

# Russia's Legal Position on the Annexation of Crimea: A Critique\*

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**Abstract:** *Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 is widely seen as a turning point in Russia's domestic politics and its relations with the international community, reflecting a new willingness to confront the West, with military means if necessary.*

*Since 1991 Russia had gradually been drawn into the sphere of international commitments, as evidenced by its inclusion in the Council of Europe, the WTO, and other bodies. But Crimea seemed to represent a break with that trajectory, signaling a flagrant disregard for the norms of international law, notably sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the binding nature of international treaties.*

*Russian officials and academics deployed some spurious legal reasoning in trying to justify the annexation, including appeals to self-determination, historical legitimacy, the Kosovo precedent, the purported illegality of the Ukrainian government, and alleged threats to the security of Russians and Russian-speakers in Crimea. At the same time, however, Moscow declined to recognize the sovereignty of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, and in annexing Crimea it tried to disguise its violation of international law (by avoiding casualties, by using "little green men," and by holding a referendum). A close study of the Crimean case can suggest ways in which international law could be strengthened with a view to deterring similar actions in the future.*

**Keywords:** Crimea, Russia, annexation, self-determination

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