

Hello and welcome. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. It's time to improve your American English while you learn about our world ...As It Is. Today we will ask the experts. Russian leader Vladimir Putin has taken over Crimea. Why did he do it?

Then, is it just my imagination, or is the weather getting warmer, and I do not mean just because it is spring time in the northern hemisphere? What is going on with this crazy weather? We'll have some answers. This is VOA, and we are happy you have joined us.

Russia has taken complete control of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula. Now, observers are debating what led Russian President Vladimir Putin to make such a move.

Western nations have called Russia's occupation of Crimea illegal. Robert Legvold is a professor at Columbia University in New York City. He says the occupation shows President Putin wants to be remembered by future generations of Russians.

“From his point of view, it would be a far more substantial legacy than (the) Sochi Olympics, which everybody has been talking about as something that he wanted to be his legacy. But to have brought Crimea back into the historical place that it has had in the fold of Mother Russia, I think he sees this (as) probably the single most important thing that he will accomplish as president.”

Professor Legvold says Mr. Putin believes he is correcting what he sees as the historical injustice of 1954. That was when then-Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev gave control of Crimea to Ukraine, which was then a Soviet republic.

Matthew Rojansky is an expert on relations between the former Soviet republics and the United States. He works at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. He says that by seizing Crimea, Mr. Putin has destroyed the image of Russia being a responsible partner on international issues.

“But there is another image that he may care much, much more about. And that is his image at home as not only the defender of the Russian people -- which certainly the argument about defending Russians in Crimea and eastern Ukraine would help -- but also as defender of a greater Russia. You know, of a vision of Russia which is more powerful and bigger and which is taken seriously perhaps more out of fear than out of love.”

Brent Scowcroft served as national security adviser to two American presidents. He told VOA before Russia’s seizure of Crimea that President Putin wants his country to be seen as a strong power.

“Putin nurses a grudge because what he says is that at the end of the Cold War, when Russia was flat on its back, we walked all over them. And we did it because they were weak. Technically, he has a point. We pushed the borders of NATO right up into the former Soviet Union. We denounced the ABM (anti-ballistic missile) treaty and so on and so forth. We didn’t do it to weaken the Russians. We did it because we thought it was useful. But that gnaws at him.”

The United States and its Western allies have ordered economic actions against Russian officials because of what happened in Crimea. The Russian government answered the orders by placing travel restrictions on U.S. officials.

Professor Legvold says the crisis over Crimea could affect American cooperation with Russia in such areas as Iran and the Syrian conflict.

“In Syria, they’ve been a problem all along the way. They helped in an important way on chemical weapons. But the notion that somehow we can find common ground for achieving a political outcome grows more remote because again the Russians have no desire to seem like a cooperative partner when they are defining us, not merely as misguided in our policy, but even malevolent in our policy. That is, beginning to think of us as an adversary, not simply a difficult interlocutor.”

Professor Legvold and others are closely watching relations between Russia and the United States. They say if tensions rise over Ukraine and other issues, there could be a new Cold War.

## Is It Hot in Here?

The World Meteorological Organization says 2013 was the sixth-warmest year since officials began collecting temperature records. The United Nations agency says the new information confirms that temperatures on Earth's surface are rising.

Last week, the agency released a report called the Status of the Climate. It shows many extreme weather events took place throughout the world last year. Christopher Cruise has been watching the thermometer rise.

The World Meteorological Organization says 13 of the 14 warmest years on record have happened in this century. And it says each of the past three decades has been warmer than the one before it. A decade is defined as a period of 10 years. The WMO says the 10 year period from 2001 to 2010 was the warmest decade ever measured.

Michel Jarraud is the secretary-general of the WMO. He told VOA the temperature records show our planet is growing warmer.

“Since 2001, the first year of this century, the coldest year that we have observed since 2001 is actually warmer than any year before 1998. So I don’t think this can be used in seeing a contradiction of the stop in the climate change. The climate change is not stopping.”

There were very low temperatures in parts of the United States and Canada last year. But Mr. Jarraud says that does not mean the Earth is not getting warmer. He says many other areas had higher temperatures than normal.

The WMO climate report provides details of ice cover, ocean warming, rising sea levels and gases linked to climate change. It says these events are all linked, and show that our world is changing.

The report says many parts of the Asian continent received more rain than usual in 2013. And it says Britain received more rain than at any time in the past 250 years.

The report says there was little rainfall in the American state of California, in the Sahel area of Africa and in parts of southern Africa. And it notes extremely dry weather was linked to record high temperatures in Australia.

Michel Jarraud says weather events such as more intense heat and heavier rainfall or snow are what one would expect as a result of human-produced climate change. He also is concerned about the condition of Arctic ice.

“What is worrying is that an increasing fraction of this ice is actually recent new ice. This ice is normally very thin and therefore it’s more vulnerable to the variability and the change in the climate. So, this is the fact that the ice surface is a little bit more than the previous year is actually not in contradiction with the global warming. Actually the volume continues to decrease.”

He also says there is a strong possibility of an El Nino developing near the end of this year. El Nino is a complex weather interaction between the atmosphere and the ocean. Mr. Jarraud says if that happens, the world can expect higher than normal temperatures in 2015.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

Thanks, Chris. By the way, here is a towel to mop that extra perspiration off your forehead! It's time for us to go cool off as we await more Learning English programs. And don't forget, world news follows at the beginning of the hour on VOA. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. We'll see you tomorrow!





