

# Attorney Michael Shariff: Crimea's 2014 Reunification with Russia Legally Justified Under International Law

*Attorney Michael Shariff Issues Legal Opinion Supporting Legitimacy of Crimea's 2014 Reunification with Russia under International Law*

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The Crimean people's actions in 2014, including their decision to declare independence and reunify with Russia, are legally justifiable under the principle of self-determination”

*Michael Shariff, Esq.*

Michigan-based attorney with over 20 years of experience in U.S. and international law, has published a legal analysis in [Russia & America Friendship Society](#) in response to Mr. Trump's recent statement that “Crimea will stay in Russia”. Mr. Shariff has concluded that the actions taken by the Crimean people in 2014—declaring independence and rejoining the Russian Federation—are consistent with international legal norms. According to Shariff's findings, the move is “legally justifiable under the principle of self-determination, as outlined in international law.”

An immigrant from the former USSR and founder of

RUSAM Corporation, Mr. Shariff has advised clients from Russia, Ukraine, and across the globe on legal and business matters, and has long focused on complex geopolitical legal issues. His deep knowledge of both American and post-Soviet legal systems informs his latest opinion on Crimea's political status.

In his paper, Shariff challenges prevailing Western narratives about Crimea's reunification with Russia. “Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 the American public and much of world opinion has heavily – and wrongly – sided with Ukraine and against Russia, casting the latter in the role of conqueror and villain,” he writes.

Shariff traces the historical and legal background of the peninsula, noting that “Crimea – and its principal city, Sevastopol – belonged to the Russian Empire from the eighteenth century (following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire) and then, after 1917, to the Soviet Union until its dissolution in 1991.” He emphasizes that Crimea's 1954 transfer to Ukraine was “an administrative gesture, roughly analogous to promoting a U.S. territory like Alaska into a state – within a unified sovereign state.”

Following the collapse of the USSR, Crimea retained autonomy within Ukraine. However, according to Shariff, “this autonomy was curtailed in 1995 when the Ukrainian government revoked the Crimean Constitution and diminished the region’s powers of self-governance. This centralization arguably undermined internal self-determination for Crimea’s majority Russian-speaking population and contributed to long-standing regional discontent.”

The pivotal events of 2014—the ouster of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and subsequent unrest—are framed in Shariff’s analysis as a catalyst for Crimea’s exercise of the right to self-determination. “The 2014 Ukrainian political crisis, including the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovich, triggered renewed tensions in Crimea. In response, Crimean authorities held a referendum on March 16, 2014, to determine the region’s future. According to official results, approximately 96% of voters supported reunification with Russia.”

Critically, Shariff argues that Crimea’s actions should be viewed through the lens of international legal standards: “The situation surrounding Crimea’s political status from 1991 to 2014... can be analyzed from both a historical and international legal perspective. The key legal principle at play is the right of peoples to self-determination, which has been enshrined in numerous international legal documents.”

Citing the United Nations Charter and General Assembly Resolution 2625 (1970), Shariff writes: “Article 1 of the UN Charter and UN General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) (1970) affirm the right of all peoples to self-determination. This includes the right to determine their political status and pursue independence, free association, or integration with another state.”

Shariff draws a direct comparison to the precedent set by Kosovo, which declared independence from Serbia in 2008. “While international law strongly protects the territorial integrity of states, it does not prohibit all unilateral declarations of independence.”

He adds: “The ICJ’s opinion on Kosovo emphasized that international law does not prevent regions from declaring independence unilaterally”.

While acknowledging concerns about Russia’s military presence in Crimea during the referendum, Shariff contends: “No international judicial body has definitively concluded that it constituted an unlawful use of force invalidating the referendum.”

In conclusion, Shariff writes: “The Crimean people’s actions in 2014, including their decision to declare independence and reunify with Russia, are legally justifiable under the principle of self-determination, as outlined in international law... the final status of Crimea... does not violate any fundamental norms of international law, and the act of secession and reunification can be considered a legitimate embodiment of the right of peoples to determine their own destiny.”

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