

A Crisis Resolved

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, APR 17 2013

This post continues discussion of the Crisis Simulation outlined in the two previous blog posts here and here.

And then, almost as quickly as it had begun, it was over.

Late last week the students in my POL 210 class completed their Crisis Simulation with the two sections managing to come to two very different but – in the end – workable solutions to the crisis they had been presented with.

To remind readers exactly what the world was faced with, there had been a serious incursion by both China and North Korea into Russia's eastern territory. Out of position, the European Union and United States joined India, South Korea and Japan in negotiating with the belligerent states towards a settlement they could all agree upon. The students, assigned to represent one of the actors, were responsible for drafting that settlement before the end of their classes for the week.

Any professor will tell you that there is a different feeling in every class or section. Even if the material is the same, the way that certain students react and the impact that this has on the success of the class will always vary. So, too, in a simulation of this sort did the settlement agreements differ between two very different sections of the same POL 210 class. Considering the two settlements allows us to open a window to the sorts of things that these students think important in international politics today.

Section One decided on a settlement that included the following points:

- China and North Korea would withdraw from Russia
- Russia would offer citizens in its eastern region the option of taking both Chinese and Russian nationality
- The US would be the facilitator of a future discussions between China and Russia on the future of the region
- China would offer favorable terms of trade to the US and the Russia in the future

All actors signed on, save for the European Union whose representatives refused to sign anything that didn't explicitly reward them in some way, ideally with a reduced energy import price.

Section Two decided on a settlement that included the following points:

- China and North Korea would withdraw from Russia
- After the withdrawal, a referendum would be held in the region allowing the citizens to decide if they preferred to be part of Russia or part of China
- Russia and China agreed to live by the result of the referendum, with Russia committing to cede territory to China if the referendum result fell China's way
- Following reports of war crimes by North Korean troops in Russia, there would be a UNSC-backed investigation of the reports, with potential ICC referral should reports be proven true

All actors agreed to this settlement, including North Korea whose representatives claimed any war crimes investigation would find them innocent.

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In both agreements there are elements that would likely never eventuate in the real world of global politics. It would be unlikely, for example, that Russia would take any steps to allow the Sinification of their eastern population, be it through a state-sanctioned double nationality program or by encouraging citizens to vote freely in an election to leave Russia. The notion that Russia would voluntarily cede territory based on a self-determination referendum seems very far-fetched, indeed. So too the notion that the EU would sit out on signing a peace treaty because the 'only' benefit they receive is a peaceful eastern border. In times of crisis it would seem to me that peace is to be valued, period.

Yet there was much sense in both agreements, too. The first and most important step in each was for the parties that had illegally violated the sovereignty of another state to return to their own side of the border. There was some negotiation on this point in Section Two and preliminary plans hatched to divide eastern Russia into a Chinese part and a Russian part, but these were eventually put down. In this sort of crisis, returning to the status quo before negotiating further is a reasonable first step and I was glad to see students didn't decide to trade their sovereignty quite so easily.

I will run the Crisis Simulation again in the Summer Session here at CEFAM, that session less than two weeks away now. I will be interested to see if the results align or if the more condensed summer session – a class almost every day for five weeks straight – encourages the students to act differently.

All in all, though, this has been another cracker of a Simulation and the students – for all the hours spent arguing over language – have emerged with a settlement as planned...and hopefully a greater appreciation for the complexities of international politics, too.

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