I can't wait to meet you all this October! We look forward to a day of heated debate over issues pertinent to the entire international community. My hope is that through working with others you will be able to explore and share your love for Model UN, similar to how Anna and I have over the course of our high school careers.

The issues you will be discussing are those that are multi-faceted and extremely complex in nature. I hope that through these issues, you will learn the value of balance between compromise and standing firm in your countries' beliefs. SPECPOL is one committee in particular that takes these values to heart.

I hope that you all are as excited for HoMMUNC as we are. In the following background guide, you will find a place to start your research, but this is by no means a place to end. Anna and I both hope you are able to research elsewhere for a committee engaged in productive and diplomatic discourse.

Best,

Ikaasa Suri

**Committee History**

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (often called “SPECPOL”) is the Fourth Committee of the United Nations’ General Assembly. This committee, created through the merger of the General Assembly’s Fourth Committee and the Special Political Committee, debates many complex topics including issues of decolonization, refugee and human rights, peacekeeping missions, outer space, University for Peace, mine action, and public information.<sup>1</sup> In the United Nations’ 68<sup>th</sup> session, the chair of the Fourth Committee was H.E. Mr. Carlos Enrique García González of El Salvador.<sup>2</sup>

### **Topic A: Crimean Crisis**

The Crimean crisis itself refers to the international clash between Ukraine and Russia over control of the Crimean peninsula. Though the crisis involved two countries, namely, Ukraine and Russia, the implications of the problem threaten the international community. The crisis has challenged the legitimacy of international borders and called for the utilization of a referendum to redefine them. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee is mandated to debate issues of decolonization. In the case of Crimea, this committee is tasked with determining which nation is sovereign and finding a solution that can eventually lead to peace.

### **History**

Crimea was conquered by the Russian tsarina Catherine the Great in 1783.<sup>3</sup> In the century after Crimea’s subjugation, the Crimean peninsula was settled by Russian nobles

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<sup>1</sup> "UN General Assembly- Special Political and Decolonization," United Nations, accessed July 29, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/fourth/index.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup> "Special Political and Decolonization (Fourth Committee) Bureau of the 68th Session," United Nations, accessed July 29, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/fourth/68/bureau.shtml>.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Lohr and Anya Schmemmann, "Spotlight on Crimea," National Interest, last modified February 27, 2014, accessed July 29, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/spotlight-crimea-9960>.

and serfs.<sup>4</sup> Crimea remained under Russian control, and the Russian population continued to grow. During World War II, Joseph Stalin deported the Crimean Tatars, the original ethnic group that inhabited the peninsula, to Central Asia during one of his fits of paranoia.<sup>5</sup> After the deportation of the Tatars, the population of Crimea was predominantly Russian.

Crimea's association with Ukraine actually began in 1954, when Soviet official Nikita Khrushchev delegated the peninsula from the Russian Socialist republic to the Ukrainian Socialist republic.<sup>6</sup> At the time, this transfer was intended to be a symbolic gesture to honor the annexation of eastern Ukraine by tsar Aleksei three hundred years earlier in 1654.<sup>7</sup> The political implications of the transfer of Crimea seemed insignificant as both the Ukrainian Socialist Republic and the Russian Socialist Republic were, at the time, part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.). But in 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and Crimea became a part of an independent Ukrainian state, despite its ethnically Russian majority.<sup>8</sup>

### Ukrainian Crisis

Ukraine faced many problems after the fall of the Soviet Union. The country did not construct a strong government and as a result, corruption became a significant problem in Ukrainian politics. In the 1990s, Ukrainian presidents allowed oligarchs to gain commercial control, only fostering further distortion of the economy.<sup>9</sup> Considering

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Robert McMahon, "Ukraine in Crisis," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified May 5, 2014, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/ukraine/ukraine-crisis/p32540>.

the government's history of corruption and the economic problems that resurged after the 2008 financial crisis, it is easy to see why Ukraine's troubles culminated in a revolt.

The ideological differences between the eastern and western Ukraine intensified the crisis within the Ukrainian government and exacerbated the tension between Crimea and Ukraine. Viktor Yanukovich was elected President of the Ukraine in 2010, after he had campaigned on a platform of closer ties to Russia.<sup>10</sup> However, during his presidency, Yanukovich discussed a trade association agreement with the European Union.<sup>11</sup> Pressure from the Kremlin prevented Yanukovich from finalizing the agreement, though Yanukovich gave a different reason for abandoning it (he claimed European competition could damage Ukraine's industry).<sup>12</sup> Yanukovich's decision to turn against the EU prompted a protest in Kiev.<sup>13</sup> Demonstrators sought to end corruption and improve relations between Ukraine and the EU.<sup>14</sup> But there was opposition to these potential reforms by eastern and southern Ukrainians, who supported closer ties with Russia. The political unrest within the Ukraine centered on whether the country's future should be aligned with the European Union or with Russia. A dichotomy was forming within the Ukraine.

#### Ukraine and Russia

The tensions between Ukraine and Russia had existed long before Ukraine's conflict began. Russia had many interests in Crimea, beyond the fact that majority of the Crimean population is ethnically Russian. Crimea was valuable to Russia because the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

peninsula is located in the Black Sea, a region that has many oil and gas reserves.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Russia has controlled a major naval base, Sevastopol, in the Crimean peninsula since the Soviet era.<sup>16</sup> The Russian fleet's presence in Ukraine has been a source of tension in the past.<sup>17</sup> During the Russian conflict with Georgia in 2008, Ukraine implored Russia to not use the fleet operating out of Sevastopol (the Black Sea fleet).<sup>18</sup> The Russian fleet's presence was supposed to end in 2017; however, Yanukovich made the decision to extend the fleet's presence by 25 years, further validating the Russian claim to the Crimean peninsula.<sup>19</sup>

Photo:

*Map of Ukraine with the Crimea Region Highlighted*, photograph, NBC News, February 27, 2014, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/ukraine-crisis/ukraines-dangerous-game-why-crimea-conflict-matters-n40121>.

#### Annexation of Crimea



Though Crimea's inhabitants were not originally antagonistic towards the Ukraine, in the midst of conflict, many longed for a stable

<sup>15</sup> William J. Broad, "In Taking Crimea, Putin Gains a Sea of Fuel Reserves," New York Times, last modified May 17, 2014, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/world/europe/in-taking-crimea-putin-gains-a-sea-of-fuel-reserves.html>.

<sup>16</sup> "Crimea Profile," BBC News Europe, last modified March 22, 2014, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18287223>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

government.<sup>20</sup> Considering Crimea's population is 59% Russian and only 24% Ukrainian, and the peninsula's history, Russian sovereignty was not a preposterous proposal.<sup>21</sup> Crimea had historically been allowed some autonomy within the confines of Ukrainian control; the nation was given autonomous republic status, but it was not granted the ability to secede.<sup>22</sup>

Pro-Russian forces gained control of Crimea in February 2014.<sup>23</sup> Crimean militiamen encircled the Ukrainian military bases on the peninsula, and assumedly Russian armed forces took over the Crimean parliament, effectively annexing Crimea from the Ukraine.<sup>24</sup> A referendum held in Crimea in March 2014 revealed that 96.77% of Crimeans were in favor of seceding from the Ukraine.<sup>25</sup> This statistic was questionable, seeing as less than 60% of Crimeans are ethnically Russian and would therefore strongly favor secession. Additionally, many Crimeans loyal to Ukraine boycotted the referendum, skewing the outcome of the vote.<sup>26</sup>

### International Response

Many members of the international community regard the March referendum as invalid and saw Russia's conquering of Crimea as an obvious power play reminiscent of the Soviet Era. The EU released a statement describing the referendum as "illegal and

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<sup>20</sup> Lohr and Schmemmann, "Spotlight on Crimea," National Interest.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> "Crimea Profile," BBC News Europe, last modified March 22, 2014, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18287223>.

<sup>23</sup> "Crimean Referendum: Voters 'Back Russian Union,'" BBC News Europe, last modified March 16, 2014, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26606097>.

<sup>24</sup> Alia E. Dastagir, "Ukraine, Russia, Crimea: How the Story Evolved," USA Today, last modified April 24, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/03/20/ukraine-crisis-explainer/6610749/>.

<sup>25</sup> David Adesnik, "How Russia Rigged the Crimean Referendum," Forbes, last modified March 18, 2014, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidadesnik/2014/03/18/how-russia-rigged-crimean-referendum/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Crimean Referendum: Voters 'Back,'" BBC News Europe.

illegitimate.”<sup>27</sup> The United States also condemned the vote.<sup>28</sup> The international community has largely responded to the situation by imposing sanctions on Russia. The United States’ has targeted an important Russian bank, high-ranking officials, and affluent and influential supporters of the Russian government by enforcing a ban on travel and doing business with these individuals, as well as freezing their assets.<sup>29</sup> The immediate effect of these sanctions was clear; share prices of the major companies owned by the targeted wealthy Russians fell after the sanctions were announced.<sup>30</sup>

### Possible Solutions

Any viable solution to the Crimean crisis must involve must involve a compromise between Ukraine and Russia over the sovereignty of Crimea, the recognition of the chosen sovereign by the international community, and the lifting of sanctions placed against Russia in response to Russian aggression.

### Questions to consider:

1. Is Russia sovereign over Crimea, or is Ukraine?
2. Does the international community have a responsibility to enforce Ukraine’s sovereignty? If so, how will this be accomplished (using military power, further sanctions, etc.)?

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Carol E. Lee, Gregory L. White, and Jared A. Favole, "U.S., Russia Trade Sanctions Over Crimea," Wall Street Journal, last modified March 21, 2014, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303802104579451142166356328>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



3. Should a new referendum be held, provided that the referendum is administered by the UN?

### **Topic B: Palestinian Refugees**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most difficult problems the United Nations is faced with solving. It is impossible to generate a solution to this conflict without solving the Palestinian refugee crisis.

#### History

The establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 displaced over 700,000 Palestinians.<sup>31</sup> According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), Palestinian refugees are defined as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.”<sup>32</sup> As of 2010, there were 4 million UN-registered Palestinian refugees who cite their homelessness as a result of the 1948 diaspora and 750,000 whose families fled in 1967.<sup>33</sup>

There are conflicting opinions about the origins of the diaspora. While some think the Palestinians left because they did not want to live in a Jewish state, others believe the Palestinians were driven from their home by Israelis. Israeli history teaches that

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<sup>31</sup> Riccardo Bocco, ed., "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History," United Nations Relief and Works Agency, last modified 2010, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/201006109359.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> "Palestine Refugees," UNRWA, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Asser, "Obstacles to Arab-Israeli Peace: Palestinian Refugees," BBC News Middle East, last modified September 2, 2010, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11104284>.

Palestinian refugees left to avoid the warzone their country was becoming.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Palestinian historians claim that their people fled as a result of “ethnic cleansing.”<sup>35</sup>

### Current Opinions

Palestinians have declared that refugees have the “right of return” to territory that belonged to them and their ancestors.<sup>36</sup> As Israel insists the Palestinians left willingly, the country asserts that Palestinians refugees should be absorbed by Arab countries or a future Palestinian state.<sup>37</sup> However, like in most refugee situations, host countries are largely unwilling to accept refugees as citizens and help them assimilate. As a result, Palestinian refugees are left to live in refugee camps.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Efraim Karsh, "How Many Palestinian Arab Refugees Were There?," Middle East Forum, last modified April 2011, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.meforum.org/2875/how-many-palestinian-arab-refugees>.

<sup>37</sup> Asser, "Obstacles to Arab-Israeli Peace," BBC News Middle East.

## Refugee Camps

There are 58 recognized Palestinian refugee camps.<sup>38</sup> These camps are located in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the West Bank, and Gaza.<sup>39</sup> The camps are lands leased by host countries and local landowners to the UNRWA, the organization responsible for improving the Palestinian refugee situation, for the purpose of housing Palestinian refugees.<sup>40</sup> Because the lands are leased to the UNRWA, refugees cannot own land in camps.<sup>41</sup> The plots allotted for refugee camps are confined, and as the refugee population grows, the population density increases drastically. Both socioeconomic and living conditions in the camps are typically substandard.<sup>42</sup> A UNRWA report found that two-thirds of Palestinian refugees are poor, that 56% of Palestinian refugees are

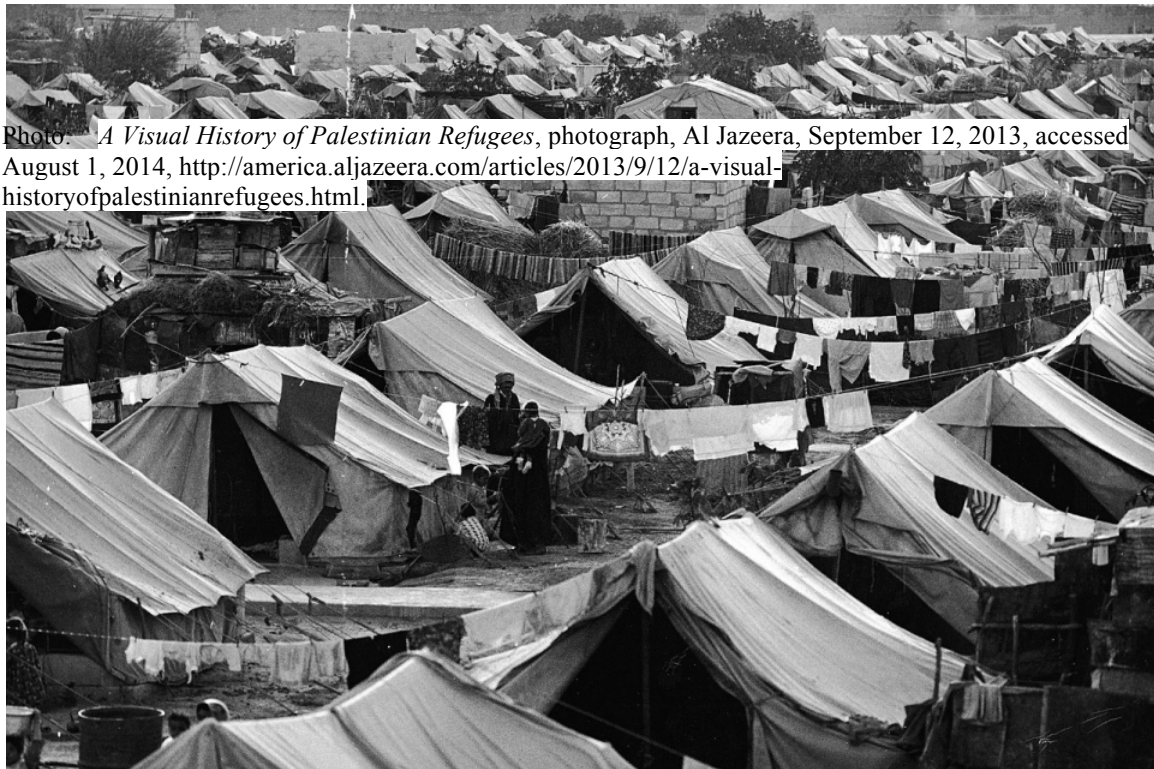


Photo. *A Visual History of Palestinian Refugees*, photograph, Al Jazeera, September 12, 2013, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/9/12/a-visual-historyofpalestinianrefugees.html>.

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<sup>38</sup> "Palestine Refugees," UNRWA.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

unemployed, and that there is a large gender gap in employment, with only 13% of women who are eligible to work being able to do so.<sup>43</sup> According to the UNRWA, the camps lack basic infrastructure including roads and sewers.<sup>44</sup> Life in refugee camps leaves refugees at a disadvantage. A Palestinian refugee in Lebanon is four times more likely than a Lebanese national to end up in extreme poverty.<sup>45</sup> While research has shown that education can help refugees move up in the socioeconomic ladder, there is a significant gap in education for refugees. Only 50% of refugees between the ages of 16 and 18 are enrolled in school, and only 13% of refugees over the age of 18 have completed a Bachelor's degree through higher education.<sup>46</sup> The conditions in the camps are not conducive to improving the refugees' ability to rebuild their lives.

### Possible Solutions

The current tumult between Israel and Hamas makes a two-state solution more challenging than ever. Thus, with no Palestine for the refugees to return to, many questions arise regarding where they will go. It is up to this committee to help aid the Palestinian refugees and improve their unfortunate situation.

### Questions to consider:

1. Who is responsible for giving aid to the Palestinian refugees: the host country, Israel, Hamas, Palestinian Authority, etc.?
2. Do Palestinian refugees have the "right of return"? If so, how can this right be enforced?

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<sup>43</sup> Jad Chaaban et al., "Socioeconomic Survey of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," last modified December 31, 2010, PDF.

<sup>44</sup> "Palestine Refugees," UNRWA.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

3. How can the conditions in refugee camps be improved? Is monetary aid enough, or is there more the international community can be doing?
4. Should host countries be expected to absorb and naturalize Palestinian refugees, or the children of refugees if they were born in the host country?

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