

Russian Diplomacy at UVU

On April 5, 2019, students at Utah Valley University were blessed with the experience of hearing from First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the UN, Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy. The experience began with a short introduction of the speaker after which he spoke on the general topic of Russia, its history, and international relations. I found it quite interesting to hear from a native and official representative of Russia on these topics. As interesting as this first portion was, the true highlight of the event was the question and answer session that followed his short presentation. Here students were offered the opportunity to personally ask the Ambassador any questions they desired. The Ambassador himself said that no topics were taboo, and students quickly jumped on a number of somewhat controversial questions.

The first question asked of the Ambassador was in reference to the events in the Donbass region, namely the annexing of the Crimean peninsula. Ambassador Polyanskiy told us that before we begin to evaluate the situation that we ought to first look back to the history of the region and understand that this is an issue that is not just a modern one. Per the Ambassador, the Crimean peninsula has been ethnically Russian for many years. In addition to this the people of the Crimea have historically voted for policies that were pro-Russian and even at one point voting to become a part of the U.S.S.R. The Ambassador mentioned that a trade agreement between the Ukraine and the E.U., although being sold as a free trade agreement, would have required cutting all ties with Russia. Ambassador Polyanskiy told us that the leaders in Kiev, located in the western half of the country, seek greater western ties and to reduce its interactions with Russia which is in opposition to the desires of those in the eastern half of the Ukraine. His ultimate point was not to immediately jump to conclusions that it was purely a Russian invasion, but that from the other side this could have been perceived as a rescue mission. He also made sure to point out that there are no official reports of troops with Russian flags on their uniforms.

The next major topic was in reference to the latest events in Venezuela. One student asked a number of questions inquiring into Russia's stance on the situation and the reasoning for the deployment of Russian troops to the country. The Ambassador informed us the contrary to the mass media, Russia does not necessarily support Maduro but rather it supports Venezuela and international law. Per the Ambassador should anyone other than Maduro be officially elected Russia would support them. In regards to troops being deployed, the Ambassador replied that these were not soldiers but military personnel that specialized in engineering. They were sent to provide technical support for the issues Venezuela has been facing with its power grids and not for military action.

The Ambassador concluded his statements by telling us that we should always search for truth and to not rely on any single source for our information. He told us that for himself he reads Russia Today but does not rely on them only, and does not trust everything they put out but also reads from a number of other

major sources such as the BBC and CNN. On this note, it was very informative to hear from the side that is generally portrayed as the enemy by the media of the United States and to learn from this side's perspective on world events.



Austin Meline with Ambassador Polyanskiy

I am grateful for the experience that I had to hear from Ambassador Polyanskiy and to the staff and students at UVU who made such an experience possible. After the session, I was able to personally meet with the Ambassador and speak for a few minutes with him, which only enhanced my overall experience.

Austin Meline, UVU student