

The Crisis in Ukraine

OVERVIEW

This lesson examines the crisis in Ukraine. First, students hold a brief discussion on what they think is the most important news story going on. Then they read and discuss a background piece on the crisis in Ukraine. Next, in small groups, they role play international lawyers and analyze Ukraine's 1994 Budapest Memorandum, an agreement among Ukraine, Russia, the U.S., and the U.K.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Explain why the protests in Ukraine took place.
- Describe the cultural divisions in Ukraine.
- Analyze and answer text-dependent questions on a primary document, citing evidence from the text (Ukraine's Budapest Memorandum).

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Common Core Standard RH.11–12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

National High School Civics Standard 22: Understands how the world is organized politically into nation-states, how nation-states interact with one another, and issues surrounding U.S. foreign policy. (1) Understands the significance of principal foreign policies and events in the United States' relations with the world (e.g., Monroe Doctrine, World Wars I and II, formation of the United Nations, Marshall Plan, NATO, Korean and Vietnam Wars, end of the Cold War). (12) Knows some important bilateral and multilateral agreements to which the United States is signatory (e.g., NAFTA, Helsinki Accord, Antarctic Treaty, Most Favored Nation Agreements).

National High School U.S. History Standard 30: Understands developments in foreign policy

California History Social Science Standard 11.9: Students analyze U.S. foreign policy since World War II.

PREPARATION

Make copies of the following handouts:

Background on the Crisis in Ukraine —1 per student

Memorandum on Security Assurances —1 per student

PROCEDURE

I. Focus Discussion

- A. Hold a brief discussion by asking students: What do you consider the most important news story going on? Why?

Accept reasonable answers.

- B. Tell students that one recent important story deals with the crisis in Ukraine.

II. Reading and Discussion — Background on the Crisis in Ukraine

- A. Distribute to each student **Background on the Crisis in Ukraine**. Ask students to read the handout and to look for:

- The Budapest Memorandums
- The divisions within Ukraine
- Why the demonstrations took place

- B. When students finish reading, hold a discussion using these questions:

1. What were the Budapest Memorandums? Why are they important?
2. How is Ukraine divided culturally?
3. What provoked the demonstrations in Kiev?
4. The Ukrainian constitution's article 111 gives parliament the right to impeach the president "if he commits treason or other crime." But it requires a 3/4 vote by parliament (which would have been 338 of the 450 lawmakers) and a review by Ukraine's Constitutional Court. Parliament's vote to oust Yanukovych had 328 members in favor. Before fleeing Kiev, Yanukovych recorded an official resignation from office. But he later revoked it, calling his ouster "illegal" and declaring, "I'm not going to resign. I'm a legitimately elected president." Do you think he is legally still the president of Ukraine? Explain.
5. Looking at the map, how would you describe Crimea geographically?
6. What arguments could be made in favor of Russia's annexation of Crimea? What arguments against it? Do you think it was legitimate? Explain.
7. In the 2010 Ukrainian presidential election, Yanukovych won by about 800,000 votes. In Crimea alone, he won by about 600,000 votes. How might it affect Ukrainian elections if Crimea is no longer a part of Ukraine?

III. Activity — Ukraine’s Budapest Memorandum

- A. Divide the class into small groups.
- B. Tell students that they are going to role play experts on international law and take a closer look at Ukraine’s Budapest Memorandum, which will be passed out to them in a moment. Explain that their purpose will be to determine the commitments the parties made under this agreement. Review the instructions for the activity and ask if students have any questions.
- C. Pass out the **Memorandum on Security Assurances** to each student and give students time to complete the activity.
- D. When students finish, call on one group to answer the first question. Then hold a class discussion. Repeat this process, calling on a new group for each question.
- E. Debrief the activity by holding a discussion on the following questions:
 - 1. Why do you think that Russia, in spite of this prior agreement, decided to take over Crimea?
 - 2. Given that Russia apparently violated the agreement, what value might the agreement have?

BACKGROUND ON THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE



Map No. 3773 Rev. 6 UNITED NATIONS

Department of Field Support

When the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) broke apart in 1991, a number of new countries were created. The largest by far was Russia (also known as the Russian Federation), and it took the USSR's seat on the U.N. Security Council. The other newly independent countries joined as member nations of the United Nations. Two of the former republics were already members, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and they changed their names to Belarus and Ukraine, respectively.

Before it split apart, the USSR had been one of the world's two superpowers (the other being the United States). It held a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons, and as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it was one of only five nations permitted to have nuclear weapons. The other four were the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and China.

When the USSR dissolved, however, part of its nuclear arsenal was outside of Russia. The newly independent states of Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine, all former Soviet Republics, possessed nuclear weapons. In 1994 in Budapest, Hungary, these three countries, each in separate agreements (known as the Budapest Memorandums), promised to turn over all their nuclear weapons to Russia and join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom also signed the agreements.

The Independent Nation of Ukraine

When the USSR dissolved, more than 90 percent of all Ukrainians voted for independence, including a majority from all the regions of the country. Under its constitution, the government of Ukraine has an elected national president, a unicameral parliament, a prime minister, and a system of courts.

Elections for political office have reflected a cultural East-West divide in the nation. Its 13 eastern provinces are culturally aligned with Russia. In general, the people speak Russian, worship at Russian Orthodox churches, and want a close relationship with Russia. In contrast, the people in the 13 western provinces, in general, speak Ukrainian, worship at Roman Catholic churches, and want a closer relationship with the West.



The Ukrainian blue-and-yellow flag and the coat of arms were adopted in 1992. (Wikimedia Commons)

Ukraine's first president tilted West, but astutely avoided the country's divisions. It was said he never needed to carry an umbrella because he could "slip between the raindrops." Amid allegations of corruption, he lost his re-election bid in 1994 to a candidate supported by the pro-Russian eastern provinces. Ukraine drew closer to Russia during the second president's two terms in office.

In the election in 2004, a major scandal erupted. A candidate supported in the western provinces, Viktor Yushchenko, was poisoned. He lived, but the poison disfigured his face. When the election was held, his opponent, another Viktor Y (Viktor Yanukovych) was declared the winner. Allegations of voter fraud led to massive protests known as the Orange Revolution, and the country's Supreme Court ordered a new election. In the subsequent election, Yushchenko won.

Yushchenko's term in office was turbulent, and he failed to make the run-off for the 2010 presidential election. The contest came down to two candidates, Yulia Tymoshenko, supported in the western provinces, and Yushchenko's previous opponent, Viktor Yanukovych, supported in the pro-Russian east. Yanukovych won.

In office, Yanukovych promised that Ukraine would not join NATO, the Western military alliance. His opponent in the presidential race, Yulia Tymoshenko, was convicted of corruption and

sentenced to prison, a prosecution that international human-rights groups condemned as politically motivated.

In a move that displeased Moscow, Yanukovich entered negotiations with the European Union to be an associate member. But days before he was supposed to sign the agreement in November 2013, he backed off and indicated he would seek closer ties with Russia instead.

Protests in Ukraine

Massive protests broke out in Kiev (Kyiv), the capital city of Ukraine.

Amid growing protests, Yanukovich announced that Russia would pay off \$15 billion of Ukrainian debt and substantially lower the cost of the natural gas it sells Ukraine.

The protests continued to grow. A huge crowd occupied the central square in Kiev and took over the city hall. Parliament initially supported President Yanukovich and responded with harsh anti-protest laws (which it later repealed).

Clashes between police and protesters continued. In one day, government snipers killed more than 80 protesters.

On February 21, 2014, President Yanukovich announced he had reached a European-brokered deal with the opposition. He agreed to form a new government and hold new elections in December. Parliament voted to free Yulia Tymoshenko from prison and to cut the president's powers.

The agreement did not calm the protesters as they took over Kiev. President Yanukovich fled from the city. The Ukrainian parliament, including members of Yanukovich's own party, voted to remove him from office, appointed an interim president, and announced elections would be held in May.

When Yanukovich reappeared, he stated that he still considered himself president, announced that a coup had taken place, and explained he was in Russia.

The Russian Response in Crimea

The Russian government viewed the new pro-Western regime in Ukraine as illegitimate. Its position was that a duly elected government had been overthrown. Russian President Vladimir Putin complained that ethnic Russians were being attacked in parts of Ukraine, particularly Crimea.



A massive protest against President Yanukovich took place in Kiev on December 13, 2013. (Wikimedia Commons/Nessa Gnatoush)

Crimea had been a part of Russia (and the USSR) for 300 years. Russia's Black Sea port at Sevastopol (which it still leases from Ukraine) has always held strategic importance as the Russian fleet's only path to the Mediterranean Sea.

In 1954, the government of the USSR issued a decree that Crimea would no longer be part of the Russian Socialist Republic, but would be part of the Ukrainian Republic. The reason for the decree is unclear. The then-USSR leader Nikita Khrushchev was a Ukrainian. Since the 1954 decree, Crimea has remained as a part of Ukraine, but with a large Russian-ethnic majority.

At the beginning of March 2014, under the claim that ethnic Russians were under attack, Russian troops moved into Crimea. The Crimean provincial government held a referendum on whether Crimea should be part of Russia. On March 16, 2014, a huge majority of those who voted — 96.7 percent — favored returning to Russia. Many members of the international community, including Ukraine, have questioned the legality of the voting process and its overwhelming results. But the international press has noted large demonstrations within Crimea supporting the independence referendum. Two days after the vote, the Russian government claimed Crimea as part of Russia.

The United States sponsored a resolution in the U.N. Security Council to affirm Ukraine's "sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity" and declare that the Crimean referendum "can have no validity." The 15-member Security Council voted 13 in favor of the resolution, China abstained, and Russia voted no. Because Russia is one of the five permanent members of the council, its vote of no amounted to a veto of the resolution.

For Discussion

1. What were the Budapest Memorandums? Why are they important?
2. How is Ukraine divided culturally?
3. What provoked the demonstrations in Kiev?
4. The Ukrainian constitution's article 111 gives parliament the right to impeach the president "if he commits treason or other crime." But it requires a 3/4 vote by parliament (which would have been 338 of the 450 lawmakers) and a review by Ukraine's Constitutional Court. Parliament's vote to oust Yanukovich had 328 members in favor. Before fleeing Kiev, Yanukovich recorded an official resignation from office. But he later revoked it, calling his ouster "illegal" and declaring, "I'm not going to resign. I'm a legitimately elected president." Do you think he is legally still the president of Ukraine? Explain.
5. Looking at the map, how would you describe Crimea geographically?
6. What arguments could be made in favor of Russia's annexation of Crimea? What arguments against it? Do you think it was legitimate? Explain.
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ACTIVITY

UKRAINE'S BUDAPEST MEMORANDUM

In 1994, Ukraine in a Budapest Memorandum promised to turn over all its nuclear weapons to Russia and join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which it did. Also signing the memorandum were the governments of Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In this activity, students role play experts on international law and analyze the commitments made by each party to the memorandum.

Each group should:

1. Read the memorandum.
2. Answer the following questions, specifically citing passages from the document as evidence for your answers. Also use the article, "Background on the Crisis in Ukraine."
 - a. Has Russia violated the memorandum?
 - b. Russia supplies natural gas to Ukraine. Would it violate the memorandum if Russia were to cut off its sales of natural gas to Ukraine?
 - c. Has the U.S. fulfilled its obligations under the memorandum?
 - d. What further information would have been helpful in answering these questions?
3. Be prepared to report your answers, with reasons and evidence, to the class. When citing evidence, quote particular passages (and know the number of the line and page the passages are on).

**Memorandum on Security Assurances in
connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty
on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons**

Budapest, 5 December 1994

The United States of America, the Russian Federation, and the
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,

Welcoming the accession of Ukraine to the Treaty on the
Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-nuclear-weapon
State,

Taking into account the commitment of Ukraine to eliminate all
nuclear weapons from its territory within a specified period of
time,

Noting the changes in the world-wide security situation, including
the end of the Cold War, which have brought about conditions for
deep reductions in nuclear forces.

Confirm the following:

1. The United States of America, the Russian Federation, and
the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
reaffirm their commitment to Ukraine, in accordance with
the principles of the CSCE Final Act [Helsinki Accords], to
respect the Independence and Sovereignty and the existing
borders of Ukraine.
2. The United States of America, the Russian Federation, and
the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
reaffirm their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of
force against the territorial integrity or political
independence of Ukraine, and that none of their weapons
will ever be used against Ukraine except in self-defense or
otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United
Nations.
3. The United States of America, the Russian Federation, and
the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
reaffirm their commitment to Ukraine, in accordance with
the principles of the CSCE Final Act, to refrain from
economic coercion designed to subordinate to their own
interest the exercise by Ukraine of the rights inherent in its
sovereignty and thus to secure advantages of any kind.

4. The United States of America, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, reaffirm their commitment to seek immediate United Nations Security Council action to provide assistance to Ukraine, as a non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, if Ukraine should become a victim of an act of aggression or an object of a threat of aggression in which nuclear weapons are used.
5. The United States of America, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, reaffirm, in the case of the Ukraine, their commitment not to use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, except in the case of an attack on themselves, their territories or dependent territories, their armed forces, or their allies, by such a state in association or alliance with a nuclear weapon state.
6. The United States of America, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will consult in the event a situation arises which raises a question concerning these commitments.

This Memorandum will become applicable upon signature.

Signed in four copies having equal validity in the English, Russian and Ukrainian languages.

For Ukraine: (Signed) Leonid D. KUCHMA

For the Russian Federation: (Signed) Boris N. YELTSIN

For the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland:
(Signed) John MAJOR

For the United States of America: (Signed) William J. CLINTON