

Saint Ignatius College Prep

SIMUN XVI

Saint Ignatius Model United Nations



Chicago, IL

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**Cabinet of the Russian Federation
Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev
7th Duma**



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Letter from the Chair:

Hello delegates, and welcome to the Russian Cabinet at SIMUN XVI! My name is Cole Hopkins, and I will be your chair for this committee. I am currently a senior at St. Ignatius, and in my fourth year on the SIMUN team. I co-chaired UNEP during SIMUN XIV, then chaired the Modern Day Israeli Cabinet during SIMUN XV. This will unfortunately be the last SIMUN conference I have the privilege of staffing, but I am hopeful it will be the best!

This committee will place delegates in a simulation of the modern day Russian government, as it deals with a variety of challenging foreign policy issues while struggling to revive its economy and maintain internal stability. Our two topics both concern ongoing conflicts, topic A being that in Ukraine and topic B being that in Syria. In both regions, we will need to draft creative solutions to protect our interests and weaken our adversaries. Though this committee is primarily focused on Syria and Ukraine, delegates should not consider themselves confined to those areas. If needed, they are free to act on other foreign policy concerns such as the United States and Europe (Danish elections are coming up, after all) or perhaps domestic issues such as the economy. Regardless of where they act, delegates will need strong skills in both drafting policy and crisis in order to succeed in committee.

Since SIMUN is a training conference, this may be the first crisis committee many of you attend. I will give a brief introduction to crisis committees at the beginning of the conference, but I recommend you come with a reasonable knowledge of how this committee format works. You will also need to come with a typed out position paper, with at least one page per topic. If you have any questions about the committee structure or topics, feel free to send me an email at cole.hopkins@students.ignatius.org. Good luck!

Letter from the Co-Chair

Hello delegates! I am Erin Levesque, a senior at St. Ignatius, and I am very excited to be your vice chair this year for the Russian Cabinet. This is my fourth year as a member of the SIMUN team. I am an active member of the club, and have attended conferences on both the high school and collegiate level, including MUNI at University of Illinois UC. I hope to see the members in this committee bring creative and new ideas to the room, make efforts to carry on a good and informed debate, and cultivate logical and innovative solutions to the issues at hand. I am looking forward to seeing all of you at the conference!

Sincerely,

Erin Levesque, erin.levesque@students.ignatius.org

Cabinet Positions



Minister of Communications and Mass Media - Nikolai Nikiforov

Minister of Culture - Vladimir Medinsky

Minister of Defence - Sergei Shoigu

Minister of Economic Development - Maxim Oreshkin

Minister of Education and Science - Olga Vasilyeva

Minister of Emergencies - Vladimir Puchkov

Minister of Energy - Alexander Novak

Minister of Finance - Anton Siluanov

Minister of Foreign Affairs - Sergey Lavrov

Minister of Health - Veronika Skvortsova

Minister of Industry and Trade - Denis Manturov

Minister of Interior Affairs - Vladimir Kolokoltsev

Minister of Justice - Alexander Kononov

Minister of Labor and Social Affairs - Maxim Topilin

Minister of Transport - Maksim Sokolov

Topic A: The Ukrainian Question



The present civil war in Ukraine began in 2013, as protests erupted over then president Viktor Yanukovich's suspension of talks with the EU on a landmark Association Agreement that would've brought the country significantly closer to the European bloc. Ukraine is a fundamentally divided country, with the Ukrainian speaking western half primarily supporting greater European integration and the Russian speaking eastern half preferring stronger ties to Russia. Mr. Yanukovich's decision was resoundly unpopular with the pro-European segment of the population, reinforcing Ukrainian perceptions of Yanukovich as a Russian puppet. Protests against his government started as a student movement in Kiev, but rapidly escalated in size and intensity. Though the protests were ostensibly against the cessation of talks, demonstrators also voiced their anger over government corruption and Mr. Yanukovich's ties with Russia. It should be noted that the Ukrainian political opposition did not play a significant role in the protests until

months after they began, and attempts at negotiation between opposition leaders and the government were regarded with suspicion by many protestors. However, the movement continued to grow to dangerous proportions. In February 2014, President Yanukovich and many of his ministers fled to Russia as Ukraine grew progressively more unstable.

A pro-West interim government was formed while separatist movements emerged in Donbass, a Russian-speaking Eastern region. Many of these separatists received support from Russia. In February, Russia occupied the Crimean peninsula, officially in order to protect the majority Russian speaking population there. Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine and be annexed by Russia later that month, though many in the international community consider the referendum illegitimate. Separatist groups wishing to form independent governments or secede to join Russia continued to proliferate in the East. The most successful of these were those in Donetsk and Luhansk, which both established themselves as de facto states independent from Ukraine in May. Pro-EU businessman Petro Poroshenko was elected president in May, presiding over an attempt by the Ukrainian army to push back against the separatists. By then it had become clear that Russia was supporting the rebels, and relations between Russia and Ukraine continued to deteriorate. Russian forces massed at the border, and a growing stream of equipment and unmarked troops flowed in to aid the separatists.

Though the insurgents were mostly pro-Russian, they were far from a single unified entity. Donetsk and Luhansk are the most well equipped organizations, and also generally the most receptive to Russian influence. Complementing them are a hodgepodge of militias, prone to infighting and somewhat difficult to control. Despite the Ukrainian army's own weakness (most of its equipment dates to the Soviet era), it managed to halt initial rebel advances and largely

confine them to parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. After Mariupol was retaken in June 2014, the cities of Donetsk, Luhansk, Horlivka, and Makiivka became the only major urban centers under separatist control. By August, it seemed like Ukrainian government was on the brink of taking control of the last major rebel strongholds. However, their advances were stalled by a strong separatist counterattack made possible through Russian assistance. Since then, the conflict has largely devolved into a stalemate, with shelling and ground combat sporadically flaring up around border regions.

Though ceasefires had been made (and broken soon after) throughout the conflict, the first real attempt at a creating lasting peace came with the Minsk 1 agreement. Hastily signed in September 2014, Minsk 1 mandated a ceasefire, prisoner exchange, and a decentralization of power in Ukraine. The agreement dampened the intensity of fighting, but violations of the ceasefire were not uncommon. By January 2015, the agreement had completely broken down and full combat had returned to Donbass. Diplomats reconvened in February, hoping once again to draft a treaty that could end the war. They emerged with a 13-point peace plan, doubtlessly more comprehensive than the one preceding it. Minsk 2 included a ceasefire, prisoner exchange, amnesty for separatists, decentralization reforms in Ukraine, humanitarian aid, withdrawal of foreign armed organizations/individuals, and eventual restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty over Donbass, among other points. Outside of a few problem areas, fighting toned down somewhat after the passing of the agreement, and both sides withdrew their artillery as requested. However, it did not take long for the ceasefire to break down once again. The status quo returned, and since then Ukraine's "frozen conflict" has continued largely unabated.

Since the start of the war, Russia has continued to involve itself in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, a commitment that is becoming ever more difficult to abandon. Russia enjoys the strongest relationship with the DPR and LPR, though it has provided support to several other separatist groups. Many separatist leaders, such as Igor Girkin and Aleksander Borodai, hold Russian citizenship and military/intelligence backgrounds. Furthermore, Russia frequently represents separatists during negotiations and strongly influences separatist leadership. Russia sends large amounts of military equipment to separatist forces, and some observers say it even launches artillery strikes on Ukrainian positions. The separatist governments are also rumored to be dependant on Russian funding to pay their bills. Roubles have become the de facto currency in the DPR and LPR, and since March 2016 Russia has recognized DPR/LPR identification documents as valid, further drawing the territories into its fold.

Russia's backing of the separatists has had its drawbacks. Economic sanctions (along with low energy prices) have damaged the economy, which has been in recession since 2015. The annexation of Crimea has also resulted in some of the largest opposition rallies in Russia in recent memory, and opposition to the Ukraine conflict has helped galvanize the opposition. Vladimir Putin's approval rating did shoot up by nearly 10 percentage points after the Crimea annexation, however. Crimea itself is of some strategic utility, containing the valuable Black Sea port of Sevastopol. Despite this, Crimea is economically backward, and modernization projects have cost nearly \$8.5 billion to Russia . This combined with the costs of supporting pro-Russia separatists has resulted in a large price tag for Russia's actions. Whether or not these costs are justified by the benefits they accrue is up for debate. Regardless of its outcome, the conflict in Ukraine is doubtless a significant factor in Russia's future, one that cannot be downplayed.

Topic B: Our Priorities in Syria



The Syrian Civil War is a complex and oftentimes difficult to understand conflict, with roots that stretch back nearly six years. The war has its origin in the Arab Spring protests which began in March 2011, consisting of unprecedented demonstrations against president Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian regime. The specific origins of the protests can be traced to the arrest and beating of several schoolboys in Daraa for writing anti-government graffiti a month earlier. Demonstrations spread from Daraa throughout the country, where they rapidly increased in size. The government responded with a combination of small reforms and force, including live fire in Daraa which killed four. As the protests grew and the government continued to crack down, the demonstrators' goal transformed from reform of the government to removal of Assad from power. The military was deployed to Daraa in March, laying siege to opposition headquarters and killing nearly 220 people suspected of protest connections. The government continued to increase its repression of protests around the country, but they only grew in size and intensity. Some parts of the military started to defect, with the majority joining the Free Syrian Army (FSA) formed in July. Skirmishes between the government and defectors were some of the first major armed confrontations of the war.

By early 2012, the country had grown significantly more unstable. Suicide bombings were becoming common, and there were sporadic clashes between the government and protesters. Many demonstrations turned violent, and protester death counts continued to rise. More opposition groups emerged, oftentimes with competing goals for Syria's future. Many of such groups began to openly attack government positions, and the military continued to besiege towns it considered loyal to the opposition. In November, several opposition/rebel groups combined into the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, an umbrella organization for coordinating opposition and garnering international support. In the same month, Syria's Arab League membership was suspended and several individuals within the government were sanctioned. This combined with an EU arms embargo and sanctions from several other organizations signaled the growing distance between Assad's regime and the rest of the world.

Russia, however, remained a staunch defender of the government. By the end of 2012 it, along with China, had vetoed all 3 UN Security Council Resolutions condemning the violence in Syria or the Syrian government. Russia also increased arms sales to Syria as the disorder grew more pronounced. Russia and Syria have a strong relationship that dates back to the 1970s, when Bashar al-Assad's father Hafez ruled. Despite a brief rift in the 80s, Syria has generally remained Russia's strongest ally in the Middle East and a dependable market for military exports. However, in the early phases of the crisis Russia abstained from military intervention and instead utilized indirect methods of supporting the Syrian government.

Even with Russian aid, the situation continued to spiral out of control. The Free Syrian army started to splinter, and more rebel groups entered the conflict. These included Islamist

organizations such as the Al-Nusra front and Kurdish paramilitaries such as the YPG. Rebel groups also began to take and hold territory for the first time. One of the first major battles occurred July 2012 in the suburbs of Damascus, where rebel troops affiliated with the FSA managed to temporarily take control of several outlying districts before being repelled. Rebel forces also attacked parts of Aleppo, the largest city in the country. Their campaign to take several Aleppo suburbs began what would become one of the longest and most destructive battles in the war. Meanwhile, attempts at making peace by the international community largely failed. Of these, the most notable was UN Secretary General Kofi Anan's 6 point peace plan, which was implemented along with UNSC resolutions 2042 and 2043 in early 2012. Despite acceptance by both sides and a 300 member UN observation mission, the ceasefire fell apart after only 2 months. Since then, all attempts at a lasting peace have met a similar fate.

As the war raged on, international opinion continued to shift against the government. Many countries turned away from it over its alleged use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs, combined with its tolerance for high levels of civilian casualties. Along with Russia, only Iran has been willing commit its resources to backing the Assad government, deploying Hezbollah militants to fight the rebels. Iraq and China have provided diplomatic support, but not to a significant extent. Some governments have even taken to supporting the rebels. Among other countries, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and France have all provided funding to insurgent organisations. Most foreign aid goes to the FSA and other secular or moderate opposition groups, though Gulf countries have provided non-lethal aid to Islamists and the West has provided material support to Kurdish militias.

As the conflict matured, hope of the FSA or another moderate rebel group quickly taking power diminished. The military started to hold its ground in the west, stalling FSA advances. Additionally, the rapid spread of the Islamic State in the East and the growth of Kurdish militias in the North further complicated the situation. The Islamic State seemed especially threatening, gaining strength at a breakneck pace and quickly taking eastern population centers following its founding in 2014. The threat posed by Islamic State jolted some Western countries into action, motivating them to begin airstrikes on IS positions and provide more aid to the Kurds fighting it. However, the Syrian government continued to suffer major defeats while fighting the rebels.

The precarious state of the country compelled Russia to militarily intervene in September 2015. At the time, the Syrian government barely controlled 1/5th of the country and was gradually being pushed back to the coast. Russia began with a campaign of aggressive airstrikes on rebel positions, coordinated with advances by Syrian and Iranian forces on the ground. Russian airstrikes hit multiple rebel factions, including both moderate groups supported by the West and Islamists backed by Saudi Arabia. Russia has, however, coordinated with Kurdish forces and attempted to repair relations between them and the government. Russia started using ship based cruise missiles in October, and deployed ground troops in November. Though the intervention was originally centered at the port of Tartus, over time Russia has built or acquired a large amount of military bases in the country from which it bases its operations. In fact, many analysts believe Russia's main priority in Syria is not propping up Assad but expanding its own regional influence. It is no accident that Russian warplanes have struck American supplied rebels, and Russian diplomats have taken an outsize role in peace negotiations. It is clear that influence and power, especially in relation to the United States, are the ultimate goals in Syria.

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