



POLICY PAPER

LIBERATING CRIMEA FROM THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE?

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IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE TO LIBERATING CRIMEA FROM THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION?

Policy paper of the Ukrainian Prism's Security Studies Program, supported by the International Renaissance Foundation.

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Introduction

What had once seemed an insignificant land grab in European backwater has turned into a major land and hybrid war in Europe with far reaching global consequences. Concentrating on conflict resolution in the east of Ukraine while leaving Crimea out of the equation allowed Russia to militarize the peninsula, occupy the sea of Azov and the Black Sea and use it as a launchpad for its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2023. Striving not to escalate, many politicians and observers were ready to agree that Crimea held a special place for Russia and de facto acquiesce to President Putin's claim that the issue had been settled and Crimea had become Russian for good. Rekindling the war, however, not only added urgency to Ukraine's desire to liberate the peninsula but also put the issue of Crimea back on the table.

At the last round of negotiations with Russia in March 2022, Ukraine was ready to concentrate on achieving the end of hostilities first and negotiate Crimea's fate for 10-15 years afterward. Since then, Ukraine's position has hardened and grown firm. President Zelenskiy clearly stated that Ukraine would never forget that the Russian war had started with Crimea, and emphasized that the war would end with Crimea. Ukraine's repeatedly stated prerequisite for peace talks is complete withdrawal of the Russian troops from Ukrainian territory within its internationally recognized borders. Regular attacks on the Russian military infrastructure in Crimea, attacks on the Kerch Strait bridge, and Russian ships and port infrastructure indicate that Ukraine is serious about achieving the goal.

Some politicians and analysts are weary of this intention believing that the loss of Crimea is unacceptable to the Kremlin and may unleash an uncontrolled escalation the west has been careful to avoid. The paper will argue that such fears are mostly a product of mirror imaging and that the liberation of Crimea is necessary to ensure security of the Black Sea region, Ukraine's military and economic security, Crimea's economic development, human rights of its residents, and achieve lasting peace based on key international law principles.

Conclusions and recommendations

Russian occupation of the Crimean Peninsula has adversely affected the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond. It allows Russia to integrate the peninsula and assimilate its residents, enforce its repressive laws, replace and militarize the peninsula's population, project its power further into the western part of the Black Sea thus posing an increasing threat to the Black Sea littoral states and their interests, threaten the EU interests, continue its aggression against Ukraine, undermine global food security and try to create dependencies that it could later exploit in its further pursuit of its imperial ambitions. In addition, the occupation is instrumental in the Russian policy aimed at undermining international norms that allow peaceful coexistence among countries.

The notion of red lines is not natural for the Russian world view, as it has appeared in the Russian discourse only recently. However, the Russian leadership uses it skillfully in combination with threats to manipulate some western countries into self-deterrence. Even a cursory look at evidence shows that there are no red lines that, once crossed, will lead to an immediate escalation. In this respect, Crimea is no different from any other occupied part of Ukraine.

This doesn't mean, however, that Russia is not going to escalate since Russia has not changed its war aims. The war has shown that Russia escalates by both hybrid and military means when it has a chance to exploit a vulnerability. While in Ukraine the escalation is both military and hybrid, when it comes to Ukraine's allies, it's hybrid for the most part. In addition, Russia doesn't abide by international law and its actions are not bound by either legal or ethical considerations. On the contrary, its tactics involve deliberate use of terror, hunger and similar means to achieve its political goals.

Despite Russian defense preparations, Crimea is potentially vulnerable because it's not physically attached to the Russian mainland and it's possible to isolate it from Russian supplies by destroying the Kerch Strait Bridge, severing the land bridge to Crimea via the currently occupied southern parts of Ukraine and hitting the Black Sea Fleet. This is not an easy task. Ukraine's efforts are currently aimed at degrading Russian air defenses, air and naval capabilities and supply routes in and around Crimea. The task of liberating Crimea from the occupation remains strategic. In addition to its own weapons, Ukraine needs continued support and long range western weapons to be successful in achieving it.

Ukrainian leadership understands the possible human toll of the military scenario, it calls on civilians to evacuate Crimea and does not discard diplomatic options. The goal of its diplomacy, however, is to liberate Crimea from the Russian occupation and not find some middle of the road solution. The position is consistent with that of the UN and the EU who support Ukraine's territorial integrity. Ukraine is also developing its policies towards the occupied peninsula, prioritizing security, human rights protection, and economic development.

Ukraine has succeeded in driving the Russian Black Sea Fleet away from the deepwater port of Sevastopol and other locations close to Odesa Oblast ports. The Russian fleet, however, remains capable of performing most war tasks. In addition, there are submarines remaining in the Black Sea and they have not played a role in the conflict. There also remains the danger of seamines. The fact that the Russian Black Sea Fleet is docked further from the Ukraine controlled shores, made it possible to open up a shipping route that allows Ukraine to export its goods by sea independently of the aggressor's control Russia exerted via the Grain Deal.

As the role of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in capturing the peninsula from Ukraine and Russia's current use of Crimea and the occupied Black Sea for unprovoked aggression indicate, Ukraine and other countries cannot feel secure and pursue their peaceful purposes unless Russian aggression is stopped and its military is removed from Crimea. In addition, Russia needs to be deterred from future aggression since it has demonstrated willingness to escalate when it sees fit. Leaving Crimea in the Russian hands will hinder Ukraine's ability to restore its economy after the end of the war. It will also not allow Crimea to develop economically due to resource dependence on Ukraine. Allowing Russia to interfere with food exports will affect global food prices.

For the reasons outlined above:

1. Ukraine and its European and Euroatlantic allies should openly acknowledge that Russian aggression is deliberate and calculated rather than a consequence of crossing a red line and that it will continue for as long as Russia preserves the capacity to escalate. This should be clearly communicated to respective publics to prepare them for a long-term confrontation;
2. The EU and NATO should develop a concept of deterrence in the Black Sea region in order to lay the foundation for the long-term regional security architecture (conventional or nuclear capabilities, NATO or some other security arrangement);
3. The EU's interest in strengthening and securing its interests in the Black Sea region articulated at the level of the European Maritime Security Strategy (updated in March 2023) should find a practical and ambitious implementation at the level of action plans;
4. The EU should develop sufficient tools and resources for demining and securing economic routes in the Black Sea because it is important for the EU's geopolitical interests;
5. Ukraine and its allies should develop plans to gradually restore the pre-2014 status quo in the Black Sea under international law. This should include continued sanctions on the Russian Federation, improving their implementation, and working with the nations who help Russia bypass them. At the same time, the understanding of Crimea as a fortress that helps control the Black Sea should lead to the need to demilitarize Crimea;
6. In the political communications of the EU and NATO and at the level of political statements of the leaders of the member countries, there should be unambiguous signals that the entire occupied territory of Ukraine, including Crimea, is legitimate for inflicting damage on strategic and operational-tactical objects of the enemy's infrastructure;
7. Ukraine and its allies should look into possible vulnerabilities Russia could exploit and make sure to close them. Do not brush off options that seem unrealistic. Keep in mind that Russia does not comply with international law and is willing to weaponize peaceful means and engage in scorched earth tactics;
8. NATO should integrate Ukraine through increasing interoperability and developing joint defense plans but without loud pronouncements and symbolic moves. Ukraine should concentrate on relevant domestic reforms to make membership a reality;
9. Ukraine's allies should help it build up defenses against Russian attacks on Ukrainian exports, maintain security of the current export corridor. Do not let Russia replace Ukraine as a food exporter to avoid dependence;
10. Ukraine should develop the International Crimea Platform into a platform for promoting security in the Azov-Black Sea region through liberation of Crimea. In addition to the

general meetings, it should also separately bring together countries of the Black Sea region as well as other countries affected by the Russian aggression in the Black Sea to develop a common vision;

11. Participating experts should develop the Crimea Platform expert network to exchange views and experiences, monitor and analyze Russian tactics in different countries, and propose solutions. Donors should consider providing funding for research and analysis and expert exchanges among the network's members.

How Russian occupation has affected the peninsula

The Crimean Peninsula has been under Russian occupation for almost 10 years, since late February 2014. From the first days of the occupation, Crimea has become a place for multiple International humanitarian law and human rights violations. Russian policy on the peninsula has been aimed at isolating its residents from the outside world, brutally suppressing dissent, Russifying public, educational and cultural spheres, replacing the peninsula's population with Russian citizens, integrating the peninsula into the Russian state, and militarizing it.

Immediately after capturing administrative buildings and blocking Crimea's land connection with Ukraine, the occupying army limited the access of its residents to alternative sources of information. The broadcast of Ukrainian media was cut off and they were gradually replaced by the Russian Federal channels and radio stations. As early as April 2014, Russia laid an underwater Internet cable connecting Crimea to Russia and severed its connection with Ukrainian mainland internet providers. By the end of September 2014, Crimea was also left without Ukrainian mobile communications. Occupation authorities use their control over the media environment to promote Russian propaganda narratives.

Residents of Crimea were illegally forced to accept Russian citizenship. Individuals who did not agree with the Russian occupation or disobeyed Russian repressive laws either disappeared, became political prisoners or were forced to flee. People without Russian passports were harassed by security services, denied medical care, banking services, dismissed from their jobs, etc. As of August 30, 2023, 44 cases of forced disappearances are known, 15 of them are people whose fate and whereabouts are still unknown.¹ There are also 180 political prisoners, including 116 Crimean Tatars. Two political prisoners died in custody.²

Educational policy became a tool of pervasive Russification and indoctrination. By the end of 2019 there were no schools that taught classes in Ukrainian and those that supposedly taught in the Crimean Tatar, in reality mostly taught in Russian.³ Schools teach Russian curriculum, including the Russian version of history. A recent study of Russian textbooks conducted by Almenda Center for Civic Education discovered 20 narratives meant to sever the connection

¹ Facebook page of the Office of the Presidential Representative to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea https://www.facebook.com/ppu.gov.ua/posts/683066793867349?ref=embed_post

² Oleksandra Boiko, "Russia holds 180 political prisoners arrested in Crimea or related to Crimea - Tasheva", *Suspilne novyny*, March 15, 2023, <https://suspilne.media/415230-politicni-vazni-rosiani-zaarestuvali-na-teritorii-okupovanogo-krimu-180-gromadan-ukraini-tamila-taseva/>

³ Andriy Hevko, "State Crimean Tatar in Crimea is an imitation": problems of the language of the indigenous people on the peninsula and the mainland", *Krym Realii*, January 19, 2020 <https://ua.krymr.com/a/derzhavna-krymskotatarska-mova-v-krymu-imitatsija/30385748.html>

between Crimean children and Ukraine and convince them that they are, in fact, Russian.⁴ Although the Crimean Constitution says that there are 3 official languages, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar are almost completely banished from the public sphere.

In addition, the peninsula's population is being replaced. At the end of 2021 Ukrainian experts estimated that between 600,000 and a million Russian citizens had moved to live in the occupied Crimea since 2014. There are Russian government programs encouraging the move. Its population in early 2014 was just under 2 million. The Ukrainian government estimates that between 2014 and 2022, 54 thousand Ukrainian citizens have left the peninsula but the total could be as high as almost 200 thousand.⁵

Crimean Tatars who identify as an indigenous people of the peninsula and are recognized as such by the Ukrainian state face destruction of their self-government and cultural heritage. Mejlis of the Crimea Tatar people, elected by the popular Qurultai to represent Crimean Tatars existed in Ukraine before the occupation. Under the Russian occupation Mejlis was banned, criminalized and dubbed an "extremists organization". Its leaders Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov had to flee Crimea to the mainland Ukraine while its Deputy Head Nariman Dzelial was sentenced by the occupiers to 17 years in prison on trumped up charges. Crimean Khan palace, the only remaining artifact of Crimean Tatar historical architecture, is being destroyed under the guise of "restoration". At the same time, a government controlled Crimean Tatar TV channel broadcasting Russian propaganda was created.

After the start of the full scale war, freedom in Crimea shrank even further. According to the Ukrainian Prosecutor General, since March 2022, the Russian authorities have fined at least 370 people in the amount of more than 12 million Russian rubles for "discrediting the Russian army."⁶ Crimea became a hub for the illegal transfer of hostages and POWs from the newly seized Ukrainian territories, including children. A specialized FSB pre-trial detention center was built for civil hostages and political prisoners. Children's summer camps are used to de facto imprison Ukrainian children from occupied Ukrainian territories. They are kept there for months, communication with their parents is not allowed and the conditions often may be described as inhumane.

Illegal conscription and mobilization of Ukrainian citizens into the Russian army is a persistent IHL violation that started in 2015 and continues after February 24, 2022. As of the end of 2021, Russia conducted 14 conscription campaigns in Crimea drafting 34 thousand Ukrainians into its army. The number of Crimea residents mobilized and killed after February 2022 is hard to verify but there are multiple reports of its residents getting mobilization notices. According to the Office of the Ukrainian President's Representative to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, by the

⁴ "Experts found 20 narratives in Russian textbooks that are imposed on Ukrainian children during the occupation", *Ukrinform*, September 1, 2023. <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3755935-eksperti-znajsli-v-rosijskih-pidrucnikah-20-narativiv-aki-navazuut-ukrainskim-ditam-v-okupacii.html>

⁵ "Almost 200,000 people left Crimea during the 9 years of occupation - Tasheva", *Fakty ICTV*, February 26, 2023 <https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/20230226-iz-krymu-za-9-rokiv-okupaciyi-vvyihaly-majzhe-200-tys-lyudej-tasheva/>

⁶ "Residents of Crimea were fined more than 12 million rubles for "discrediting the Russian army" - Kostin", *Ukrinform*, August 22, 2023 <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-crimea/3751602-za-diskreditaciu-armii-rf-ziteliv-krimu-ostrafuvali-na-ponad-12-miljoniv-rubliv-kostin.html>

beginning of 2023, 243 graves of those killed in the war against Ukraine were found. 143 of them "probably were Ukrainian citizens".⁷

While between April 2014 and February 2022, most attention was focused on the hostilities in the east of Ukraine, Russia worked to militarize the Peninsula. It launched a large-scale rearmament program and beefed up its Southern Military District, into which it had included Crimea. From 2014 to 2018, the Russian Black Sea Fleet received six new Kilo-class submarines, three frigates, and several other smaller surface vessels. Generally, the increase of Russian military presence in Crimea between 2014-2020 was estimated at 6 times compared to the pre-2014 size.⁸

Although it has not been confirmed that Russia has moved nuclear weapons to Crimea, there are some reduced naval nuclear-capable forces that remained after the dissolution of the USSR.⁹ In 2015 Russian president approved basing two dual-capable systems in Crimea: the Iskander-M short-range ballistic missile and Backfire bomber. There are at least two nuclear storage facilities that have been restored and verified information that additional tunnels for submarines have been built, the Ukrainian NSDC said.¹⁰

At the same time, trying to buy the loyalty of the Crimea residents, Russia invested significantly into civilian and dual use infrastructure, having built the Kerch Strait Bridge, the airport in Simferopol, Tavrida highway, power plants, hospitals, schools, kindergartens, housing etc.

Western sanctions imposed in response to annexation make some services unavailable to its residents. There are also no international flights and no international investments, which means there are no big banks, limited number of cellular operators, and most other big international companies are absent from its market. In addition, Crimea is dependent on Ukraine for its water supplies, as Rory Finnin argues with historical references, Crimea needs Ukraine to be resource-secure.¹¹

⁷ Viktoriya Veselova, "Coffins that are not seen. How Russia buries its military in Crimea", *Krym Realii*, January 6, 2023. <https://ua.krymr.com/a/krym-kladovysche-mohyly-viyskovi-rosii/32211887.html>

⁸ Oleksii Polegkyi et al, "Security dilemma in the Black Sea region in light of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict", *Instytut Europy Środkowej*, IEŚ Policy Papers 05/2021, p. 40. <https://ies.lublin.pl/ies-policy-papers/security-dilemma-in-the-black-sea-region-in-light-of-the-russian-ukrainian-conflict/>

⁹ Hans Kristensen, "Rumors About Nuclear Weapons In Crimea", Federation of American Scientists, December 18, 2023, <https://fas.org/publication/crimea/>

¹⁰ Kateryna Glanko, "The National Security and Defense Council named facilities in occupied Crimea, where Russia can store nuclear weapons", *Suspilne Krym*, November 16, 2020 <https://crimea.suspilne.media/en/news/2090>

¹¹ Rory Finnin, "Why Crimea Is the Key to Peace in Ukraine", *Politico*, January 13, 2023 <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/01/13/peace-ukraine-crimea-putin-00077746>

Consequences for the Black Sea region and beyond

Russian occupation of Crimea and the Black Sea and subsequent full-scale aggression primarily affect Ukraine's security and economy. There are, however, wide regional and global consequences such as disruptions to freedom of navigation, intensive hybrid warfare, including subthreshold attacks on NATO members, and deliberate sabotage of global food security.

Russian military presence in Crimea was used both in 2014 and in 2022 to undermine Ukraine's security. The Russian Black Sea fleet whose stay in Crimea was extended by the so-called Kharkiv Agreements signed by then Ukrainian President Yanukovich in 2010 was actively involved in capturing the peninsula in 2014. By 2023 it grew at the expense of Russia capturing 51 Ukrainian ships (about 80% of the Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet) and transferring additional Russian capabilities to the port of Sevastopol which is both deep and located in the center of the Black Sea. According to the Ukrainian Defense Ministry, in mid-February 2022 the Russian grouping in Crimea comprised 32 thousand personnel. Russia had 7 large landing ships, 6 of which moved to the Black Sea from other fleets.

Crimea continues to serve as a logistics hub for the Russian operations in the south of Ukraine. Sea, air and land-based missiles of various ranges targeting mainland Ukraine are regularly launched from occupied Crimea and Ukrainian territorial waters around Crimea. According to BlackSeaNews, in 9 months of 2023, the Russian armed forces launched 230 Kalibr sea-based cruise missiles from ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, 590 Shahed-136/131 type attack UAVs, 40 Iskander type ballistic missiles, 17 P-800 Onyx anti-ship missiles from the territory of the occupied Crimea.¹² The Kerch Strait bridge between Crimea and Russia whose construction was completed in December 2019 is used to transport military equipment, ammunition and personnel to the occupied territory and further on to the southern battlefield in Kherson and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts.

The occupation also has a significant immediate and long-term impact on Ukraine's economy. Ukraine had been able to use only six out of its 18 ports, namely three on the Danube and three on the Black Sea. The inability to export feeds into the loss of markets and benefits Russia as it is also one of the top agricultural producers. However, if Russia replaces Ukraine as a grain exporter it will create dependencies Russia can later exploit the way it did with its natural gas supplies to Europe.

Russia also steals Ukrainian grain grown in the occupied areas and transports it via the Black Sea. According to the US ODNI, it exports stolen grain to Syria, Israel, Iran, Georgia and Lebanon. In 2022 stole almost 6 million tons of Ukrainian wheat.¹³ Exporting to Syria allows Putin to protect Assad's government and hold geostrategic positions in Syria to exert influence over the Middle

¹² "Russian missile and UAV attacks on the regions of Ukraine from the territory of the occupied Crimea in January-September 2023 (database)", *Black Sea News*, September 30, 2023 <https://www.blackseanews.net/read/209270>

¹³ Assessment of Impact of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine on Food Security, ODNI, June 2023 <https://files.constantcontact.com/fab49a91901/1e86de0d-671c-4652-9c56-dec0554e13a2.pdf>

East.¹⁴ Black Sea is also used to transport weapons to the war zone in Syria, weaponizing civilian vessels for the purpose.

Regular Russian attacks on Ukrainian ports and grain storage facilities since Russia's withdrawal from the Grain Deal on July 17, 2023 leave no doubt that they constitute a deliberate attempt to weaponize hunger. According to Maxim Gardus, an expert of the Office of Reforms of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, a large amount of grain has to be accumulated in port before being loaded onto a ship. Such accumulation is visible from space and Russia uses its intelligence satellites to plan its attacks when such accumulation takes place. As an example, 40,000 tons of grain were destroyed in the port of IZmail on August 2, and 60,000 tons were destroyed in a single attack on the ports of Odesa and Chornomorsk on July 17.¹⁵ Per the British government, as of September 11, 2023, the attacks destroyed 280,000 tonnes of grain – enough to feed over 1 million people for a year.¹⁶ The Institute for the Study of War also assessed that Russian strikes on Ukrainian port and grain infrastructure are part of a Russian campaign to damage Ukrainian relations with its Western neighbors.¹⁷

Other Ukraine's exports are also under threat. Oleksandr Vodoviz, General Director of Ukraine's biggest exporter "Metinvest" said that his company used to export 25 million tons of its products by sea annually. Currently, its mining and processing plants operate at 15% of capacity, and are able to export only to plants located in Eastern Europe.¹⁸ Before the war, Ukrainian business exported more than 85% of ferrous metals through the ports of Odesa and Mykolaiv. According to the results of the first half of 2022, Ukrainian metal exports decreased by 47.3% due to the blocking of Ukrainian ports among other factors.

The Black Sea has become an arena of intensified hybrid warfare. On September 13, the Romanian army identified possible drone fragments a few hundred meters away from a military base near the city of Tulcea, 25 kilometers deep into Romanian territory. It was the third incident of this kind after the Russian withdrawal from the Grain Deal. Ukrainian ports on the Danube are located across the river from Romania. In addition to the ports, Russia targets a ferry crossing between the two countries. On September 18, drone debris was discovered on Bulgarian territory. Several days before, Russia imposed a partial blockade of Bulgaria's Black Sea exclusive economic zone ostensibly for a military exercise until the end of September. Bulgaria's Defence Minister Todor Tagarev called this a provocation and said his country was in consultations with its NATO

¹⁴ Jonas Heins, "Putin and Assad, Partners in Crime: Why Russian Forces Steal Wheat From Ukraine", *International Centre for Defense and Security*, November 3, 2022 <https://icds.ee/en/putin-and-assad-partners-in-crime-why-russian-forces-steal-wheat-from-ukraine/>

¹⁵ "Damage is measured in billions." How has the port infrastructure of the south changed?", *Novyny Pryazovyya*, October 7, 2023 https://youtu.be/e3FLicfX_EY?si=7NHuIhdMVXwGz10f&t=627

¹⁶ Press release "New intelligence shows Russia's targeting of a cargo ship", *Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP*, September 11, 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-intelligence-shows-russias-targeting-of-a-cargo-ship>

¹⁷ Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 21, 2023, *Institute for the Study of War*, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-21-2023>

¹⁸ Olga Bystritskaya, "Pressure points on the aggressor country that will allow the ports to be opened", *Center for Transport Strategies*, August 3, 2023. https://cfts.org.ua/articles/tochki_tisku_na_kranu_agresora_yaki_dozvolyat_vidkriti_porti_1987

allies.¹⁹ There were a number of other encounters, including the Russian jet downing an American UAV over the Black Sea in March 2023.

Politico notes that “Russia’s increasingly desperate efforts to choke the Ukrainian economy are starting to affect Turkey’s interests too.”²⁰ In particular, Russian aggressive actions lead to rising insurance premiums for vessels operating in the area which makes Turkish energy supplies more expensive. Turkey also ranked third among top destinations of Ukrainian grain whose exports were disrupted by Russia stalling the Grain Deal. Russian refusal to rejoin the Grain Deal in summer 2023 is also a blow to President Erdogan’s prestige, as he is trying to play the role of balancer and mediator in the conflict.

Seamines pose danger to civilian shipping and coastal areas. In a recent incident, a Togo-flagged general cargo ship Seama possibly hit a mine near the Black Sea port of Sulina in Romania, close to the northern border with Ukraine on the morning of September 20. A Turkish ship Kafkametler was also reported to have had a close encounter with a mine. In the first seven months of 2023, the detonation of 32 mines in the Black Sea area was recorded in Odesa and Mykolaiv Oblasts.²¹

With the EU weaning itself off Russian energy and seeks to assure its autonomy, it is interested in the stability of the region. Black Sea is becoming an important transit route for alternative energy sources. Kazakhstan Caspian Pipeline Consortium exports 67 million tons or over 80% of all Kazakh export oil through Russia to Europe via the Black Sea. The EU is Kazakhstan's first trading partner, accounting for 40% of the country's foreign trade. Russia has stopped the functioning of the oil terminal in the port of Novorossiysk on four occasions in 2022. After the escalation Kazakhstan said that it will consider moving its exports via a different route. One of them is the so-called trans-Caspian International Transport Route (also known as the Middle Corridor).

In May 2023 the EU announced its intention to lay an underwater Internet cable in the Black Sea to improve communication with Georgia and reduce dependence on lines that pass through Russia.²² The project is still under consideration, and tenders for its implementation have not yet been opened. The current developments clearly jeopardize the initiative.

With Russian actions threatening so many interests and posing threat to so many actors, new possible avenues of cooperation in this notoriously discordant region open up.

¹⁹ “Bulgaria, NATO discuss response to Russian blockade in Black Sea”, *Euroactive*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/bulgaria-nato-discuss-response-to-russian-blockade-in-black-sea/>

²⁰ Gabriel Gavin, “Russia and Turkey vie over Black Sea, as Erdoğan prepares to visit Putin”. *Politico*, August 30, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/black-sea-russia-turkey-ukraine-war/>

²¹ “The mine danger on the Odesa coast has not gone away, but only intensified - Humenyuk”, *Ukrinform*, August 10, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/3746786-minna-nebezpeka-na-odeskomu-uzberezzi-nikudi-ne-podilasa-a-tilki-posililas-gumenuk.html>

²² Anna Kholodnova, “FT: EU plans to lay submarine internet cable in Black Sea. This should reduce dependence on Russia”, *Babel*, May 12, 2023 <https://babel.ua/en/news/93777-ft-eu-plans-to-lay-submarine-internet-cable-in-black-sea-this-should-reduce-dependence-on-russia>

Implications for international peace and order

The occupation of Crimea constitutes the first time the principle of respect for territorial integrity was violated in Europe since the end of World War II. In 1996 Ukraine and Russia signed the so-called "Big Treaty" or a Treaty on Friendship in which Russia recognized Ukraine's territorial integrity, including Crimea. International law principles and the main implementing body, the United Nations, often come under criticism in the current conflict because they have failed to stop the Russian aggression and often failed to give an adequate response to Russian actions in Ukraine. The Russian President often attacks the idea of rules based order, claiming that it means living without rules. Nevertheless, European experience of the 20th century shows that adhering to the principle of territorial integrity as well as upholding the principle of peaceful conflict resolution are fundamental to living in peace.

Another implication is for the nuclear non-proliferation regime. In the early days of its independence Ukraine signed the Budapest memorandum, according to which it gave up the nuclear weapons it inherited from the Soviet Union and received security assurances from the nuclear states including Russia in response. Although the signatories gave only assurances that they would not put pressure on Ukraine, attack it and so on rather than guarantees that they will protect Ukraine from an attack, Russia's blatant violation of the memorandum and the use of the nuclear weapons as a conventional deterrence tool sends a wrong message to those countries who may want to use their nuclear potential for coercive purposes and may stimulate proliferation by those who feel insecure.

Russia flaunts the entire system of international humanitarian law designed to regulate interstate conflict. In addition, the Russian president rewards those who committed the most egregious violations, as evidenced by his decision to award the 64th brigade, which occupied Bucha in Kyiv Oblast in March 2022 and is associated with atrocities committed there, the honorary title of "guards". Russia also flaunts the basic principles of the international law of the sea which guarantees freedom of navigation which has implications for international trade and economic development.

The consequences of Russian actions were summarized by the Polish President Andrzej Duda at the August 23, 2023 Crimea Platform summit. He stressed that Ukraine has to liberate Crimea "No one should have any illusions that the occupation of Crimea is some kind of regional problem. It is a problem of a global level. If we do not solve it together, we will de facto start agreeing to a new security architecture in the world, a new world order based on "might makes right" – the order imposed by Russia," Duda said.²³

²³ "Duda explained why it is dangerous to agree to the occupation of Crimea by Russia", *Ukrainska Pravda*, August 23, 2023. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/08/23/7416796/>

Military and diplomatic efforts to retake Crimea

Crimea's future as well as Ukraine's ability to regain control over it are debated internationally. The optimism that dominated Ukrainian society prior to the summer 2023 counteroffensive gradually gave way to more realistic expectations in the face of the dense minefields and a system of fortified Russian defenses in Kherson and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts. Nevertheless, liberating Crimea remains an important goal for Ukraine and it takes both military and diplomatic steps to achieve it. While alternative scenarios are proposed, other options are not likely to ensure Ukrainian and regional security and promote some of Russia's goals.

Speaking at the Crimea Platform expert network event on August 22, 2023, National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov said that Ukraine will liberate Crimea and most likely this will be done by military means unless the aggressor realizes that it has to leave the peninsula on its own. "We have no other option. Any other case regarding Crimea means conservation of the situation," Danilov stressed.²⁴ His statement was reiterated in two days by the head of the Main Intelligence Directorate, Kyrylo Budanov, who said that things will not end with individual strikes on Crimea: there will be a ground operation and "the return of our territories."²⁵

Historically, Crimea has been captured 3 times with an attack from the mainland. Some experts stress the losses that were incurred by the attacking side, others point out that the flat terrain that starts after the Perekop Isthmus makes it difficult to defend. The fact that Crimea is not physically attached to the Russian mainland makes it possible to isolate it and make holding it untenable for the Russian Federation, as the former Commanding General of US Army Europe Ben Hodges suggests. He is echoed by Kurt Volker, the former U.S. special envoy for Ukraine "There are three critical points: the land bridge to Russia, the Kerch Strait bridge, and the naval base at Sevastopol. They should knock out all three."²⁶ This, however, cannot be done without continuous western support and long-range weapons the west had been hesitant to provide due to the fear of escalation.

Unable to recapture Crimea head on, Ukraine seems to have adopted a strategy of small cuts that gradually degrades Russian air defense and naval capabilities as well as its ability to supply the peninsula and the southern battlefield. The strategy is similar to that Ukraine used in relation to the right bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast in summer and fall of 2022.

The strike campaign started as early as April 13, 2022 with the sinking of the Black Sea Fleet flagship Moskva which was essential for the peninsular air defenses with two Ukrainian "Neptun"

²⁴ «Most likely, we will liberate Crimea by military means – Danilov”, *Ukrinform*, August 22, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-crimea/3751562-krim-svidse-za-vse-bude-zvilnatimemo-vijskovim-slahom-danilov.html>

²⁵ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/08/24/7416948/>

²⁶ "Blinken: Crimea a 'red line' for Putin as Ukraine weighs plans to retake it", *Politico*, February 15, 2023 <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/15/blinken-crimea-ukraine-putin-00083149>

missiles. This enabled the liberation of Snake Island, just off the Ukrainian and Romanian coast, opposite the Danube Delta. The Kerch Strait bridge was successfully attacked twice which disrupted but was not able to stop Russia from running military supplies. The strike campaign intensified in late summer 2023 and allowed Ukraine to drive most of the Russian Black Sea Fleet to the northeastern part of the Sea. The Institute for the Study of War assessed, however, that the Fleet has experienced some setbacks but is still “capable of conducting most wartime operations”.²⁷ In addition, there are submarines remaining in the Black Sea that have not played a role in the current war.

This success enabled Ukraine to launch a new sea transport corridor through the territorial waters of Ukraine and three littoral NATO members, out of Russian Black Sea Fleet reach. Between its launch on September 16, 2023 and October 22, 2023 at least 42 vessels arrived in the three Ukrainian ports of Odesa Oblast and at least 23 vessels carrying 0.85 million tons of cargo left it.²⁸

The issue of both military and civilian victims is of concern in the military scenario. On the eve of the 2023 Crimea Platform summit President Zelenskiy said that Ukraine wants to limit the number of victims among Ukrainian servicemen. “[we want] Fewer victims. If we are on administrative or conditional borders with Crimea, I believe that it is possible to politically push for the demilitarization of Russia on the territory of Ukrainian Crimea.”²⁹ Vice Prime Minister - Minister for the Reintegration of the Occupied Territories Iryna Vereshchuk has on multiple occasions called on the civilian residents of the peninsula to move to a safe place to avoid casualties.

While employing military means, Ukraine does not abandon its diplomatic efforts. The third annual summit of the Crimea Platform, an international coordination mechanism initiated by Ukraine to return the Crimea issue to the agenda, protect human rights in Crimea and promote the de-occupation of the peninsula, strengthening European and global security, was held on August 23, 2023 in Kyiv. The number of its participants increased to 67 (compared to 47 participants of the inaugural summit).³⁰ Although Russia is not invited to participate, condemns the meetings and puts pressure on countries that do take part, Ukraine doesn't rule out the possibility of inviting it if it demonstrates a constructive approach.³¹ Ukrainian diplomats also

²⁷ Nicole Wolkov and Mason Clark, “Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, Special Edition: Ukraine’s Strike Campaign Against Crimea”, the Institute for the Study of War, October 8, 2023 <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/special-edition-campaign-assessment-ukraine%E2%80%99s-strike-campaign-against-crimea>

²⁸ Andriy Klymenko, *Facebook page*, October 22, 2023 https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0jZAuaN15Du9cr8YnMCBdx6HVinYGnum9UwHctDd8bTMD7w9KNCLNVZ9uCu25srU2l&id=100003576664760

²⁹ Kateryna Tyshchenko, “Zelensky hopes to achieve the demilitarization of the Russian Federation in Crimea by “political pressure”, *Ukrainska Pravda*, August 27, 2023 <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/08/27/7417315/>

³⁰ “The number of participants in the Crimea Platform has increased: Serbia has joined”, *Evropeyska Pavda*, August 23, 2023 <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/08/23/7416781/>

³¹ “Dzaparova named the condition for Russia's participation in the Crimea Platform”, *Ukrinform*, July 6, 2021 <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-crimea/3276111-dzaparova-nazvala-umovu-dla-ucasti-rosii-u-krimskij-platformi.html>

work actively in international organizations and have launched an outreach to countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Ukraine's approach aimed at liberating Crimea from the Russian occupation is often criticized as maximalist. Among alternative options proposed by some analysts is deciding Crimea's fate by a referendum among its residents. Not only does this approach assume that Crimea is a disputed territory (rather than occupied) but also it assumes that residents of Crimea constitute a separate people who can decide their own fate. It also ignores the fact that although prior to the occupation Crimea residents predominantly voted for the pro-Russian Party of Regions, its agenda was about cooperating with Russia, not becoming a part of it. No organized separatist movement existed in Crimea before its occupation in 2014. In addition, supporting this idea will be helpful to Russian efforts to undermine the principle of territorial integrity fundamental for peaceful coexistence. On the practical side, the question is who is going to organize such a referendum. While Crimea remains under the Russian occupation, a free and fair vote is highly unlikely, as evidenced by the conduct of elections in the Russian Federation itself. Proposals to leave it under joint Russian and Ukrainian control or run by some international body also do not look plausible. It is not clear why Russia would choose to abide by any commitments if its imperial ambitions stay the same and there is no credible deterrent in the region. Russian behavior in the Gran Deal has demonstrated that one cannot count on its good will.

Ukraine's position is also consistent with that of the United Nations that has on several occasions called on the Russian Federation to withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory. The EU also endorsed the International Crimea Platform Declaration adopted on 23 August 2021 in Kyiv and "remains steadfast in its commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders."³²

³² EU Statement – United Nations General Assembly: "Problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov", European External Action Service, December 9, 2021, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-%E2%80%93-united-nations-general-assembly-%E2%80%9Cproblem-militarization-autonomous-republic-crimea-en>

Is Crimea a red line?

The view that Crimea is a red line for Putin and he will defend it “at all costs” is widely shared in western policy circles. As an example, the US Foreign Secretary Anthony Blinken said that attacking Crimea could lead to a wider Russian response.³³ The Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur warned that Crimea is a red line for Putin.³⁴ Liana Fix and Michael Kimmage urged to go slow on Crimea because, in their view, Crimea holds a special place for Putin and he “will go to great lengths” to hold on to it. The main threat envisioned by the analysts in case Ukraine moves to take Crimea is nuclear escalation.³⁵

It’s true that Russia has constructed an extensive mythology around the peninsula and its capture was widely supported by the Russian population. In his state-of-the-nation address at the end of 2014 Putin went as far as comparing Crimea to the Temple Mount. He also made an unproven claim that Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv Rus was baptized in Khersonesus bringing Christianity to the ancient Rus which made Crimea a sacred place for Russia. Around 84-88% of the Russian population have consistently viewed the annexation of Crimea favorably between March 2014 and April 2021, the last year when Levada Center asked this question.³⁶ But is the notion of a red line even relevant?

According to Gazeta.ru, the idea of a “red line” first appeared in the Russian political discourse on April 21, 2021, when Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered his address to the Russian Federal Assembly. Without mentioning anyone specific Putin complained that picking on Russia has become a habit and those who will do this, will regret it. “I hope that it will not occur to anyone to cross the so-called red line with respect to Russia. And where it will take place, we will determine it ourselves in each specific case,” the publication quoted Putin.³⁷ He also promised that there would be an “asymmetrical, rapid and harsh” response.³⁸

³³ Alexandr Ward and Paul Mcleary, “Blinken: Crimea a ‘red line’ for Putin as Ukraine weighs plans to retake it”, *Politico*, February 15, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/15/blinken-crimea-ukraine-putin-00083149>

³⁴ “Crimea Is a ‘Red Line’ for Putin, NATO Defense Minister Says”, *Newsweek*, May 18, 2023 <https://www.newsweek.com/crimea-red-line-putin-nato-hanno-pevkur-1800939#:~:text= Losing%20control%20of%20occupied%20Crimea,fears%20over%20Moscow's%20nuclear%20arsenal.>

³⁵ Liana Fix and Michael Kimmage, “Go Slow on Crimea”, *Foreign Affairs*, December 7, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/go-slow-crimea>

³⁶ Anon, “86% of Russians still support the annexation of Crimea”, *Ukrainska Pravda*, April 29, 2021 <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/04/29/7291974/>

³⁷ “Red lines are drawn.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs specified the lines that Ukraine and the West should not cross”, *Gazeta.ru*, October 9, 2022, <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2022/10/09/15597907.shtml>

³⁸ “Putin warns of tough Russian action if West crosses ‘red line’”, *BBC*, April 21, 2021 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56828813>

Afterwards, red lines have come up several times in Putin's rhetorics. For example, on November 30, 2021 he expressed concern that NATO could eventually use the Ukrainian territory to deploy missiles capable of reaching Moscow in just five minutes. "The emergence of such threats represents a 'red line' for us," Putin said.³⁹ A little later, on December 26, 2021 Putin claimed that Russia is already with its back against the red line.⁴⁰

The issue of red lines came up again on 17 June 2022 when Putin addressed the St. Petersburg Economic Forum. He, however, refrained from identifying the "red lines" of the special operation in Ukraine, saying that the enemy's leadership must itself realize where these "red lines" were.⁴¹ On 26 March 2023 Putin said that by supplying Ukraine with weapons, the West is crossing all red and even burgundy lines.⁴²

On 13 June 2023 When asked by the Russian military correspondents why Russia was not reacting to the west crossing Russian red lines, Putin said that the "special military operation itself" is Russia's reaction to the fact that the West had crossed the red lines. "Isn't a strike on the Ukrainian energy system the answer to crossing the "red lines"? And the actual destruction of the headquarters of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Armed Forces of Ukraine near Kiev - isn't this the answer?" Putin asked.⁴³

As we can see, there is little consistency in Putin's statements. If one looks at how well the claimed red lines correlate with Russian attacks, one will find little correlation. The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine happened despite the fact that NATO never moved any of its infrastructure to Ukraine. Putin also said that Russia has been forced to counter the growing NATO threats by developing new hypersonic weapons. Does that count as a 'rapid and harsh response'? Western weapons supplies have never been met with any "asymmetrical, rapid and harsh response". Hans Petter Midttun identified multiple other examples when "red lines" drawn by Russian officials were crossed by Ukraine with no consequence.⁴⁴

On the other hand, there are cases when Russian attacks intensified with no prior provocation. For example, it withdrew from the Grain Deal, an important lifeline for Ukraine, and launched attacks on Ukrainian port infrastructure on the eve of the new harvest. The timing was most likely chosen to exploit Ukraine's vulnerability and to gain leverage. Attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure in 2022-2023, although reportedly undertaken in response to Ukraine's first attack

³⁹ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Putin warns West: Moscow has 'red line' about Ukraine, NATO", *AP News*, November 30, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-moscow-cd558699728e9ae935eaadf940efeb18>

⁴⁰ Anon., "Putin: Russia has already been "pinned" to the "red line", *Izvestia*, December 26, 2021, <https://iz.ru/1269916/2021-12-26/putin-rossiiu-uzhe-priperli-k-krasnoi-linii>

⁴¹ Aysel Geremkhanova, "Putin answered a question about "red lines" in a special operation in Ukraine", *RG.ru*, June 17, 2022, <https://rg.ru/2022/06/17/putin-otvetil-na-vopros-pro-krasnye-linii-v-specoperacii-na-ukraine.html>

⁴² "Putin called arms supplies to Kyiv crossing red lines", *RBC.RU*, March 26, 2023 <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/642042099a79470af6bda896>

⁴³ "Putin called the Special Military Operation Russia's answer to overcoming "red lines", *Interfax*, June 13, 2023 <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/906065>

⁴⁴ Hans Petter Midttun, "Russia's "ultimate" red line is as hollow as the first ten", *Euromaidan Press*, October 3, 2023 <https://euromaidanpress.com/2023/10/03/russias-ultimate-red-line-is-as-hollow-as-the-first-ten/>

on the Kerch Strait Bridge, lasted throughout the entire winter and most likely were planned far in advance.

Several Russia watchers have warned against applying generic logic to analyzing Russian behavior. Sam Green noted in the recent *Foreign Affairs* piece, “the overwhelming focus, in recent years, on studying the country by way of statistical modeling rather than in-depth field research” is likely to blame for the lack of understanding of Russia on the part of the west.⁴⁵ Keir Giles warned in his book “Russia’s War on Everybody and What it Means for You” that one should not be guided by what appears reasonable to him or her when analyzing Russia and should not engage in mirror imaging. In the case of Putin’s red lines, it seems that this is exactly what some observers in the west are doing. Even a cursory look at the evidence does not produce enough correlation to claim that crossing the alleged red lines will have any effects. The escalation, however, proceeds according to its own logic underpinned by the lack of a credible deterrent and Russia’s remaining ability to escalate.

⁴⁵ Sam Greene, “The Black Box of Moscow”, *Foreign Affairs*, September 22, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/black-box-moscow-understand-russia>

Ukraine's vision of Crimea's future

Prior to the Russian occupation, the Ukrainian government had often been criticized for the lack of consistent policy towards the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. In fact, this lax approach most likely had contributed to the ease with which the peninsula was captured by the Russian troops. Today, under the leadership of the President's Representative to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Ukraine is developing its policies towards the Crimean peninsula after its liberation.

The strategy to liberate Crimea from the Russian occupation and reintegrate it into Ukraine was adopted in March 2021, before the start of the full scale aggression.⁴⁶ It stipulated "a complex of measures of a diplomatic, military, economic, informational, humanitarian and other nature." It set the priority of diplomatic means, although said that Ukraine reserved the right to use all means allowed by international law, called for the development of transitional justice framework, and stressed that "Ukraine defends the principle of denuclearization and demilitarization of the Crimean peninsula, transformation of the Black Sea region into a territory of peace and security."

The document remains in force but its implementation plan has been amended to reflect the changed situation. In April 2023, the Ministry for the Reintegration of the Occupied Territories added tasks to elaborate the draft law "On the legal regime in the de-occupied territories"; form a reserve of employees for judicial, law enforcement, and government bodies; form a military administration for the Autonomous Republic of Crimea; ensure medical, rehabilitation, psychological adaptation of war veterans and persons released from Russian captivity.

On August 23, 2023 the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, determined priorities in the field of deoccupation, reintegration and restoration of Crimea and Sevastopol.⁴⁷ The document stressed that state policy in this area is based on the priority of guarantees of human security, his rights and basic freedoms. The Rada said that any attempts to have a peace settlement at the expense of territorial concessions are not acceptable. It also said that freedom of navigation in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov is possible only after liberating Crimea and with Ukraine's participation.⁴⁸

The government is developing an economic model for Crimea. It envisions Crimea as the new tourist center of Europe, an all year round resort, with developed infrastructure to connect Crimea with Ukraine, Europe and the world integrated into the European TEN-T road network. It should also be integrated into the ENTSO-E system and emphasize renewable energy sources, as well as the development of the Black Sea gas shelf using the latest technologies. Crimea's

⁴⁶ On the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine of March 11, 2021 "On the Strategy of Deoccupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol", Decree of the President of Ukraine, №117/2021, March 24, 2021 <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1172021-37533>

⁴⁷ <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/930569.html> <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/pubFile/1935143>

⁴⁸ "The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine may legally prohibit territorial concessions to the Russian Federation", *Krym Realii*, August 19, 2023 <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-verkhovnaya-rada-zapretit-territorial-nyye-ustupki-rf/32555095.html>

agricultural sector will be developed with the restoration of irrigation and a separate emphasis will be made on viticulture. And a European and world-class IT hub on the peninsula with a special regime for attracting investments in science, education and innovation.⁴⁹

The government's efforts also find support among Ukraine's civil society. 15 large businesses have already joined the memorandum on the restoration of Crimea after its liberation.⁵⁰ "The Team of Crimea", a project meant to train future Crimean public servants, has been launched. Estimated 50 thousand people including future public servants, doctors and teachers need to be trained. A working group was formed at the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories to work on transitional legislation.⁵¹ According to the results of the survey conducted by the Sociological group "Rating" on August 16-20, almost 70% of Ukrainians have a good and neutral attitude towards Crimeans living under Russian occupation.⁵²

The plans, however, are not realistic unless Ukraine prosecutes traitors and ensures its security. The prosecutor's office of Crimea and Sevastopol has already charged 736 traitors from occupied Crimea who decided to cooperate with the Russian invaders; 344 indictments have been sent to the court. Making sure Russian citizens that illegally moved to the occupied territory return to Russia is another goal. Ukraine stresses, however, that there can be no bulk decisions due to the need to abide by international law. Ukrainian officials also say that it needs to have a Navy in the Black Sea because without the navy it will find itself in a difficult situation, as NSDC Secretary Danilov said.

⁴⁹ The government is developing an economic model for the development of Crimea within the framework of the Strategy for the recovery of the peninsula after its deoccupation, the Ministry for the Reintegration of the Occupied Territories, August 24, 2023 <https://minre.gov.ua/2023/08/24/uryad-rozroblyaye-ekonomichnu-model-rozvytku-krymu-v-mezhah-strategiyi-vidnovlennya-pivostrova-pislya-jogo-deokupacziyi/>

⁵⁰ "Already 15 large businesses have joined the memorandum on the restoration of Crimea after deoccupation", *Ekonomiczna Pravda*, August 24, 2023 <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2023/08/24/703552/>

⁵¹ <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3753247-roboca-grupa-rozroblatime-perehidne-zakonodavstvo-dla-zvilnenih-teritorij-minreintegracii.html>

⁵² Tetiana Lozovenko, "Almost 70% of Ukrainians have a good and neutral attitude towards Crimeans under occupation, worse – towards residents of the east", *Ukrainska Pravda*, August 23, 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/08/23/7416730/>

Is there an alternative to liberating Crimea from the Russian Occupation?

POLICY PAPER

LIBERATING CRIMEA FROM THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE?



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