

THIRD-PARTY CONSIDERATIONS IN U.S. BILATERAL RELATIONS:
FOUR CASE STUDIES EXAMINING THE PRESENCE OF THE MOSCOW FACTOR
IN U.S. POLICY TOWARD SOVEREIGN UKRAINE

by

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Third-Party Considerations in U.S. Bilateral Relations:
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U.S. Policy Toward Sovereign Ukraine*

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Abstract

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The purpose of this instrumental multicase study, which relies on the structured, focused comparison method, is to explore whether, how, with what impact, and under what circumstances Washington's Moscow-related considerations have factored in policy toward sovereign Ukraine. It does so by examining four key Ukraine-related policy decision points across the George H. W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama Administrations. This study relies on data generated by a review of documentary evidence, supplemented by practitioner interviews. It fills a gap in existing scholarship, which has tended to focus on bilateral dynamics without a more rigorous exploration of the key questions posed.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Context, Key Research Question, and Methods

A déjà vu moment

In the ebb and flow of foreign affairs there are inflection points, in the parlance of the elites, or gut-check moments, in the jargon of the public-at-large, that tend to define the beginning of new periods and sometimes even emergent eras in international relations. Arguably, one such moment was captured in a conversation that took place in the Oval Office on a crisp fall day.

This conversation involved the Commander-in-Chief and a U.S. ambassador to an East European country that was still convulsing after five plus years of external aggression. The ambassador, a career member of the U.S. Foreign Service, was making a pitch for a more robust American posture supporting the independence of that East European country. Addressing the Chief Executive, the ambassador expressed confidence that Washington had the wherewithal to stay true to its principled position in the face of Moscow's pressure against its neighbor "if we...take a strong line and not deviate from it."¹ The ambassador added that the "strong line" was needed because Moscow's view of its neighbor's independence was "quite different from our own conception."²

¹ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, 1948, p. 67.

² Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, p. 67.

When the President pushed back by expressing confidence that the Kremlin leader would not go back on his word about respecting the neighbor's sovereignty, the ambassador diplomatically suggested that previous actions by the President's counterpart in Moscow "have shown him not to be dependable."³ In response, the President "asked rather sharply and with a note of sarcasm, Do you want me to go to war with Russia" over its neighbor's independence?⁴ Seemingly as a way to rationalize this sharp response, the President added that the Kremlin's idea of having a cordon sanitaire, in the shape of a mid-sized neighbor "under Russian influence, as a bulwark to protect...against further aggression was understandable."⁵

This conversation took place more than 75 years ago.⁶ The victimized country was Poland, not Ukraine. The aggressor country was the USSR, the American president was FDR, and the cordon sanitaire idea was, of course, Stalin's. Despite the differences, there is an eerie similarity, particularly when it comes to how our perceptions (and misperceptions), the "Moscow factor," as I call it, played out in our de facto and, in some respects, de jure policy toward a neighbor in the geographic center of Europe.

"Europe whole, free and at peace"

With Russia's war against Ukraine entering its eighth year, the debate over what the Western democracies should and should not do about Moscow's ongoing violation of that neighboring state's territorial integrity continues as the Biden Administration takes

³ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, p. 67.

⁴ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, p. 67.

⁵ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, p. 67.

⁶ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed*, pp. 64-65.

the reins of executive power in Washington. At its basis, the regional crisis that started in February 2014 with Moscow's illegal occupation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula was a reminder of the deep and fundamental foreign and security policy challenge facing Western, including U.S., policymakers. The essence of this challenge is finding the right balance between two often mutually exclusive priorities: maintaining engagement with Russia – a geostrategic necessity, as argued by many, no matter how unpalatable that interaction may be – and helping Ukraine join “Europe [that is] whole, free and at peace,” a policy priority broadly embraced by successive Republican and Democratic Administrations in Washington.

The latter policy was first unveiled by President George H. W. Bush, who used the occasion of his May 31, 1989 speech in Mainz, West Germany to assert that the Cold War cannot be truly considered over until “Europe is whole.”⁷ This policy speech set the course for successive U.S. Administrations, which over time made more granular the meaning of the phrase “Europe whole, free and at peace” and put it in the context of the evolving, post-Cold War regional dynamics. At the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, for example, President Clinton referenced missed opportunities to establish “a peaceful, democratic, undivided Europe.”⁸

The Administration of George W. Bush made even clearer that such a Europe can only be created with the successful transformation of the post-Soviet states located in geographic Europe, especially Ukraine. Indeed, in the wake of Russia's 2008 invasion of

⁷ George H. W. Bush, “A Europe Whole and Free,” 31 May 1989.

⁸ The White House, Remarks by President Bill Clinton, French President Jacques Chirac, Russian President Boris Yeltsin, and NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, 27 May 1997.

Georgia, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that the United States has “long believed that Ukraine’s independence, its democracy, is essential to a Europe whole and free and at peace.”⁹

The Obama Administration, the last Administration examined in this study, continued in a similar vein. Speaking at a high-powered conference hosted by the Atlantic Council of the United States, then-Vice President Biden paid tribute to the Transatlantic community – a reference to NATO – and its open door “to free nations who share the values and commitments we have, and to those who dream from inside the captive nations of the day they too might join a Europe whole and free.”¹⁰

But these, arguably only rhetorical expressions of support for a “Europe whole, free and at peace” that includes Ukraine are only part of the picture. Various critics of U.S. policy in the region have charged that the United States applies variable standards when it comes to following through on its commitments to Ukraine. One of the best examples of such criticism is Paul Goble’s article “The West’s Real Double Standards in the Ukrainian Crisis” in which the author asserted that “Moscow is routinely held to lower standards than the [other post-Soviet states]...and is not given the constant...lectures on how it must behave domestically and internationally if it is to be a partner of the West.”¹¹ Goble, an internationally recognized expert on post-Soviet societies and politics, went on to assert that “[i]f any other country had [done what Russia

⁹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), “U.S. Confirms Negotiations with Georgia on Bilateral Charter,” 24 December 2008.

¹⁰ Joseph Biden, Closing Remarks, Atlantic Council of the United States conference “Toward a Europe Whole and Free,” 29 April 2014.

¹¹ Paul Goble, “The West’s Real Double Standards in the Ukrainian Crisis,” 22 May 2014.

is doing to Ukraine], the West would have classified that as an invasion, a clear violation of international law, and asked itself first and foremost what it could do to repel the invaders. But in this case, many Western politicians and commentators have gone out of their way to understand the aggressor and condemn the victim.”¹² Goble may have had a point.¹³

Perhaps no single document epitomizes the tensions inherent in this dynamic more than the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, which sealed Ukraine’s denuclearization. Under the terms of this document, Ukraine gave up the nuclear arsenal it inherited from the USSR – at that time, the third largest in the world (176 intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of hitting targets all over the globe and a total of 1,272 nuclear warheads)¹⁴ – in return for financial compensation as well as “security assurances” from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation. These assurances promised Ukraine protection from the threat or use of force and from economic coercion, as well as respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity within the borders it assumed at the collapse of the USSR and as recognized by the international community.¹⁵

At the same time, the United States has staked considerable geopolitical capital on Russia’s own post-Soviet transformation. The NATO-Russia Founding Act is replete with Washington’s vision of Russia’s constructive interaction with the West, particularly with NATO. Though the Russian invasion of Ukraine that started in February 2014

¹² Paul Goble, “The West’s Real Double Standards in the Ukrainian Crisis,” 22 May 2014.

¹³ Goble had held a number of posts in the U.S. Government, including that of Senior Advisor for Soviet Nationalities in the Department of State.

¹⁴ “20 Years Since the Signing of the Budapest Memorandum,” brochure, 2014.

¹⁵ “20 Years Since the Signing of the Budapest Memorandum,” brochure, 2014.

brought these competing U.S. interests in the region into sharper relief, these contradictions had already been evident not only as far back as the U.S.-Ukrainian-Russian negotiations over Ukraine's denuclearization but even to the period immediately preceding the USSR's collapse. One of the more explicit examples of this was President George H. W. Bush's so-called "Chicken Kiev" speech, in which he – apparently egged on by then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev – called on Ukrainian civil society, which was then pushing for greater autonomy from Moscow, not to pursue "suicidal nationalism."¹⁶

That Russia would figure prominently – even if not always explicitly – in the American approach to Ukraine is hardly surprising, and not just because of Russia's domination of the Eurasian landmass and its self-promotion as a "great power." A factor that is certainly also in play is our American socialization about the region. Various facets of the American cultural encounter with "Russia" have contributed considerably to Americans' perceptions and misperceptions about Russia, the Soviet Union, and the region as a whole. The enduring conflation of the terms "Russia" and the "Soviet Union," including the latter's diverse component parts, by academics, cultural figures and institutions, and senior political figures has ingrained in the American psyche the notion that these two terms are interchangeable.¹⁷ The impact has been so great that even the

¹⁶ John-Thor Dahlburg, "Bush's 'Chicken Kiev' Talk – an Ill-Fated U.S. Policy," *The Los Angeles Times*, 19 December 1991.

¹⁷ Even when U.S. officials were aware of the existence of Ukraine, for example, they often had a distorted view of regional history. One glaring example of this phenomenon was Secretary of State Dean Rusk's 22 August 1961 letter to Congressman Howard W. Smith, in which Rusk wrote: "The United States Government's position is weakened by any action which confuses the rights of formerly independent peoples or nations with the status of areas, such as the [sic] Ukraine, Armenia or Georgia, which are traditional parts of the Soviet Union. Reference to these latter areas places the United States Government

collapse of the USSR and the emergence of twelve independent countries from its rubble, including Russia and Ukraine, have yet to erode the notion of interchangeability between “Russia” and the “Soviet Union.”

History matters

This, in turn, suggests once again that history – or, more accurately, historiography – matters greatly. Accepted conventional wisdom, especially if sustained over time, becomes highly pervasive and remarkably resilient to correction, no matter how factually based.¹⁸ The challenge becomes even greater when the conventional wisdom is reinforced on multiple fronts, including through political discourse, high culture, popular culture, etc. More practically speaking, such distortions as the interchangeable use of “Russia” and the “Soviet Union” create opportunities for Moscow to advance its own favored and often misleading narratives.¹⁹

These distortions are hardly an artifact of a bygone era, and the continued misuse of the term “Russia” is by no means limited to non-specialists. A representative example of this phenomenon can be found in a 2014 Brookings Institution policy paper: “In the forty-five years between the end of the Second World War and the end of the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy had two central pillars: the containment of Russia (sic), through

in the undesirable position of seeming to advocate the dismemberment of an historical state.” Rusk was clearly not aware of the long histories of the three “areas” mentioned, all of which predate both the Russian nation and state, not to mention the USSR.

¹⁸ See Stephanie Neubronner’s “Building Resilience Against Disinformation: Need For Wider Education” in *Eurasia Review*, 22 September 2018.

¹⁹ This is a topic that arguably deserves closer academic scrutiny.

deterrence and alliances, and the spread of the liberal international order, through economic institutions and protection of the global commons.”²⁰

This phenomenon is particularly intriguing because the collapse of the USSR offered a clear real-world opportunity to learn the difference between it and “Russia,” since the former disappeared at that time and the latter re-emerged after seven decades of being subsumed by the larger entity. Moreover, one could argue rather convincingly that the failure to distinguish between these two entities (and between modern Russia and the Russian Empire that preceded the Soviet Union) contributed to the West’s inability to anticipate – or even contemplate – the USSR’s dissolution in late 1991. This is where the impact of the aforementioned historiography often comes into play. According to Paul Robert Magocsi, a respected Canadian historian of the region, “[s]cholars in the West, particularly in the United States, have essentially adopted the traditional Russian view of the history of eastern Europe. Kievan (sic) Rus, Muscovy, the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union are all seen as part of a single historical continuum and are referred to in popular and often in professional literature simply as Russia.”^{21,22} Magocsi concluded that “[i]n such a warped framework, Ukraine has no independent historical existence.”²³

This concept is also examined and elaborated upon by Harvard’s Serhii Plokhy, whose book *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation*

²⁰ Bruce Jones and Thomas Wright, Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2014.

²¹ Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, p. 24.

²² A scholar who played a significant role in shaping American views of “Russia” was Nicholas Riasanovsky. The first chapter of his *A History of Russia* is called “Kievan Russia,” a misnomer that conflates the Kyivan Rus state formation that was centered on Kyiv, the capital of modern Ukraine, and Russia. Riasanovsky was Professor Emeritus of History at the University of California, Berkeley and is considered by many to have been the dean of North American Russianists.

²³ Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, p. 23.

focuses, in part, on Russia's cultural misappropriation of the legacy and patrimony of Kyivan Rus, as already referenced.²⁴ According to Plokhy, this misappropriation involves not only the unfounded claim that the Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians are essentially three components of the one "Great Russian" nation, but also the equally false notion that Kyiv is the birthplace of the Russian state and even monarchy. In turn, Moscow and its fellow travelers in the West have used this notion to attempt to legitimize Tsarist Russia's domination and consequent Russification of its Belarusian and Ukrainian neighbors while preventing the emergence – until the USSR's collapse – of their own independent states.²⁵ This is especially operative in the case of Ukraine, which, given its capital and location, has a much more direct claim to the patrimony of Kyivan Rus than Russia.

Indeed, the issue of Russia casting a long shadow on U.S. policy toward Ukraine and this dynamic's practical challenges and implications predate the crisis that started in 2014, and, based on the major indicators in play, including Russia's apparent inability to accept itself as a strictly post-imperial power. In view of President Putin's own apparent reference points and visions for the region, Moscow's neo-imperial attitudes and behaviors will likely be a significant factor in international relations for some time. Other major indicators virtually assuring this issue's longevity are the highly consequential nature of Ukraine's geopolitical choice in favor of the Western direction and its historical tug-of-war with Russia over the related issues of identity, patrimony,

²⁴ Serhii Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation*, 2017.

²⁵ For a leading presentation of regional dynamics in the late first half of the 20th century please see Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*.

and legitimacy. Furthermore, the transformation of the post-Soviet space – a process whose linearly positive progression had been taken for granted by the bulk of North American and European academics and government officials alike – remains a top policy focal point in Washington and other Western capitals, particularly of U.S. Allies in Central Europe.

Though for much of the time since the USSR’s collapse Kyiv had formally pursued a multi-vectored foreign policy, it has been clear that independent Ukraine has perceived Russia as its top security threat and the West as the likeliest exogenous security provider. With Russian aggression ongoing, much if not all of the pretense has been removed. Putin’s war against Ukraine has also contributed significantly to the growing number of Ukrainians supporting membership in both the European Union and NATO.²⁶ A clear majority now sees itself as European.²⁷

Efforts to anchor Ukraine in Europe politically, economically, and militarily are not new, however. A range of 19th century Ukrainian public figures attempted to develop a geopolitical concept of the Baltic-Black Sea region.²⁸ The July 1990 Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine asserted that “[t]he Ukrainian SSR...directly participates in the general European processes and European structures.”²⁹ In the post-Soviet Ukrainian context, the idea was picked up by President Leonid Kravchuk in 1993 when he proposed the establishment of a zone of stability and security in Central and Eastern Europe, a clear

²⁶ UNIAN, “Ukraine Survey Shows Popular Attitudes Toward EU, NATO Membership,” 11 November 2020.

²⁷ UNIAN, “Over Half of Ukrainians Consider Themselves European – Poll,” 22 June 2020.

²⁸ Oleksiy Volovych, “The Baltic-Black Sea Union: Prospects of Realization,” *Borysfen Intel*, 30 May 2016.

²⁹ Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 16 July 1990.

effort to address Ukraine's security deficit and to anchor it to its western neighbors.³⁰ In 1999, Kravchuk's successor, Leonid Kuchma, asserted that the "Baltic-Black Sea axis can and should be one of the consolidating and stabilizing rods of the new Europe and, therefore, an integral part of it." The NATO-Ukraine Distinctive Partnership and the NATO-Ukraine Commission were set up in response to Kyiv's requests for more formal links with the Alliance. These requests were driven to a large extent by the concern that once Ukraine's western neighbors joined institutional Europe, Ukraine would be once again consigned to the wrong side of a new dividing line on the continent.

According to Volodymyr Horbulin's *The World Hybrid War*, "[f]or the Russian Federation, Ukrainian accession to the North Atlantic Alliance would mean the final and total loss of Ukraine and Kyiv's exit from the sphere of the Kremlin's unconditional control."³¹³² In view of this, "Russia is exerting systematic political, economic and military pressure on Ukraine and on the Alliance member states in order to prevent the possibility of Ukrainian Euro-Atlantic integration."³³ This notion is also highlighted by Steven Pifer in his *The Ukraine Crisis*, in which he asserts that "[t]he Kremlin believes that an unstable Ukraine is in its interests. Such instability makes Ukraine an unattractive political model for Russians as well as an unattractive candidate for NATO or the European Union."³⁴³⁵

³⁰ Oleksiy Volovych, "The Baltic-Black Sea Union: Prospects of Realization," *Borysfen Intel*, 30 May 2016.

³¹ Volodymyr Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War*, p. 27.

³² Volodymyr Horbulin was a longtime National Security Advisor to Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma and is still considered to be one of his country's leading strategic thinkers.

³³ Volodymyr Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War*, p. 27.

³⁴ Steven Pifer, *Averting Crisis in Ukraine*, p. 5.

³⁵ Steven Pifer is a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine.

Key research questions

Given the policy frictions referenced above – and in view of Washington’s historically much more robust focus on Moscow – the following key research questions emerge: Whether, how, with what impact, and under what circumstances have Washington’s Moscow-related considerations factored in policy formulation and implementation toward Ukraine as the latter regained its independence, focusing on the recognition of Ukraine’s independence from the USSR, the pursuit of Ukraine’s denuclearization, on support for the so-called Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the non-provision of lethal military assistance to Ukraine in the face of Russia’s occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and aggression in eastern Ukraine?

To answer these questions in turn, this study will focus on how the four U.S. Administrations in question – two Republican and two Democratic, by happenstance – formulated and implemented U.S. policy toward Ukraine as and since the latter secured its independence from the USSR.³⁶ My underlying premise is that the Ukraine policy of each of these four Administrations had its own internal logic shaped by the prevailing contemporaneous conditions. This study will also invariably capture the ebb and flow of bilateral relations throughout the period in question, as referenced below.

³⁶ According to Robert Stake, whose work has focused on case selection, “[t]he benefits of multicase study will be limited if fewer than...4 cases are chosen, or more than 10,” with three or fewer cases supposedly being insufficient to draw broader conclusions and 11 or more being potentially unwieldy (Stake, *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, p. 22). The upper limit proposed by Stake appears to be especially arbitrary.

Research design

One of the earlier claims to the broad utility of case studies – and therefore their increasing use – was Kathleen Eisenhardt’s assertion that “case studies can be used to accomplish various aims: to provide description, test theory, or generate theory.”³⁷³⁸ According to Eisenhardt, “[o]ne strength of theory building from cases is its likelihood of generating novel theory...because [b]uilding theory from case studies centers directly on...the juxtaposition of contradictory or paradoxical evidence.”³⁹ Eisenhardt also asserted “that the resultant theory is likely to be empirically valid...because the theory-building process is so intimately tied with evidence that it is very likely that the resultant theory will be consistent with empirical observation.”⁴⁰

Based on the key research questions I have identified, the ultimate dependent variable in my research design model is U.S. policy toward sovereign Ukraine and the intervening dependent variable I focus on are Moscow-related considerations (aka, the Moscow factor, direct or indirect) in the formulation and implementation of said U.S. policy. This intervening dependent variable has three components: whether, how, and with what impact the Moscow factor manifested itself. The Moscow factor is a function of, but not identical with, Moscow’s behavior (because of perceptions, misperceptions, etc.). As explained below, Moscow’s behavior is one of a series of independent variables against which I compare my initial findings about the presence of the Moscow factor to

³⁷ Kathleen Eisenhardt, “Building Theories from Case Study Research,” p. 535.

³⁸ Eisenhardt is the Stanford W. Ascherman, M.D. Professor and co-director of the Stanford Technology Ventures Program at Stanford University.

³⁹ Kathleen Eisenhardt, “Building Theories from Case Study Research,” p. 546.

⁴⁰ Kathleen Eisenhardt, “Building Theories from Case Study Research,” p. 547.

see under what broader, identified circumstances, including the policy context, this factor has presented itself and to what effect.

The desire to consider a range of potentially correlated factors in the guise of independent variables is in part a nod to Jon Elster's credible assertion that social science explanations are not like the law-like, deterministic explanations of the hard sciences.⁴¹⁴² In other words, there is rarely if ever one explanation, and an overreliance on a particular, too narrowly defined theoretical model can prevent the attainment of new knowledge rather than facilitate it.

Based on existing literature, the independent variables I have identified for consideration as those affecting the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy toward Ukraine represent both external and domestic factors. These include 1) the relative heft of U.S. domestic and foreign priorities; 2) the relative commitment to the policy of "Europe whole and free"; 3) the relative heft of Ukraine policy in comparison to other foreign policy priorities; 4) the perceived complementarity of Kyiv's behavior with U.S. interests and objectives; 5) the perceived complementarity of Moscow's behavior with U.S. interests and objectives; 6) pertinent views of key executive branch personalities and their relative clout; 7) Congressional pressures and constraints; and 8) the pressure applied by Ukrainian diaspora organizations.⁴³

⁴¹ Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, p. 9.

⁴² Jon Elster is the Robert K. Merton Professor of the Social Sciences Political Science at Columbia University.

⁴³ The author also considered other potential independent variables, including that focusing on the expert community.

In view of the key research questions posed, it is evident that Moscow-related considerations have been present throughout the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy toward Ukraine, as one would anticipate based on the broad pragmatic realism of international relations. Moscow-related considerations have largely manifested themselves by playing a constraining role in U.S. policy toward Ukraine. But again, whether, how, and with what impact Moscow-related considerations have played out in shaping U.S. policy toward Ukraine have largely depended on the independent variables referenced above.

Moreover, while the specific combinations and relative weights in which these independent variables have come together to provide the context for and affect Ukraine policy formulation and implementation likely varied from Administration to Administration and even from major decision point to major decision point (thereby providing ample fodder for case study comparisons), the key factor across the board is the role played by well-placed individuals who, based on strongly held views of the prevailing international dynamics and the specific issues and countries involved, take on the championing of a particular policy approach and have the clout to do so.

This dynamic is consistent with Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow's writings, including on the understanding that "[i]ndividuals become players in the national security policy game by occupying a position in the major channels for producing action on national security issues."⁴⁴ Indeed, their Model III was my theoretical starting point, given my expectation of "players in position" wrestling over U.S. policy toward Ukraine,

⁴⁴ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, p. 296.

more often than not in the context of the U.S. Government's Moscow considerations. How these struggles panned out has likely been connected to the key parameters in play as referenced in Model III, e.g., the specific bureaucratic perches the "players in position" occupy and their ability – or inability – to sway the senior-most decision makers, first and foremost the President (and the President's prevailing worldview).⁴⁵

Those who have argued for greater positive prominence of the Moscow factor in U.S. policy toward sovereign Ukraine (i.e., for constraining U.S. support for Ukraine, in effect) have tended to identify more closely with the realist and neo-realist focus on relative power realities and, therefore, are more likely to emphasize the priority of cooperative relations with Russia to the detriment of others in the region, including Ukraine. On the other hand, those who have given greater negative prominence to the Moscow factor in order to embolden U.S. support for Ukraine may have come from two somewhat overlapping points of view. The first is of those who have prioritized the need to contain Moscow, while the second could be ascribed to more idealistic notions, including the desire to transform regional dynamics based on the promotion of Western values as global values and on associated aspirations. But the key takeaway has been the confirmation that the Moscow factor has loomed prominently on both sides of the Ukraine policy argument.

⁴⁵ At the same time, Allison and Zelikow, point out that "[t]he need for all three lenses [i.e., Models I-III] is evident when one considers the causal bottom line," *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, p. 383.

Data collection

According to the aforementioned Kathleen Eisenhardt, “[c]ase studies typically combine data collections methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observations.” One of the better examples of the usage of a full range of available sources is Piotr Ozieranski’s “Who Rules Postcommunism? The Case of Drug Reimbursement Policy in Poland,” a Doctoral Dissertation he defended at the University of Cambridge in 2012. This dissertation examined the effect of lobbying on drug reimbursement policy in post-communist Poland by relying on “in-depth, semi-structured, anonymous, elite interviews” that Ozieranski supplemented with observations as well as a close reading of pertinent legislation, policy documents, official reports, and press articles.⁴⁶ What emerged out of this effort was a strong and ground-breaking project replete with a “thick description” of consequential and policy-relevant findings.

I attempted to replicate at least some of Piotr Ozieranski’s success by relying on a broad range of sources. These entail archival materials, including those declassified materials pertaining to policy deliberations; press statements issued by the White House and the Department of State; Congressional testimony, confirmation hearings, and press releases; relevant retrospective articles authored by the policymakers referenced above; more formal memoirs, including by former senior officials; targeted open-ended interviews with particularly well-placed former officials; and pertinent opinions and editorials, and other media sources.

⁴⁶ Piotr Ozieranski, “Who Rules Postcommunism? The Case of Drug Reimbursement Policy in Poland,” University of Cambridge (UK) Doctoral Dissertation, 2012.

In order to operationalize my approach, I took the above sources and matched them with the independent variables I identified earlier. This exercise helped me better conceptualize the mechanics of the research process and provided the added benefit of demonstrating that there was sufficient data available for the independent variables in question.

Methods of analysis

This dissertation relies heavily on the instrumental multiple-case study approach, as identified by Robert Stake.⁴⁷ According to Robert Yin, the use of case studies is most appropriate when the following conditions are present: the main research questions are “how” or “why” questions; a researcher has little or no control over behavioral events; and the focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon.⁴⁸ Because these conditions appear to apply to a great extent, I expected the four cases I selected for analysis (the four particular policies) would provide ample material for the “seeking [out] of patterns of unanticipated as well as expected relationships.”⁴⁹

These units of analysis – which are “easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry,” as required by Stake – are organically bounded both in terms of time and scope given the specific policies examined. Stake imagines the case as an “integrated” and “bounded system” that is an “object rather than a process.”⁵⁰ Put together, I anticipated that these

⁴⁷ According to Robert Stake, an instrumental case study is used to understand phenomena beyond the case itself, a concept well suited for this study. See in particular *The Art of Case Study Research* (p. 3).

⁴⁸ Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Robert Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, p. 41.

⁵⁰ Robert Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, p. 2.

four case studies would produce an end product that is stronger in terms of its analytical takeaways than the four cases would be if examined individually.⁵¹ Moreover, I expected that examining the same issue (the impact of Moscow-related considerations on U.S. policy toward Ukraine) across four different decision points considered during four different U.S. Administrations would allow me to study the phenomenon “in different environments.”⁵² Furthermore, the cases I selected “provide[d] good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts.”⁵³

Of note is the fact that the phenomena studied in these case studies and the contexts involved are not clearly separated, another factor in favor of using the case study approach.⁵⁴ Each of the four case studies relies on a range of data sources, as referenced above. I had every expectation that these would fill out appropriate contexts for the cases being examined, an important consideration in view of Stake’s argument that “issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political contexts.”⁵⁵ This appears to be especially true when focusing on such highly politicized entities as U.S. Administrations and their policies.

Beyond the instrumental multiple-case study approach, this study relies on Alexander George’s structured, focused comparison method.⁵⁶ According to George, the “structured” component of this method pertains to utilizing the same standardized set of

⁵¹ Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, p. 65.

⁵² Robert Stake, *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, p. 23.

⁵³ Robert Stake, *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Robert Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, p. 17.

⁵⁶ See Alexander George’s works, starting with his “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison,” 1979.

questions for each case being examined in order to generate comparable data across the cases being compared. George argued these “questions must be carefully developed to reflect the research objective and theoretical focus of the inquiry.”⁵⁷ This approach maximizes the advantage to be derived from systematically looking at a set of similar cases, as traditional single cases are more challenging to deal with from the comparative perspective. This is one of the reasons I chose to use the multicase approach for this study.

Consistent with George’s writings, I have identified the universe of the cases to be studied (the four U.S. policies toward Ukraine selected), the single phenomenon to be studied (Moscow-related considerations in the formulation and implementation these policies), a well-defined research objective (studying this phenomenon within each policy and across the four policies identified), variables of theoretical interest for purposes of explaining the phenomenon to be studied (e.g., such independent variables as each Administration’s overarching foreign policy priorities and Moscow’s behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities).

For its part, the “focused” component refers to examining only certain, carefully selected aspects of the cases without trying to cover the whole waterfront. As George put it, “[a] single study cannot address all the interesting aspects of a historical event.”⁵⁸ Perhaps most importantly, this method is quite appropriate as it easily lends itself to studying historical cases with the objective of yielding useful generalizations, including

⁵⁷ Alexander George, “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison,” p. 45.

⁵⁸ Alexander George, “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison,” p. 45.

when examining complex foreign policy issues, which this study attempts to do. As a result, this method also lends itself to connecting the focused conclusions drawn across the cases into a broader theoretical context.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Historical Context

Late Soviet-era perceptions and dynamics

It is difficult to disagree with Alexander George's assertion that "situating one's research in the context of the literature is key to identifying the contribution the new research makes."⁵⁹ A thorough perusal of extant literature indicates there has been little written about the specific focus of this proposed study – a systematic analysis of Moscow-related considerations in the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy toward Ukraine.

The American policy discourse immediately prior to the USSR's dissolution implicitly and overwhelmingly assumed the Soviet Union's continued existence.⁶⁰ Seweryn Bialer and Michael Mandelbaum's edited volume on Washington's policy toward the Soviet Union is a widely recognized canonical work that provides ample insight into the pertinent academic perceptions during the late Soviet period.⁶¹ Much of the indirect conversation that took place in their *Gorbachev's Russia (sic) and American Foreign Policy*, published in 1988, focused on best approaches to what was expected to

⁵⁹ Alexander George, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ This reliance on conventional wisdom was prevalent but not universal. Paul Goble, Uri Ra'anan, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Marshall Goldman, and others represented the dissenting – and more accurate – voices in various ways.

⁶¹ Seweryn Bialer and Michael Mandelbaum (Eds.). *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988.

be a long-standing relationship. As a consequence, the discourse engaged was overwhelmingly Kremlin-focused, with little variance exhibited among a range of prominent scholars, starting with John Gaddis and his essay “The Evolution of U.S. Policy Toward the USSR in the Postwar Era.”

Gaddis launched his essay by asking “What have been the objectives of the United States in its relations with the Soviet Union since the formation of that state seven decades ago?”⁶² In order to answer this question, Gaddis organized the essay “around five theoretically plausible alternatives: (1) overthrowing the Soviet regime altogether; (2) containing Soviet influence within the boundaries of the USSR; (3) changing that country’s internal structure; (4) competing selectively within a framework of overall co-existence; and (5) cooperating generally within a framework of shared interests.”⁶³ He then compared these options against “the historical record of American policy toward the Soviet Union since 1917 (sic)⁶⁴ with a view to determining: (a) which of them were seriously pursued, by whom, for how long, and with what results; (b) what the assumptions behind these options were; and (c) whether a comparison of those assumptions with the results they produced can provide a useful standard for evaluating current and future policy toward the USSR.”⁶⁵

In terms of the first option, that of overthrowing the Soviet regime, Gaddis argued that “[i]t was the administration of Woodrow Wilson that came closest to seeking the

⁶² John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 305.

⁶³ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 305.

⁶⁴ The USSR was established in 1922.

⁶⁵ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 305.

overthrow of the Soviet government as a deliberate objective.”⁶⁶ According to Gaddis, “Wilson refused to extend diplomatic recognition to the new regime, initiated an ambitious ideological campaign against it, and in the summer of 1918 actually authorized military intervention by the United States – alongside that of its wartime allies – in Siberia and North Russia.”⁶⁷ Beyond Wilson’s limited intervention, “[t]he United States government has at no point committed itself wholeheartedly to the objective of overthrowing the Soviet regime....Nor has official Washington ever claimed that postwar global stability requires elimination of the Soviet regime,” something to keep in mind for the later discussion of the USSR’s collapse.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, Gaddis asserted that “[t]he issue of ‘legitimacy’ persists, one suspects, because of the **extraordinary sensitivity** the Soviet leadership continues to feel on such questions.”⁶⁹⁷⁰ Based on this assertion, Gaddis suggested several implications for U.S. policy. First, he argued that “**the United States government should avoid any appearance of challenging Soviet legitimacy**, for the simple reason that it has never considered itself to have a vital interest in replacing that regime.”⁷¹⁷² Second, he called on the United States to “encourage greater understanding on the Russians’ (sic) part of American...constitutional separation of powers...so that the criticisms of the Soviet system that will inevitably be made are not regarded as reflecting any official

⁶⁶ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 305.

⁶⁷ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 306.

⁶⁸ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 312-313.

⁶⁹ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 313.

⁷⁰ Bolded for emphasis.

⁷¹ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 313.

⁷² Bolded for emphasis.

determination to destabilize that regime.”⁷³ Third, he underscored the need to remind “the Russians (sic) that their own concept of ‘peaceful coexistence’ insists that struggles between systems can take place within limits that imply tacit acknowledgements of legitimacy on both sides.”⁷⁴

In terms of his second policy option, that of containing Soviet influence within the boundaries of the USSR, Gaddis argued that the experience of containment yielded several policy lessons. First and foremost, Gaddis asserted that containment “was intended for a particular situation at a particular time.”⁷⁵ In other words, containment should not be seen – or used – as a long-term strategy. According to Gaddis, another critical assertion was that “there is a fine line to walk, in strategy, between flexibility and credibility,” apparently another admonition against overreliance on containment.

Gaddis left even less doubt about what he thought of the third option, that of removing the Soviet threat by changing the Soviet Union’s internal structure. He wrote “with the passage of time, the idea that one can force the Soviet system to change by exhausting it has come to seem about as plausible as earlier efforts to remind Kremlin leaders of their obligation to respect human rights. The Soviet economy seems no nearer collapse today than it did in 1981; certainly the ability of those who direct it to allocate resources more or less as they choose has not been impaired.”⁷⁶ That Gaddis got it so wrong so close to the USSR’s collapse is intriguing, but must be dealt with elsewhere.

⁷³ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 313.

⁷⁴ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 313.

⁷⁵ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 318.

⁷⁶ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 324.

Gaddis suggested the fourth option, which involves competing for influence within a framework of shared systemic interests, is a good one because “attempts to end the Cold War through containment – by building centers of resistance to the Russians (sic) in those parts of the world threatened by them – ran the risk...of bankrupting the United States and ultimately undermining its way of life.”⁷⁷ In this context, he praised President Eisenhower’s preferred strategy of relying “heavily upon the prospect of nuclear ‘retaliation’ to deter Soviet expansionism while at the same time conserving limited American resources.”⁷⁸

Among the policy lessons suggested by Gaddis within the context of his option, one stands out in particular: that “there can be, on both sides, a strong interest in maintaining the status quo at the systemic level – that is, doing nothing to destabilize the overall structure of international relations – while simultaneously pursuing competitive advantages within it.”⁷⁹ Gaddis followed this assertion with the conclusion that “[a] major task for Soviet-American diplomacy then becomes that of defining in a mutually acceptable way the boundary that separates competitive from cooperative interest; or, to put it another way, distinguishing competition that has the potential to destabilize the international system from that which does not.”⁸⁰

In the context of his policy option five, cooperative co-existence in which the United States could “enlist the assistance of [the Soviet Union] in the joint task of preserving world order,” Gaddis claimed that “[h]istorical evidence for the existence of

⁷⁷ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 326.

⁷⁸ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 327.

⁷⁹ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 330.

⁸⁰ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 330.

this approach to the Russians (sic) can be located in two very different periods and under two very different administrations...those of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Richard M. Nixon.”⁸¹ In terms of the former, Gaddis focused on “the persistence with which [Roosevelt] tried to preserve prospects for cooperation.... His appointment of the egregiously pro-Soviet Joseph E. Davies as ambassador in 1936, together with the ‘purge’ the following year of the allegedly anti-Soviet East European Division in the Department of State, can be understood in this context....[T]hese actions grew out of Roosevelt’s conviction that Germany and Japan posed greater threats to American interests than did the Russians (sic), and that, despite differences on other points, Moscow and Washington had a common interest in opposing those aggressors.”⁸²

When writing about the latter Administration, Gaddis pointed out that “Nixon and Kissinger were...optimistic about their...ability, through skillful diplomacy, to secure Soviet cooperation....[They offered] “explicit acknowledgement of the Soviet Union’s status as one of the world’s two super-powers....Nixon and Kissinger recognized – and were prepared elaborately to defer to – the Soviet government’s determination to be treated with respect.”⁸³

Gaddis concluded his essay by suggesting that “Soviet-American contacts are likely to remain...more ‘competitive’ than ‘cooperative.’”⁸⁴ He also asserted that “[w]here agreements to cooperate – tacit or explicit – are reached, they are unlikely to be observed unless grounded firmly in respective national interests on both sides.” In other

⁸¹ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 331.

⁸² John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 332.

⁸³ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 334.

⁸⁴ John Gaddis in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 336.

words, he succumbed to the conventional, straight-line thinking of the day while treating the Soviet Union as a more or less normal state rather than seeing it for what it was: a multinational empire possibly on its last legs.

The basic premise of Joseph S. Nye's essay "Gorbachev's Russia (sic) and U.S. Options" is that "Gorbachev has presented us with new options in our Soviet policy, but there is far less agreement on what those options are and how we should respond."⁸⁵ Nye identified two diametrically opposed mainline American reactions to Gorbachev's policies: pressing the U.S. advantage at a time of Soviet introspection versus easing of the bilateral confrontation to accommodate Gorbachev's perceived needs.

Nye asserted that "[f]or those who believe that now is the time to squeeze the Soviet Union, the appropriate policies are: (1) continue trying to roll back Soviet gains in the Third World; (2) organize a coordinated Western policy of economic denial; (3) press ahead with military innovations in which our technology is superior to that of the Soviet Union; (4) by and large, arms control agreements should be avoided because they tend to lull public opinion in the West while relieving pressure on the Soviet Union."⁸⁶

At the same time, Nye wrote that "[f]or those who believe the appropriate policy is to deal rather than to squeeze, the recommendations are almost the inverse: (1) In regard to developing countries, we should try to arrange talks designed to clarify interests and set limits on conflict rather than try militarily to roll back all Soviet gains; (2) we should not try to organize an economic denial policy but should permit and encourage

⁸⁵ Joseph Nye in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 393.

⁸⁶ Joseph Nye in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 396.

expanded trade in all but a few strategic goods; (3) early testing or developments SDI should be avoided so as not to jeopardize the Antiballistic Missile Treaty and the prospects for a grand compromise in strategic arms.”⁸⁷

Nye dropped any lingering pretense of impartiality by suggesting that “A confrontational American policy seems more likely to constrain than to encourage the further development of reform.”⁸⁸ He further contextualized this notion by reminding the reader that “[T]he United States has sought three broad goals in its Soviet foreign policy: avoiding nuclear war; containing the spread of Soviet power and ideology; and gradually encouraging change in the nature of the behavior of the Soviet Union....[T]he United States has not done that badly. Nuclear war has been avoided...[T]he United States has been surprisingly successful at political containment...As for the third general objective...it is clear that some change has occurred. Gorbachev’s Soviet Union is very different from Stalin’s.”⁸⁹

In arguing thusly, Nye appears to contradict Gaddis’s views on the broader utility of containment, while at the same time managing to reflect the latter’s lack of insight into the profound changes taking then taking place in the Soviet Union and in general exhibiting a lack of imagination – largely in retrospect, to be fair – in terms of the breadth of possible outcomes where those changes could lead.

Moreover, Nye added an additional word of caution by warning that “if liberalization encourages instability in the Soviet inner empire of Eastern Europe (sic),⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Joseph Nye in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 396.

⁸⁸ Joseph Nye in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 404.

⁸⁹ Joseph Nye in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 405.

⁹⁰ This suggests that Nye did not consider the USSR itself to be an empire.

it may be reversed at home.”⁹¹ His reference to Eastern Europe as the “inner empire” underscored the extent to which he and many other scholars of his generation lost touch with the reality that the USSR itself was an empire, a set of blinders that could not have but prevented them from even conceiving the possibility that the Soviet Union may collapse under its own weight. Nye summed up his cautious approach with a rather Hippocratic notion that “the United States should...follow policies that at least do not make things worse.”⁹²

In his “U.S. Policy and Gorbachev’s Russia (sic),” William H. Luers argued that “The efforts of the Gorbachev leadership to reform the Soviet system and to infuse ‘new thinking’ into Soviet foreign policy offer important opportunities for the United States.”⁹³ Echoing Gaddis, Luers further asserted that “With all its flaws, the Nixon-Kissinger détente still remains the model for a sound American strategy toward the Soviet Union.”⁹⁴ Building on this notion, Luers argued that “the peaceful integration of the Soviet Union into the international community and multipolar restraint on Soviet power are precisely our objectives.”⁹⁵

In this context, Luers warned that “it is...evident that American policy objectives that advocate internal change in the Soviet Union can become obstacles to conducting serious relations with a Soviet leadership that is ever suspicious and insecure.”⁹⁶ To mitigate against the Kremlin’s alleged insecurity, Luers suggested that the United States

⁹¹ Joseph Nye in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 406.

⁹² Joseph Nye in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 407.

⁹³ William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 409.

⁹⁴ William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 410.

⁹⁵ William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 412.

⁹⁶ William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 413.

“build into the relationship some inducements such as trade and credits, and even some increased transfer of nonmilitary technology as well as continued recognition of the superpower status of the Soviet Union.”⁹⁷ Moreover, he called on the U.S. leadership to “stress the need to institutionalize summitry and negotiations while avoiding the temptation to dramatize and ‘succeed’ or ‘win’ at every encounter.”⁹⁸

In terms of the Soviet hold on what was then called Eastern Europe, Luers opined that “[t]he first reality is that there is no prospect for fundamental change in the relationship between the Soviet Union and any East European Warsaw Pact member in the near future.”⁹⁹ Moreover, he claimed that “change cannot take place in any of these countries without the initiative, or at least the cooperation, of the Communist regimes.”¹⁰⁰

Luers’ failure of imagination was also reflected in his recommendations:

“American policy should incorporate several basic aims. It must promote the yearning for national identity which, after Soviet power, is the second most powerful force in the region. American administrations must plan for the long term and realize that there are no quick ‘victories.’”¹⁰¹ Luers did add that “The United States should maintain its policies of encouraging the national identity and diversity of all the nations of Eastern Europe through periods of U.S.-Soviet tension and détente.”¹⁰² But in unison with the other authors referenced in this section, he did not extend the notion of the reality of

⁹⁷ William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 411.

⁹⁸ William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 412.

⁹⁹ William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 420.

¹⁰⁰ William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 423.

¹⁰¹ William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 423.

¹⁰² William Luers in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 429.

diverse identities to the USSR itself, including the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which bordered on Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania.

These themes were also reflected in William G. Hyland's "East-West Relations." Hyland asserted that "The Soviet Union will not simply acquiesce in the disintegration of its position of power. Gorbachev was not elected to preside over the dismantling of the Soviet empire....[I]t is a time of **unusual opportunity for American policy to explore a more constructive yet durable relation with the Soviet Union.**"¹⁰³¹⁰⁴

Hyland expressed further optimism by arguing that "We are now entering the fourth major period in which some progress toward settling our conflict with the Soviet Union is possible. Since the war there have been three moments for such progress: after Stalin died in 1953, after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962-1963, and during the period of détente, 1969-1972. Each period has yielded some progress, and consequently the conflict has become less volatile. But each period has ended in failure. It is this inability to stabilize the relationship that is dangerous and that challenges the current American and Soviet leadership."¹⁰⁵

At the same time, Hyland warned that while "a good case can be made...that Gorbachev may be the last best hope, lest a far more ruthless regime take over...this cannot be the basis for Western policy."¹⁰⁶ Rather, "what the West needs in order to survive these potential twists and turns is a general strategy that recognizes there are

¹⁰³ William Hyland in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 440-441.

¹⁰⁴ Bolded for emphasis.

¹⁰⁵ William Hyland in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 447.

¹⁰⁶ William Hyland in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 448.

indeed domestic changes underway, but one that tempers that recognition with a hardheaded assertion of Western security requirements. We should help Gorbachev, but only if we thereby help ourselves.”¹⁰⁷

Hyland further pushed back on Nye by arguing that “There is little historical precedent to suggest that a conflict of the scope and depth of the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union will fade away [based simply on the changes initiated by Gorbachev]....Moreover, American policy-makers cannot risk waiting for history to transform the conflict with the Soviet Union....This has meant a greater reliance on politics and diplomacy, and diplomacy that goes beyond the prevailing obsession with arms control.”¹⁰⁸

Therefore, Hyland suggested that “The first objective for American policy...is to create the circumstances that will make it difficult for the Soviet Union to resume the offensive if and when Gorbachev or his successors have rebuilt Soviet power.”¹⁰⁹ He added that the effort to build a “viable Soviet-American relationship...is bound to be protracted.”¹¹⁰ In other words, he too felt no inkling of the transformative changes on the horizon.

In his “The Soviet Union and the West: Security and Foreign Policy,” Seweryn Bialer, made the case for modest expectations of – and significant praise for – Gorbachev’s reforms. He argued that it is “most important that these changes move in

¹⁰⁷ William Hyland in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 448-449.

¹⁰⁸ William Hyland in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 449.

¹⁰⁹ William Hyland in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 449.

¹¹⁰ William Hyland in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 455.

the direction in which the West has always wanted the Soviet Union to go: **toward**¹¹¹ greater freedom and openness at home and greater moderation abroad...[W]e should stress the positive direction of these changes and remember that the best is the enemy of the good.”¹¹² Bialer paid Gorbachev a compliment by asserting that “the changes in the Soviet Union have already gone far beyond mere public relations and tactical maneuvers.”¹¹³

In concert with the other authors cited here, Bialer argued that “Western efforts to influence the Soviet Union should not be principally directed at domestic issues. Rather, they should be mainly concerned with the new opportunities to influence Soviet security and foreign policies. Western success in influencing Soviet international thinking and behavior is likely to have indirect positive repercussions on the domestic Soviet scene.”¹¹⁴

Echoing Hyland, Bialer admitted that “It is probable that the changes in the Soviet Union, precisely because they are significant, will eventually make the country stronger than it is now.”¹¹⁵ But he attempted to put a different spin on it by suggesting that “The central question is not whether the Soviet Union will eventually become stronger, but rather whether it will become an easier country with which to coexist. I believe that if Gorbachev’s program of reforms were gradually implemented, the danger from the

¹¹¹ Bolded for emphasis.

¹¹² Seweryn Bialer in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 481.

¹¹³ Seweryn Bialer in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 481.

¹¹⁴ Seweryn Bialer in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 486-487.

¹¹⁵ Seweryn Bialer in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 488.

Soviet Union to the West would decrease rather than increase.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, Bialer asserted that “There is a great likelihood that conditions for improvement are now finally emerging. The stakes are so immense, the opportunities for change so singular, that they seem to warrant an active American policy toward the Soviet Union that will try to influence the process of change in Russia (sic) and **even to help Gorbachev.**”¹¹⁷¹¹⁸

Particularly given Washington’s fixation on Gorbachev, no discussion of the historical context of U.S. policy toward Ukraine would be complete without at least a reference to the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States and its efforts to influence the aforementioned policy. According to Orest Subtelny, author of *Ukraine: A History*, “Although numerous compared to their compatriots elsewhere in the West, Ukrainians are relatively insignificant among the many ethnic groups in the United States....And their political influence is even less than might be expected.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, “as a result of intra-diaspora frictions, the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States lacks “a single, generally recognized body that could legitimately claim to represent them all.”¹²⁰

Despite these dynamics, as described by Subtelny, it was the diaspora that could be counted on to keep the hope of an independent Ukraine alive even during the darkest years of the Cold War. The diaspora did so through a variety of means. It is in this context that Subtelny acknowledged that “clearly the most impressive achievement of the Ukrainian American community...was the endowment in 1970 of three chairs in

¹¹⁶ Seweryn Bialer in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 488.

¹¹⁷ Seweryn Bialer in Bialer and Mandelbaum, *Gorbachev’s Russia and American Foreign Policy*, p. 490.

¹¹⁸ Bolded for emphasis.

¹¹⁹ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 560.

¹²⁰ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 561.

Ukrainian studies at Harvard University. Subsequently, the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute was established.”¹²¹ He added that “another high point...was the raising of a statue of [national bard] Taras Shevchenko in Washington in 1964.”¹²²

According to Subtelny, the late Soviet-era changes under Gorbachev “elicited great excitement in the diaspora. For generations, it had steadfastly espoused the cause of Ukrainian independence.”¹²³ Subtelny pointed out that even prior to Ukraine’s renewed independence in late 1991, “The diaspora in the West mobilized its resources to help the homeland....The initial catalyst in this effort was the Chernobyl disaster. [C]ommunities abroad, most notably in the United States and Canada, dispatched shipments of medicine, clothes, and food to the victims.”¹²⁴¹²⁵

It is important to note that “Aid from the diaspora soon expanded to include those individuals and movements in Ukraine who called for independence and the rejuvenation of national culture. [W]hen Rukh was formed, Ukrainian Canadians established a well-organized support group, the Canadian Friends of Rukh, which provided valuable financial and technical assistance to the reformist forces. Similar groups were established in the United States. Meanwhile, contacts between the long-separated diaspora and homeland expanded rapidly.”¹²⁶

Writing in his *A History of Ukraine*, Paul Robert Magocsi added another important example of the diaspora’s rather consequential activism. According to

¹²¹ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 562.

¹²² Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 562.

¹²³ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 593.

¹²⁴ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 593.

¹²⁵ Here and elsewhere, Ukrainian personal and place names are transliterated from the Ukrainian language.

¹²⁶ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 593.

Magocsi, “With the new atmosphere in the Soviet Union, in 1987 the clandestine Greek Catholic hierarchy decided to ‘come up from the underground.’ Their action prompted the Vatican and Ukrainians living in the diaspora to increase their lobbying of the United States and western governments, who in turn exerted diplomatic pressure on the Soviet Union.”¹²⁷ These efforts bore results two years later when the Soviet government “granted permission to the Greek Catholic church to register its parishes. Similarly, in the summer of 1989 the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox church, banned by the Soviets since the early 1930s, began its reconstitution, a process that culminated a year later in a church council (sobor) which formally restored the church’s hierarchy.”¹²⁸

Dissolution and independence recognition

Based on the works that followed, both secondary sources and a growing number of memoirs, it is clear that the U.S. Government continued to bank on Moscow and Gorbachev even in the aftermath of the August 1991 failed coup, which accelerated the centrifugal tendencies and led to the USSR’s formal collapse that December.¹²⁹ The United States not only preferred continuity, but actually took positive action to preserve the USSR. Moreover, those who challenged Gorbachev in Moscow – most prominently, Boris Yeltsin – or in the non-Russian union republics, including Ukraine, were viewed with suspicion and dealt with sparingly. President George H. W. Bush’s aforementioned

¹²⁷ Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, p. 671.

¹²⁸ Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, p. 671.

¹²⁹ Memoirs, as a particular type of a primary source, are given a more thorough treatment in the subsequent chapters. Out of necessity, there is some overlap between the literature review section in this chapter and elsewhere. This is especially true of the works by Amb. Matlock and Amb. Pifer.

“Chicken Kiev” speech in the Ukrainian parliament is exemplary of the then U.S. policy posture. And when the USSR’s demise became a foregone conclusion, senior U.S. officials scrambled to find ways to slow down the process, as referenced by Steven Pifer in his *The Eagle and the Trident* and by Orest Subtelny in his *Ukraine: A History*.

Nevertheless, according to Jack Matlock, the last U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Washington’s signals during the last two years of Gorbachev’s rule were often mixed. For example, “while Bush and Baker usually talked of their desire to improve relations...others – including Scowcroft, his deputy, Robert Gates, and Defense Secretary Richard Cheney – stressed the need for the United States to keep up its guard and at times suggested in public that Gorbachev might not last much longer.”¹³⁰

In their *Power and Purpose*, James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, the latter to become U.S. ambassador to Russia during the Obama Administration, put the correlation of forces around President Bush somewhat differently. According to them, “Not everyone in the administration shared Scowcroft’s view....Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and his top advisers saw the devolution of power and potential independence for the Soviet Republic of Ukraine as significantly advantageous for the geostrategic interests of the United States.”¹³¹

These two authors even referenced Amb. Matlock in their writing arguing that “The advocates of regime change and Yeltsin at the Pentagon also had an ally in Jack Matlock, American ambassador to the Soviet Union. Matlock believed that the

¹³⁰ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 197.

¹³¹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 23.

administration had established a false dichotomy between Gorbachev and [Russian leader Boris] Yeltsin. He believed that the United States could still preserve its relationship with Gorbachev and at the same time pursue a more active engagement with Yeltsin and the other leaders of the republics.”¹³²

According to Goldgeier and McFaul’s interpretation, “Secretary of State James A. Baker III and his advisers stood somewhere in between the cautious voices at the White House and the more proactive regime transformers at the Pentagon. Baker recognized the importance of Boris Yeltsin and the leaders of the other republics sooner than did his colleagues at the White House, but he also feared that the breakup of the Soviet Union might present the worst of all nightmares: a Yugoslavia with nuclear weapons.”¹³³ Throughout the book, the authors stressed the importance and impact of the key personalities involved. For example, “Baker and his top adviser on Soviet affairs, Dennis Ross, had spent a great deal of time with [Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard] Shevardnadze, who made a big impact on their thinking.”¹³⁴

And speaking of both Yeltsin and Matlock, according to the latter, his view of the dynamic between Gorbachev and Yeltsin was much more nuanced than presented by Goldgeier and McFaul. At one point in his memoir, Matlock pointed out that “My meeting with Yeltsin had confirmed my hunch that he wished to use the trip [to the United States] to bolster his political prestige at home so he would be seen operating as *the* opposition leader to Gorbachev. I realized, of course, that the skittishness in the

¹³² James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 24.

¹³³ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 24.

¹³⁴ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 24.

White House stemmed precisely from that: there was a great reluctance to do anything to offend Gorbachev. Nevertheless, I thought that the White House attitude was ill advised....We should support principles, not persons.”¹³⁵

As if to justify his posture, Matlock asserted that “Of course, if Yeltsin had been backing policies inconsistent with U.S. interests, it would be prudent to avoid actions that seemed to endorse them. This, however, was not the case....[Yeltsin’s] policies were closer to ours than Gorbachev’s were.”¹³⁶ Nevertheless, Matlock had to acquiesce to a compromise arrangement for Yeltsin’s White House visit during which “there would be no formal meeting with President Bush, but the president and Vice President Dan Quayle would drop in on Yeltsin’s meeting with Scowcroft.”¹³⁷

Here too, Goldgeier and McFaul describe this dynamic somewhat differently. According to them, “The rise of Yeltsin, his more revolutionary approach to regime change, and his more pro-Western policy in foreign affairs presented a real dilemma for the Bush administration.”¹³⁸ Moreover, “[T]he Bush administration did not want to do anything that might weaken or undermine America’s trusted friend in the Kremlin....**Yeltsin’s challenge to Gorbachev was extremely inconvenient for U.S. national security interests.**¹³⁹ Gorbachev was delivering on things that mattered to President Bush and his national security team....for many in the Bush administration, the alternatives did not look appealing.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 250.

¹³⁶ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 250.

¹³⁷ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 250.

¹³⁸ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose* p. 21.

¹³⁹ Bolded for emphasis.

¹⁴⁰ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 21.

Furthermore, “Yeltsin’s call for Russian sovereignty...made him particularly radioactive for many Bush administration officials....By challenging the sovereignty of the USSR, however, Russia’s opposition effectively breached one of the principal rules of the game of the international system in which states recognize one another’s right to exist.”¹⁴¹ But Goldgeier and McFaul did not stop there. They alleged that “Although decolonization from imperial domination was a norm recognized by the international community of states, secession did not have a similar standing.”¹⁴² Based on this assertion, they clearly did not subscribe to the notion that the Soviet Union was an empire. As unlikely as it may seem, they may have also been unaware of the Soviet constitution’s provision allowing secession by the union republics.

Nevertheless, Goldgeier and McFaul’s description of the Bush Administration’s policy toward the USSR at this point appears to be spot on: “President Bush maintained a firm policy of noninterference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union. Bush and Scowcroft discerned no strategic advantage in pushing the political change under way in the USSR. As for the battle between the Soviet Union and Russia and the very personalized contests between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the White House firmly sided with the internationally recognized leader of the USSR. For President George H. W. Bush and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, the paramount importance of stability in the U.S.-Soviet relationship and the sense that Gorbachev could deliver for them on matters of importance to the United States led them to stand by their man.”¹⁴³ As

¹⁴¹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 22.

¹⁴² James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 23.

¹⁴³ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 23.

discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, this policy had clear and immediate implications for the non-Russian union republics as well.

For his part, Raymond Garthoff in his *The Great Transition* asserted that President Bush's message was "sound, if not welcomed by all."¹⁴⁴ Garthoff praised the President for taking "a courageous stand" by expressing support for democracy, economic reform, and freedom "while not opening himself up to danger of interference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union."¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Garthoff argued that this was the right approach to take as "no one anticipated the convulsions that would lead to the end of the Soviet Union in four months."¹⁴⁶

Goldgeier and McFaul's account of the Bush Administration's approach to the non-Russian union republics of the USSR is essentially consistent with Garthoff's. They assessed that "the Bush administration maintained a...policy of supporting the status quo in reacting to sovereignty claims from other republics. The only exception was the bolder language reserved for calling on the Soviet government to recognize the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, whose incorporation in the Soviet Union had never been recognized by the United States."¹⁴⁷

According to Goldgeier and McFaul, "Bush was reluctant to get ahead of history. As he [stated in Kyiv] in August 1991, 'We will not try to pick winners and losers in political competitions between Republics or between Republics and the center. That is

¹⁴⁴ Raymond Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 471.

¹⁴⁵ Raymond Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 471.

¹⁴⁶ Raymond Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 471.

¹⁴⁷ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 26.

your business; that's not the business of the United States of America."¹⁴⁸ They explain this reluctance by suggesting that "No one wanted a replay of the Yugoslav scenario in the Soviet Union....Until the coup attempt in August 1991, the Bush administration did not pass judgment on the Soviet Union's internal matters. Nor did Bush ever label the USSR an empire...Bush never...called[ed] for the freedom of the Armenian, Ukrainian, or Russian peoples. He was not a Wilsonian champion of self-determination."¹⁴⁹

Despite the fact that Gorbachev emerged from the August 1991 hardline coup attempt severely – and probably mortally – weakened, Goldgeier and McFaul asserted that "Bush remained convinced that Gorbachev and the center could still play a role and that the United States should remain supportive."¹⁵⁰ At a meeting of top presidential advisors almost two months after the coup and almost a year since his "Pathways" speech at the Wilson Center, Secretary Baker asserted that "We should not establish a policy of supporting the breakup of the Soviet Union into twelve republics."¹⁵¹

In his *The Eagle and the Trident*, Steve Pifer, a former ambassador to Ukraine and senior Clinton White House official, captured the Bush Administration posture well: "Washington was slow to recognize the Soviet Union's demise. Moreover, once they realized its likelihood, many senior officials, including in the White House, became apprehensive at the prospect. Some even seemed to look for ways to slow the processes under way inside the Soviet Union, which the United States could hardly affect."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁰ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 34.

¹⁵¹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 34.

¹⁵² Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 33.

While their descriptions of a range of dynamics point to rather contrasting takes, in a number of respects Goldgeier and McFaul picked up where Matlock left off: “As events progressed in 1991, the main focus of attention in the Bush administration on democracy in the Soviet Union was not Gorbachev versus Yeltsin but what to do about the upcoming December 1 referendum on independence in Ukraine.”¹⁵³ Goldgeier and McFaul zeroed in on the importance of Ukraine, without which “there would be no Union. Without Ukraine, the Soviet Union would lose a significant economic base, 50 million people from a republic crucial to the balance among Slavs and Muslims in the empire, and a geostrategic position in the heart of central and eastern Europe.”¹⁵⁴

Goldgeier and McFaul’s work further contributed to our understanding of the dynamics in late 1991 by referencing the views of key individual and institutional players within the Administration: “As the referendum approached, Secretary of Defense Cheney and his aides favored being as forward leaning as possible. Pentagon officials wanted a bold statement from the president immediately following the referendum and argued that Ukrainian commitments to date were sufficient grounds to extent recognition.”¹⁵⁵ This position was consistent with Cheney’s view that the United States should be “pushing for the breakup of the Soviet Union.”¹⁵⁶

But it was also clear that Cheney was up against a more powerful coalition. According to Goldgeier and McFaul, “State Department officials did not want the United States to be seen as accelerating the disintegration of the Soviet Union...Baker writes in

¹⁵³ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 34.

¹⁵⁴ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 34.

¹⁵⁵ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 35.

¹⁵⁶ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 35.

his memoirs that on November 26, the president sided with the State Department's 'delayed recognition' option."¹⁵⁷

This is where the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States may have played a role that was well out of proportion with its supposedly modest influence and capabilities. As Goldgeier and McFaul put it, "Domestic politics intervened to help shape U.S. policy on this issue. On November 28, Bush met with a group of Ukrainian Americans, who in turn leaked a U.S. position that sounded more like the Pentagon view."¹⁵⁸

The authors did acknowledge, that "with the Ukrainian vote in favor of independence, the Soviet Union's collapse was going to accelerate regardless of what anyone outside the country did or did not do. On December 8, 1991, Yeltsin flew to Minsk...to meet with Belarusian head of state Stanislau Shushkevich and Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk to form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an ill-defined grouping of newly independent states that would replace the Soviet Union."¹⁵⁹ Matlock also came to the same conclusion about the inevitability of the USSR's collapse at that point. He wrote, "As soon as the results of the referendum were in – on December 3, 1991 – the RSFSR officially recognized Ukraine as independent. The three Baltic states, the Eastern European countries, and Canada...also extended prompt recognition."¹⁶⁰

No matter what the Western preference, Subtelny argued that "The repercussions of the [independence] referendum were immediate, dramatic, and far-reaching. Although

¹⁵⁷ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 35.

¹⁵⁸ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 35.

¹⁵⁹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁶⁰ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 632.

the withdrawal of the Baltic states from the USSR and Russia's proclamation of sovereignty had indicated clearly that the Soviet Union was on the verge of disintegration, it was the results of the Ukrainian referendum that delivered the death blow."¹⁶¹ Finally, "Gorbachev himself proclaimed that 'the Soviet Union without Ukraine is inconceivable.'"¹⁶²

According to Subtelny, "For Ukraine, the next great issue was the world's reaction to its proclamation of independence. Some neighboring states, such as Poland and Hungary, immediately welcomed it....Canada, with its large and influential Ukrainian community, was also among the first to extend recognition."¹⁶³ Subtelny went out of his way to underscore that, despite the recognition extended by a range of countries, "the world's most powerful country wavered. Until the very end, the Bush administration tried to preserve the USSR, believing that its continued existence would best guarantee stability in Eurasia. Moreover, many of its policy-makers remained staunchly Russo-centric in their thinking and could not conceive of the [USSR's] disintegration. But on 25 December, Washington finally gave in to the inevitable and recognized Ukraine's independence. Within several months, most countries in the world had done likewise. Ukraine's lengthy isolation from the world was finally over."¹⁶⁴

Subtelny also pointed out that "After the proclamation of independence, the diaspora continued to provide significant aid to the new state. Ukrainians in the United States and Canada vigorously lobbied their governments to grant recognition to Ukraine."

¹⁶¹ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 583.

¹⁶² Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 583.

¹⁶³ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 583.

¹⁶⁴ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 583.

The diaspora also extended more practical assistance, including by “providing offices for Ukrainian diplomats in England and Australia and collected funds for the Ukrainian embassy in Washington...Many Ukrainians trained in the West placed their expertise at the disposal of the new state and some served in advisory positions in the government.”¹⁶⁵

Denuclearization as key U.S. priority

With the collapse of the USSR a fait accompli, Washington’s attention shifted to efforts aimed at consolidating and securing the Soviet nuclear arsenal, the bulk of which was to be found on the territories of newly independent Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine. As Goldgeier and McFaul described it:

On May 23-24, Baker and the foreign ministers of Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Russia met in Lisbon to sign the START protocols, which stated that the non-Russian states would become non-nuclear ‘in the shortest possible time’ and ‘immediately take all necessary actions to this end in accordance with their constitutional practices.’ In a side letter, Kravchuk committed Ukraine to getting rid of its strategic nuclear weapons within seven years of START’s entry into force. But even at the signing ceremony, the American delegation was not sure what ultimately would happen. Baker had gotten so mad at Ukrainian foreign minister Zlenko over apparent Ukrainian backsliding just before the meeting in

¹⁶⁵ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 594.

Lisbon that he hung up the phone on him. And just before the ceremony, Zlenko said he was not sure he was going to sign. Baker screamed at him, telling Zlenko that if Ukraine did not sign, it would have no U.S. support. Baker argued that Ukraine's relationship with Russia would be better if it gave up its nuclear weapons, and he made clear that if Ukraine did not relinquish these weapons, then relations with the West would sour immediately. But Baker was so unsure of the outcome that he decided not to let anyone make a statement at the ceremony for fear someone would walk back on his commitments. Finally, the four came out, and 'six minutes later' Baker had achieved what he wanted, a commitment that only one nuclear power would emerge from the wreckage of the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁶

Goldgeier and McFaul identified an important shift in tactics early on in the Clinton Administration.¹⁶⁷ According to them, the new team "switched from the Bush administration's approach of merely threatening Ukraine that it would be isolated internationally if it failed to denuclearize to a strategy of cooperation."¹⁶⁸ Moreover, the Clinton Administration "offered Ukraine Nunn-Lugar assistance and participation in a deal with Russia that provided compensation for the highly enriched uranium (HEU) processed from the dismantled warheads (while still making clear that the threat of isolation remained)."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 56.

¹⁶⁷ This issue is explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

¹⁶⁸ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 160.

¹⁶⁹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 160.

This was an important development since “During the first few months of 1993, it became increasingly clear that Ukrainian backtracking on the non-nuclear commitment was a serious possibility, particularly because in February, the Ukrainian parliament, or Rada, had voted to postpone consideration of the START Treaty. [Strobe] Talbott recalls that Deputy Secretary of Defense William J. Perry viewed ‘Ukraine’s reluctance to give up the missiles...[as] the single biggest threat to international peace and security that we faced anywhere in the world.’”¹⁷⁰

Once again, members of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States may have played an important role in helping to break the logjam. According to Goldgeier and McFaul, “During the U.S.-Russia summit in Vancouver in April 1993, a group of Ukrainian-Americans asked senior U.S. government officials why they were paying attention only to Russia.”¹⁷¹ As a result, “Talbott asked NSC staffer Rose Gottemoeller to pull together an interagency group to figure out how the United States could keep the process moving whereby the warheads would first be taken out of operational deployment and then transferred out of the country to the Russian Federation for dismantlement.”¹⁷²

This Talbott tasking led to a policy review in May 1993, which “turned to consideration of the sweeteners available to induce the Ukrainian government to move in the right direction.”¹⁷³ As Goldgeier and McFaul put it, “It was no longer enough to threaten Ukraine, as Baker had done in April 1992 to ensure the signing of the Lisbon

¹⁷⁰ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 166.

¹⁷¹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 166.

¹⁷² James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 166.

¹⁷³ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 166.

protocol. To get the Rada to ratify the Lisbon protocol meant finding the right carrot.”¹⁷⁴ One of the key breakthroughs that changed the then prevailing negative dynamic was “deciding that the United States would not insist on moving the weapons out of Ukraine immediately but rather would focus first on getting them off their missiles and into a Ukrainian storage facility pending final resolution. In other words, aid would not be conditioned on parliamentary ratification of START but rather moving to denuclearize with concrete steps and the promise of ratification. And the other was determining that Nunn-Lugar funds for safe and secure dismantlement could be offered if Ukraine made clear that it would get this job done.”¹⁷⁵

Once the interagency finished the policy review, “Ambassador-at-Large Talbott flew to Kiev in May 1993 with a mission to expand the portfolio of activities in the bilateral relationship and to assess what the Ukrainian government wanted. President Leonid Kravchuk was seeking billions of dollars in assistance and a U.S. security guarantee similar to the one provided by NATO allies to one another.”¹⁷⁶ This opening salvo marked the beginning of “a process whereby Talbott would go to Ukrainian deputy foreign minister Boris Tarasyuk and then to Russian deputy foreign minister Mamedov (and vice versa) to try to work a deal among the parties for removing the Ukrainian nuclear weapons.”¹⁷⁷

According to Goldgeier and McFaul, “The United States was willing to offer the standard NTP language on security assurances, but nothing that approached the NATO

¹⁷⁴ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 166.

¹⁷⁵ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, pp. 166-167.

¹⁷⁶ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 167.

¹⁷⁷ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 167.

Article V guarantee. Talbott says the sweetener that clinched the deal was the promise that Clinton would stop in Kiev on his January 1994 trip to Europe, and \$100 million in Nunn-Lugar would be released immediately after the accord was signed.”¹⁷⁸

This mix of incentives combined with the disincentive of losing favor with the United States indeed proved sufficient for Kyiv to follow through on its denuclearization commitment. The three presidents signed the Trilateral Statement, which Goldgeier and McFaul incorrectly refer to as the “Trilateral Accord,” on January 14. The deal “committed Ukraine to the ‘elimination of all nuclear weapons, including strategic offensive arms, located on its territory.’ [I]n a private letter to Clinton, Kravchuk promised that Ukraine would be nuclear free by June 1996.”¹⁷⁹

For their part, “[t]he United States and Russia...reaffirm[ed] Ukrainian territorial integrity in line with the provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act (which sought to ensure that any border changes in Europe occurred peacefully).”¹⁸⁰ Later that year, “the United States, Great Britain, and Russia provided Ukraine with stronger security guarantees (sic), and Ukraine formally acceded to the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear weapons state. And in June 1996...Ukraine completed the transfer of its final nuclear weapons to Russia.”¹⁸¹

In addition to helping consolidate Soviet-era nuclear weapons in Russia – and potentially making Kyiv more vulnerable to Moscow’s pressure down the line – the overall process of Ukraine’s denuclearization underscored the important role performed

¹⁷⁸ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, pp. 168-169.

¹⁷⁹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 170.

¹⁸⁰ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 170.

¹⁸¹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 170.

and still to be played by the United States in the region and in the Ukrainian context in particular. According to Sherman Garnett, “U.S. engagement made a significant difference” in Kyiv’s decision to give up the nuclear arsenal it inherited from the Soviet Union.¹⁸²

Garnett, who was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Clinton Administration and quite involved in these issues at the time, offered some candid introspection on this issue set. According to Garnett, “[T]here was no better way to develop a more positive approach to Ukraine and Ukrainian independence than that ultimately selected on the nuclear question. Many critics of the earlier handling of the issue, including this author [meaning, Garnett], believe that the final and successful U.S. policy approach – mixing incentives for expanded political relations and economic reform with continued firmness on nuclear disarmament – should have been tried from the very beginning, not after nearly two years of misunderstanding and mutual recriminations.”¹⁸³

As Garnett saw it, “The nuclear question unfolded in three distinct phases, the first of which can be described as a stage of declarations and romanticism on the Ukrainian side and great anxiety on the part of the West....The second phase began with the signing of the Lisbon Protocol in spring 1992 and ended with the U.S.-Ukrainian-Russian Agreement in January 1994....The third phase was one of implementation of Ukraine’s nuclear commitments and the broadening of U.S.-Ukrainian ties.”¹⁸⁴ Though

¹⁸² Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 113.

¹⁸³ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 113.

¹⁸⁴ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, pp. 113-115.

the way he conceived of these phases does not align fully with the framework proposed by Goldgeier and McFaul, the latter would no doubt agree that “It was during the second phase that the United States confronted the bleakest options for dealing with Ukraine and decided upon a course that led to broadening political, economic, and security ties with Ukraine.”¹⁸⁵

Of note is the apparent suggestion by Garnett that given time, the Bush Administration’s policy may have also evolved toward pursuing a broader agenda with Ukraine. He wrote, “By late 1992, it was clear to Washington policy-makers that the Lisbon Protocol could not be implemented without U.S. engagement and involvement. The Bush administration attempted to broaden its approaches to Ukraine at that time...but a broad strategic dialogue with the Bush administration did not develop, given President Bush’s defeat in November.”¹⁸⁶ As a result, “the transition to a new administration and its early concentrated focus on supporting Russian reform left Ukraine on the back burner until the early spring of 1993.”¹⁸⁷

Here, Garnett’s narrative tracks closely with that of Goldgeier and McFaul:

In early 1993, the U.S. government began to review its Ukrainian policy. No one in the U.S. government questioned the basic nuclear elements of the policy, and no serious player – in fact, no player at all – advocated tolerance for a Ukrainian nuclear deterrent....Differences in views did emerge, however, over whether the key to Ukrainian compliance was to

¹⁸⁵ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 115.

¹⁸⁶ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, pp. 115-116.

¹⁸⁷ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, pp. 115-116.

expand the U.S. policy of engagement or to tighten the screws still further. The review ended with a decision to engage Ukraine in a broad discussion of improved economic, political, and security ties, implementation of which would be linked to the resolution of the nuclear issue. In May 1993, then U.S. Ambassador-at-Large Strobe Talbott visited Kiev to discuss a “turning of the page” in U.S.-Ukrainian relations. Discussions between Ukraine and the United States focused not only on outstanding nuclear matters but also on economic assistance, expanded military and defense ties, and a renewed political relationship between the United States and Ukraine. In essence, the U.S. side sought to sketch the kind of relationship that could arise once the nuclear problems were removed. This initial visit did not reverse months of mutual suspicion, but it did begin a process that brought senior levels of both governments together in an atmosphere of give-and-take on the full set of issues.¹⁸⁸

Garnett’s analysis also included the observation that “The Russians were...sure that, on the nuclear question, U.S. and Russian interests coincided. The Russian side trusted the U.S. side, even when tactical differences emerged, to advance the common agenda of achieving a non-nuclear Ukraine.”¹⁸⁹ In other words, the policy outcome in question could not – and almost certainly would not – be replicated in the absence of such a strong alignment between U.S. and Russian interests. Moreover, “The significance of the

¹⁸⁸ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, pp. 118-119.

¹⁸⁹ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 122.

Trilateral Agreement was that it provided a multilateral framework within which to address nuclear and other issues. It legitimized U.S. interest in issues that would ordinarily remain bilateral matters between Moscow and Kiev.”¹⁹⁰ In giving the United States credit for Ukraine’s eventual denuclearization, Garnett asserted that it was Washington’s involvement that “added balance to a situation that could easily be derailed if it remained bilateral.”¹⁹¹

For his part, Pifer too agreed that “The U.S. government focused its attention primarily on the nuclear arms issue and ensuring the elimination of the nuclear warheads and strategic delivery vehicles in Ukraine. This topic...dominated the Bush administration’s approach to Kyiv. It provided the focus for the first months of the Clinton administration’s approach as well until May 1993, when the interagency process moved to begin expanding Washington’s engagement with Ukraine and developed a strategy designed to support a broader relationship.”¹⁹²

As a key author of the Trilateral Statement, Pifer acknowledgement that “In retrospect, the U.S. government erred during the first two years of its engagement with Ukraine in focusing too heavily on the nuclear weapons issue” is quite noteworthy.”¹⁹³ He went on to write that:

While it was certainly a critical issue on the U.S. agenda, the overly narrow focus failed to create confidence in Kyiv that, once the nuclear weapons question was resolved, there would be a robust bilateral

¹⁹⁰ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 122.

¹⁹¹ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 123.

¹⁹² Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 34.

¹⁹³ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 34.

relationship or, for that matter, any significant U.S. interest in Kyiv. The alternative would have been to signal more clearly from the outset that Washington intended to engage Kyiv on a wide set of issues. In reality, and as became apparent, many factors argued for pursuing a broad relationship: Ukraine's key geopolitical position and potential contribution to a more stable and secure Europe; the prospect of mutually beneficial commercial relations with a country of some 50 million people; and possible Ukrainian support in addressing other proliferation challenges, such as the control of ballistic missile technology. However, in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse and with fears that 'loose nukes' might fall into the hands of third countries or even nonstate terrorist organizations, Washington's attention centered on nuclear weapons, and U.S. officials conditioned steps toward a broader relationship on Ukraine's actions in the nuclear area.¹⁹⁴

Moreover, Pifer noted that "The dominant focus on nuclear arms may have had the unintended consequence of inflating the value of those weapons in the minds of Ukrainian officials. That likely made the nuclear negotiation more difficult. If Kyiv thought that all Washington cared about was the nuclear weapons, it had every incentive to drive a hard bargain for their elimination."¹⁹⁵ He gave considerable credit to the Clinton Administration for adopting a posture that seemed to be more favorably inclined

¹⁹⁴ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 34.

¹⁹⁵ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 34-35.

toward addressing Ukrainian concerns. According to Pifer, “Strobe Talbott’s visit to Kyiv in May 1993, followed by Warren Christopher’s trip in October, began to outline Washington’s vision for a broad and robust relationship and to allay concern among Ukrainian officials that all they would hear about from their American interlocutors was the nuclear issue.”¹⁹⁶

As a result, “By the end of 1994, the U.S. government had put in place arrangements to achieve its goal of getting nuclear weapons out of Ukraine. Although the process was painful at times, Washington in the end succeeded in assembling a package of measures that met the fundamental requirements of all three countries. Russia and the United States wanted the nuclear weapons out of Ukraine.”¹⁹⁷ Just as those writing before him, Pifer deduced that “U.S. engagement...proved necessary to bring the denuclearization process to a conclusion. American officials recognized that Ukraine...had a hard time dealing one-on-one with Russia.”¹⁹⁸

Given his access at the time, Pifer was able to shed additional light on the thoughts behind the U.S. policy on Ukraine’s denuclearization. For example, he convincingly argued that “The process...succeeded because the sides were prepared to look for practical solutions....[W]hile Baker strongly resisted new commitments to Ukraine, State Department officials...repackaged existing assurances from documents such as the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act. Although the assurances themselves

¹⁹⁶ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁹⁷ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 72.

¹⁹⁸ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 72.

were not new, their packaging in a Ukraine-specific document was symbolically and politically important to Kyiv as it sought to bolster its sovereignty.”¹⁹⁹

Moreover, “U.S. officials used events and presidential engagement to drive the process. In January 1994, the possibility of a trilateral Clinton-Kravchuk-Yeltsin meeting...helped the push to conclude the Trilateral Statement. At the end of the year, the Budapest summit became the target for completing the remaining steps so that the assurances could be formally conveyed in conjunction with Ukraine’s accession to the NPT and START’s entry into force.”²⁰⁰

Pifer’s work is also useful because it alludes to the Ukrainian perceptions in play. For example, he acknowledged that “Kyiv was sometimes frustrated with Washington, believing U.S. officials joined with their Russian counterparts to push Ukraine too hard.”²⁰¹ He acknowledged that, in retrospect, “Washington might not have fully understood or appreciated the pressures on Kravchuk and Kuchma....Overtly hardball tactics, particularly from the Russian side, did not go down well in Kyiv. A more nuanced approach by the United States and Russia might have led to a smoother negotiating process.”²⁰²

Broader U.S.-Ukrainian agenda and dynamics

With the nuclear issue resolved, Steven Pifer asserted that “The relationship...turned to other issues, and the years 1995-1997 witnessed a major

¹⁹⁹ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 72-73.

²⁰⁰ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 73.

²⁰¹ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 73-74.

²⁰² Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 73-74.

expansion of U.S.-Ukraine relations, in ways that put to rest any lingering concerns in Kyiv that the U.S. government cared only about the nuclear arms question. It likewise opened the door to an expansion of Ukraine's relations with Europe."²⁰³

The work that perhaps has come the closest to examining the Russia factor in the U.S. policy toward Ukraine is Sherman Garnett's *Keystone in the Arch*.²⁰⁴ Garnett started with the premise that "Ukraine remained largely unknown in the West."²⁰⁵ According to Garnett, the "general ignorance and neglect of Ukraine by the West continued throughout the Soviet period."²⁰⁶ He further argued that "[o]nly the imminent collapse of Soviet power brought Ukraine and the other captive nations of the Soviet Union into prominent relief."²⁰⁷ While Garnett stated that President Bush's "Chicken Kiev" speech was both impolitic and "just plain wrong," he also asserted that "the emergence of an independent Ukraine represents a great departure from the accustomed patterns of political life in Central and Eastern Europe."²⁰⁸ Moreover, he made the case that while "[t]he old patterns of empire may not be forever vanquished, and the [smaller] nations may not be guaranteed success...it is clear that the chances for both propositions will be greatly increased if Ukraine remains independent and stable," an acknowledgment of Ukraine's key regional role.²⁰⁹

²⁰³ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 74.

²⁰⁴ More recently a Dean at Michigan State University, Garnett served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Administration of William J. Clinton.

²⁰⁵ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 4.

²⁰⁷ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 4.

²⁰⁸ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 5.

²⁰⁹ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 5.

According to Garnett, “doubts about Ukraine’s place in Europe are usually linked to the view that Ukraine is somehow Russia’s problem.”²¹⁰ Moreover, “those who subscribe to this view generally have yet to grasp the importance of states like Ukraine...to European security,” and therefore to U.S. security. Garnett argued that this latent ignorance is dangerous because “the greatest challenges...in this region of Europe lie ahead.” From his perspective, “Ukraine is the keystone in the arch of the emerging security environment of Central and Easter Europe. It is a state that is too large and too geographically central to this emerging security environment to be ignored.”²¹¹ These were prescient words by any measure.

Well ahead of other observers, Garnett saw that “Ukraine already plays a much larger role in the security of Europe than either Western commitments or analyses currently reflect.”²¹² At the core of this argument was the notion that “Ukraine now has a chance to be the security keystone for this part of Europe; its failure to become that could mean a collapse of peace for Europe as a whole.”²¹³ Ever mindful of the broader European context, Garnett asserted that “Ukraine is too close to a vulnerable Central Europe to assume that a crisis there could be contained. U.S. and Western interests in Ukrainian stability will only grow if Poland becomes a member of NATO,” as it is today.²¹⁴ Perhaps expressing more hope than conviction, Garnett predicted “U.S. and Western power and influence will remain an instrument of consequence to the future

²¹⁰ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 6.

²¹¹ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 7.

²¹² Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, pp. 9-10.

²¹³ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 10.

²¹⁴ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 127.

stability of Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia.”²¹⁵ But yet in another clairvoyant moment, he wrote that “[t]he problems of Ukrainian stability and of the stability of Ukraine’s relations with Russia are part of the European security agenda.”²¹⁶

A major part of Garnett’s contribution came down to the way he captured the essence of Ukraine’s geopolitical state. Specifically, he asserted that “Ukraine’s size, location, and the need to continue the work of internal reforms and consolidate its statehood make it an awkward fit in the new Europe. It no longer ‘belongs’ to Russia, yet it is unable to make a credible near-term claim on Europe’s core institutions.”²¹⁷ Because of this, Garnett called on the West to come with a sustainable policy that “rests upon a clear view of the region as a whole and Ukraine’s crucial place within it.”²¹⁸ Moreover, Garnett suggested that many senior U.S. policymakers “have yet to grasp the importance of states like Ukraine...to European stability – particularly if Western security obligations are to be defined by a new front-line on the eastern edge of Poland.”²¹⁹

Garnett’s assessment was echoed by Subtelny, who argued that “The emergence of an independent Ukraine was an event of major geopolitical significance....By the mid-1990s, Western and, more slowly and reluctantly, Russian statesmen began to consider the ramifications that a Ukrainian state...would have for the greatly altered geopolitical chessboard of Eurasia.”²²⁰ Though “Washington adopted a ‘Russia first’ policy on the

²¹⁵ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 133.

²¹⁶ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 135.

²¹⁷ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 136.

²¹⁸ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 136.

²¹⁹ Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch*, p. 6.

²²⁰ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 598.

assumption that Moscow was best able to restore stability in the former USSR...beginning in 1994...U.S.-Ukrainian relations improved dramatically.”²²¹

Subtelny also noted that it was at this time that “relations between the United States and an increasingly assertive Russia cooled,” an important consideration for this study and a rather rare reference in the extant literature to the role played by Russia-related considerations in U.S. policy toward Ukraine.²²² He argued that “[i]t was, therefore, in the American strategic interest to support Ukraine and, indeed, the two countries began to describe their relationship as a ‘strategic partnership.’ In 1996, the Kuchma-Gore Commission was established to review periodically the gamut of contacts between Ukraine and the United States. Meanwhile, President Bill Clinton visited Kiev, and Kuchma made several visits to Washington. Despite occasional strains in the relationship, by 2000 Ukraine had attained an important place in American global strategy, and this was reflected in the fact that it became a major recipient of U.S. foreign aid.”²²³

According to Subtelny, “Another important aspect of Ukraine’s relationship with the West was its contacts with NATO....On 8 February 1995, Ukraine became the first CIS country to accept NATO’s invitation to enter its Partnership for Peace program, which called for limited cooperation between the alliance and non-member countries in the area of military training and security arrangements.”²²⁴ Pifer too identified Ukraine’s emerging relationship with NATO as a key component in Washington’s

²²¹ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 600.

²²² Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 600.

²²³ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, pp. 600-601.

²²⁴ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 601.

interaction with Ukraine.²²⁵ Another aspect that solidified U.S.-Ukrainian ties at the time was the establishment of the Gore-Kuchma Commission in 1996. According to Pifer, this Commission provided “the level, intensity, and visibility of engagement with the White House that Kyiv wanted.”²²⁶

The growing bilateral relationship was not without its problem areas, however. As Pifer put it, “In retrospect, a couple of problems could be seen in the mid-1990s that foreshadowed later difficulties between the United States and Ukraine...After an initial spate of reform decisions at the beginning of his presidency, [President] Kuchma’s attention seemed to turn elsewhere. Ukraine soon fell off-program with the International Monetary Fund.”²²⁷ According to Pifer, “U.S.-Ukraine relations hit a post-Cold War low at the end of 2002” with the allegation that Kuchma approved the sale of an advanced early warning system to Saddam’s Iraq.²²⁸

But Pifer’s overall assessment is that “For most of the twenty-five years since Ukraine regained its independence in 1991, the U.S.-Ukraine relationship has been strong and positive.”²²⁹ Moreover, “U.S. policy largely succeeded in mobilizing correct combinations of diplomacy, carrots and sticks to secure Ukrainian agreement to and support for key American foreign policy goals.”²³⁰ According to Pifer, “What caused more intractable difficulties for the relationship were problems internal to Ukraine: the slow pace of reform, bad election processes, a questionable commitment to democracy,

²²⁵ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 121.

²²⁶ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 121.

²²⁷ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 123-124.

²²⁸ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 257.

²²⁹ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 315.

²³⁰ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 315-316.

and continuing corruption. The U.S. record of addressing these challenges – and of persuading the government in Kyiv to address them – shows fewer positive results.”²³¹

Another important takeaway identified by Pifer was the need for sustained high-level engagement. In this context, he gave considerable credit to President Clinton and Vice President Gore. The latter especially “took a particular interest in Ukraine, gave a generous amount of his time, and had the institutional support of the bilateral commission that he co-chaired with Kuchma.”²³² According to Pifer, Vice President Joe Biden took on a similar role following the Maydan Revolution, though he did not have a formal structure like Gore’s.”²³³ However, even with these efforts “Washington lacked a constant and consistent channel through which to mentor, coax, and press the Ukrainian president to take actions, particularly on reform.”²³⁴

But even high-level engagement has not been enough, including during stretches when it was sustained. As Pifer pointed out, “subtlety did not work....It is better to be blunt, to ensure that there is no misunderstanding later on.”²³⁵ He added that “the U.S. government should have been tougher when pressing Kyiv and should have used the substantial political leverage that it had.”²³⁶

By the same token, Pifer argued that “There were also times when the United States could and should have been more supportive.”²³⁷ As one example, he cited “[t]he

²³¹ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 316-317.

²³² Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 322.

²³³ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 322.

²³⁴ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 322.

²³⁵ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 323.

²³⁶ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 323.

²³⁷ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 323.

odd case of Russia’s construction of a levee from the Russian mainland to Tuzla Island in 2003 [that] posed a direct challenge to Ukraine’s territorial integrity, which both Moscow and Washington had pledged to respect in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. The National Security Council’s decision not to adopt a stance supportive of the Ukrainian position was a mistake.”²³⁸ Moreover, “[i]t sent a disquieting message to Kyiv, and the Russians certainly noticed the lack of a formal American protest – something that the Kremlin might have remembered in 2014 when it considered and then took action to seize Crimea.”²³⁹ And speaking of Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine, Pifer asserted that “The U.S. government...could and should have done more.”²⁴⁰

As pertinent as Pifer’s, Garnett’s, and Subtelny’s works have been, they stopped short of examining the Russia factor in any rigorous way. Other scholars have attempted to advance this line of inquiry, but have done so based on arguably faulty assumptions. For example, proponents of the contestation narrative – that the key dynamic in the region is the competition between Russia and the West, usually the United States – have tended to brush aside the question of Ukraine’s right or even ability to pursue its own geopolitical interests.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 323-324.

²³⁹ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 323-324.

²⁴⁰ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 76.

²⁴¹ This notion is in sharp contrast to the works of Moscow-centric authors, who have tended to focus on what they believe are Russia’s national interests, in the process often confusing these with those of the main occupant of the Kremlin and his regime. An early example of such thinking was Raymond Garthoff’s attempt to explain Moscow’s increasingly irresponsible international behavior as manifestations of the fact that “Russia is an independent country and great power with its own national interests.” Raymond Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 791.

Samuel Charap and Timothy Colton's *Everyone Loses* is quite representative of this phenomenon. The authors conceived of the six former Soviet republics located entirely in Europe as the "In-Betweens."²⁴²²⁴³ Moreover, they referred to these countries – as well as the five Central Asian states – as a "unique post-imperial landscape."²⁴⁴ The authors' Russo-centric views are also reflected in other ways.²⁴⁵ According to them, only Russia could be the "originator and coordinator of a programme of...integration."²⁴⁶ While they are no doubt correct in a narrow sense, this statement suggests they continue to view the rather disparate parts of the former Soviet Union in a largely if not solely post-Soviet context – as does Moscow.

The core of the authors' argument is that "the Ukraine crisis is the apotheosis of a broader regional dynamic: zero-sum policies producing negative sum results. It is a game that has produced no winners. All major players are worse off today than they were when the crisis began."²⁴⁷ Though there may indeed be something to this observation, the authors overstated its utility as evidence in favor of the contestation argument. Moreover, it is very much an open question whether a territorially integral but Moscow-oriented Ukraine under President Yanukovich was a better option than a de facto rump Ukraine increasingly anchored in institutional Europe.

²⁴² This number does not include the Baltic States, which the United States never recognized as part of the Soviet Union.

²⁴³ Samuel Charap and Timothy Colton, *Everyone Loses*, p. 40.

²⁴⁴ Samuel Charap and Timothy Colton, *Everyone Loses*, pp. 40-41.

²⁴⁵ For example, Charap and Colton seem to justify Russia's illegal occupation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula by referring to Moscow's brazen land grab in violation of multiple bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements as addressing a "latent territorial grievance" against Kyiv (p. 52).

²⁴⁶ Samuel Charap and Timothy Colton, *Everyone Loses*, p. 54.

²⁴⁷ Samuel Charap and Timothy Colton, *Everyone Loses*, p. 151.

In terms of Charap and Colton’s recommendations for how to move past what they referred to as a “negative-sum game,” they suggested it is “high time to revive the debate over the future of post-Soviet Eurasia; to reconnect it with realities on the ground; and to move past summations of the problem, and of the misbehavior of this or that side, to innovative and realistic proposals for moving past the negative-sum game.”²⁴⁸ This view appears to accept the Russian notion that the countries involved have neither agency nor voice, and are simply territories to be negotiated over. This apparent outright dismissal of sovereign choice – one that is enshrined in a range of international documents, including the Helsinki Final Act – is present throughout their book.²⁴⁹

As the subtitle of Gerard Toal’s book *Near Abroad* indicates (*Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*), he also sees Ukraine and the broader region, to include Georgia, as an area being actively contested by Russia and the West. Like Charap and Colton, he also focused on the big players involved, while giving the societies in question little space for agency and voice. And in doing so, Toal appeared to equate Putinist neo-imperial tendencies vis-à-vis the other post-Soviet countries with the West’s often reluctant efforts to include those sovereign states in the broader regional dynamics and processes.

²⁴⁸ Samuel Charap and Timothy Colton, *Everyone Loses*, p. 177.

²⁴⁹ In this respect, the authors include a particularly noteworthy quote by Charles Kupchan, whom they incorrectly identified as the Obama Administration’s “senior National Security Council official for the In-Betweens” (p. 180). Kupchan’s actual title was Senior Director for Europe. In any event, the authors quote Kupchan as saying “The United States would hardly sit by idly if Russia formed an alliance with Mexico and Canada and started building military installations along the U.S. border.” While there are quite a few things wrong with this assertion, one stands out in particular. The notion that both Mexico and Canada would want to join a Russian-led alliance is laughable, not something one could say about the Central and Eastern European countries that have already joined or are seeking to join NATO.

For example, Toal argued “[t]he compromise language of the Bucharest Declaration – Georgia and Ukraine ‘will become members of NATO’ – was a personal rebuke to [Putin], for he made it clear that NATO expansion to these countries was a ‘red line’ for Russia.”²⁵⁰ He continued, “[b]ut those promoting NATO membership for both believed the Russian position amounted to anachronistic sphere-of-influence thinking, and they were determined to prevent what they described as a ‘Russian veto’ on NATO expansion.” Much like Moscow, Toal did not seem to differentiate between MAP and membership. At the same time, Toal asserted that “NATO’s open expansionist policy, and its mantra of a ‘Europe, whole and free,’” needs critical reevaluation.”²⁵¹

Toal’s book echoed some of the themes present in Angela Stent’s 2014 *The Limits of Partnership*, in which she claimed that “[t]he post-Soviet space had evolved into a battleground between the two countries.”²⁵² At the same time, Stent provided one of the most succinct – and much more accurate, in my view – descriptions of Moscow’s and Washington’s approaches to the region: “Russia has only partly reconciled itself to the loss of its (sic) former Soviet republics and continues to believe that it is entitled to special relations with these countries. The United States, by contrast, has insisted that these are independent states and that they have the right to choose their own geopolitical orientation. It has never acknowledged publicly that Russia has any unique or special rights in the post-Soviet space and has rejected the legitimacy of the concept of spheres of influence in the area.”²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad*, 2017, p. 198.

²⁵¹ Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad*, p. 299.

²⁵² Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 2014, p. 97.

²⁵³ Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, p. 97.

In another example of analytical clarity, Stent argued that, for its part, “Washington denies that the two countries are rivals in the area...The mantra of both the Clinton and Bush administrations was that the Cold War was over and Russia should not view the relationship with the United States in zero-sum terms. Washington officials were fond of using phrases like ‘win-win situation,’ but Moscow suspected that this was a cover for the reality of the United States competing with Russia for influence in the post-Soviet space, continuing to impose its global agenda on Russia, and treating it as a junior partner.”²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Stent then appeared to take at face value the Russian narrative that “[i]n 2003 and 2004...[a] new issue inflamed U.S.-Russian relations – Washington’s role in supporting ‘color revolutions’ in Russia’s back yard.”

In part because of Stent’s apparent equivocation, other scholars have come out even more strongly in panning the shortcomings of the contestation narrative. A prime example of this effort is Taras Kuzio’s “Ukraine ‘Experts’ in the West and Putin’s Military Aggression: A New Academic Orientalism.” In this article, Kuzio argued that “pro-Putin apologists, realists and some Russianists” imagine Ukraine the same way Western imperialist thinking imagined the Orient, i.e., both “are treated as passive subaltern subjects of the world order who are denied the dignity of choosing their own destiny.”²⁵⁵ According to this approach, “[b]eing incapable of their own initiative, Ukrainians are manipulated by the West to pursue ‘Russophobic’ policies.”²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, p. 98.

²⁵⁵ Taras Kuzio, “Ukraine ‘Experts’ in the West and Putin’s Military Aggression: A New Academic ‘Orientalism?’,” Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper, No. 17/06, Johns Hopkins University, September 2017, p.3.

²⁵⁶ Taras Kuzio, “A New Academic Orientalism,” p. 4.

In a sign of “academic orientalism,” overnight “Ukraine experts,” Kuzio argued, ignore such contextually important issues as the “legacy of Russian-Ukrainian relations and national identity,” while relying almost exclusively on Russian sources about developments in Ukraine.²⁵⁷ Kuzio concluded that “[i]t is not NATO or EU enlargement or Western conspiracies lurking behind color revolutions which have created the [current] crisis, but the unwillingness of Russian chauvinism to accept Ukrainians as a separate people with a right to decided their destiny.”²⁵⁸

Another work that pushed back on the contestation narrative is “Ukraine’s Foreign Policy and the Role of the West” by Oleksiy Haran and Petro Burkovskyy, who especially took former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to task for suggesting that Washington should adopt a “realistic” approach to the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine and attempt to resolve it by “try[ing] to make Russia a partner in a solution.”²⁵⁹ Moreover, Kissinger attempted to put much of the onus of the conflict on the West by arguing that “the United States and Europe must relinquish their quest to turn Ukraine into an extension of the Western security system.” Haran and Burkovskyy asserted that the “main problem of this realistic approach is that it is based on the outdated stereotyped perception of Ukraine,” a reference to Ukraine being seen as a territory rather than an international actor in its own right.

Edward Lucas took this argument a step further in his “Don’t Play Risk With Europe.” He argued that the proponents of uncaveated contestation assume moral

²⁵⁷ Taras Kuzio, “A New Academic Orientalism,” p. 5.

²⁵⁸ Taras Kuzio, “A New Academic Orientalism,” p. 19.

²⁵⁹ In Daniel Hamilton and Stefan Meister’s *Eastern Voices: Europe’s East Faces an Unsettled West*, p. 57.

equivalence between Putinist Russia and the Western democracies. According to Lucas, they also tend to ignore the societal preferences in the “in-between” states. This approach therefore also tends to leave no room for these countries to be accepted as full participants in the security discussions affecting them first and foremost. Finally, Lucas put the bulk of the blame for the current state of affairs in Eastern Europe on the “Russian leadership’s ruthless, zero-sum thinking.”²⁶⁰ He also called on the West not to make deals with Russia at the “expense of real countries and real people.”²⁶¹

In his *Russian Foreign Policy: Return of Great Power Politics*, Jeffrey Mankoff posited that it is Moscow’s inability to come to grips with the changing world, including Russia’s neighbors’ independent voice and agency, that is largely to blame for the tensions between Russia and the West. Moreover, Mankoff argued that “[w]hile it remains too soon to assess the long-term consequences, it is clear that the relationship between Russia and the West in the borderlands between them will be much more competitive than in the past, and Western leaders will have to decide what risks they are willing to take to maintain their influence in the face of mounting Russian opposition.”²⁶² Furthermore, “[g]iven the extent to which most of Russia’s foreign policy attention is devoted to cultivating and balancing the Great Powers, its approach to the former Soviet Union...is in many ways sui generis. In general, Russia’s leaders have seen the former USSR as an arena within which the complex interactions of the major powers play

²⁶⁰ Edward Lucas, “Don’t Play Risk With Europe,” Center for European Policy Analysis, 18 June 2018, p. 2.

²⁶¹ Edward Lucas, “Don’t Play Risk With Europe,” Center for European Policy Analysis, 18 June 2018, p. 2.

²⁶² Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, p. 242.

themselves out – as objects for diplomacy rather than subjects in their own right. For much of the post-1991 period, Russia’s approach to dealing with its immediate neighbors was little more than an adjunct to its larger ambition of establishing itself as a major international player.”²⁶³

Paul D’Anieri’s work is the most recent and most thorough treatment of the complex and largely unhealthy relationship between Russia and Ukraine, and the challenges these dynamics presented and continue to present to Western governments, including that of the United States. As he astutely observed, “there was much negative spillover across the multiple issues” of the Russian-Ukrainian-U.S. triangular relationship.²⁶⁴ But perhaps this book’s greatest contribution is D’Anieri’s convincing argument regarding the critical connection between the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine and the “much deeper set of conflicts that emerged with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union.”²⁶⁵ Moreover, D’Anieri compellingly argues that “[t]o explain the outbreak of violent conflict in 2014 without looking at the long-term sources of the conflict is to take the events of 2013-14 out of context and therefore to misinterpret them.”²⁶⁶

In summation, the American policy discourse prior to the USSR’s dissolution implicitly and overwhelmingly assumed the Soviet Union’s continued existence. Moreover, much of the indirect conversation that took place in Seweryn Bialer and Michael Mandelbaum’s edited work, as well as the thrust of Secretary Baker’s speech at

²⁶³ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, p. 242.

²⁶⁴ Paul D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, p. 46.

²⁶⁵ Paul D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, p. 182.

²⁶⁶ Paul D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, p. 182.

the Wilson Center focused on best approaches to what was expected to be a long-standing relationship, despite the then already on-going Gorbachev experiment in Moscow. As a consequence, the discourse engaged by the authors in question was overwhelmingly Kremlin focused, with little variance exhibited despite the engagement of a range of prominent scholars.

It is in this context that the works of Orest Subtelny and Paul Robert Magocsi, *Ukraine: A History* and *A History of Ukraine*, respectively, provided much-needed additional texture, particularly by shedding light on the role of Ukraine, the second-most important Soviet republic, as well as of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States, including its efforts to focus Western attention beyond Moscow and the Kremlin.

Based on a range of works, including Jack Matlock's *Autopsy of an Empire*, it is quite clear that the United States Government continued to bank on Moscow and Gorbachev even in the aftermath of the August 1991 failed coup, which accelerated the centrifugal tendencies and led to the USSR's collapse that December. Of particular note was the discussion, including James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul's *Power and Purpose*, of the important role played by the various personalities involved, especially in the context of the formulation of Washington's policy toward the Soviet Union in the last months of its existence.

The United States not only preferred continuity, even in the face of increasingly long odds, but actually took positive action to preserve the USSR in the guise of Gorbachev's rule. Moreover, those who challenged Gorbachev in Moscow – most prominently, Boris Yeltsin – or in the non-Russian union republics, including Ukraine,

were viewed with suspicion and dealt with sparingly. President George H. W. Bush's "Chicken Kiev" speech in the Ukrainian parliament is exemplary of the then American policy posture. And when the USSR's demise became inevitable, some senior U.S. officials scrambled to find ways to slow down the process of dissolution, as referenced by Steve Pifer in his *The Eagle and the Trident* and by Subtelny in his aforementioned work.

A range of authors, including Sherman Garnett (*Keystone in the Arch*), gave credit to the Clinton Administration for introducing incentives into U.S. efforts to secure Ukraine's post-Soviet denuclearization, itself largely a policy outgrowth of Washington's fixation on Moscow, whether Soviet or Russian. Rightly or wrongly, the nuclear question remained a prism through which the United States viewed its relations with Ukraine, a focus that came at the expense of other dimensions, including the question of post-Soviet transformation and reform.

It was not until Ukraine irrevocably committed to rid itself of its Soviet-era nuclear arsenal that bilateral relations entered a qualitatively new phase. This period coincided with the growing realization of the important role Ukraine could play in the broader regional context, a notion captured well in both Garnett's and Pifer's volumes, among others. The realization has only been reinforced by the illegal Russian occupation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and its ongoing aggression in eastern Ukraine, developments that have their roots in the USSR's collapse and associated dynamics, as argued most convincingly by D'Anieri.

As significant as these works are, none set out to methodically examine the related questions of whether, how, and with what impact Russia-related considerations

have affected U.S. policy toward Ukraine. As a result, there appears to be ample space for the study undertaken here, especially the exploration of the potentially causal relationships that may be inherent to the formulation and implementation of Washington's Ukraine policy.

Chapter 3

U.S. Policy Toward the Emergence of Independent Ukraine

The Reagan Baseline

This chapter focuses on exploring the U.S. policy toward Ukraine in the context of the late Soviet period. While the bulk of this focus is by necessity directed at the Bush '41 Administration, this chapter starts with a few key reference points to the preceding Reagan Administration. It does so for two key reasons. The first is substantive: in the context of his “evil empire” rhetoric, Reagan made a number of references to Ukraine that arguably set the stage for the post-Soviet period.

The second reason is procedural. The other three cases examined in this study naturally build on the preceding case. Without the Reagan references, it would leave this first case without an important baseline. No matter the Administration, the question of Ukraine and its independence is intimately connected to the issue of U.S.-Soviet relations and Washington’s perception of the USSR’s overall direction.

Ukraine and Ukrainians’ desire for freedom were not unknown to the Reagan Administration, which regularly marked important anniversaries pertaining to human rights, including in Ukraine, to highlight Soviet human rights abuses. These efforts included honoring the Ukrainian Helsinki Monitoring Group, which emerged in the 1970s following the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act to promote the implementation of

the Helsinki Accords. The 21 September 1982 Presidential proclamation honoring the Group condemned the “long prison terms meted out to members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Monitoring Group for their courageous activities to secure greater freedom in Ukraine.”²⁶⁷

The proclamation also called the persecutions “graphic testimony to the inability of Communism to compete with the principles of freedom in the marketplace of ideas” and called these an international embarrassment to the Soviet Union.”²⁶⁸ This proclamation was made three and a half months after the 8 June 1982 speech in the British House of Commons in which President Reagan predicted that communism would find itself on the “ash heap of history.”²⁶⁹

At a 19 July 1983 ceremony marking the annual observance of Captive Nations Week, President Reagan addressed “every person trapped in tyranny, whether in the Ukraine, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, or Vietnam” and told them that “[y]our struggle is our struggle, your dream is our dream, and someday, you, too, will be free.”²⁷⁰ The fact that he included Ukraine in a list of countries and even listed it first underscored

²⁶⁷ Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 4973—Honoring the Ukrainian Helsinki Monitoring Group Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/246865>.

²⁶⁸ Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 4973—Honoring the Ukrainian Helsinki Monitoring Group Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/246865>.

²⁶⁹ Ronald Reagan, Address to Members of the British Parliament Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/245236>.

²⁷⁰ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at a Ceremony Marking the Annual Observance of Captive Nations Week Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262583>.

the importance with which he viewed Ukraine in the context of pressing the Soviets, particularly in the wake of his 8 March 1983 “evil empire” speech.²⁷¹

Based on Secretary Shultz’s recollections, “The Soviet Union, I told [President Reagan in the summer of 1984], was mired in a protracted and so far inconclusive process of succession in leadership and the difficulties of a stagnant and foundering economy....Among the Soviets’ biggest potential challenges, I told him, were the separatist tendencies among their nationalities, problems in the assimilation of their burgeoning Muslim population, and the rising anti-Moscow sentiment in the Baltics and the Ukraine.”²⁷² The fact that Secretary Shultz referenced Ukraine in the same context as the Baltics is noteworthy.

On 14 September 1984, the Reagan White House acknowledged the death of Yosyp Cardinal Slipyy, Major Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. The condolence statement in particular highlighted the 18 years the cardinal spent in Soviet prison camps. In celebrating Slipyy, the White House underscored his refusal to betray his church, which brought into focus “the power and strength of the human spirit.”²⁷³ The statement concluded by asserting that Slipyy will remain “cherished not only by Ukrainians, but by men and women of good will in all nations.”²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at a Ceremony Marking the Annual Observance of Captive Nations Week Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/262583>.

²⁷² George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 478.

²⁷³ Ronald Reagan, Statement on the Death of Josyf Cardinal Slipyyj Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/261370>.

²⁷⁴ Ronald Reagan, Statement on the Death of Josyf Cardinal Slipyyj Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/261370>.

Later that fall, the Reagan White House marked the anniversary of the Great Famine of 1932-1933, a multi-pronged Soviet-staged genocide by starvation that decimated Ukraine, the Ukrainian ethno-linguistic areas of southern Russia, particularly the Kuban, and Kazakhstan. While the false Soviet narrative about what transpired blamed climactic factors, the White House statement of 30 October 1984 left no doubt who was to blame for this crime against humanity – the Soviet government.²⁷⁵ The statement asserted that the “Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933 was a tragic chapter in the history of the Ukraine, all the more so because it was not the result of disasters of nature, but was artificially induced as a deliberate policy.”²⁷⁶ The statement went on to state that “this callous act” was aimed at “crushing the political, cultural, and human rights of the Ukrainian and other peoples.”²⁷⁷

Also that October, the White House issued a statement on the death in a Soviet prison of Valeriy Marchenko, one of the most prominent human rights activists who had devoted himself to exposing the “harshness of Soviet labor camps and the violations of human and national rights in the Ukraine.”²⁷⁸ A little over a year later, on 21 November 1985, the Reagan Administration agreed to establish a new Soviet consulate in New York

²⁷⁵ It is noteworthy that this historically accurate assertion predated the U.S. Commission on the Ukraine Famine, which was established by Congress in late 1985 and did not issue its report blaming the Soviet regime for the genocidal actions until April 1988.

²⁷⁶ Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 5273—Commemoration of the Great Famine in the Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260555>.

²⁷⁷ Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 5273—Commemoration of the Great Famine in the Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260555>.

²⁷⁸ Ronald Reagan, Statement on the Death of Valeriy Marchenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/260804>.

in return for a new American consulate in Kyiv.²⁷⁹ President Reagan chose to tout this development during his address before the joint session of Congress, stating that the move “will bring a permanent U.S. presence to the Ukraine for the first time in decades.”²⁸⁰

Secretary Shultz’s memoirs provide additional granularity on this subject. He claimed to have told President Reagan that “opening of U.S. and Soviet consulates in Kiev and New York would have the advantage of getting us onto new Soviet terrain while increasing the Soviet presence here only marginally. The Soviets already have a big UN Mission in New York, while our new consulate would be the first Western mission in the capital of the Ukraine. There is a growing interest in a Kiev consulate in Congress and among American Jewish and Ukrainian groups. A U.S. presence there would also help us broaden our access to and ideological penetration of Soviet society. My recommendation ran into intense opposition from the NSC staff.”²⁸¹²⁸²

In his greeting on the occasion of Orthodox Christmas on 6 January 1986, Reagan referenced not only Russian believers, but also those elsewhere under Soviet rule, including in Ukraine.²⁸³ The Reagan White House continued to reference Ukraine by name, including in its 21 July 1986 remarks on the signing of the Captive Nations Week

²⁷⁹ Ronald Reagan, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Following the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259002>.

²⁸⁰ Ronald Reagan, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Following the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Geneva Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259002>.

²⁸¹ George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 276.

²⁸² Secretary Shultz did not elaborate on the rationale behind the NSC staff’s opposition to the opening of a U.S. consulate in Kyiv.

²⁸³ Ronald Reagan, Message on the Observance of Orthodox Christmas Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/258643>.

Proclamation. That it did so on par with internationally recognized countries like Romania and Poland was particularly noteworthy.²⁸⁴ And on the occasion of Human Rights Day, the 10 December 1986 Presidential Proclamation condemned the Soviet government for repressing Catholics in Lithuania and Ukraine.²⁸⁵ In his remarks that same day, Reagan again singled out Ukraine while condemning “the continued imprisonment of religious activists in Ukraine and throughout the Soviet Union.”²⁸⁶

The 17 July 1987 Captive Nations Week proclamation asserted that the “struggle that began in Ukraine 70 years ago is taking place throughout the Soviet empire,” a reference to the fleeting independence of the Ukrainian National Republic seven decades earlier.²⁸⁷²⁸⁸ The proclamation went on to say that “[a]ll captive nations deserve and require our special support.”²⁸⁹ Moreover, it promised that “[f]or those seeking to enjoy humanity's birthright of liberty, independence, and justice, we serve as guardians of their

²⁸⁴ Ronald Reagan, Remarks on Signing the Captive Nations Week Proclamation Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/258992>.

²⁸⁵ Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 5589—Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, 1986 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/258398>.

²⁸⁶ Ronald Reagan, Remarks on Signing the Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week Proclamation Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/258392>.

²⁸⁷ Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 5680—Captive Nations Week, 1987 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/253560>.

²⁸⁸ Despite President Reagan’s activism when it came to standing up for Ukraine and staring down the Soviets, it has been Congress that typically outdoes the executive branch in this regard. Indeed, President Reagan’s quote above indirectly references the work of Congressman James Hamill (D-NJ), who in 1917 introduced a Joint Resolution to proclaim a nationwide Ukrainian Day. According to Orest Deychakiwsky, a longtime professional staff member of the Helsinki commission, the resolution passed and President Wilson proclaimed April 27, 1917 as a day to collect moneys for the aid of the “stricken Ruthenians (Ukrainians).” Rep. Hamill remained active in trying to obtain U.S. recognition for Ukrainian independence, including through his subsequent December 1918 resolution on the eve of Versailles. But, as Deychakiwsky writes, U.S. policy did not support Ukrainian national aspirations and the measure was defeated. Orest Deychakiwsky, “Ukraine in Congress: A Century of U.S. Congressional Support for Ukraine, 29 August 2018.

²⁸⁹ Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 5680—Captive Nations Week, 1987 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/253560>.

dream.”²⁹⁰ On the occasion of a White House briefing on religious freedom in the Soviet Union, held on 3 May 1988, President Reagan pointed out that the “Ukrainian Catholic Church, the Uniate Church, is still closed, outlawed, and persecuted.”²⁹¹ Later that year, on 26 September 1988, President Reagan referenced Ukraine in his address to the United Nations General Assembly:

This regard for human rights as the foundation of peace is at the heart of the U.N. Those who starve in Ethiopia, those who die among the Kurds, those who face racial injustice in South Africa, those who still cannot write or speak freely in the Soviet Union, those who cannot worship in the Ukraine, those who struggle for life and freedom on boats in the South China Sea, those who cannot publish or assemble in Managua—all of this is more than just an agenda item on your calendar. It must be a first concern, an issue above others.²⁹²

During his 4 November 1988 remarks on the signing of the Genocide Convention Implementation Act of 1987 (the Proxmire Act), President Reagan once again explicitly referenced Ukraine, along with Cambodia and Ethiopia, while referencing the genocidal horrors of the 20th century.²⁹³ At the same time, according to Bill Burns, a senior

²⁹⁰ Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 5680—Captive Nations Week, 1987 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/253560>.

²⁹¹ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at a White House Briefing on Religious Freedom in the Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/254874>.

²⁹² Ronald Reagan, Address to the 43d Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/252858>.

²⁹³ Ronald Reagan, Remarks on Signing the Genocide Convention Implementation Act of 1987 (the Proxmire Act) in Chicago, Illinois Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/252640>.

member of the Foreign Service who later became Deputy Secretary of State, “Reagan...had seemed in his later years in office to understand the desperation in Gorbachev’s maneuvers and the terminal rot in the Soviet system.”²⁹⁴

The Early Bush Record

George H. W. Bush’s inaugural address, which he delivered on 20 January 1989, focused on two primary messages. First, the world is moving in the right direction – defined by freedom, prosperity, and “moral and intellectual satisfactions” – and that direction was set by the United States.²⁹⁵ And second, there is both a need and, now, an opportunity to focus on domestic problems, in the process making “kinder the face of the Nation and gentler the face of the world.”²⁹⁶ Among the afflictions besetting the United States, President Bush noted homelessness, drug addiction, reliance on welfare, crime, and teenage pregnancy. He also pointed out that “[w]e have a deficit to bring down” and a federal budget to be balanced.²⁹⁷

To bridge the gap between the domestic demands and the need to be fiscally responsible, President Bush referenced his Thousand Points of Light theme, in which “all the community organizations that are spread like stars throughout the Nation” work

²⁹⁴ Bill Burns, *The Back Channel*, p. 50.

²⁹⁵ George Bush, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247448>.

²⁹⁶ George Bush, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247448>.

²⁹⁷ George Bush, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247448>.

separately but also in unison to address the various ills.²⁹⁸ On the foreign policy front – and to complement his domestic agenda – President Bush stated that the United States “will continue the new closeness with the Soviet Union, consistent both with our security and with progress.”²⁹⁹

President Bush’s fixation on domestic priorities and his words regarding relations with the Soviets were largely buttressed by the diplomatic reporting that was coming in from the U.S. embassy in Moscow. Ambassador Jack Matlock’s 3 February 1989 cable to Gen. Scowcroft, Bush’s National Security Advisor, asserted that “we can plan our foreign policy with a high degree of confidence that the Soviet leadership’s preoccupation with internal reform will continue throughout the first Bush administration.”³⁰⁰ It also warned that the Soviet economy would not improve markedly in the foreseeable future, creating the potential “for severe outbreaks of public disorder.”³⁰¹ The cable, however, also predicted the regime would be able to maintain order and suggested that Gorbachev would “remain the top Soviet leader for at least five (probably ten) more years.”³⁰² At the same time, Matlock warned that his “confidence in

²⁹⁸ George Bush, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247448>.

²⁹⁹ George Bush, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247448>.

³⁰⁰ Embassy Moscow cable 02962, The Soviet Union Over the Next Four Years, from Amb. Matlock to Gen. Scowcroft, 3 February 1989, declassified.

³⁰¹ Embassy Moscow cable 02962, The Soviet Union Over the Next Four Years, from Amb. Matlock to Gen. Scowcroft, 3 February 1989, declassified.

³⁰² Embassy Moscow cable 02962, The Soviet Union Over the Next Four Years, from Amb. Matlock to Gen. Scowcroft, 3 February 1989, declassified.

this prospect is lower than that in the continuation of a Soviet preoccupation with internal reform.”³⁰³

In his first State of the Union address on 9 February 1989, President Bush focused on reducing the federal budget deficit and otherwise getting the country’s fiscal house in order. He also called for extending “American leadership in technology, increas[ing] long-term investment, improve[ing] our educational system, and boost[ing] productivity.”³⁰⁴ President Bush also made the pitch to incentivize better performance in education, in the process challenging the legislature to become the "Education Congress" – and also prioritized the war against drugs, increased funding for AIDS research, and a strengthened Clear Air Act.³⁰⁵

On foreign policy, President Bush focused on the USSR, expressing both hope and caution:

And it's a time of great change in the world, and especially in the Soviet Union. Prudence and common sense dictate that we try to understand the full meaning of the change going on there, review our policies, and then proceed with caution. But I've personally assured General Secretary Gorbachev that at the conclusion of such a review we will be ready to move forward. We will not miss any opportunity to work for peace. The

³⁰³ Embassy Moscow cable 02962, The Soviet Union Over the Next Four Years, from Amb. Matlock to Gen. Scowcroft, 3 February 1989, declassified.

³⁰⁴ George Bush, Address on Administration Goals Before a Joint Session of Congress Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247737>.

³⁰⁵ George Bush, Address on Administration Goals Before a Joint Session of Congress Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247737>.

fundamental facts remain that the Soviets retain a very powerful military machine in the service of objectives which are still too often in conflict with ours. So, let us take the new openness seriously, but let's also be realistic. And let's always be strong.³⁰⁶

In a follow-on to the 3 February cable, Ambassador Matlock sent another message to Gen. Scowcroft, this time focusing on his prediction for the course of Soviet foreign policy through the end of 1992. The cable's key argument was essentially that Soviet foreign policy was becoming increasingly constrained by "domestic demands and domestic capabilities. These require a reduction of international tension, so that a greater measure of resources and leadership attention can be devoted to solving domestic problems. This situation suggests that we are likely to see: continued effort to pare down (but not eliminate) military commitments abroad...ideological revisionism to provide a conceptual framework for a shift to a less confrontational stance vis-à-vis the capitalist world...growing willingness to engage in joint bilateral or international efforts to deal with specific global problems."³⁰⁷

However indirectly, this understanding became the basis for President Bush's approach to and support for Gorbachev and the Soviet Union. And as a result – and by extension – this understanding also became the prism through which the President viewed Ukraine and the other non-Russian union republics of the USSR.

³⁰⁶ George Bush, Address on Administration Goals Before a Joint Session of Congress Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/247737>.

³⁰⁷ Embassy Moscow cable 03850, Soviet Foreign Policy Over the Next Four Years, from Amb. Matlock to Gen. Scowcroft, 13 February 1989, declassified.

The third in a series of cables from Embassy Moscow focused on U.S.-Soviet relations, claiming that there was a real opportunity to help transform the USSR and make it a more responsible international actor. In this message, Ambassador Matlock asserted that the United States has “an historic opportunity to test the degree the Soviet Union is willing to move into a new relationship with the rest of the world, and to strengthen those tendencies in the Soviet Union to ‘civilianize’ the economy and ‘pluralize’ the society.”³⁰⁸ He went on to argue that the United States could use its newfound leverage to pursue “the long-term transformation of the Soviet Union into a society with effective organic constraints on the use of military force outside its borders.”³⁰⁹

This last cable arrived in the wake of President Bush’s 13 February 1989 directive calling for “a full-scale strategic review of U.S.-Soviet relations.”³¹⁰ As part of this effort, the President postponed all policy decisions until after the completion of the policy review. Completed on 14 March, the strategic review “gave guarded approval to perestroika but warned that the Soviets still aspired to become ‘a more competitive superpower’ and found Gorbachev’s effort to create a ‘less confrontational’ relationship ‘double-edged’ because it might divide the Western alliance.”³¹¹ Secretary Baker was so dissatisfied with the review’s recommendations that he called them “mush.” For his part,

³⁰⁸ From Embassy Moscow cable 04648, U.S.-Soviet Relations: Policy Opportunity, 22 February 1989, declassified.

³⁰⁹ From Embassy Moscow cable 04648, U.S.-Soviet Relations: Policy Opportunity, 22 February 1989, declassified.

³¹⁰ Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, p. 467.

³¹¹ Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, p. 469.

Gen. Scowcroft told his staff that the review's outcome pointed to their "lack of imagination."

Meanwhile, the CIA warned in an April 1989 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) that "Soviet citizens are organizing groups that could form the basis of a political opposition and are advancing a wide range of demands that challenge central authority."³¹² It went on to point out that "[t]he most **dangerous** of these are the nationalist movements that have blossomed in many republics, unleashing centrifugal forces that, if unchecked, could threaten to tear the system apart."³¹³³¹⁴ It went on to claim that "[t]his increasing assertiveness by national minorities is provoking a backlash among the Russians, emboldening Russian nationalist groups and setting the stage for violent clashes in the republics where the Russians are in danger of becoming second-rate citizens."³¹⁵

Perhaps more to the point, the NIE asserted that as a result of these dynamics, "opposition groups could come to share power, as Solidarity did in Poland in the early 1980s, or individual republics might win de facto independence."³¹⁶ The policy-relevant punchline followed: "To help ease the strain of the economy and improve the prospects

³¹² Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, National Intelligence Estimate, Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution, April 1989, declassified 28 March 1994.

³¹³ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, National Intelligence Estimate, Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution, April 1989, declassified 28 March 1994.

³¹⁴ Bolded for emphasis.

³¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, National Intelligence Estimate, Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution, April 1989, declassified 28 March 1994.

³¹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, National Intelligence Estimate, Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution, April 1989, declassified 28 March 1994.

for delivering on promises to the consumer, the Soviet leadership will continue to vigorously pursue arms control and seek ways to reduce military spending.”³¹⁷ The latter part must have especially resonated with the Bush White House, particularly given its own domestic challenges.

For its part, Congress, and especially particular members, began to assert themselves on this broad issue set. On 19 April 1989, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) introduced a resolution supporting the “demands of the people of the Republic of Georgia for national independence, self-determination, and human rights.”³¹⁸ It also urged the Soviet government, to acquiesce to these demands and to “guarantee the Georgian people their right to self-determination.”³¹⁹

On 2 August of that same year, Sen. Helms tabled another resolution, this time designating 23 August 1989 as “Hitler-Stalin Denunciation Day” and showing solidarity with the “Baltic peoples in protesting the events of 1939-1940,” as well as supporting their demands for self-determination.³²⁰ This initiative was followed by another draft resolution, this time submitted by Sen. Robert Kasten (R-WI) on 14 September 1989, also urging a more robust U.S. posture vis-à-vis Moscow on the issue of the Baltic States.³²¹

³¹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, National Intelligence Estimate, *Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution*, April 1989, declassified 28 March 1994.

³¹⁸ Senate Resolution 110, 101st Congress, 19 April 1989, www.congress.gov.

³¹⁹ Senate Resolution 110, 101st Congress, 19 April 1989, www.congress.gov.

³²⁰ Senate Resolution 163, 101st Congress, 2 August 1989, www.congress.gov.

³²¹ Senate Concurrent Resolution 69, 101st Congress, 14 September 1989, www.congress.gov.

In a follow-on NIE, this one published in September 1989, the CIA argued that “Western actions that could be presented by his opponents as attempts to ‘take advantage’ of Soviet internal instability could hurt Gorbachev.”³²² The CIA also asserted, with apparently little basis, that a constitutionally structured federative union, as advocated by Gorbachev, “**would certainly** be a positive development from the US perspective.”³²³³²⁴

These takeaways, whatever their validity, no doubt fed into Bush White House policy deliberations and, as a result, into National Security Directive (NSD) 23, which was issued on 22 September 1989. This NSD for the first time suggested that time may be nigh to shift away from the strategy of containment based on the “character of the changes taking place in the Soviet Union.”³²⁵ Moreover, the NSD suggested that the next step may be the introduction of a policy that “actively promotes the integration of the Soviet Union into the existing international system.”³²⁶ The day after NSD 23 was published, the White House announced the first Bush-Gorbachev summit, tentatively scheduled for “early spring or early summer.”³²⁷

³²² Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, National Intelligence Estimate, Gorbachev’s Domestic Gambles and Instability in the USSR, September 1989, declassified February 2000.

³²³ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, National Intelligence Estimate, Gorbachev’s Domestic Gambles and Instability in the USSR, September 1989, declassified February 2000.

³²⁴ Bolded for emphasis.

³²⁵ National Security Directive (NSD) 23, “United States Relations with the Soviet Union,” 22 September 1989.

³²⁶ National Security Directive (NSD) 23, “United States Relations with the Soviet Union,” 22 September 1989.

³²⁷ George Bush, Remarks Announcing the Summit Meeting With Soviet President Gorbachev and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/263375>.

During his address to the UN General Assembly on 25 September 1989, President Bush, perhaps buoyed by the possibilities referenced in NSD 23, laid out a vision of a “world where free governments and free markets meet the rising desire of the people to control their own destiny, to live in dignity, and to exercise freely their fundamental human rights,” and made the case for moving forward to “limit and eliminate weapons of mass destruction.”³²⁸ He also claimed the United States is “serious about achieving conventional arms reductions as well.”³²⁹ It was within this context that President Bush mentioned easing tensions in Europe and taking a step closer to a “Europe whole and free.”³³⁰ He also praised signs of a “new attitude that prevails between the United States and the U.S.S.R.”³³¹

The summit with Gorbachev took place earlier than expected, with the two leaders meeting onboard the Soviet vessel Maksim Gorkiy off Malta in early December. According to the declassified memorandum of conversation, President Bush praised Gorbachev’s perestroika (restructuring) policy and assured his interlocutor that the Administration and, “for the most part,” Congress wanted the Soviet leader to succeed in

³²⁸ George Bush, Address to the 44th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/263386>.

³²⁹ George Bush, Address to the 44th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/263386>.

³³⁰ George Bush, Address to the 44th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/263386>.

³³¹ George Bush, Address to the 44th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/263386>.

his reform efforts.³³² Bush also went out of way to stress to Gorbachev that “[I have] conducted myself in ways not to complicate your life,” even pointing out that this was the reason why he has not “jumped up and down on the Berlin Wall.”³³³

The 1990 National Security Strategy of the United States, issued by the White House in March 1990, noted that the USSR “has taken major steps toward rapprochement with the international system, after seventy years of seeking to undermine it.”³³⁴ It also praised “today’s dramatic process of political and economic reform” and asserted that the United States have a “significant stake in it.”³³⁵ Moreover, the document asserted that “the United States is determined...to work to put Soviet relations with the West on a firmer, more constructive course than had ever been thought possible in the postwar era.”³³⁶ President Bush picked up on this theme during his second State of the Union address, delivered on 31 January 1990. Specifically, he argued that it is “time to build on our new relationship with the Soviet Union, to endorse and encourage a peaceful process of internal change toward democracy and economic opportunity.”³³⁷

³³² US Memorandums of Conversation, George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev at Malta Summit, 2-3 December 1989,” December 2, 1989, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, George Bush Presidential Library, National Security Council, Condoleezza Rice and Arnold Kanter files. Obtained by Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrinson, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117430>.

³³³ US Memorandums of Conversation, George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev at Malta Summit, 2-3 December 1989,” December 2, 1989, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, George Bush Presidential Library, National Security Council, Condoleezza Rice and Arnold Kanter files. Obtained by Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrinson, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117430>.

³³⁴ National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, March 1990, p. 9.

³³⁵ National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, March 1990, p. 9.

³³⁶ National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, March 1990, p. 10.

³³⁷ George Bush, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/263819>.

Meanwhile, the Administration's commitment to the Soviet relationship and Gorbachev personally, continued to grow, seemingly exponentially. During his 9 February 1990 meeting with Gorbachev and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow, Secretary Baker appeared to conspire with his hosts to present a particular picture of the bilateral relationship:

I want you to know that we will support you in any way we can. We'll do so publicly and in other ways. We are seeking to provide a stable international environment for you....And I hope that it is still positive for you domestically for you to be able to show that you are managing the US-Soviet relationship productively and in a way that moves the arms control and disarmament process forward to agreements.³³⁸

Speaking with Shevardnadze later that spring, President Bush seemed to go even further:

Our relationship is absolutely vital and I want it to be better. You know that the Baltics have caused a complication in our relationship. It is necessary to overcome that and I look forward to the Summit with President Gorbachev which I hope will be a productive meeting.³³⁹

Several weeks later, Secretary Baker continued on this theme while visiting Moscow on 18 May 1990 by acknowledging the early reservations about the true nature of Gorbachev's policies, expressing the hope that the relationship moves to "cooperation on

³³⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, 9 February 1990, The Kremlin, Secretary Baker's meeting with President Gorbachev and Eduard Shevardnadze, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

³³⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze of the Soviet Union, Washington DC, 6 April 1990, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

all fronts,” and underscoring Washington’s commitment to supporting Gorbachev’s policies, including perestroika.³⁴⁰³⁴¹ In referencing his earlier public speeches on the subject, Secretary Baker emphasized the need to identify new areas for cooperation, particularly in the context of what he described as a “great deal of debate” in the United States about the ultimate success of Gorbachev’s efforts.³⁴² He also admitted that there are “Cold War warriors” who wanted Gorbachev to fail because they “can’t give up old habits,” perhaps a reference to Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, among others.³⁴³ In this context, Baker committed the United States to helping “create a stable international environment for perestroika.”³⁴⁴

In an exchange with reporters later that May, President Bush was asked about his chemistry with Gorbachev. In response, Bush suggested that he and his Soviet counterpart “both realize we’re engaged in very, very historic and important work here.”³⁴⁵ In response to another question – one having to do with what he can or should do to help Gorbachev – President Bush asserted that “working closely with the Soviet

³⁴⁰ Record of Conversation between Gorbachev and Baker with delegations, Moscow, 18 May 1990, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

³⁴¹ As elsewhere, the author uses the standard U.S. Government transliteration guide to transliterate from Slavic languages into English.

³⁴² Record of Conversation between Gorbachev and Baker with delegations, Moscow, 18 May 1990, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

³⁴³ Record of Conversation between Gorbachev and Baker with delegations, Moscow, 18 May 1990, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

³⁴⁴ Record of Conversation between Gorbachev and Baker with delegations, Moscow, 18 May 1990, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

³⁴⁵ George Bush, Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters on the Soviet-United States Summit Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265119>.

Union...is in our interest.”³⁴⁶ He also appeared to go out of his way to give significant credit for the changes then afoot in Central Europe to Gorbachev personally.

Speaking at an 8 June 1990 fundraising luncheon for a Senatorial candidate in Nebraska, President Bush chose to focus on the perceived benefits of his Administration’s recent interactions with the Soviet leadership. In particular, the President talked up the so-called peace dividend that is to be had based on a “safer, more democratic world.”³⁴⁷ In terms of specifics, he mentioned the bilateral U.S.-Soviet agreement to “eliminate the great majority of chemical weapons that have been stockpiled over the years.”³⁴⁸ He added that “our common goal is nothing less than a global ban on these devastating...weapons.”³⁴⁹ He also referenced a mutual commitment to continue negotiations on nuclear and space arms, and underscored the importance of conventional arms control in Europe, which the President argued is “crucial to a Europe that is whole and free.”³⁵⁰

Interestingly enough, it was in this speech that President Bush first publicly referenced Ukraine during his presidency. However, the reference was quite telling in

³⁴⁶ George Bush, Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters on the Soviet-United States Summit Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265119>.

³⁴⁷ George Bush, Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Senatorial Candidate Hal Daub in Omaha, Nebraska Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/264107>.

³⁴⁸ George Bush, Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Senatorial Candidate Hal Daub in Omaha, Nebraska Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/264107>.

³⁴⁹ George Bush, Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Senatorial Candidate Hal Daub in Omaha, Nebraska Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/264107>.

³⁵⁰ George Bush, Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Senatorial Candidate Hal Daub in Omaha, Nebraska Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/264107>.

terms of his views and the associated blinders, as he compared Ukraine to the American Midwest:

Issues like world peace, agriculture, the environment, and education are not merely American questions. They affect every part of the world from the Midwest to the Ukraine.³⁵¹

Ten days later, Congress raised the stakes with the Administration, this time by adopting a joint resolution, initially sponsored by Sen. Donald Riegle (D-MI) on 7 February 1990, calling on the Soviet Union to recognize the sovereignty of the Baltic States and designating 14 June 1990 as Baltic Freedom Day.³⁵² And a month later, in honor of Captive Nations Week, which honors the struggle for freedom around the world, Sen. Paul Simon (D-IL) reminded his colleagues that much work remains to be done. As an example, he mentioned that the USSR continues to “illegally occupy...the Baltic States,” and added that the “people of Armenia, Ukraine, and Albania can still only hope to begin their march along the road toward freedom.”³⁵³

Meanwhile, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow for the first time acknowledged the possibility that the USSR may not survive the Gorbachev experiment by admitting that the “prospects of the Gorbachev regime have deteriorated over the past year” and that “some Republics will leave the Soviet Union.”³⁵⁴ The latter most likely was a reference

³⁵¹ George Bush, Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Senatorial Candidate Hal Daub in Omaha, Nebraska Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/264107>.

³⁵² Public Law No. 101-309, 101st Congress, 18 June 1990, www.congress.gov.

³⁵³ Sen. Paul Simon, On the Occasion of Captive Nations Week, 17 July 1990, www.congress.gov.

³⁵⁴ From Embassy Moscow cable 23603, Looking into the Abyss: The Possible Collapse of the Soviet Union and What We Should Be Doing About It, 13 July 1990, declassified.

to the Baltic States, which the United States never recognized as part of the USSR. Several policy recommendations followed, including taking steps toward establishing a permanent presence in the non-Russian union republics.

The cable also warned that “our arms control negotiations are in serious danger of being a day late and a dollar short,” an indirect suggestion that agreements should be arrived at sooner rather than later or risk being overtaken by other, no less momentous event.³⁵⁵ And speaking of which, the cable’s truly key takeaway was the explicit warning that “[t]ruly dangerous scenarios – ranging from civil war and the loss of control over nuclear weapons to a truncated, belligerent, nuclear-armed Soviet or Russian state – cannot be excluded.”³⁵⁶ Based on these factors, the Embassy recommended that Washington “take a close look at our policy to make certain that it minimizes the probability of extreme outcomes.”³⁵⁷

Saving the Soviet disunion

Just three days later, on 16 July 1990, the Ukrainian Rada (parliament) voted to approve Ukraine’s state sovereignty by declaring that “[t]he Ukrainian SSR, as a sovereign national state, develops within existing boundaries on the basis of the realization of the Ukrainian nation’s inalienable right to self-determination.”³⁵⁸ It also

³⁵⁵ From Embassy Moscow cable 23603, *Looking into the Abyss: The Possible Collapse of the Soviet Union and What We Should Be Doing About It*, 13 July 1990, declassified.

³⁵⁶ From Embassy Moscow cable 23603, *Looking into the Abyss: The Possible Collapse of the Soviet Union and What We Should Be Doing About It*, 13 July 1990, declassified.

³⁵⁷ From Embassy Moscow cable 23603, *Looking into the Abyss: The Possible Collapse of the Soviet Union and What We Should Be Doing About It*, 13 July 1990, declassified.

³⁵⁸ Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 22 July 1990.

defined state sovereignty as “supremacy, independence, fullness and indivisibility of the republic’s authority within the boundaries of its territory, and its independence and equality in external relations.”³⁵⁹

If this consequential development was noticed at the Bush White House, the President hid it well during his 17 July 1990 conversation with Gorbachev.³⁶⁰ Instead, President Bush focused his conversation on the then hot topic of German unification by praising Gorbachev and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl for the way they were handling the issue, adding that he hoped to “make similar progress on CFE and on START in the months ahead” – a clear echo of Embassy Moscow’s thoughts on swiftly concluding arms control agreements.³⁶¹ President Bush also went out of his way to praise Gorbachev for his handling of the just concluded Communist Party Congress, echoing Secretary Baker’s earlier comment that “it is fair to say that all of us want you to succeed.”³⁶²

For his part, Gorbachev told President Bush that “we have reached a stage when we are about to embark on major reforms on the economy and on a new federation between the republics,” thereby underscoring to the President that Gorbachev is the West’s best hope on the reform front and, in parallel, signaling to the President the

³⁵⁹ Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 22 July 1990.

³⁶⁰ As a Department of State summer intern, this dissertation’s author drafted an analysis of the Rada’s action and sent it “upstairs.” There was no feedback, though it is unlikely that an intern would have heard of it in any event.

³⁶¹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, 17 July 1990, The Oval Office, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

³⁶² Memorandum of Telephone Conversation with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, 17 July 1990, The Oval Office, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

Kremlin's preferred outcome in terms of center-periphery relations.³⁶³

Meanwhile, the *Ukrainian Weekly*, the leading English-language newspaper of the North American diaspora, welcomed the Rada's sovereignty declaration and asked rhetorically, but with a clear tinge of hope, whether a declaration of full independence might be far behind.³⁶⁴³⁶⁵ A week later, the *Ukrainian Weekly* took a shot at the Bush White House by citing former Carter Administration National Security Advisor Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski's comment that the aspirations of nations suppressed by the Soviets were bound to resurface and that "[t]his development is to be welcomed, not deplored."³⁶⁶

The paper's editorial board also welcomed Dr. Brzezinski's reminder that "democracy and self-determination are tied together." In this context, the *Ukrainian Weekly* called on the United States to "establish contacts with leaders of Soviet republics engaged in democratization, support movements for democracy through various programs and channel economic assistance to individual republics, particularly those who've proclaimed sovereignty of their laws."

The Bush Administration was in a clearly different place, however. During their 9 September 1990 conversation with Gorbachev and close advisor Yevgeniy Primakov, President Bush and Secretary Baker lamented the difficulty of the creeping diffusion of

³⁶³ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, 17 July 1990, The Oval Office, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

³⁶⁴ "A Step Toward Independence?," Letter From the Editor, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 22 July 1990.

³⁶⁵ *The Ukrainian Weekly* is the oldest English-language newspaper of the Ukrainian diaspora in North America. It was founded in 1933.

³⁶⁶ "Self-Determination, At Last," Letter From the Editor, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 29 July 1990.

power from Moscow to the union republics. Baker even quipped that U.S. companies are “worried that the Republics will come back and say there is no deal.”³⁶⁷ This comment gave Primakov the opening to suggest that “we should not forget the importance of the central government.”³⁶⁸³⁶⁹

Several weeks later, President Bush used the occasion of the 45th session of the UN General Assembly on 1 October to announce that the “U.S.-Soviet relationship is finally beyond containment and confrontation, and now we seek to fulfill the promise of mutually shared understanding. The long twilight struggle that for 45 years has divided Europe, our two nations, and much of the world has come to an end.”³⁷⁰ Seemingly referencing NSD 23, he asserted that the “Soviet Union has taken many dramatic and important steps to participate fully in the community of nations,” going particularly out of his way to praise Moscow’s condemnation of Iraq’s aggression against Kuwait.³⁷¹

President Bush then proceeded to broaden the aperture of his rhetoric by outlining a vision of a “new partnership of nations that transcends the Cold War: a partnership

³⁶⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR, 9 September 1990, Helsinki, Finland, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

³⁶⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR, 9 September 1990, Helsinki, Finland, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

³⁶⁹ Writing years later in a joint book project, Gen. Scowcroft claimed that the Bush Administration “strongly supported self-determination as a matter of principle. As a practical point, however, we were aware of Gorbachev’s vulnerability to the political threat posed by nationalism.” For his part, President Bush recalled he “felt caught between my desire to back self-determination and the reality of the situation. If we exhorted change, our rhetoric might produce a military backlash and set back the cause of freedom throughout the Soviet Union rather than move it forward...I tried to find a balance.” In George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 207.

³⁷⁰ George Bush, Address Before the 45th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/264816>.

³⁷¹ George Bush, Address Before the 45th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/264816>.

based on consultation, cooperation, and collective action, especially through international and regional organizations; a partnership united by principle and the rule of law and supported by an equitable sharing of both cost and commitment; a partnership whose goals are to increase democracy, increase prosperity, increase the peace, and reduce arms.”³⁷² The juxtaposition of this vision and the changes in Soviet behavior made it clear that he saw the USSR as a critical player in this vision.³⁷³

Secretary Baker’s 19 October 1990 address before the American Committee on U.S.-Soviet Relations entitled “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage: Next Steps in Soviet-American Relations” reflected the Bush Administration’s positive assessment of developments under Gorbachev.³⁷⁴ Baker began by recalling that “eighteen months ago, President Bush...told us to move beyond containment.”³⁷⁵ Baker interpreted Bush’s instruction as a directive to “pursue a creative search for points of mutual advantage with the Soviet Union.”³⁷⁶ The core of Baker’s argument was that enough had been done over the course of the preceding year to warrant a shift to what he called “pathways of cooperation” for addressing post-Cold War challenges.³⁷⁷

³⁷² George Bush, Address Before the 45th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/264816>.

³⁷³ It happened to be a week later on 8 October 1990 that George Kennan made an entry in his diary referencing Ukraine, the only time Ukraine is mentioned by name in his diaries: “But much trouble lies ahead in connection with Ukraine, parts of whose population are stridently demanding independence, whereas the country is in a number of respects very poorly fitted for it... anything of that sort would hold great dangers for everyone involved, including ourselves.” It is not clear whether this particular view made it into subsequent policy deliberations. In any event, it would have been quite consistent with the prevailing views in the Bush White House and in Moscow.

³⁷⁴ Secretary Baker was speaking at the Wilson Center upon receiving the George Kennan Award, which he shared with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.

³⁷⁵ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 1.

³⁷⁶ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 1.

³⁷⁷ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 2.

As Exhibit A, Baker asserted that “the changes in Europe over the past year may be the most hopeful ones of this century. Germany has unified, peacefully and freely. The peoples of Warsaw, Budapest, Prague, Sofia, and even Bucharest are struggling to establish democracies and ensure economic liberty.”³⁷⁸ He gave Gorbachev and his own Soviet counterpart Shevardnadze the credit for being “the first [Soviet] leaders to understand that security ultimately rests on the legitimacy that can only be granted by the consent of the governed.”³⁷⁹ This concept apparently did not extend to the USSR itself, where a series of union republics had declared sovereignty earlier in the year; Ukraine did so on 16 July 1990.

Baker did praise the “normalization” of Soviet society, which he characterized as involving “the pluralization of political power, the decentralization of economic life, and the long-overdue recognition of the need for a **voluntary multinational union**.”³⁸⁰³⁸¹ As if to signal U.S. opposition to the USSR’s breakup, he asserted that “Fragmentation equals or exceeds pluralization in many Soviet political debates....Freedom has unleashed age-old ethnic animosities that often shout down the voices of tolerance. This other, darker side of the Soviet revolution concerns all of us.”³⁸²

It is easy to see how this sentiment made its way into Bush’s so-dubbed “Chicken Kiev” speech delivered in the Ukrainian capital the following August and discussed later in this chapter. But Baker went even further by asserting that “we all must be

³⁷⁸ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 2.

³⁷⁹ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 2.

³⁸⁰ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 5.

³⁸¹ Bolded for emphasis.

³⁸² James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 5.

understanding of the hardship a great people is now enduring,” apparently alluding to the “Soviet people” – a moniker that held more meaning for Kremlin’s propagandists than to the societies in question.³⁸³

As if to underscore the Administration’s support for Gorbachev and his policies, Baker asserted that “the danger is that the breakdown of the old Stalinist system will outstrip the development of a new system – one built on universal democratic values and the rule of law.”³⁸⁴ He went on to express “hope for a new Soviet Union” built on such values.³⁸⁵ He also made clear his ideal vision: “A ‘normal’ relationship – possibly even a genuine partnership – may be in reach.”³⁸⁶

The harsh Soviet crackdown in Lithuania in early January 1991 did not appear to appreciably erode the Bush Administration’s support of Gorbachev. During an 11 January 1991 exchange with reporters, the President was asked about whether the crackdown was discussed during his recent call with Gorbachev. President Bush’s response – that there “was not a great discussion of that” – was made worse by his initial follow-on utterings admitting that there was “some discussion of the internal affairs of the Soviet Union.”³⁸⁷ His effort to draw a distinction between the Baltic States and the other nominal union republics of the USSR probably did not earn him many points in any of the pertinent diasporas.

³⁸³ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 5.

³⁸⁴ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 5.

³⁸⁵ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 5.

³⁸⁶ James Baker, “From Points to Pathways of Mutual Advantage,” p. 3.

³⁸⁷ George Bush, Exchange With Reporters on the Telephone Conversation with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265691>.

The President's performance was so underwhelming that the White House felt the need to re-reference an 8 January 1991 statement by Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater that expressed concern about Moscow's decision to send military units into the Baltic States and restated the policy that the United States has never recognized the forcible incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union. Several days later, perhaps spurred on by President Bush's response during the press event, Sen. Donald Riegle (D-MI) introduced a Joint Resolution expressing support for the people of the Baltic States to independence and democracy, calling on the USSR to "immediately cease all hostilities" against the Baltic States, and urged President Bush to "open closer diplomatic ties" with the governments of the Baltic States, paving the way for official U.S. recognition of these governments.³⁸⁸

For his part, President Bush continued to handle Gorbachev with kid gloves, at one point saying in their 18 January conversation that the United States remains "hopeful the Baltic situation can be resolved peacefully. It would really complicate things."³⁸⁹ This conversation took place in the wake of Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's resignation over what he described as a looming dictatorship and which must have been an unwelcomed development in the context of all the praise that the Administration had heaped on Gorbachev's democratization efforts. Though President Bush's 29 January 1991 State of the Union address understandably focused on the then ongoing campaign to force Saddam Hussein's armies out of Kuwait, it also devoted considerable attention to

³⁸⁸ Joint Resolution 42, 102nd Congress, 16 January 1991, www.congress.gov.

³⁸⁹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telephone Conversation with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, 18 January 1991, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

U.S.-Soviet relations, in the process making it clear how much he thought was riding on the relationship:

Our relationship to the Soviet Union is important, not only to us but to the world. That relationship has helped to shape these and other historic changes. But like many other nations, we have been deeply concerned by the violence in the Baltics, and we have communicated that concern to the Soviet leadership. The principle that has guided us is simple: Our objective is to help the Baltic peoples achieve their aspirations, not to punish the Soviet Union. In our recent discussions with the Soviet leadership we have been given representations which, if fulfilled, would result in the withdrawal of some Soviet forces, a reopening of dialog with the Republics, and a move away from violence....I want to continue to build a lasting basis for U.S.-Soviet cooperation – for a more peaceful future for all mankind.³⁹⁰

It was also in this speech that President Bush made it clear where Europe ended – at the putative Soviet border. While referencing the re-unification of Germany and the fall of communist regimes in Central Europe, he announced that “**Europe has become whole and free.**”³⁹¹ This framework clearly left nations like Ukraine and others still subject to Moscow’s domination on the wrong side of the artificial dividing line. As in his previous

³⁹⁰ George Bush, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265956>.

³⁹¹ George Bush, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265956>.

addresses to Congress, the President also spent considerable time on his Administration's domestic priorities, particularly controlling federal spending.

According to Steven Pifer, a former Ambassador to Ukraine, the marching orders given to the U.S. diplomats detailed to the newly opened consulate in Kyiv in February 1991 called on them to "report on developments and gently encourage democracy and market economic reforms but to do nothing that would be seen as encouraging Ukrainian independence."³⁹² They performed their duties admirably, in the process sending back diplomatic reporting that detailed the growing popular sentiment in favor of the reestablishment of a truly sovereign Ukrainian state outside the framework of the USSR.

In the wake of the 17 March 1991 Soviet referendum on the Union Treaty proposed by Gorbachev, which yielded inconclusive results open to interpretation, the so-called center-periphery relations became the subject of several exchanges at State Department daily briefings. During the first such discussion, the Department's spokesperson Richard Boucher, was asked to comment on the results of the referendum. In response, Boucher suggested that the nature of relations between Moscow and the union republics is for the "Soviet people" to decide through a "prolonged political process."³⁹³ But he also asserted that there "clearly is support in many areas of the USSR for preservation of the Union."³⁹⁴

The following day, Boucher stated that the "internal structure" of the Soviet Union is something to be worked out by the people, a response to a question that left

³⁹² Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and The Trident*, p. 14.

³⁹³ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #44, 19 March 1991.

³⁹⁴ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #44, 19 March 1991.

hanging the issue of Ukraine's and others' sovereignty declarations.³⁹⁵ Boucher compounded the problem by adding that "the Soviet Union that we recognized in 1933 had certain borders, and those are the borders that we recognize."³⁹⁶ Apparently, he was unaware of the Soviet annexation of Polish, Czechoslovak, and Romanian territories into the Belarusian and Ukrainian union republics, moves that were contemporaneous with the USSR's absorption of the Baltic States.

Meanwhile, Congress continued to up the ante with the Administration. A Senate Resolution introduced by Sen. Jesse Helms called on the Soviet government to recognize the results of the 31 March 1991 referendum on Georgia's independence, marking yet another escalation in the legislative branch's efforts to weigh in on the Administration's Soviet policy, this time going well beyond the Baltic issue set.³⁹⁷ Nine days later, Sen. Robert Dole (R-KS) introduced a bill that would declare it to be U.S. policy to "support self-determination and independence for all Soviet republics which seek such status."³⁹⁸

According to President Bush's memoirs, he wanted to "avoid the international and domestic political pressure on Gorbachev that immediate U.S. recognition [of the Baltic States] would bring, and the perception that he and his associates were acting under duress....I also did not want the Soviet central leadership to feel backed up against a wall."³⁹⁹ Though this posture applied, first and foremost, to the Baltic States, the President's logic applied to Ukraine and the other union republics in spades. In any

³⁹⁵ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #45, 20 March 1991.

³⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #45, 20 March 1991.

³⁹⁷ Senate Resolution 94, 102nd Congress, 9 April 1991, www.congress.gov.

³⁹⁸ Senate bill 860, 102nd Congress, 18 April 1991, www.congress.gov.

³⁹⁹ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 538.

event, just a week after Sen. Dole's bill was introduced, the CIA wrote that "[e]conomic crisis, independence aspirations, and anti-Communist forces are breaking down the **Soviet empire** and system of governance."⁴⁰⁰ On the issue of Ukraine, the CIA concluded that "in the union's second largest republic with 50 million inhabitants, the drive for sovereignty is picking up speed."⁴⁰¹ On the previous month's referendum, the CIA analysts bluntly stated that it was a "glittering nonevent."⁴⁰²

Perhaps more to the point as far as the Administration's Soviet policy was concerned, the CIA assessed that "Gorbachev has gone from ardent reformer to consolidator."⁴⁰³ It also posited that "[a]s a result of his political meandering and policy failures, Gorbachev's credibility has sunk to near zero."⁴⁰⁴ Essentially, the CIA was warning the White House that the Union was very much in trouble.⁴⁰⁵ While it is not clear what the Bush White House thought of these assessments, what is known is that President Bush doubled down on this relationship with Gorbachev during their next conversation, which took place on 11 May 1991.⁴⁰⁶ After alluding to domestic criticism of this policies toward the USSR, the President told Gorbachev that he remains "firmly

⁴⁰⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Soviet Analysis, 25 April 1991, "The Soviet Cauldron," declassified.

⁴⁰¹ Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Soviet Analysis, 25 April 1991, "The Soviet Cauldron," declassified.

⁴⁰² Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Soviet Analysis, 25 April 1991, "The Soviet Cauldron," declassified.

⁴⁰³ Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Soviet Analysis, 25 April 1991, "The Soviet Cauldron," declassified.

⁴⁰⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Soviet Analysis, 25 April 1991, "The Soviet Cauldron," declassified.

⁴⁰⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Soviet Analysis, 25 April 1991, "The Soviet Cauldron," declassified.

⁴⁰⁶ Former Amb. Pifer also wrote "Most of Washington was slow to pick up the strength of the centrifugal forces gaining momentum within the Soviet Union...It was not clear at the White House that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse, and it leaned toward supporting Gorbachev. See *The Eagle and The Trident*, arguably the best book on U.S.-Ukrainian bilateral relations.

committed to a strong cooperative relationship with you.”⁴⁰⁷ President Bush then took the additional step of referring to Gorbachev as “my friend” and mentioning that he doesn’t like “stories in our press that put you down.”⁴⁰⁸ As if that were not enough, the President then appeared to take a position on what State Department Spokesperson Boucher referred to as the “internal structure” of the Soviet Union by stating that Gorbachev would “get nothing by praise” as long as he continues “down the reform path with measures like the new agreement with the nine republics.”⁴⁰⁹

Toward the end of May, the CIA warned the Bush White House that the “The fate of the political system is directly linked to the current struggle for power. If traditionalists prevail they would seek to preserve the empire and autocratic rule through tougher means....They would adopt a more truculent public posture toward the United States and seek opportunities to assert their influence abroad.”⁴¹⁰ The CIA also pointed out that “[m]ost Russian and Ukrainian reformers have genuinely democratic goals.”⁴¹¹

One of these reformers, relatively speaking, was Boris Yeltsin, who emerged as a major thorn in Gorbachev’s side through his embodiment of the Russian republic’s aspirations relative to the central Soviet authorities. As Russia’s first elected leader,

⁴⁰⁷ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union on May 11, 1991, Camp David, National Security Archive, Gelman Republic, The George Washington University.

⁴⁰⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union on May 11, 1991, Camp David, National Security Archive, Gelman Republic, The George Washington University.

⁴⁰⁹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union on May 11, 1991, Camp David, National Security Archive, Gelman Republic, The George Washington University.

⁴¹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, 23 May 1991, “Gorbachev’s Future,” declassified.

⁴¹¹ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, 23 May 1991, “Gorbachev’s Future,” declassified.

Yeltsin was beginning to assert himself on the world stage, most recently securing a meeting in Washington. It was this meeting that became the focus of the 21 June 1991 conversation between President Bush and Gorbachev. When asked by the latter how the meeting went, the President went out of his way to stress that he made it clear to Yeltsin that Gorbachev is “our man.”⁴¹² President Bush then went out of his way to reassure Gorbachev that the “Yeltsin visit has done nothing to embarrass [the central authorities].”⁴¹³

With the Moscow Summit scheduled for late July, President Bush met with Soviet journalists to share his vision for the relationship, underscore the USSR’s importance in world affairs, and, in the process, try to prop up the floundering Gorbachev. In this context, the President said he would “convey a message of respect, wanting to work with the Soviet Union, discussing all issues including the regional issues where Soviet participation – very important on the Middle East – discussing what we call a new world order where a changing Soviet Union, changed Soviet Union, are an integral part of it.”⁴¹⁴ When asked about U.S. relations with the union republics, President Bush drew a (rather imprecise) parallel with Moscow’s interaction with governors of U.S. states. The unfortunate analogies continued. In response to a question about what he expects the

⁴¹² Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telephone Conversation with Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the Soviet Union, 21 June 1991, declassified 4 September 2007, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁴¹³ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telephone Conversation with Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the Soviet Union, 21 June 1991, declassified 4 September 2007, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁴¹⁴ George Bush, Remarks and an Exchange With Soviet Journalists on the Upcoming Moscow Summit Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265479>.

USSR to look like in 2000, President Bush said he did not want to necessarily suggest the Soviets would have a system akin to the American federal and state governments when predicting that Moscow would “sort out” its relations with the republics.⁴¹⁵

According to Amb. Matlock, “When Secretary Baker came to Moscow in mid-March [1991], we tried to find a way for him to meet with Yeltsin without offending Gorbachev and to recognize the growing importance of the union republics.”⁴¹⁶ While Matlock nominally agreed on the need not to “be drawn into the internal political struggle,” he counseled talking to all parties.⁴¹⁷ Baker’s visit was followed by a presidential visit to the region, which began on 29 July 1991. This was Bush’s first visit to Moscow as president of the United States. According to Matlock, “There were few contentious bilateral issues to discuss...Nevertheless, there was much to talk about. The state Gorbachev headed was visibly crumbling; **these problems haunted both presidents** and dominated most of their private conversation.”⁴¹⁸⁴¹⁹

Moscow was not the only presidential stop in the then USSR, however. A visit to the Ukrainian capital was also on the President’s his itinerary. Matlock recalled that “The idea of Bush’s visit to Kiev arose naturally. During his trip to the United States the previous year, Gorbachev had made stops in Minneapolis-St. Paul and in San Francisco and the bay area. With all the republics becoming more assertive, Bush thought it would

⁴¹⁵ George Bush, Remarks and an Exchange With Soviet Journalists on the Upcoming Moscow Summit Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265479>.

⁴¹⁶ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, pp. 488-489.

⁴¹⁷ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 510.

⁴¹⁸ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, pp. 562-563.

⁴¹⁹ Bolded for emphasis.

be appropriate not only to call on Yeltsin in Moscow but also to stop in at least one of the republic capitals. This would give him a chance to make a speech directed at the non-Russian republics in which he could call attention to their cultural and national distinctiveness.”⁴²⁰ According to Matlock, the choice of Kyiv was “obvious.”⁴²¹ Not only was it the capital of the second-largest republic, but it was also “moving more rapidly toward democracy than many republics in Central Asia, and was free of the strife that had convulsed the Transcaucasus. Furthermore, it was convenient. Bush could stop there for a few hours on August 1 and still get back to Washington the same day.”⁴²²

With President Bush already in the midst of his east-bound travel during which he signed a major, and last arms control agreement with the Soviets, the White House issued the 1991 version of the National Security Strategy of the United States. The document trumpeted the ending of the Cold War and the beginning of a new era with a “fundamental transformation of the global strategic environment.”⁴²³ While referencing reform processes in the USSR, the strategy made no mention of the political and other aspirations of the union republics and even more of the non-Russian peoples. Rather, the document focused on the “revolutionary” impact of the aforementioned reform processes on Soviet foreign policy, praising Moscow for its “new pragmatism.”⁴²⁴ These notions were no doubt reinforced during his meetings in Moscow, where he heard Yeltsin intimate that his “first priority [was] protecting the notion of Russia and the Soviet Union

⁴²⁰ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 564.

⁴²¹ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 565.

⁴²² Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 565.

⁴²³ National Security Strategy of the United States, 1 August 1991, The White House.

⁴²⁴ National Security Strategy of the United States, 1 August 1991, The White House.

being treated as equals in their dealing with the United States.”⁴²⁵ According to the President, Yeltsin “seemed worried about Ukraine’s moves toward independence, which he feared would cripple the Union.”⁴²⁶

Throughout his visit to Kyiv, President Bush guarded against any perception that he was encouraging the Ukrainian authorities to pursue greater autonomy from Moscow.⁴²⁷ At times, it seemed like the President and Rada Chairman Leonid Kravchuk were having two separate conversations. During the 1 August 1991 arrival ceremony, the former responded to the latter’s call for the establishment of direct relations between Ukraine and the United States by stating that the “American people applaud the changes taking place in the Soviet Union.”⁴²⁸ Even while mentioning the importance of ties with Ukraine and the other republics, President Bush stuck to the script and stressed the desire to “retain the strongest possible official relationship with the Gorbachev government.”⁴²⁹ The President brought his remarks to a close with a cryptic statement to the effect that a “new day, **in some ways**, has already arrived.”⁴³⁰

President Bush’s less than encouraging words about Ukraine’s place in the sun led Kravchuk to remind him both about Ukraine’s sovereignty declaration as well as the fact that Ukraine is a founding member of the United Nations. Despite this, President Bush

⁴²⁵ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 512.

⁴²⁶ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 512.

⁴²⁷ As Roman Popadiuk, the first U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, put it later, “there was a tendency to see the region, including Ukraine, through the Moscow prism.” Interview with the author, 7 December 2020.

⁴²⁸ George Bush, Remarks at the Arrival Ceremony in Kiev, Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265632>.

⁴²⁹ George Bush, Remarks at the Arrival Ceremony in Kiev, Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265632>.

⁴³⁰ George Bush, Remarks at the Arrival Ceremony in Kiev, Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265632>.

stiff-armed Kravchuk's request to reciprocate and open a consulate in the United States, once again stressing that Washington will continue to "deal officially with the center" out of his "deep respect for President Gorbachev."⁴³¹

But President Bush's most memorable words, ones that are still referenced in any work pertaining to U.S.-Ukrainian relations, were spoken that day in the hall of the Rada. He began by repeatedly referencing "our nations" without any particular clarity if the second nation in question was the USSR or Ukraine, though smart money has always been on the former.⁴³² In apparent contradiction to his private conversations with Gorbachev, the President proclaimed that "We will support those in the center and the Republics who pursue freedom, democracy, and economic liberty. We will determine our support not on the basis of personalities but on the basis of principles. We cannot tell you how to reform your society. We will not try to pick winners and losers in political competitions between Republics or between Republics and the center. That is your business; that's not the business of the United States of America."⁴³³

Despite these words and his claim that he doesn't "want to sound like I'm lecturing," President Bush proceeded to expand on what the term "freedom" means in his

⁴³¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Ukrainian Supreme Soviet Chairman Leonid Kravchuk, 1 August 1991, Kyiv, declassified, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁴³² George Bush, Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of the Ukraine in Kiev, Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265653>.

⁴³³ George Bush, Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of the Ukraine in Kiev, Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265653>.

view. With that accomplished, he delivered perhaps the most infamous line of this infamous speech:

Yet freedom is not the same as independence. Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred.⁴³⁴

The President completed his speech, which columnist William Safire later dubbed the “Chicken Kiev” speech, by making yet another pitch on behalf of Gorbachev’s efforts to save the Soviet Union.⁴³⁵⁴³⁶ With Soviet Vice President and soon-to-be-coup plotter Gennadiy Yanayev looking on approvingly, President Bush once again contradicted his own admonition against lecturing and telling others how to live by stating that the “**nine-plus-one agreement holds forth the hope that Republics will combine greater autonomy with greater voluntary interaction** – political, social, cultural, economic – rather than pursuing the hopeless course of isolation.”⁴³⁷

Despite the logistical convenience and other favorable factors – or perhaps because of them – “Bush and his staff [were] hypercautious to avoid anything that might

⁴³⁴ George Bush, Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of the Ukraine in Kiev, Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265653>.

⁴³⁵ Later that day while speaking at the Babyn Yar site where the Nazis massacred much of the remaining Jewish population of Kyiv, President Bush appeared to draw a parallel between Abraham Lincoln and Gorbachev. See George Bush, Remarks at the Babi Yar Memorial in Kiev, Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265654>.

⁴³⁶ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 570.

⁴³⁷ George Bush, Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of the Ukraine in Kiev, Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265653>.

embarrass Gorbachev during the Kiev trip. In fact they began to think of ways it could be used to ‘help Gorbachev.’ Speechwriters scoured their drafts with orders to remove anything Gorbachev might find offensive.”⁴³⁸ According to Amb. Matlock, the speechwriters “overdid it.”⁴³⁹ It did not help that “they failed to consult either our embassy in Moscow or our diplomats in Kiev about how the speech might be interpreted.”⁴⁴⁰

In fact, Matlock claims he “saw the [speech] text for the first time as we were flying from Moscow to Kiev....[It] had already been reproduced for distribution to the press.”⁴⁴¹ Matlock acknowledged that he “read it hurriedly and thought it had many strong points ...Nevertheless, several sentences heaping praise on Gorbachev seemed unnecessary and out of place....I also doubted that it was a good idea to endorse specifically the new union treaty as the speech text did.”⁴⁴² Many years later, Matlock also acknowledged that “In general, there was no effort to create an independent Ukraine. We did want a more democratic Soviet Union.”⁴⁴³ He also asserted that “as long as Gorbachev was in power, democratization was more likely to come from Moscow than from Kyiv.”⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁸ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 565.

⁴³⁹ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 566.

⁴⁴⁰ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, pp. 565-566.

⁴⁴¹ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 566.

⁴⁴² Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 566.

⁴⁴³ Email correspondence between Jack Matlock and the author, 20 March 2018.

⁴⁴⁴ Matlock email, 20 March 2018.

President Bush's seemingly tone-deaf visit to Ukraine elicited predictable exasperation from the Ukrainian diaspora community in the United States.⁴⁴⁵ In an 11 August 1991 Letter From the Editor entitled "Educating George," the *Ukrainian Weekly's* editorial board argued that the President all too willingly acted as a "messenger for Gorbachev."⁴⁴⁶ It too expressed incredulity that the White House would confuse a nation of 52 million with U.S. states. Most pointedly, the *Ukrainian Weekly* reminded the President that if he "wants the Ukrainian American vote, he'll have to prove that he has learned some lessons about Ukraine."⁴⁴⁷

This editorial came on the heels of a statement by Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ) on the President's visit to Ukraine, in which the Senator said he was "stunned by some of the comments made by the president in his remarks to the democratically elected members of the Ukrainian Parliament."⁴⁴⁸ Sen. DeConcini went on to label President Bush's comments on "suicidal nationalism" as "inexplicable," particularly in the context of a nation that "has lost millions as a direct result of Moscow's policies."⁴⁵⁰ The Senator also panned the President's "veiled attempts to equate the relationship between the center and republics with American federalism."⁴⁵¹ Brent Scowcroft's subsequent attempt to further explain President Bush's particular posture has centered on what

⁴⁴⁵ According to Brent Scowcroft, critics of the President's speech "got it wrong." However, this explanation – that the message was aimed not directed specifically at Ukraine but "at a number of areas where an upsurge of intolerant nationalism threatened the outbreak of major violence" – does not sound particularly convincing. In George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 516.

⁴⁴⁶ "Educating George," Letter from the Editor, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 11 August 1991.

⁴⁴⁷ "Educating George," Letter from the Editor, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 11 August 1991.

⁴⁴⁸ Statement by Sen. Dennis DeConcini, "For the Record," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 25 August 1991.

⁴⁴⁹ New York Times columnist William Safire labeled the President's address to the Rada the "Chicken Kiev speech."

⁴⁵⁰ Statement by Sen. Dennis DeConcini, "For the Record," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 25 August 1991.

⁴⁵¹ Statement by Sen. Dennis DeConcini, "For the Record," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 25 August 1991.

French President Francois Mitterrand allegedly told the President earlier that year: “Gorbachev has inherited an empire...It is now in revolt. If the Ukraine starts to move, Gorbachev is gone; a military dictatorship would result.”⁴⁵²

Coming to grips with the failed coup and its aftermath

Much of this debate appeared to become academic, at least in the first instance, when the aforementioned Gennadiy Yanayev and other coup plotters, including the Chairman of the KGB and the Minister of Defense, on 19 August 1991 isolated Gorbachev at his dacha in Crimea and took over the reins of power in the Soviet Union. At that day’s State Department Daily Press Briefing, Department Spokesperson Boucher was asked if President Bush’s words in Kyiv signaling strong support for the preservation of the Soviet Union may have played into the coup plotters’ hands. Needless to say, Boucher sidestepped this question.⁴⁵³

Thanks to the coup plotters’ incompetence and the personal bravery exhibited by Yeltsin and others in Moscow and elsewhere, the attempt to turn back the clock failed. Within days, Gorbachev was back in Moscow, but things would never be the same. This new reality even crept into President Bush’s first post-coup attempt conversation with Gorbachev, in which the President clumsily said to Gorbachev “I don’t know what news you’ve been getting, but we’ve been supporting Yeltsin and you as President of the

⁴⁵² George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 223.

⁴⁵³ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #123, 19 August 1991.

USSR.”⁴⁵⁴ Gorbachev’s thanks for President Bush’s principled position was quite generous, as other accounts demonstrate.

When it came to reacting to the August 1991 coup against Gorbachev by Soviet hardliners, Amb. Matlock claimed Bush erred on several fronts. According to Matlock, “[W]hen the president made his first statement to the press, he sounded as if he thought the coup had been successful and he intended to deal with the emergency committee.... Though he was to issue a much sterner statement that evening, the initial statement was damaging, particularly within the Soviet Union.... Throughout the crucial day of August 19, Bush avoided telephoning Yeltsin directly.... Although Bush’s error on the morning of August 19 was corrected... it did illustrate some of the flaws in the White House’s judgment of events in the Soviet Union that plagued Bush’s team throughout Bush’s term.”⁴⁵⁵

In Amb. Matlock’s view, “Although the administration’s understanding of the scene in Moscow gradually came into better focus, Bush still seemed to view the political maneuvers there more in personal terms than in the perspective of interests and policies.”⁴⁵⁶ This hardly seemed like a surprise to Matlock, who opined that “Bush... always seemed just a step behind.... Not having confidence that he could mold the future, he concentrated on managing the present and avoiding the mistakes of the past.”⁴⁵⁷ In this context, Matlock asserted that “If it had been in the power of the United

⁴⁵⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR, 21 August 1991, Kennebunkport, Maine, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁴⁵⁵ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 588.

⁴⁵⁶ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 591.

⁴⁵⁷ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 591.

States and Western Europe to create a democratic union of the Soviet republics, they would have been delighted to do so. But, of course, it was not in their power. So they could only watch with dismay as the empire fell apart.”⁴⁵⁸

With power increasingly shifting away from the Soviet authorities to those at the republican levels, including to Boris Yeltsin, the Daily Press Briefings at the State Department became the site of growing sparring between Richard Boucher and the Department press corps. As before, the initial focus was on the Baltic States and the Bush Administration’s refusal to move forward with recognizing their independence declarations. Boucher’s canned response, a valiant effort to run interference for the Bush White House, typically amounted to stating that “our policy...on recognition is well-known. We...are closely monitoring the rapidly changing situation.”⁴⁵⁹⁴⁶⁰

The situation was indeed developing rapidly, with the Ukrainian parliament declaring full independence on 24 August 1991, followed by Belarus and other union republics. When asked at a 26 August news conference about recognizing Ukraine’s and others’ independence, President Bush responded by saying “We’ve got to wait and see...I don’t know whether it’s a breakup or not,” adding that he doesn’t “want to be a part of making a mistake that might contribute to some kind of anarchy inside the Soviet Union.”⁴⁶¹ By contrast, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, standing next to the President, offered up a much more direct response: “[O]bviously, we will respect the

⁴⁵⁸ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, p. 672.

⁴⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #124, 22 August 1991.

⁴⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #126, 27 August 1991.

⁴⁶¹ George Bush, The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Mulroney of Canada in Kennebunkport, Maine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265970>.

freely expressed wishes of the people of the Ukraine.”⁴⁶² When asked about Defense Secretary Cheney’s comment that he would prefer Yeltsin over Gorbachev, the President responded cryptically that “We’ll deal with who’s there.”⁴⁶³

On the question of who is likely to be there, President Bush may have been receiving some faulty analysis and advice. In a 5 September memorandum to the President, three days after Washington finally extended full diplomatic recognition to the Baltic States and the day after the President chaired a Cabinet meeting on how to respond to the “upheaval” in the Soviet Union, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft clearly assumed that a new union treaty was still forthcoming and that with the exception of Georgia and Moldova, all the other republics, including Ukraine, would join the new arrangement.⁴⁶⁴⁴⁶⁵ In reference to the President’s friend, Mikhail Gorbachev, the memorandum asserted that the Soviet leader “through sheer determination and political skill, [has] carved out a role for himself in the new union.”⁴⁶⁶

On the matter of Ukraine, the document was quite explicit and remarkably wrong: Ukraine is the wild card in this. Both Yeltsin and Gorbachev feel that Ukraine must stay in the Union. It is a huge economy tightly integrated with Russia, and an abrupt separation would be disastrous. Kravchuk may

⁴⁶² George Bush, The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Mulroney of Canada in Kennebunkport, Maine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265970>.

⁴⁶³ George Bush, The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Mulroney of Canada in Kennebunkport, Maine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265970>.

⁴⁶⁴ The U.S. recognition of the Baltic States was preceded by some three dozen other countries.

⁴⁶⁵ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 540.

⁴⁶⁶ Memorandum for the President, from Brent Scowcroft, Developments in the USSR, 5 September 1991, declassified 26 April 2012.

agree, but his political situation is tenuous, and Ukrainian independence is the one cause uniting virtually all political factions in that republic. It is likely in the end that Kravchuk will not win the key December elections, but that Ukraine will stay in the union, primarily as a way to try to control Russia.⁴⁶⁷

According to Brent Scowcroft's memoirs, Secretary of Defense Cheney was in a minority when he called for a more "aggressive" approach to supporting the breakup of the USSR, arguing that the "voluntary breakup of the Soviet Union is in our interest."⁴⁶⁸ Secretary Cheney also predicted (correctly) that Ukraine would not join the new Union favored by Gorbachev. His "aggressive" approach consisted initially of moving forward with establishing U.S. consulates in all the republics. Secretary Cheney dismissed as "an example of old thinking" Gen. Scowcroft's counter that U.S. aid programs were premised on a strong center.⁴⁶⁹ For his part, Secretary Baker argued in favor of propping up the center while considering "how to react to the trend toward the independence of the republics."⁴⁷⁰ As President Bush admitted later, his preference was for the republics having "some relationship with one another through a center."⁴⁷¹

Vice President Cheney's memoirs, however, attempt to skirt where President Bush stood on the issue, but make it clear that both Secretary Baker and Gen. Scowcroft "were both more cautious, arguing that we did not necessarily want to see the breakup of

⁴⁶⁷ Memorandum for the President, from Brent Scowcroft, Developments in the USSR, 5 September 1991, declassified 26 April 2012.

⁴⁶⁸ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 541.

⁴⁶⁹ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 541.

⁴⁷⁰ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 541.

⁴⁷¹ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 541.

the Soviet Union out of concern for the instability that might generate.”⁴⁷² In term of his own motivations, Vice President Cheney explained that he thought the U.S. Government “should do everything possible to push as hard as we could to lessen Moscow’s control over the former republics as a matter of principle and because “this was a case where our moral interests and our strategic interests were clearly aligned.”⁴⁷³

The Vice President added that a bold policy initiative appeared necessary “to cement the downfall of the Soviet Union” and to be “firmly and clearly” identified with the pro-democracy forces inside the Soviet Union.⁴⁷⁴ On a personal level, Vice President Cheney added that “it was breathtaking to think that after so many years of facing down the Soviet nuclear threat and countering their efforts to subjugate people all over the world, we might be watching the Soviet Union disappear peacefully.”⁴⁷⁵

With real-world momentum for independence recognition building, Secretary Baker announced, also on 5 September, the five principles on which the United States would make such decisions. These were self-determination, respect for existing borders, support for democracy, safeguarding of human rights, and respect for international law. These parameters gained immediate prominence, leading one journalist to ask at the State Department’s 5 September Daily Press Briefing if there was any precedent for such conditionality in U.S. diplomatic history. To give him credit, Richard Boucher admitted

⁴⁷² Dick Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 232.

⁴⁷³ Dick Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 232.

⁴⁷⁴ Dick Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 232.

⁴⁷⁵ Dick Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 231.

that he has “no idea how many times we’ve announced principles [for U.S. recognition].”⁴⁷⁶

Boucher’s deputy, Margaret Tutwiler, did much worse the next day. When asked whether during an upcoming trip to the region Secretary Baker’s interlocutors – “the Defense Minister, the KGB chief, and so on” – have any credible basis to speak or make commitments on behalf of the various peoples living in the USSR, Tutwiler responded by stating “I don’t think that he has any reason to believe otherwise.”⁴⁷⁷ Meanwhile, the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff was busy drafting a memorandum laying out “a framework for dealing with the likely fragmentation of the Soviet Union.”⁴⁷⁸

For its part, the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* kept hammering away at the Bush Administration, asking in an 8 September Letter from the Editor “Who... was calling the shots in U.S. foreign policy [toward the region]?” The newspaper’s answer: “apparently it was Mikhail Gorbachev.” In this context, the editorial board panned the President’s desire to “avoid doing anything that would hasten the demise of the USSR,” including recognizing the independence of the other captive nations. The newspaper predicted, accurately, that the United States will once again “bring up the rear” on this issue as well.⁴⁷⁹

Given these perceptions, the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States “increased its push for diplomatic recognition of Ukraine in the fall.”⁴⁸⁰ This effort included generating

⁴⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #129, 5 September 1991.

⁴⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #130, 6 September 1991.

⁴⁷⁸ Bill Burns, *The Back Channel*, p 76.

⁴⁷⁹ “Who’s in Charge?,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 8 September 1991.

⁴⁸⁰ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 17.

“letters and petitions from across the country targeted at building Congressional interest in and support for Ukraine.” And it appears to have paid off. Sen. Mitchell’s 10 September intervention argued that the “reversal of the coup [against Gorbachev] now allows us to move swiftly, with renewed vigor, to help strengthen and make irreversible the forces of change in **what was once** the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”⁴⁸¹

With a republic-wide referendum on Ukraine’s independence now scheduled for 1 December 1991, in parallel with the first ever popular presidential election, the diaspora community redoubled its efforts to secure U.S. recognition of Ukraine. In its 15 September 1991 edition, the *Ukrainian Weekly* argued that “Only independence can guarantee freedom and democracy for all the people of Ukraine, regardless of their ethnic, religious or other backgrounds.”⁴⁸² The newspaper endorsed diaspora demonstrations planned for 22 September in Washington, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

The Ukrainian cause received a boost from Sen. DeConcini’s introduction on 17 September of a joint resolution calling on the Bush White House to support the “struggle of the Armenian people to achieve freedom and independence.”⁴⁸³ The State Department’s Richard Boucher called the Armenian referendum on independence “noteworthy.” He also welcomed the “results of the referendum as the free and democratic expression of the Armenian people,” but said nothing about U.S. recognition.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Congressional Record, 102nd Congress, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r102:21:./temp/~r102NhlZSf>.

⁴⁸² “In Unity and Solidarity Toward Ukraine’s Independence,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 15 September 1991.

⁴⁸³ Joint Resolution 195, 102nd Congress, 17 September 1991, www.congress.gov.

⁴⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #140, 23 September 1991.

Meanwhile, President Bush continued to warn about what may happen if the USSR collapsed, this time during his 23 September speech at the 46th session of the UN General Assembly. Though this was hardly the exact intent, his words seemed to present a spirited defense of communism, at one point referring to it as an ideology that “suspended ancient disputes, and...suppressed ethnic rivalries, nationalist aspirations, and old prejudices. As it has dissolved, suspended hatreds have sprung to life.”⁴⁸⁵

That the President put “nationalist aspirations” in the same category as disputes, rivalries, and prejudices spoke volumes about his views of the creeping marginalization of the central authorities in Moscow. In a growing sign of some U.S. acceptance of the on-the-ground transference occurring between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the President praised both for standing up to the coup plotters.

This largess did not appear to apply to Kravchuk, and not without basis. Unlike Yeltsin, Kravchuk was much more cautious in standing up to the coup plotters, letting Yeltsin absorb the risk in Moscow – and the fame that came with success – while keeping his own options open. Nevertheless, the 25 September statement by Marlin Fitzwater on the outcome of the President’s meeting with Kravchuk gave little cause for Ukrainians – and the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States – to celebrate. Without referencing Ukrainian aspirations, the statement expressed “the administration’s firm support for the efforts underway **in the Soviet Union** to build democracy, market economic reform, and

⁴⁸⁵ George Bush, Address to the 46th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266506>.

the rule of law.”⁴⁸⁶⁴⁸⁷ Kravchuk’s request for “direct diplomatic relations” with the United States went essentially unanswered.⁴⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the *Ukrainian Weekly* editorial board used its Letter From the Editor to suggest that Washington continued to ignore the republics and their leaderships at its own risk.⁴⁸⁹ Thanks in large part to the diaspora’s efforts, this sentiment appeared to have a committed cohort of adherents on Capitol Hill. Sen. DeConcini’s draft concurrent resolution, which he introduced on 1 October, called on President Bush to recognize Ukraine’s independence and establish diplomatic relations in the event the 1 December referendum on independence returns an affirmative result.⁴⁹⁰

Meanwhile, the State Department continued to treat any manifestation of Ukraine’s proclaimed independence as a serious risk to regional peace and stability, with Ukraine’s plans to have its own military described by Richard Boucher as running “counter to the efforts of all the nations of Europe and North America to reduce military forces and enhance stability.”⁴⁹¹ He added that the United States does not believe “any useful purpose would be served by the creation of large independent armies.”⁴⁹² The State Department had not expressed any concerns about earlier statements from Russian

⁴⁸⁶ George Bush, Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the President's Meeting With Chairman Leonid M. Kravchuk of the Supreme Rada of the Republic of the Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266586>.

⁴⁸⁷ Bolded for emphasis.

⁴⁸⁸ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 17.

⁴⁸⁹ “Ignore the Republics at Your Own Risk,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 29 September 1991.

⁴⁹⁰ Concurrent Resolution #65, 102nd Congress, 1 October 1991, www.congress.gov.

⁴⁹¹ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #161, 23 October 1991.

⁴⁹² U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #161, 23 October 1991.

officials that Russia's borders with neighboring countries, including Ukraine, may have to be adjusted.

During their 29 October dinner on the eve of the Middle East peace conference in Madrid, Presidents Bush and Gorbachev, Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzales, and Spanish monarch Juan Carlos discussed a range of international topics. Once Gorbachev recommitted to the "Union of Sovereign States," the new USSR based on the draft union treaty, becoming a "powerful positive factor in the international arena" and playing a "constructive role in the world," those assembled heaped praise on Gorbachev, in rapid succession.⁴⁹³

Prime Minister Gonzales asserted that Europe and the international community writ large needed the Union to be preserved, arguing that without the "Union of Sovereign States" as the "second circle," Europe with only the EU would be unstable.⁴⁹⁴ Walking through this rather large opening, Gorbachev, in turn, asserted that "chaos and constant instability in our country will create a threat to everybody."⁴⁹⁵ This is why, he continued, a Union "with the kind of center [the republics] need, that would serve a single economic space, ensure defense with unified armed forces, ensure a coordinated

⁴⁹³ Record of Dinner Conversation between Gorbachev, Bush, Gonzales and King Juan Carlos of Spain, 29 October 1991, declassified, The Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.

⁴⁹⁴ Record of Dinner Conversation between Gorbachev, Bush, Gonzales and King Juan Carlos of Spain, 29 October 1991, declassified, The Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.

⁴⁹⁵ Record of Dinner Conversation between Gorbachev, Bush, Gonzales and King Juan Carlos of Spain, 29 October 1991, declassified, The Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.

foreign policy...a single power grid, transportation and communications, ecology, etc.” is something he is committed to preserving.⁴⁹⁶

For his part, President Bush stated that “we are all concerned about this issue” and proceeded to ask Gorbachev about his chances of success, his relations with Yeltsin, and where Ukraine stood on these dynamics.⁴⁹⁷ He then attempted to reassure Gorbachev that he will continue to emphasize the need for cooperation between Moscow and the republics.⁴⁹⁸ The President also told Gorbachev that his meetings with republican leaders like Kravchuk and Kyrgyzstani President Askar Akayev are not meant to “undermine your positions.”⁴⁹⁹ Encouraged by President Bush’s words, Gorbachev announced that he is “firmly convinced of one thing – it is not possible to tear Ukraine and Russia apart – they will be together.”⁵⁰⁰ Gonzales’s follow-on comment that it is “impossible to tear Russia from Russia, it began in Kiev” did not elicit any pushback from the President.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁶ Record of Dinner Conversation between Gorbachev, Bush, Gonzales and King Juan Carlos of Spain, 29 October 1991, declassified, The Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.

⁴⁹⁷ Record of Dinner Conversation between Gorbachev, Bush, Gonzales and King Juan Carlos of Spain, 29 October 1991, declassified, The Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.

⁴⁹⁸ Earlier that day during his news conference with Gorbachev, President Bush said he has no plans to change the way he interacts with Gorbachev and the leaders of the republics. See George Bush, The President's News Conference With President Gorbachev of the Soviet Union in Madrid, Spain Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266014>.

⁴⁹⁹ Record of Dinner Conversation between Gorbachev, Bush, Gonzales and King Juan Carlos of Spain, 29 October 1991, declassified, The Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.

⁵⁰⁰ Record of Dinner Conversation between Gorbachev, Bush, Gonzales and King Juan Carlos of Spain, 29 October 1991, declassified, The Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.

⁵⁰¹ Record of Dinner Conversation between Gorbachev, Bush, Gonzales and King Juan Carlos of Spain, 29 October 1991, declassified, The Gorbachev Foundation Archive, Fond 1, Opis 1, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.

This should not come as a surprise in general, but especially in view of what transpired during the President's bilateral meeting with Gorbachev, also on 29 October. In response to Gorbachev's outright dismissiveness of the republics' independence declarations and frank description of what he is trying to establish – “a unitary state, not a free commonwealth” – President Bush stated “you know my position has been...support for you.”⁵⁰² And in a moment of particular frankness, the President disclosed that the speech he gave to the Rada in Kyiv, which was “sharply criticized,” was driven specifically by this consideration and not by the need to talk about freedom and democracy per se.

Two weeks later, under the tantalizing title of “Bush in 1992?,” the *Ukrainian Weekly* called on the President to “forget the Soviet Union. Little remains of it, apart from Mikhail Gorbachev, a leader without a country.”⁵⁰³ The editorial board also reminded President Bush of his 1982 speech to the Ukrainian National Association, in which he pledged to be a “champion of freedom and democracy for all.”⁵⁰⁴ And as a warning, the newspaper suggested that Democratic Sen. Harris Walford's victory over former Attorney General Dick Thornburgh in a recent election “is a sign of the times.”⁵⁰⁵

The Bush Administration did not appear to be listening, however. Just four days later, the State Department announced the U.S. Government will be hosting a team of Soviet officials for the inaugural meeting of the newly formed U.S.-Soviet working group

⁵⁰² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with President Gorbachev of the USSR, 29 October 1991, Madrid, Spain, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University, nsarchiv@gwu.edu.

⁵⁰³ “Bush in 1992?,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 10 November 1991.

⁵⁰⁴ “Bush in 1992?,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 10 November 1991.

⁵⁰⁵ “Bush in 1992?,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 10 November 1991.

on the future security agenda. When queried about the working group's specific charge, Richard Boucher said it would be "future-oriented" and would strive to "promote greater mutual understanding of the rapidly changing international security environment."⁵⁰⁶

The Soviet Union had about a month and a half to live.

While the Bush White House continued to staunchly defend Gorbachev and the USSR in public, the U.S. government was making adjustments in response to developments on the ground. The State Department's guidance for the 27 November North Atlantic Council session and its likely focus on the 1 December independence referendum in Ukraine is perhaps the best available example of this phenomenon. The guidance stated that it is "clear that we are in a transition period between the old Soviet order and new institutions" and, as a result, the U.S. Government intends to "build stronger relationships with the Russian, Ukrainian and other reform republics during this period" while continuing to work with "effective organs of the center."⁵⁰⁷

On Ukraine, the guidance asserted that the "question for us is not whether to recognize Ukraine, but how and when."⁵⁰⁸ In a nod to the White House, the document acknowledged that "we must be careful that our response does not contribute to accelerated disintegration and disorder in the **former** USSR."⁵⁰⁹⁵¹⁰⁵¹¹ The guidance

⁵⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State Daily Press Briefing #168, 14 November 1991.

⁵⁰⁷ Draft Cable to USNATO for November 27 NAC, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵⁰⁸ Draft Cable to USNATO for November 27 NAC, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵⁰⁹ Draft Cable to USNATO for November 27 NAC, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵¹⁰ As far as the author is aware, this may have been the first use of the word "former" in reference to the USSR in a U.S. Government document.

⁵¹¹ Bolded for emphasis.

declared that the United States “will respect the will of the Ukrainian people and has no intention of standing in the way of Ukrainian independence.”⁵¹² However, the guidance also poured some cold water on the enterprise as a whole by underscoring the need to assess the “reactions of the Russian and center governments.”⁵¹³ Finally, the guidance committed the United States to making a public statement which “will voice support for the wishes of the Ukrainian people but stop short of a definitive statement on recognition.”⁵¹⁴

This bottom line was based on a series of high-level conversations about whether and how to recognize Ukraine when the time comes. According to Secretary Baker’s memoirs, “the Defense Department was the most forward leaning, starting at the top with Dick Cheney. Dick wanted to see the Soviet Union dismantled, felt Ukraine was key, and, moreover, believed that by getting in ‘on the ground floor’ with recognition, the Ukrainian leadership would be more inclined to a positive relationship with us.”⁵¹⁵ Secretary Baker “took a slightly different tack,” as he put it diplomatically, with assuring a peaceful dismantlement of the USSR the primary concern.⁵¹⁶⁵¹⁷

⁵¹² Draft Cable to USNATO for November 27 NAC, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵¹³ Draft Cable to USNATO for November 27 NAC, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵¹⁴ Draft Cable to USNATO for November 27 NAC, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵¹⁵ James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 560.

⁵¹⁶ James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 560.

⁵¹⁷ According to another account, “As the referendum approached, Secretary of Defense Cheney and his aides favored being as forward leaning as possible. Pentagon officials wanted a bold statement from the president immediately following the referendum and argued that Ukrainian commitments to date were sufficient grounds to extend recognition.” See James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 35.

Meanwhile, President Bush continued to build his relationship with Yeltsin, which he tried to do without detriment to Gorbachev, and, in effect, at Ukraine's expense. In a phone conversation with Boris Yeltsin on 29 November, the President went out of his way to underscore that he did not want there to be any differences between the United States and the newly emerging Russian government on Ukraine. President Bush almost sounded apologetic when he told Yeltsin "I hope you understand that as a democratic nation, we must support the will of the Ukrainian people."⁵¹⁸

In a similar vein, the President also asserted that "it would be a mistake to take actions that would appear to resist, or somehow punish through economic sanctions, this vote for independence," something that Yeltsin did not suggest in his remarks.⁵¹⁹

Consistent with the earlier State Department guidance, President Bush assured Yeltsin that the U.S. statement on the results of the Ukrainian referendum will note "our desire to work closely with you and President Gorbachev," and will not signify U.S. recognition of Ukraine."⁵²⁰ The President kept his word.⁵²¹

Just two days prior to the Bush-Yeltsin conversation, a group of diaspora representatives met with President Bush to press for speedy recognition, in anticipation of a strong pro-independence vote.⁵²² They were not disappointed as Ukrainians

⁵¹⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of Republic of Russia, 30 November 1991, Camp David, declassified 22 February 2008.

⁵¹⁹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of Republic of Russia, 30 November 1991, Camp David, declassified 22 February 2008.

⁵²⁰ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of Republic of Russia, 30 November 1991, Camp David, declassified 22 February 2008.

⁵²¹ The four-page statement issued by the White House after the referendum results came in made it clear that while the United States congratulates Ukraine on the vote, Washington was not yet prepared to extend formal diplomatic recognition.

⁵²² According to Secretary Baker, the diaspora representatives put "a very forward-leaning spin" on the conversation with the President as they "leaked" the proceedings to the press. In Secretary Baker's view,

overwhelmingly voted in support of the Rada independence declaration and elected Leonid Marchuk as the first president of the modern Ukrainian state. More than any other event that took place outside Moscow, this outcome sealed the USSR's demise. As Ambassador Pifer put it, "A serious argument within the U.S. Government for sticking with Gorbachev was no longer possible."⁵²³

With a positive vote in the bag, the *Ukrainian Weekly* reminded its readers that "the work of the Ukrainian American community is far from over. This is not a time for Ukrainian Americans to rest on their laurels. This pressure for the United States to recognize Ukraine must be kept up."⁵²⁴ The newspaper's editorial board may have already been aware of what the President told the diaspora leaders, including his admission that "the U.S. Government was engaged in a balancing act – every time he called Gorbachev, he placed a call to Yeltsin – and did not want to complicate things."⁵²⁵ Ukraine was not even in the picture.

President Bush faithfully stuck to the script during his 3 December conversation with newly elected President Kravchuk, whom he congratulated on his election and on the "overwhelming results of the referendum."⁵²⁶ All the President was willing to extend to Ukraine at the time is a visit by Assistant Secretary of State for Europe Thomas Niles to be followed by a visit by Secretary Baker. In the meantime, President Bush made it

this lead to "the nuances of our position" being lost in the resulting press coverage. In James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 561.

⁵²³ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 18.

⁵²⁴ "Keep the Pressure On," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 1 December 1991.

⁵²⁵ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 18.

⁵²⁶ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine on December 3, 1991, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

clear that “implementing independence will require resolution of some complex issues between Ukraine, Russia – on economics, defense, and related issues. Obviously you want a peaceful resolution of those issues.”⁵²⁷ There is no evidence that the same was required of Moscow as part of Washington’s recognition of post-Soviet Russia’s independence.

President Bush paid little attention to Kravchuk’s reference to an upcoming meeting with Yeltsin and Belarusian leader Stanislau Shushkevich in Belarus to “discuss all issues of our policy.”⁵²⁸ Trying to get off the phone as quickly as possible, the President only managed to utter “good luck” to Kravchuk’s announcement that his inauguration would take place that Thursday.⁵²⁹ Two days later President Bush made it clear why he had trouble focusing on what Kravchuk was saying. When asked during a 5 December 1991 news conference if the USSR exists in his mind, the President responded in the affirmative, only adding that the USSR was in the “throes of evolution now.”⁵³⁰

The independence homestretch

The 8 December 1991 trilateral meeting in Belarus turned out to be quite consequential, including in terms of Washington’s policy toward the region, including

⁵²⁷ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine on December 3, 1991, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵²⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine on December 3, 1991, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵²⁹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine on December 3, 1991, declassified, National Security Archives, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵³⁰ George Bush, The President’s News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265830>.

Ukraine, as became clear during the President's phone call with an excited Boris Yeltsin. In response to the latter's initial announcement that he, Kravchuk and Shushkevich had decided to create a commonwealth of independent states to replace the USSR and do away with the central authorities, including Gorbachev, and a long-winded explanation of what this commonwealth would entail, President Bush uttered exactly eight words: "I see," "Okay," "I see," and "Boris, are you."⁵³¹ Perhaps even more remarkable was Yeltsin's admission that Gorbachev was not aware of these proceedings and that they wanted the President to know first, a clear effort to get his buy-in before the inevitable confrontation with Gorbachev.

Meanwhile, the State Department was having its own communication challenges. In response to a question about whether the United States recognized the newly created commonwealth of independent states, Margaret Tutwiler attempted to clarify the situation by stating "We don't, as far as I know...not recognize it."⁵³² There was considerably more clarity in the 9 December statement by the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), which questioned the legality of the new commonwealth arrangement in the context of the 16 July 1990 sovereignty declaration, the 24 August 1991 independence declaration, and the 1 December 1991 referendum confirming the independence declaration with 90 percent of the vote. The UCCA appealed to President Bush to establish bilateral relations with Ukraine "without delay."⁵³³

⁵³¹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Yeltsin of the Republic of Russia, 8 December 1991, declassified 23 September 2008, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

⁵³² U.S. Department of State Daily Press Briefing #183, 9 December 1991.

⁵³³ Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, Statement, 9 December 1991.

It is not clear what direct impact appeals like UCCA's had, but in combination with internal USG analyses and, most importantly, developments on the ground, they appear to have convinced the Bush White House that neither Gorbachev nor the USSR could be saved. In this regard, Secretary Baker's 12 December 1991 speech at Princeton amounted to a somewhat of a watershed moment.⁵³⁴ Without batting an eye, Secretary Baker spoke of the USSR's collapse as a *fait accompli* and expressed "hope for a better future across the former Soviet Union."⁵³⁵

To soften the blow that Gorbachev would inevitably feel when reading this line, Secretary Baker asserted that "these achievements were possible primarily because of one man, Mikhail Gorbachev."⁵³⁶ As if to underscore that the Soviet leader was on the cusp of leaving the political scene, he added that Gorbachev's "place in history is secure."⁵³⁷ And in terms of the USSR itself, Secretary Baker offered up some revisionist analysis on behalf of the Bush Administration, arguing that "by early August of this year, the all-powerful Stalinist state was well on its way to dissolution."⁵³⁸ This was true enough, but it did not reflect the wishful thinking of the Bush White House throughout the second half of 1991.

⁵³⁴ According to Secretary Baker's memoirs, his approach to the speech "was not only a decisive departure from containment, but also from our theretofore correct emphasis on Gorbachev....Now it was obvious that a new era was beginning." In James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 562.

⁵³⁵ James Baker, speech at Princeton, "America and the Post-Coup Soviet Union," 12 December 1991, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?23366-1/post-coup-soviet-union>.

⁵³⁶ James Baker, speech at Princeton, "America and the Post-Coup Soviet Union," 12 December 1991, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?23366-1/post-coup-soviet-union>.

⁵³⁷ James Baker, speech at Princeton, "America and the Post-Coup Soviet Union," 12 December 1991, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?23366-1/post-coup-soviet-union>.

⁵³⁸ James Baker, speech at Princeton, "America and the Post-Coup Soviet Union," 12 December 1991, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?23366-1/post-coup-soviet-union>.

Whatever observers thought of Secretary Baker's Princeton speech, its main thrust made for an uncharacteristically uncomfortable 13 December phone conversation between President Bush and Gorbachev. In anticipation of a negative reaction from Gorbachev, President Bush opened the exchange by stating that he has been "thinking of [Gorbachev] professionally and personally."⁵³⁹ Gorbachev was not assuaged. He fired a direct broadside by stating bluntly that "Jim Baker's Princeton speech should not have been made, especially the point that the USSR had ceased to exist," forcing the President to state that he accepts Gorbachev's criticism.⁵⁴⁰ President Bush also promised Gorbachev to pass along the latter's "constructive suggestion" to Secretary Baker.⁵⁴¹ That he may have done, but it changed little. On 21 December, leaders of 11 of the 12 union republics (minus Georgia) endorsed the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States to replace the USSR during a meeting in Almaty, the Kazakhstani capital.⁵⁴²

Meanwhile, there was yet another sign that the Bush White House had finally accepted the inevitable: the title of this Memorandum of Telephone Conversation was recorded as "Telephone Conversation with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the FSU" – as in the Former Soviet Union.⁵⁴³ That same day, President Bush appeared to complete

⁵³⁹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telephone Conversation with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the FSU, 13 December 1991, declassified.

⁵⁴⁰ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telephone Conversation with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the FSU, 13 December 1991, declassified.

⁵⁴¹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telephone Conversation with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the FSU, 13 December 1991, declassified.

⁵⁴² Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 18.

⁵⁴³ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telephone Conversation with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the FSU, 13 December 1991, declassified.

the transference from Gorbachev to Yeltsin as the focal point of U.S. policy in the region when he spoke with the latter about the easing out of Gorbachev.⁵⁴⁴ Two days later, the *Ukrainian Weekly* noted that Ukraine's independence referendum was the factor that "brought about the long-overdue conclusion to the bittersweet love affair between the United States and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev."⁵⁴⁵ The editorial ended with a short but powerful sentence: "The Soviet Union is no more."⁵⁴⁶

The *Ukrainian Weekly* was no doubt correct for most intents and purposes, but the USSR's collapse still did not necessarily signify the speedy U.S. recognition of Ukraine and the other former republics. When asked by the press about U.S. plans for recognition in view of the 19 December 1991 Swedish recognition of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, President Bush gave a rambling, defensive response:

We are taking these things under advisement...I've already indicated that as these people self-determine, we are very flexible and open about the question of recognition. But we also want to see adherence to these principles that I've outlined. So, I can't give you an exact date. But that's going to be right on the front line of the agenda to discuss with Secretary Baker, whom I talked to just a few minutes ago. And he filled me in a little on this question of his talks on all of these different Republics. But I need to sit down with him, with General Scowcroft and others, and then we will

⁵⁴⁴ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telephone Conversation with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia, 13 December 1991, declassified 22 February 2008.

⁵⁴⁵ "USSR: R.I.P.," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 15 December 1991.

⁵⁴⁶ "USSR: R.I.P.," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 15 December 1991.

be talking more about timing...[A]s I've indicated, there will be, I mentioned this about the Ukraine, but there are certain things that have to be resolved. We're not trying to determine with finality how that area is going to look.⁵⁴⁷⁵⁴⁸

Four days later, President Bush had a follow-on conversation with Boris Yeltsin in which the former congratulated the latter on the way he had “led the peaceful evolution of the commonwealth.”⁵⁴⁹ The President also told Yeltsin he was “pleased by the way the nuclear question has been handled.”⁵⁵⁰ Finally, President Bush offered Yeltsin some “personal advice.”⁵⁵¹ In particular, he expressed concern about Yeltsin’s heavy work and travel schedule” and asked the Russian leader to “[p]lease take care of your health.”⁵⁵² The President later returned to the topic and added that he wishes Yeltsin well and that the latter should not “get too tired.”⁵⁵³ The substitution of Gorbachev with Yeltsin was essentially complete. Russia was not the USSR, but Moscow was still Moscow. Ukraine remained unrecognized.⁵⁵⁴

President Bush’s farewell conversation with Gorbachev on the day that the USSR formally ceased to exist encapsulated the Bush Administration’s approach to the region.

⁵⁴⁷ George Bush, The President’s News Conference With Foreign Correspondents Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266225>.

⁵⁴⁸ Gen. Scowcroft admitted later that it was “painful to watch Yeltsin rip the Soviet Union brick by brick away from Gorbachev. See George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 556.

⁵⁴⁹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, 23 December 1991, declassified 23 September 2008.

⁵⁵⁰ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, 23 December 1991, declassified 23 September 2008.

⁵⁵¹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, 23 December 1991, declassified 23 September 2008.

⁵⁵² Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, 23 December 1991, declassified 23 September 2008.

⁵⁵³ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, 23 December 1991, declassified 23 September 2008.

⁵⁵⁴ Years later, President Bush claimed he “felt a tremendous charge as I watched the final breakup of the Soviet Union. I was pleased to watch freedom and self-determination prevail as one republic after another gained its independence.” See George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 564.

The President promised Gorbachev to “stay involved, particularly with the Russian republic.”⁵⁵⁵ A similar mix of on-the-fly revisionism and fixation on Russia was evident in President Bush’s 25 December 1991 address to the Nation in which the President welcomed the “historic and revolutionary transformation of a totalitarian dictatorship, the Soviet Union, and the liberation of its peoples” and called the outcome “a victory for the moral force of our values.”⁵⁵⁶ He also hailed the emergence of independent nations “out of the wreckage of the Soviet empire,” a term he had never previously used in reference to the USSR itself.⁵⁵⁷

This was also the speech that set a precedent across Administrations of using the phrase “Russia and the other Republics,” indicating that Moscow would remain in a class of its own despite the USSR’s collapse.⁵⁵⁸ And speaking of the Soviet Union’s collapse, President Bush proclaimed that it “clearly serve[s] our national interest,” despite the Administration’s previous posture to the contrary.⁵⁵⁹ To adjust the record, the Bush Administration also sent a letter to the Ukrainian diaspora on the occasion of the 72nd anniversary of the proclamation of Ukraine’s independence on 22 January 1920, in which

⁵⁵⁵ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the Soviet Union, 25 December 1991, Camp David, declassified 23 September 2008.

⁵⁵⁶ George Bush, Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266243>.

⁵⁵⁷ George Bush, Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266243>.

⁵⁵⁸ George Bush, Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266243>.

⁵⁵⁹ George Bush, Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266243>.

it congratulated Ukrainians on achieving the “long awaited goal of independence.”⁵⁶⁰

Unfortunately, the letter – no doubt inadvertently – used a Soviet-era phrase – “build[ing] a brighter future” – in reference to Ukraine’s post-Soviet development.⁵⁶¹

It is indeed noteworthy that the United States did not recognize Ukraine’s independence until 25 December 1991, when Gorbachev conceded and the USSR was formally dissolved.⁵⁶² This fact is consistent with the notion that Washington was quite reluctant to take any step that would be seen as sounding the death knell of the Soviet Union, a notion that flies in the face of Russian President Putin’s false narrative about the West’s single-minded commitment to the destruction of the USSR. In the end, Ukraine rejoined the formal community of nations largely despite the Administration’s efforts and not because of them.

The Moscow factor’s presence and its impact

Based on the available information, the Moscow factor was present, often quite explicitly, in the question of U.S. policy relating to Ukraine’s independence, both directly and, more often, indirectly, particularly in the context of Washington’s approach to its perceived late-Soviet and Russian equities. While the Moscow factor on occasion played a positive role in terms of Ukraine, such instances were limited to the Reagan Administration and were, therefore, rather infrequent in the overall scope of this chapter.

⁵⁶⁰ George Bush, Letter to the Ukrainian Diaspora, The White House, 22 January 1992.

⁵⁶¹ George Bush, Letter to the Ukrainian Diaspora, The White House, 22 January 1992.

⁵⁶² Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, “A Guide to the United States’ History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Ukraine.”

Much more frequently and with more significant consequences, the Moscow factor played a negative role vis-à-vis Ukraine and its interests.

Though this chapter does not focus on the Reagan Administration, it is important to note that the Reagan White House referenced Ukraine and praised anti-Soviet Ukrainians with some regularity, most often in the context of Soviet human rights abuses, including in terms of religious freedom issues. As was the case with the Soviet-occupied Baltic States, President Reagan utilized the well-founded captive nation narrative, no doubt with an eye to the respective diaspora communities, to bludgeon the Soviets and the “evil empire” rhetorically, in the process raising Ukraine’s international profile. His Administration’s decision to select Kyiv as the site of the new U.S. consulate should be seen in this context. But Reagan’s intrinsic dislike of the Soviets – one that George H. W. Bush did not appear to share, at least to the same intensity – was also mitigated by his warming to Gorbachev over time.

For his part, though President Bush exhibited an early distrust of Gorbachev’s intentions, he did not share Reagan’s rhetorical affinity for the captive nations narrative. And as the President’s relations with Gorbachev grew closer and yielded more in terms of Washington’s ‘druthers, whatever marginal support that may have been present for Ukraine’s and others’ aspirations faded well into the background. Moreover, the USSR’s continued existence was an implicit assumption for the Bush Administration.

The Bush White House did not even seriously consider other potential outcomes until quite late in the process. As a result, Ukraine policy was even more of a derivative of the Administration’s policy toward Moscow, and a distant derivative at that. Simply

stated, the Bush White House desired to have a stable, predictable, and positive relationship with the Soviet Union, one that allowed for the pursuit of major policy priorities, most importantly arms control. The Bush Administration did not seek nor did it encourage the USSR's collapse.

Quite the contrary, the Bush Administration went to extraordinary lengths to help the "Center," and especially Gorbachev personally, and wanted to stave off the Soviet Union's dissolution for as long as possible. Its motivations were divided between Soviet-specific dynamics – the Bush White House saw Gorbachev as a reliable partner who could continue to keep national and other passions pent up while pursuing arms control and other bilateral priorities – and interests further afield that required Moscow's assistance or, at least, acquiescence.

Either way, the Bush Administration treated the aspiration of the captive nations within the Soviet Union, even including the Baltic States, whose incorporation into the USSR the United States never recognized, as at best a distraction from its core interests in the region and beyond. With the most prominent exception of then Defense Secretary Cheney, the Bush team was more than satisfied with the dilution of Soviet communism and a convergence based largely on Western terms – rather than the breakup of the USSR – as the main policy objective.

This approach was bound to have implications for Ukraine and Ukrainians, among others. As a result of the stated Bush Administration policy priorities, the impact of the presence of the Moscow factor in this Administration's views of and approach to Ukraine was both significant and omnipresent. Though this factor manifested itself most

acutely in President Bush's perhaps appropriately named "Chicken Kiev" speech, it also came through in the Administration's regular and purposeful devaluing of Ukraine's independence aspirations and, with time, the reluctant and heavily conditioned extension of U.S. recognition – and only with Moscow's consent and with the USSR already gone for most intents and purposes.

Interplay with selected independent variables

Relative importance of domestic priorities: As President Bush made clear during his inaugural speech and his State of the Union addresses, among other occasions, he wanted to begin to tackle the of myriad domestic problems facing America. These problems included an unbalanced federal budget and a ballooning deficit. The President hoped to benefit from the end of the Cold War to secure a "peace dividend" that could be used to help address – and fund – these domestic challenges, especially with his 1992 re-election bid looming.

Relative importance of other foreign policy priorities: In addition to ending the standoff in Europe, most importantly the complex issue set pertaining to German reunification, the Bush Administration's other foreign policy priorities pertained to arms control, countering Saddam's threat to Iraq's neighbors, especially Kuwait, and the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process.

Relative commitment to “Europe whole and free” policy: As referenced in Chapter 1, the Bush Administration was not a stranger to the notion of a Europe whole and free. This concept was directly related to the issue of German re-unification. As such, it did not extend to the nations of the inner Soviet empire, e.g., Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

Congressional role and posture: Driven in large part by their own electoral considerations, members of Congress were often ahead of the Bush Administration on the question of supporting the aspirations not only of the Baltic States but also of those Soviet republics that sought sovereignty and, eventually, independence from Moscow. These efforts ultimately culminated in the passage of the seminal Freedom Support Act, which set the stage for a more granular but not necessarily overall successful U.S. assistance policy to the successor states of the Soviet Union.

Extent of Ukrainian diaspora activism: Emboldened by President Reagan’s willingness to confront the Soviets and his focus on Soviet human rights abuses, the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States was riding considerable momentum entering the Bush years. When it became clear that the Bush White House not only would not show the same degree of attention to diaspora causes but actually demonstrate significant support for the central Soviet government, the community worked hard to encourage Congress to a higher level of activism on Ukraine’s behalf.

Moscow's behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities: With Gorbachev at the Soviet helm, Cold War tensions receded appreciably. The USSR became more open to arms control initiatives, including in the conventional sphere. It also became less adventuresome abroad, forsaking leftist revolutionary movements in far-flung places. Over time, Gorbachev also demonstrated a willingness to erode the monopoly of the Soviet Communist Party, and made perestroika and glasnost the core of his domestic policy approach. In sum, these changes, however nascent, exceeded all but the wildest expectations, even if Gorbachev pursued these policies to save rather than destroy the Soviet system.

Kyiv's behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities: The Bush Administration did not view Ukrainian aspirations to sovereignty and, over time, to independence favorably as they challenged the President's fixation on Moscow and Gorbachev (and on Yeltsin, toward the end of 1991). Ukraine and difficulties associated with its views and interests figured prominently in Gorbachev's negative references to President Bush. Matters were not helped by the fact that Kravchuk sat on the fence at the time of the coup attempt against Gorbachev.

Executive branch policy champions: The center of gravity in the Bush Administration was clearly in the camp that thought it prudent to support Moscow and Gorbachev. This camp included not only Secretary Baker and National Security Advisor Scowcroft, but most importantly President Bush. In terms of Cabinet-level advocates, only Secretary

Cheney questioned the fixation on the central Soviet government and spoke on behalf of shifting focus on the union republics, including Ukraine.

Summary

In summation, the most important factor that played itself out was the Policy Champion-in-Chief's perception of Moscow's constructive behavior and the danger of a revanchist backlash, particularly its potential impact on other foreign policy priorities and, even more importantly, a rather real and more immediate impact on the President's domestic priorities. While both Congress and the Ukrainian diaspora did their best to appreciably shift Administration policy away from its fixation on Moscow, they played, at best, mitigating roles in practical terms.

The Administration's stated commitment to a "Europe whole and free" played no appreciable role as Ukraine did not fit the President's definition of Europe. Finally, the Bush White House perceived Kyiv's efforts to secure greater recognition for Ukraine, first with the Rada's sovereignty declaration and later, in the wake of the failed coup against Gorbachev and the independence declaration as developments that were not in line with U.S. policy priorities.

Chapter 4

U.S. Efforts to Secure Ukraine's Denuclearization

Denuclearization policy takes shape

With the collapse of the USSR a fait accompli, Washington's attention shifted to efforts aimed at consolidating and securing the Soviet nuclear arsenal, the bulk of which was to be found on the territories of newly independent Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine. This is not to say that the Bush Administration was starting from scratch in this regard. Rather, concerns about the fate of the Soviet nuclear arsenal in the context of a weakening central government had manifested themselves in the wake of the failed coup attempt against Gorbachev and the subsequent declarations of independence by a number of union republics, starting with Ukraine.

Speaking at a 29 August 1991 joint news conference with British Prime Minister John Major, President Bush expressed confidence that "everybody in the Republics and everybody in the center understands that the last thing that the world needs is some kind of a nuclear scare, say nothing of a nuclear confrontation."⁵⁶³ The President did not take the bait when a reporter asked him to comment about a Ukraine with nuclear weapons on

⁵⁶³ George Bush, The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Major of the United Kingdom in Kennebunkport, Maine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265972>.

its territory trying to “break away” from the USSR.⁵⁶⁴ According to a National Intelligence Council Memorandum (NICM) published in September 1991, Ukraine was home to about 20 percent of the Soviet Union’s ICBM warheads and about 40 percent of its heavy bomber weapons.⁵⁶⁵

As the NICM correctly pointed out, some 15 percent of the Soviet defense industry was based in Ukraine – including key production facilities for SS-18 and SS-24 ICBMs. Finally, the Memorandum predicted that “Sovereignty could restrict and disrupt the deployment and operation of strategic forces...reduce strategic depth, warning, and engagement time for air and ballistic missile defenses...[and] hamper [Moscow’s] ability to develop and produce strategic arms.”⁵⁶⁶ The publication of the NICM was timed, in part, to the early October visit to Moscow by Reginald Bartholomew, the Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs. On 5 October, Undersecretary Bartholomew accompanied by members of his delegation met with “representatives of the Republics of Russia, the Ukraine, Belorussia and Kazakhstan on President Bush’s nuclear initiative,” which aimed to protect and, if possible, advance existing arms control agreements with the Soviets even under conditions of increased activism by the union republics.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ George Bush, The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Major of the United Kingdom in Kennebunkport, Maine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265972>.

⁵⁶⁵ National Intelligence Council Memorandum, Central Intelligence Agency, Impact of Republic Sovereignty on Soviet Strategic Forces, September 1991, declassified in part 2 February 2016.

⁵⁶⁶ National Intelligence Council Memorandum, Central Intelligence Agency, Impact of Republic Sovereignty on Soviet Strategic Forces, September 1991, declassified in part 2 February 2016.

⁵⁶⁷ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 28582, 7 October 1991, Undersecretary Bartholomew’s Discussion with Representatives of Soviet Republics, declassified.

During his meetings, Undersecretary Bartholomew focused on one essential element: that the weakening of the Soviet central government “not lead to the creation of new nuclear powers,” according to the Embassy Moscow cable that informed Washington of the proceedings.⁵⁶⁸ He warned that “efforts by Republics to exploit or take exclusive control of nuclear weapons on their territory would be politically costly.”⁵⁶⁹ In response to a suggestion “that under the current conditions” arms control negotiations require some form of participation by republic-level authorities, Bartholomew made it clear that the U.S. Government “looks to the central Soviet authorities as its negotiating partner on these issues.”⁵⁷⁰

Furthermore, Bartholomew warned that while some “might think that control of nuclear weapons would confer political influence, bargaining leverage, or a seat at the table...given the global interest in non-proliferation that was simply not the case. In fact, it would actually have the reverse effect. A move to try to assert control over nuclear weapons would be costly in terms of political access and leverage.”⁵⁷¹ In response, Boris Yeltsin’s representative said that Russia “had a strongly positive view of President Bush’s nuclear initiative.”⁵⁷² The cable did not transmit the responses of the non-Russian representatives.

⁵⁶⁸ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 28582, 7 October 1991, Undersecretary Bartholomew’s Discussion with Representatives of Soviet Republics, declassified.

⁵⁶⁹ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 28582, 7 October 1991, Undersecretary Bartholomew’s Discussion with Representatives of Soviet Republics, declassified.

⁵⁷⁰ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 28582, 7 October 1991, Undersecretary Bartholomew’s Discussion with Representatives of Soviet Republics, declassified.

⁵⁷¹ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 28582, 7 October 1991, Undersecretary Bartholomew’s Discussion with Representatives of Soviet Republics, declassified.

⁵⁷² Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 28582, 7 October 1991, Undersecretary Bartholomew’s Discussion with Representatives of Soviet Republics, declassified.

Much of what was described in the cable is corroborated by the detailed notes from another meeting, this time with Gorbachev advisor Aleksandr Yakovlev. According to Yakovlev's notes, Undersecretary Bartholomew was particularly interested in "the positions of the Soviet Republics – especially Ukraine, but also, to a lesser extent, Kazakhstan, and even less the RSFSR – on the possession of nuclear weapons, and their participation in the formulation and implementation of the general Soviet national security policy."⁵⁷³ Describing the U.S. Administration's position in this matter, Undersecretary Bartholomew stressed that "the United States really does not want to see the emergence of several new nuclear powers."⁵⁷⁴

Undersecretary Bartholomew also underscored that while the union republics "should have a voice in what happens with nuclear weapons that are located on their territory...this is a question they can resolve only with Moscow."⁵⁷⁵ His admission that "the U.S. is paying close attention to [Ukrainian Rada Chairman Leonid] Kravchuk's, [Ukrainian opposition leader Vyacheslav] Chornovil's, and [Kazakhstani leader Nursultan] Nazarbayev's statements on these issues" – but not Yeltsin's – underscored that Moscow was and would continue to be the preferred partner.⁵⁷⁶

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States had its own ideas about what should happen to the Soviet nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory. Charging

⁵⁷³ Conversation between A.N. Yakovlev and the U.S. Undersecretary of State Reginald Bartholomew, 8 October 1991, Wilson Center.

⁵⁷⁴ Conversation between A.N. Yakovlev and the U.S. Undersecretary of State Reginald Bartholomew, 8 October 1991, Wilson Center.

⁵⁷⁵ Conversation between A.N. Yakovlev and the U.S. Undersecretary of State Reginald Bartholomew, 8 October 1991, Wilson Center.

⁵⁷⁶ Conversation between A.N. Yakovlev and the U.S. Undersecretary of State Reginald Bartholomew, 8 October 1991, Wilson Center.

headlong into the nascent debate, the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* argued that while “it is true that all of Ukraine’s leaders have said that Ukraine wants to become a nuclear-free zone, Ukraine must have a say in the future of these weapons.”⁵⁷⁷ It was in this editorial that the authors wrote what others, most notably in Kyiv, were almost certainly thinking, that the nuclear arsenal Ukraine inherited from the Soviet Union could be a bargaining chip to secure not only financial assistance from the West but also longer-term Western commitment to Ukraine. In other words, this was exactly the kind of thinking that Undersecretary Bartholomew tried to head off.

As the Ukrainians made the case for a more assertive Ukrainian policy, the United States was increasingly making common cause with the Russian government of Boris Yeltsin. Just one day before the 1 December 1991 Ukrainian referendum on independence from the Soviet Union, President Bush and Yeltsin discussed the importance of Ukraine’s speedy denuclearization. Specifically, Yeltsin made clear that Ukraine committing to becoming a nuclear-free state was a “truly necessary condition” for U.S. recognition.⁵⁷⁸ He also emphasized that it was important for the United States to insist on this condition being met as “Russia cannot place similar requirements vis-à-vis Ukraine in the current context.”⁵⁷⁹ Essentially, Yeltsin asked the President to apply pressure on Ukraine on Russia’s behalf.

⁵⁷⁷ “Third-Largest Nuclear Power?,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 3 November 1991.

⁵⁷⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of Republic of Russia, 30 November 1991, Camp David, declassified 22 February 2008.

⁵⁷⁹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of Republic of Russia, 30 November 1991, Camp David, declassified 22 February 2008.

President Bush did not disappoint. During his 6 December 1991 talk at the Ontario, California Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs, he referenced Ukraine in the context of his point about preventing nuclear arms proliferation when responding to what sounded like a planted question: “Are you concerned about the independent Republics of the Soviet Union regarding their possession of nuclear weapons and conventional weapons and troops? And what steps are you taking to allay those concerns, if you have any?”⁵⁸⁰ After initially pointing out that “we don’t need any more nuclear powers, he added that “the United States has a key role now in seeing that as [Ukraine] emerges, that it safely disposes of its nuclear weapons.”⁵⁸¹ Perhaps with his 30 November conversation with Yeltsin still fresh on his mind, the President disclosed that he has been “in very close touch with Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Republic, and he shares our concern.”⁵⁸²

Speaking at Princeton University almost a week later, as referenced in the preceding chapter, Secretary Baker more succinctly laid out the Bush Administration’s policy on the disposition of Soviet nuclear weapons in the context of the collapsing Union. After stating that “we do not want to see new nuclear weapon states emerge as a result of the transformation of the Soviet Union,” Secretary Baker added that “for those republics who seek complete independence, we expect them to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear states.”⁵⁸³ Having laid out the policy, Secretary

⁵⁸⁰ George Bush, Remarks to the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs in Ontario, California Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265855>.

⁵⁸¹ George Bush, Remarks to the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs in Ontario, California Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265855>.

⁵⁸² George Bush, Remarks to the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs in Ontario, California Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/265855>.

⁵⁸³ James Baker, speech at Princeton, “America and the Post-Coup Soviet Union,” 12 December 1991, www.c-span.org/video/?23366-1/post-coup-soviet-union.

Baker then attempted to lock Ukraine in by praising Kyiv's "determination to become nuclear free."⁵⁸⁴

In his memoirs, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, Secretary Baker wrote that "[w]e had a vital interest in ensuring that only one nuclear power emerged from the breakup of the former Soviet Union. We had begun this revolution with one nuclear power on that strategic space and did not wish to see a proliferation of nuclear countries when the dust settled."⁵⁸⁵ He added that "the political disputes between Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan were real, we definitely did not want to see states with these kinds of conflicts end up in uneasy nuclear standoffs with one another," an admission that the U.S. Government was essentially acquiescing to Moscow having an additional advantage in prevailing over its post-colonial neighbors.⁵⁸⁶

Speaking on 28 January 1992 at what would end up being his last State of the Union address, President Bush announced that he is pursuing deeper cuts in the U.S. and ex-Soviet nuclear arsenals and that he would discuss these with Yeltsin at an upcoming meeting at Camp David. As part of the proposed deal, the United States would eliminate all Peacekeeper missiles, reduce the number of warheads on Minuteman missiles to one, and reduce the number of warheads on sea-based missiles by about a third if "the Commonwealth" eliminates all land-based multiple-warhead ballistic missiles.⁵⁸⁷ The

⁵⁸⁴ James Baker, speech at Princeton, "America and the Post-Coup Soviet Union," 12 December 1991, www.c-span.org/video/?23366-1/post-coup-soviet-union.

⁵⁸⁵ James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 658.

⁵⁸⁶ James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 658.

⁵⁸⁷ George Bush, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266921>.

President made no mention of the three non-Russian former union republics – now sovereign states – where many of these missiles were based. Moreover, he implied that Yeltsin can make decisions for the entire Commonwealth of Independent States, as the post-Soviet construct came to be called.

Much of the rest of the President’s speech was devoted to domestic priorities, which could now be addressed because with the disappearance of “an avowed enemy that was a superpower...we can now stop making sacrifices...and look homeward even more.”⁵⁸⁸ As part of that domestic focus, the President promised to eliminate tariffs and subsidies that “damage America’s farmers and workers,” invest in computer literacy, encourage research and development, “do something” about drugs, incentivize businesses to enter the inner city, reform the health care system, get the federal deficit under control, institute bank, civil justice, and tort reform, and strengthen the family.⁵⁸⁹ While this impressive list was short on specifics, it certainly made it clear where President Bush thought his political and electoral vulnerabilities lay.

As part of the preparations for the Camp David meeting, Secretary Baker visited Moscow to go over the presidential agenda and iron out any last-minute wrinkles, to the extent possible. The Secretary’s report, contained in a Memorandum for the President dated one day after the State of the Union address, was simply gushing: “My meeting today with Boris Yeltsin was extraordinary in many respects...He focused almost

⁵⁸⁸ George Bush, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266921>.

⁵⁸⁹ George Bush, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266921>.

exclusively on security questions...on his desire to see a joint US-Soviet(sic) strategic defense...I think he wants to demonstrate in his new capacity that there really is a new world. I think he wants to use that new world to justify a far smaller military establishment.”⁵⁹⁰ This last bit especially must have been music to President Bush’s ears, particularly in view of the (expensive) domestic priorities he outlined.

The Memorandum contained another element that, though not irrational, would set an arguably damaging precedent in U.S. dealings with Yeltsin for years to come. Specifically, Secretary Baker warned the President that “We need to remember that for all of his desire to develop and affirm a relationship of friendship with us, Yeltsin is a genuine Russian nationalist. He will be sensitive to charges that he is making unilateral concessions and he is being exploited by us.”⁵⁹¹ This need to be sensitive to Yeltsin’s domestic standing signaled not only the completion of Yeltsin’s emergence in American thinking as the new Gorbachev but also materially added to the impact of the already robust Moscow factor in the U.S. policy toward the region.

When the two presidents actually met at Camp David, there was hardly any discord. In discussion matters related to arms control, Yeltsin reaffirmed to the President that Moscow’s priority is to get Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear states. Right before they broke for lunch, Yeltsin asked President Bush if the United States and Russia are “still(sic)

⁵⁹⁰ Memorandum for the President, From James Baker, Secretary of State, 29 January 1992, My Meetings in Moscow, released in part.

⁵⁹¹ Memorandum for the President, From James Baker, Secretary of State, 29 January 1992, My Meetings in Moscow, released in part.

adversaries.”⁵⁹² The President answered “No, we are not,” in the process failing to point out that it was the USSR not Russia that had been America’s adversary.⁵⁹³⁵⁹⁴

This new collaborative spirit came through loudly and clearly in the two presidents’ news conference on 1 February, with Yeltsin’s question and the President’s response very much on the President’s – and his speechwriter’s – minds. President Bush’s opening remarks did indeed sound like he was talking about a kinder and gentler Soviet Union, not post-Soviet Russia: “Today, for the first time, an American President and the democratically elected President of an independent Russia have met, and we did so not as adversaries but as friends. This historic meeting is yet another confirmation of the end of the cold war and the dawn of a new era. Russia and the United States are charting a new relationship.”⁵⁹⁵

As if to underscore just how little the President’s reference points changed despite the USSR’s utter collapse, he announced that Yeltsin had invited him “to come to the Soviet Union” for a state visit later in the year.⁵⁹⁶ On substance, the President and Yeltsin did indeed agree on the important issues of safe handling of nuclear weapons and arms reductions, making it a productive meeting indeed in the context of President

⁵⁹² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia, 1 February 1992, Camp David, declassified 22 February 2008, Wilson Center.

⁵⁹³ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia, 1 February 1992, Camp David, declassified 22 February 2008, Wilson Center.

⁵⁹⁴ President Bush’s response showed not only the extent to which Yeltsin had replaced Gorbachev but also the parallel transposition of the USSR and Russia, arguably at the direct expense of the other post-Soviet states, including Ukraine.

⁵⁹⁵ George Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Boris Yeltsin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266968>.

⁵⁹⁶ George Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Boris Yeltsin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266968>.

Bush's agenda. The same could not be said of the reaction in Kyiv, where Kravchuk objected to the U.S.-Russian talks on nuclear arms reductions, pointing out that Yeltsin does not have the authority to speak on behalf of Ukraine and calling for a negotiating format in which not only Russia, but also Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine hold direct talks with the United States.⁵⁹⁷ The White House responded with the President calling Kravchuk on 27 February and inviting him for an official visit to Washington, tentatively scheduled for 6 May.⁵⁹⁸

Kravchuk's comments and the temporary halt to the withdrawal of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons from Ukraine to Russia, which became known on 12 March, brought the question of Ukraine's denuclearization to the front burner.⁵⁹⁹ During their 19 March conversation, Yeltsin told President Bush that Russia will continue to be "the continuation state for nuclear weapons and we will continue our policies."⁶⁰⁰ Two weeks later, at the 1 April news conference, the President announced a major new initiative to support reforms in Russia. He elaborated by stating that:

We're working to develop, with our allies and the IMF, a \$6 billion currency stabilization fund to help maintain confidence in the Russian ruble. The U.S. will also join in a multilateral effort to marshal roughly \$18 billion in financial support in 1992 to assist Russian efforts to stabilize

⁵⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #26, 19 February 1992.

⁵⁹⁸ George Bush, Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the President's Telephone Conversation With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266851>.

⁵⁹⁹ James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 659.

⁶⁰⁰ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Telcon with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia on March 19, 1992, declassified 27 March 2008, Wilson Center.

and restructure their economy. We've been working with the Russian Government for 3 months to help it develop an economic reform plan to permit the major industrialized countries to provide support. We will work to complete action on this approximately \$24 billion package by the end of April. And I pledge the full cooperation of the United States in this effort.⁶⁰¹

Next, President Bush took the unusual step of adding what he called "a personal note."⁶⁰² He proceeded to make the case that "President Yeltsin's reform program holds the greatest hope for the future of the Russian people and for the security of the American people as we define a new relationship with that great country."⁶⁰³ The President went on to praise Yeltsin for taking "some very courageous steps for democracy and free markets," adding that he is "convinced that it is in our own national interest to support him strongly."⁶⁰⁴

President Bush built on this theme when speaking to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on 9 April. He argued that America's best hope for a secure future is

⁶⁰¹ George Bush, The President's News Conference on Aid to the States of the Former Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267607>.

⁶⁰² George Bush, The President's News Conference on Aid to the States of the Former Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267607>.

⁶⁰³ George Bush, The President's News Conference on Aid to the States of the Former Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267607>.

⁶⁰⁴ George Bush, The President's News Conference on Aid to the States of the Former Soviet Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267607>.

having “democrats in the Kremlin.”⁶⁰⁵ The President argued that with that established, “we have the chance to build a very different world, a world built on the common values of political and economic freedom between Russia and America, between East and West and at long last, a peace built on mutual trust, not on mutual terror.”⁶⁰⁶ President Bush also warned that “the failure of the democratic experiment [in Moscow] could bring a dark future, a return to authoritarianism or a descent into anarchy. In either case, the outcome would threaten our peace, our prosperity, and our security for years to come.”⁶⁰⁷

The President provided further insight into his thinking by arguing that “working with our Russian partners and our allies, we can create a new international landscape, a landscape where emerging threats are contained and undone, where we work in concert to confront common threats to our environment, where terrorists find no safe haven, and where genuine coalitions of like-minded countries respond to dangers and opportunities together.”⁶⁰⁸ Moreover, a “democratic Russia, one dedicated to free market economies, will provide an impetus for a major increase in global trade and investment.”⁶⁰⁹ Finally, the President announced that the United States and Russia are working “to reach historic nuclear reductions.”⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁵ George Bush, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266587>.

⁶⁰⁶ George Bush, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266587>.

⁶⁰⁷ George Bush, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266587>.

⁶⁰⁸ George Bush, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266587>.

⁶⁰⁹ George Bush, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266587>.

⁶¹⁰ George Bush, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266587>.

Making sure that such historic reductions are possible required keeping the Ukrainians onside, including by engaging them in high-level diplomacy. For days after the speech to the editors, on 13 April, the Department of State announced that it will be sending a delegation to Kyiv to discuss the full range of political, economic and security issues in bilateral relations, and to help prepare for President Kravchuk's visit to Washington on 6 May.⁶¹¹ On 14 April, Secretary Baker met with Ukrainian Defense Minister Kostyantyn Morozov. Uncharacteristically, the meeting lasted "approximately 90 minutes."⁶¹² There was even a photo opportunity for the press corps to take a picture of the two ministers.

In terms of substance, the conversation predictably focused on Kyiv's policy regarding the nuclear weapons on Ukraine's territory. Department of State Spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler underscored that Morozov made it clear that Kyiv's policy "has not changed."⁶¹³ For his part, Morozov repeated the Ukrainian government's requirement that an "international inspection system" be put in place to assure the destruction of the strategic ICBMs shipped to Russia from Ukraine.⁶¹⁴ When Kyiv and Moscow appeared to come to an agreement on the way forward, in the process resuming the shipment of tactical nuclear weapons to Russia, the Department of State enthusiastically welcomed the accord.⁶¹⁵ A little over two weeks later, a Policy Planning Staff memorandum for Secretary Baker made clear what the U.S. policy priority was when it came to the post-

⁶¹¹ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #55, 13 April 1992.

⁶¹² U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #56, 14 April 1992.

⁶¹³ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #56, 14 April 1992.

⁶¹⁴ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #56, 14 April 1992.

⁶¹⁵ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #58, 16 April 1992.

Soviet nuclear arsenal and the broader approach to the region: “Nothing is of more central importance in this process than consolidation of nuclear weapons in a democratizing Russia.”⁶¹⁶

Arguably, this is the context in which Kravchuk’s early May 1992 visit to Washington and the May 6 joint declaration by the two presidents should be seen. This declaration applauded “Ukraine's leadership, manifested in its agreement to ratify and implement the START and CFE treaties, and its commitment to renounce nuclear weapons and join the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear weapons state at the earliest possible time.”⁶¹⁷ It also reaffirmed Ukraine’s “decision to complete the removal of all tactical nuclear weapons from its territory by July 1, 1992, and all remaining nuclear weapons in accordance with her relevant agreements and during the seven-year period of time as provided by the START Treaty.”⁶¹⁸

Seemingly as part of the U.S. compensation for this restatement of the Ukrainian position, the document declared that “The Ukrainian people are now building their own state, one whose independence and commitment to democracy can make a vital contribution to the creation of a new **Europe truly whole and free.**”⁶¹⁹⁶²⁰ This appears

⁶¹⁶ Memorandum for the Secretary, from Dennis Ross, Policy Planning Staff, Foreign Policy in the Second Bush Administration: An Overview, 30 April 1992, released in full 10 April 2017.

⁶¹⁷ George Bush, Joint Declaration With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267205>.

⁶¹⁸ George Bush, Joint Declaration With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267205>.

⁶¹⁹ George Bush, Joint Declaration With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267205>.

⁶²⁰ Bolded for emphasis.

to be the first time that the Bush Administration publicly acknowledged that this formulation includes Ukraine.

Speaking at a joint news conference that same day, President Bush was uncharacteristically magnanimous in his praise of Ukraine, claiming that “All of us join in celebrating the renaissance of freedom and independence for the great and ancient nation of Ukraine...[W]hen we welcome Ukraine’s new independence we honor generations of women and men who kept a flame of hope alive through years of darkness. And free people must never forget the suffering Ukraine endured under the totalitarian yoke.”⁶²¹

The President continued his charm offensive by announcing that “President Kravchuk and I agreed that the United States and Ukraine should be not just friends but partners. Ukraine’s future security is important for the United States and for stability in Europe. We welcome President Kravchuk’s assurance that Ukraine will remove all nuclear weapons from its territory and join the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear-weapons state. We have pledged to assist Ukraine in the accounting and control of its nuclear reaction materials...and to explore additional assistance for weapons destruction.”⁶²²

When asked about Ukrainian views of Russia, Kravchuk laid out the Ukrainian position: “There is a problem of security for Ukraine...[W]e decided to destroy these

⁶²¹ George Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267204>.

⁶²² George Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267204>.

weapons. We think this policy is correct in principle, and we do not want to change that policy. But some of our neighbors, especially the great neighbors such as Russia, have political forces which would like to make territorial claims against Ukraine. That certainly worries us....[This is why w]e continue to request that the international community identify an appropriate forum to address [our position] on the elimination of nuclear weapons and also provide some guarantees for the national security of Ukraine.”⁶²³

Kyiv’s concerns about Ukraine’s security were not theoretical. They were also rather prophetic. Referencing efforts by some Russians, including Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoy, to destabilize the situation in Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, Kravchuk stated: “There is a multinational population there; nobody is deprived of their rights. But there are some forces from the outside that stimulate and instigate separatist sentiments. They also finance those sentiments and, in a way, egg on those sentiments.”⁶²⁴

Two weeks later, on 21 May, the Russian parliament voted to declare illegal the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine. When questioned by a reporter at the daily Department of State press briefing about the implications of this vote, Richard Boucher went out of his way to point out the legislature did not make any territorial claims against Ukraine per se. He added that “the issues involved are matters that must be resolved by

⁶²³ George Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267204>.

⁶²⁴ George Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267204>.

the parties involved,” a statement that no doubt contributed to Kyiv’s apprehension about speedy, complete and unconditional denuclearization.⁶²⁵ When asked a follow-up question about whether this issue would be raised by the U.S. side during Secretary Baker’s upcoming meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev, in part to prepare for Yeltsin’s June visit to Washington, the Department spokesperson said he “couldn’t really predict at this point.”⁶²⁶

One of the reasons why Boucher may have been evasive with his answer was the growing perception in the Bush Administration that “Boris Yeltsin comes to Washington at a critical moment in the Russian reform process, with the balance finely weighed between advance and retreat,” as Secretary Baker’s 11 June Memorandum for the President put it.⁶²⁷ The Memorandum argued that Yeltsin “will be looking for strong U.S. endorsement of his leadership” and suggested that [t]his visit should be designed not only to solidify America’s relationship with Yeltsin, but also your personal ties with him.”⁶²⁸

Among other visit objectives, Secretary Baker suggested the U.S. Government should provide the public endorsement Yeltsin seeks, achieve far-reaching additional reductions in strategic arms, and, remarkably, particularly in view of Russia’s imperial history, “give substantive meaning to our new partnership by...working together to promote new mechanisms to deal with, defuse and manage emerging ethnic-driven

⁶²⁵ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #81, 22 May 1992.

⁶²⁶ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #81, 22 May 1992.

⁶²⁷ Memorandum for the President, From James Baker, Your Meetings with Boris Yeltsin, 11 June 1992, declassified in part, Wilson Digital Archive.

⁶²⁸ Memorandum for the President, From James Baker, Your Meetings with Boris Yeltsin, 11 June 1992, declassified in part, Wilson Digital Archive.

conflicts in Eurasia.”⁶²⁹ In an effort to further underscore what may be at stake, the Memorandum concluded by arguing that:

Russian democracy remains extremely fragile....Conservatives...are becoming more vocal and positioning themselves to offer an alternative to Yeltsin’s democratic course...[I]t will be important to express our understanding for the pressures he is under and our desire to avoid steps that would play into the hands of those trying to subvert moves toward democracy.⁶³⁰

Two days later, Gen. Scowcroft sent his own Memorandum for the President, which largely tracked with Secretary Baker’s message that the U.S. Government must demonstrate support for Yeltsin or risk him being ousted or, at the very least, his supposedly liberal agenda, as favored by Washington, falling by the wayside.

Specifically, it stated that:

Boris Yeltsin has very high expectations for next week’s summit. He hopes to use the summit with you to build on your Camp David meeting by producing tangible evidence to his domestic opponents that the relationship with the U.S. pays off. He will be looking for public indications of our respect for him as a leader, and for Russia as a great democratic power (albeit in temporary difficulties). He will be acutely

⁶²⁹ Memorandum for the President, From James Baker, Your Meetings with Boris Yeltsin, 11 June 1992, declassified in part, Wilson Digital Archive.

⁶³⁰ Memorandum for the President, From James Baker, Your Meetings with Boris Yeltsin, 11 June 1992, declassified in part, Wilson Digital Archive.

sensitive to any, even inadvertent, effect to gain advantage from Russia's current economic weakness (say in the arms control area).⁶³¹

In terms of the U.S. stake in the upcoming meeting, the Memorandum argued that "The U.S.-Russia relationship is vitally important for us, and the stakes are high for this summit. The young democrats in the Russian government, who have moved quickly to transform the domestic and foreign policies of the former Soviet Union, are now increasingly on the defensive."⁶³² Three days later, President Bush and Yeltsin assured each other in their bilateral meeting that they "share a goal on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction."⁶³³ Yeltsin told the President that he will insist on Kravchuk reaffirming Ukraine's commitment to join the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state when meeting with the latter a week later on 23 June.

Also on 16 June, the President and Yeltsin made the most of their new strategic arms reductions – below the levels determined by START – to underscore their burgeoning partnership at a joint news conference. President Bush clearly took Secretary Baker's advice to heart, as evidenced by his statement that "Our ability to reach this agreement so quickly is a tribute to the new relationship between the United States and Russia and to the personal leadership of our guest, Boris Yeltsin."⁶³⁴

⁶³¹ Memorandum for the President, From Brent Scowcroft, 13 June 1992, Overview for Your Upcoming Meetings With Boris Yeltsin, June 16-17, declassified 27 March 2008.

⁶³² Memorandum for the President, From Brent Scowcroft, 13 June 1992, Overview for Your Upcoming Meetings With Boris Yeltsin, June 16-17, declassified 27 March 2008.

⁶³³ Memorandum of Conversation, First Expanded Meeting with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia on Military and Security Issues, 16 June 1992, declassified 10 December 2007, Wilson Digital Archive.

⁶³⁴ George Bush, Remarks With President Boris Yeltsin of Russia Announcing Strategic Arms Reductions and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/266872>.

On 19 June, President Bush told the Industrial League of Orange County that the United States “must not miss this opportunity” to help the Russian government.⁶³⁵ He argued that having spent trillions confronting the “communist menace,” it would be shortsighted not to make available several hundred million dollars to make sure Russia stays on the democratic path.⁶³⁶ In this context, the President called on Congress to pass the FREEDOM Support Act as “an insurance policy for the people of the United States.”⁶³⁷

In a moment of frankness, which provided ample insight into the President’s personal view of post-Soviet equities, not to mention a significant lack of understanding of Russian imperialism, President Bush disclosed that it was “fascinating hearing [Yeltsin] discuss what’s going to happen in Azerbaijan or Armenia or how they’re going to treat the problems of Ukraine.”⁶³⁸ He added that it “was just a marvelous experience, and I gave him the U.S. view on this thing.”⁶³⁹ The next day, elements of the Russian 14th Army stationed in Moldova’s eastern Transnistria region engaged Moldovan security forces in and around Tighina (Benderi/Bendery), a city claimed both by the legitimate Moldovan authorities and the pro-Russian Transnistrian “separatists.”⁶⁴⁰ Shortly

⁶³⁵ George Bush, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Industrial League of Orange County in Irvine, California Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267000>.

⁶³⁶ George Bush, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Industrial League of Orange County in Irvine, California Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267000>.

⁶³⁷ George Bush, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Industrial League of Orange County in Irvine, California Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267000>.

⁶³⁸ George Bush, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Industrial League of Orange County in Irvine, California Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267000>.

⁶³⁹ George Bush, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Industrial League of Orange County in Irvine, California Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267000>.

⁶⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #96, 22 June 1992.

thereafter, on 7 July, President Bush welcomed “Russia’s commitment to a foreign policy based on the principle of law and justice.”⁶⁴¹

Part of President Bush’s re-election strategy hinged on two major initiatives, the START treaty, i.e., delivering on his foreign policy experience, including by supposedly making the world a safer place, and the FREEDOM Support Act (FSA). The Senate ratified the former on 1 October 1992, allowing the President to claim during the election homestretch that his efforts not only culminated in a historic arms control agreement but also helped “ensure that the demise of the Soviet Union does not stimulate nuclear proliferation.”⁶⁴² Later that month, on 24 October, President Bush signed FSA into law. The White House statement on the occasion praised “the American people [who] have united to advance the cause of freedom, to win the peace, to help transform former enemies into peaceful partners.”⁶⁴³ It added that “[t]his democratic peace will be built on the solid foundations of political and economic freedom in Russia and the other independent states.”⁶⁴⁴

President Bush needed all the help he could muster, given the more dynamic electoral campaign being waged by his opponent in the upcoming general election, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. The latter’s foreign policy team used Gov. Clinton’s 2

⁶⁴¹ George Bush, Munich Economic Summit Political Declaration: Shaping the New Partnership Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267539>.

⁶⁴² George Bush, Statement on Senate Ratification of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/268698>.

⁶⁴³ George Bush, Statement on Signing the FREEDOM Support Act Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267278>.

⁶⁴⁴ George Bush, Statement on Signing the FREEDOM Support Act Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/267278>.

October 1992 speech in Milwaukee to score points with the various Central and East European diasporas. It did so by claiming, with good basis, that “President Bush seems too often to prefer a foreign policy that embraces stability at the expense of freedom, a foreign policy built more on personal relationships with foreign leaders than on consideration of how those leaders acquired and maintained their power.”⁶⁴⁵

The Bush-Clinton transition

Gov. Clinton went on to blast the Bush White House for relying “on old balance-of-power strategies [that] cannot bring the same practical success as a foreign policy that draws more generously from American democratic experience and ideals.”⁶⁴⁶ As an example of the President’s foreign policy missteps, Gov. Clinton cited the former’s “Chicken Kiev” speech, in which President Bush “lectured a people subjected to genocidal starvation in the Stalin era, warning that their aspirations for independence constituted, and I quote, ‘a suicidal nationalism.’”⁶⁴⁷

For its part, the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* renewed calls for financial compensation and security guarantees for Ukraine in return for its denuclearization. It argued that Kyiv’s move to assume “a more decisive stance on its nukes” and insist “that it be rewarded for its decision to become a non-nuclear state”

⁶⁴⁵ William J. Clinton, Excerpts of Remarks in Milwaukee Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/285621>.

⁶⁴⁶ William J. Clinton, Excerpts of Remarks in Milwaukee Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/285621>.

⁶⁴⁷ William J. Clinton, Excerpts of Remarks in Milwaukee Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/285621>.

was justified.⁶⁴⁸ In this context, the editors criticized efforts to portray Ukraine “as a renegade state with its finger on the nuclear trigger.”⁶⁴⁹ Unlike in the past, the newspaper was no longer targeting President Bush, who had already lost his re-election bid earlier in the month, but rather President-elect Clinton, who seemed to show some sympathy to Ukrainian aspirations.

Meanwhile, Yeltsin told Senators Sam Nunn and Dick Lugar, when he received them on 23 November 1992 in the Kremlin, that “Russia does not want any pause in cooperation with the U.S., especially in the area of arms reduction” as a result of the Bush-Clinton transition.⁶⁵⁰ He added that any such interruption would be “very bad.”⁶⁵¹ Yeltsin also acknowledged that he had already invited President-elect Clinton to Moscow in the hope of meeting as soon as possible after the 20 January 1993 inauguration.

Yeltsin also told the visiting Senators that in “his discussion with...350 generals,” it became clear that all former Soviet nuclear weapons “must be under Russian jurisdiction and on Russian territory.”⁶⁵² While mentioning positive trends in Russia’s interactions with Belarus and Kazakhstan, he asserted that “there are problems with the

⁶⁴⁸ “Nukes and Stability,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 15 November 1992.

⁶⁴⁹ “Nukes and Stability,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 15 November 1992.

⁶⁵⁰ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

⁶⁵¹ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

⁶⁵² Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

Ukrainians.”⁶⁵³ Specifically, Yeltsin predicted Kyiv would “break the Lisbon accords [on START] and this is not permissible,” and called on the United States to “help influence Ukraine.”⁶⁵⁴ Moreover, Yeltsin charged that Washington “made a tactical mistake in handling the nuclear issue with Ukraine,” arguing that Ukrainian independence should not have been recognized before Kyiv signed the NPT.⁶⁵⁵

Rather than restore balance in the conversation and remind Yeltsin of the unhelpful Russian actions challenging Ukraine’s territorial integrity, Senator Nunn said he and Senator Lugar had taken up the nuclear issue in Kyiv in a “forceful, very forceful, manner.”⁶⁵⁶ According to the cable, the Senators “made it clear to the Ukrainians that Ukraine made a public commitment in Lisbon and the U.S. expects that commitment to be honored...without delay and without amendments.”⁶⁵⁷

When Senator Nunn brought up security guarantees for Ukraine, Yeltsin assured him that Russia is ready to give guarantees “if they are needed.”⁶⁵⁸ In retrospect, this may have been the timeframe when Ukraine’s denuclearization became even more

⁶⁵³ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

⁶⁵⁴ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

⁶⁵⁵ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

⁶⁵⁶ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

⁶⁵⁷ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

⁶⁵⁸ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

important for the Kremlin than for the White House. In terms of the pre-inauguration hiatus in the United States, Senator Nunn agreed that such a delay is “unacceptable” because [t]oo much depends on the U.S.-Russian relationship, a statement that must have been music to Yeltsin’s ears.⁶⁵⁹

The Senators continued with these themes when they returned to Washington, including during their post-trip news conference on Capitol Hill, which was inexplicably entitled “Report from Their Tour of **Russian Republics**.”⁶⁶⁰⁶⁶¹ Specifically, Senator Nunn appeared to be channeling his conversation with Yeltsin when he asserted that:

We do not have the luxury, with the clock ticking in this part of the world...of declaring a recess while we change administrations for 60 days and while we wait perhaps another 60 to 90 days for the Clinton administration to have their own people in place at the second and third levels down from the cabinet...We have to move on. There is a unique responsibility here on the part of the outgoing administration and the incoming administration to work together and to make sure that we do not let anything slip in terms of accomplishing and completing these all-important agreements that relate to our national security and to our future.⁶⁶²

⁶⁵⁹ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 35873, 24 November 1992, Yeltsin to Nunn/Lugar: Concern Over “Pause” in U.S.-Russian Relations, Willing to Give Guarantees to Ukraine, released in full, 29 September 2015.

⁶⁶⁰ Press Conference with Senator Sam Nunn and Senator Richard Lugar, Report from Their Tour of Russian Republics, The Capitol, Federal News Service.

⁶⁶¹ Bolded for emphasis.

⁶⁶² Press Conference with Senator Sam Nunn and Senator Richard Lugar, Report from Their Tour of Russian Republics, The Capitol, Federal News Service.

For his part, Senator Lugar added that “Obviously, if for some reason [Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine] do not keep their word and these arrangements do not work out, the effects on American...interests are likely to be profound. They understand that. They have pledged to us on the affirmative side that they are going to move.”⁶⁶³

Meanwhile, Yeltsin was not only counting on others to get the incoming team’s attention. According to President Clinton’s memoirs, *My Life*, Yeltsin was already in touch with him several days after the election. The President recalled that “Yeltsin had a hard row to hoe [as he] had destroyed the old system, but not yet been able to build a new one.”⁶⁶⁴ He added that “Yeltsin was up to his ears in alligators, and I wanted to help him.”⁶⁶⁵

For his part, President Bush sent a privacy channel message to Kravchuk on 4 December 1992 dangling the so called Nunn-Lugar funding, designed to incentivize denuclearization, and reminding Kyiv of the Rada’s pledge to make Ukraine a non-nuclear state in its 16 July 1990 Declaration of Sovereignty, a document that the Bush Administration took no note of at the time. Specifically, the President stated that the United States is “prepared to provide assistance worth at least \$175 million to Ukraine,” adding that Ukraine must first approve the START Treaty and the Non-Proliferation Treaty before the funds could flow.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶³ Press Conference with Senator Sam Nunn and Senator Richard Lugar, Report from Their Tour of Russian Republics, The Capitol, Federal News Service.

⁶⁶⁴ Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 503.

⁶⁶⁵ Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 504.

⁶⁶⁶ Privacy channel message from President Bush to President Kravchuk, 4 December 1992, Bush Presidential Library, declassified in part 26 December 2007.

President Bush then attempted to scratch Kyiv's itch for security guarantees by indicating that "The United States looks forward to working closely with Ukraine as partners in enhancing the security and prosperity of our two nations."⁶⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the Bush Administration's efforts to proceed with START II prior to Gov. Clinton's inauguration further underscored the importance of securing Ukraine's START ratification, as evidenced by Richard Boucher's references during an 8 December 1992 daily press briefing at the Department of State.⁶⁶⁸

The Bush Administration's vision of a democratic, reformist Russia absorbed a significant body blow later that December when Yeltsin's chief reformer, Acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaydar, was forced out. The Department of State's spokesperson, Joseph Snyder, attempted to put a brave face on this devastating development by asserting that the U.S. Government is "pleased to see that the process of choosing a Prime Minister was conducted in a legal and constitutional manner."⁶⁶⁹ He added, that "[t]he United States continues to support President Yeltsin's effort to bring about democratic change and economic reform."⁶⁷⁰

In his transition Memorandum for Secretary-designate Warren Christopher, Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, who had replaced Secretary Baker toward the end of President Bush's term, wrote to his expected successor that "During your tenure, many achievements are possible[, including] the gradual incorporation of a reforming

⁶⁶⁷ Privacy channel message from President Bush to President Kravchuk, 4 December 1992, Bush Presidential Library, declassified in part 26 December 2007.

⁶⁶⁸ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #177, 8 December 1992.

⁶⁶⁹ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #181, 14 December 1992.

⁶⁷⁰ U.S. Department of State Daily Briefing #181, 14 December 1992.

Russia...into a stable European system.”⁶⁷¹ He asserted that “if reform succeeds in Russia, it may not assure the success of reform in the other states of the [former Soviet Union]; but if reform fails in Russia, it most assuredly will mean the failure of reform throughout the former Soviet empire.”⁶⁷²

In developing this Russia first theory – and justification – further, Secretary Eagleburger argued that:

Our broad policy toward Russia ought to [include]...lock[ing] in as fast as we can further stabilizing reductions of nuclear weapons, and their consolidation in Russia. Conclusion of START II is an important step forward. We are also working hard to hold the Ukrainians, Belarussians(sic), and Kazakhs to their non-nuclear commitments, and the denuclearization of those three states will need to remain one of your major priorities.⁶⁷³

Speaking of Ukraine, Secretary Eagleburger asserted that “We can help temper Ukrainian behavior by working now to **treat** Ukraine as an important player in its own right – not an adjunct to our central relationship with Russia,” an indirect admission of the extant,

⁶⁷¹ Memorandum for Secretary of State-designate Warren Christopher from Lawrence Eagleburger, Parting Thoughts: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Years Ahead.

⁶⁷² Memorandum for Secretary of State-designate Warren Christopher from Lawrence Eagleburger, Parting Thoughts: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Years Ahead.

⁶⁷³ Memorandum for Secretary of State-designate Warren Christopher from Lawrence Eagleburger, Parting Thoughts: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Years Ahead.

Russia-focused policy toward the region and a foreshadowing of the calculated U.S. approach to relations with Ukraine.⁶⁷⁴⁶⁷⁵

While awaiting President-elect Clinton's inauguration, the Bush Department of State proceeded with implementing Secretary Eagleburger's treatment plan for Ukraine. Commenting on the upcoming bilateral talks between Under Secretary of State Frank Wisner and Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk, Department spokesperson Richard Boucher disclosed that these are to focus on "addressing common security, foreign policy, and economic concerns" and that they will help develop a "relationship with a free and independent Ukraine." When a journalist asked Boucher how this focus squared with the U.S. insistence that Ukraine denuclearize, the latter was forced to perform a quick two-step dance and confirm that progress on START ratification and NPT accession remain of "great importance" and that "these meetings provide an excellent opportunity to discuss those as well as other security issues."⁶⁷⁶

At next day's Department press briefing, Richard Boucher confirmed that the United States and the other NPT depository states, including Russia, had been working to develop security assurances for Ukraine. Moreover, Boucher stated that the United States "is cooperating with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to ensure the rapid dismantlement of nuclear weapons and the fair sharing of proceeds of sales of fissile materials."⁶⁷⁷ He added that the two countries "have discussed a number of bilateral

⁶⁷⁴ Memorandum for Secretary of State-designate Warren Christopher from Lawrence Eagleburger, Parting Thoughts: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Years Ahead.

⁶⁷⁵ Bolded for emphasis.

⁶⁷⁶ Department of State, Daily Press Briefing #3, 6 January 1993.

⁶⁷⁷ Department of State, Daily Press Briefing #4, 7 January 1993.

issues which reflect the positive and strengthening relationship between the United States and Ukraine.”⁶⁷⁸

These efforts appear to have paid some partial dividends. Tarasyuk’s report to his leadership “On the Results of Ukrainian-American Political Consultations in Washington” claimed that “the American side had to acknowledge that they made a mistake by looking at Ukrainian-American relations through the lens of their relations with Russia, forgetting that Ukraine had its own interests.”⁶⁷⁹ However, Tarasyuk also acknowledged that his delegation failed to secure its overarching objective, that of obtaining from the United States “clear written guarantees of the national security of Ukraine connected with Ukraine’s attainment of the non-nuclear status.”⁶⁸⁰

Meanwhile, the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* picked up on what looked like a greater understanding of Kyiv’s position by mainstream observers, commenting that “after... portraying Ukraine as the nuclear bogeyman of the new world order and a nationalistic state engaging in nuclear blackmail, some American opinion leaders are finally getting it.”⁶⁸¹ The newspaper argued that “this soon-to-be nuclear-free state is

⁶⁷⁸ Department of State, Daily Press Briefing #4, 7 January 1993.

⁶⁷⁹ “Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine B. I. Tarasiuk, ‘Report on the Results of the Ukrainian-American Political Consultations,’” January 08, 1993, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, fond 1, delo 7061. Obtained by Mariana Budjeryn and translated by Volodymyr Valkov, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/144981>.

⁶⁸⁰ “Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine B. I. Tarasiuk, ‘Report on the Results of the Ukrainian-American Political Consultations,’” January 08, 1993, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, fond 1, delo 7061. Obtained by Mariana Budjeryn and translated by Volodymyr Valkov, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/144981>.

⁶⁸¹ “Security and Nukes,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 10 January 1993.

legitimately concerned about its security, existing in the shadow of a nuclear superpower, its larger, more powerful neighbor, Russia, which has subjugated Ukraine in the past.”⁶⁸²

Policy continuity sets in

Despite its criticism of the Bush foreign policy, the incoming Clinton Administration signaled considerably more continuity than change, at least in the context of Russia policy, as the inauguration date approached. During his confirmation hearing, Secretary of State-designate Warren Christopher argued that among the principal security challenges facing the United States in the 1990s, “None is more important than helping Russia demilitarize, privatize, invigorate its economy, and develop representative political institutions.”⁶⁸³ He went on to assert that “President Yeltsin's courageous economic and political reforms stand as our best hope for reducing the still-formidable arsenal of nuclear and conventional arms in Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union, and this, in turn, permits reductions in our own defense spending.”⁶⁸⁴

In his inaugural address, delivered on 20 January 1993, President Clinton called for greater investment “in our own people, in their jobs, and in their future, and at the same time cut our massive debt,” priorities that were remarkably similar to those outlined

⁶⁸² “Security and Nukes,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 10 January 1993.

⁶⁸³ Statement at Senate Confirmation Hearing, Secretary-Designate Christopher, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 13 January 1993.

⁶⁸⁴ Statement at Senate Confirmation Hearing, Secretary-Designate Christopher, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 13 January 1993.

by President Bush in his inaugural address.⁶⁸⁵ On foreign policy, President Clinton made the case that:

There is no longer a clear division between what is foreign and what is domestic. The world economy, the world environment, the world AIDS crisis, the world arms race: they affect us all. Today, as an older order passes, the new world is more free but less stable. Communism's collapse has called forth old animosities and new dangers.⁶⁸⁶

In early February, it became known that President Clinton's friend and former fellow Rhodes scholar Strobe Talbott would be nominated for a new position at the Department of State to oversee policy toward the former Soviet states, in a move that would separate this issue set from the Bureau of European Affairs.⁶⁸⁷⁶⁸⁸⁶⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the Department of State began to revert to its typical Russo-centric rhetoric when it came to developments in the region. Speaking about the then ongoing conflict in the former Yugoslavia, Secretary Christopher made the case that "The world's response to the violence in the former Yugoslavia is an early and crucial test of how it will address the

⁶⁸⁵ William J. Clinton, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219347>.

⁶⁸⁶ William J. Clinton, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219347>.

⁶⁸⁷ Department of State, Daily Press Briefing #20, 8 February 1993.

⁶⁸⁸ In President Clinton's view, Strobe Talbott "had known and cared more about Russia and the Russian people more than anyone else I knew." Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 504.

⁶⁸⁹ As Strobe Talbott put it in his memoir, "My title was to be one of the longest in the federal government: ambassador-at-large and special adviser to the secretary of state on the new independent states of the former Soviet Union." Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 39.

concerns of ethnic and religious minorities in the post-Cold War world,” a fair assertion.⁶⁹⁰

But then the Secretary chose to reference the non-Russian countries of the former Soviet Union “where the fall of communism has left some 25 million ethnic Russians living as minorities in other republics,” an oft-repeated Moscow talking point not backed up by any evidence of the mistreatment of ethnic Russian citizens of these countries.⁶⁹¹ He followed with an announcement that President Clinton earlier that day spoke with Yeltsin “to convey his personal request that both our nations work closely and cooperatively in this search for a peaceful resolution” in the former Yugoslavia, a clear attempt not only to leverage Moscow’s friendly relations with Belgrade but also to give Yeltsin a prominent role in the proceedings.⁶⁹²

Meanwhile, President Clinton used his first State of the Union address on 17 February to outline his Administration’s goals. He listed as his “immediate priority” the creation of jobs, including by supporting small businesses. He also promised to “to end welfare as we know it.”⁶⁹³

A week later, Secretary Christopher met with Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev in Geneva in what both of them described as a “businesslike session.”⁶⁹⁴ In announcing a

⁶⁹⁰ News Conference on Former Yugoslavia, “New Steps Toward Conflict Resolution in the Former Yugoslavia,” Opening statement, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 10 February 1993.

⁶⁹¹ News Conference on Former Yugoslavia, “New Steps Toward Conflict Resolution in the Former Yugoslavia,” Opening statement, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 10 February 1993.

⁶⁹² News Conference on Former Yugoslavia, “New Steps Toward Conflict Resolution in the Former Yugoslavia,” Opening statement, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 10 February 1993.

⁶⁹³ William J. Clinton, Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/218852>.

⁶⁹⁴ News Conference with Russian ForMin, “U.S.-Russia Summit and Invitations To Middle East Peace Talks Announced,” Opening statement, Geneva, Switzerland, Office of the Spokesman, 25 February 1993.

presidential meeting for 4 April 1993, which ended up being planned for Vancouver, the Secretary underscored President Clinton's "strong personal support for the reform policies of the Yeltsin Administration" and asserted that a "strong and cooperative US-Russian relationship, a relationship of genuine partnership, is of the highest priority for President Clinton and his Administration."⁶⁹⁵

The Administration's early and exclusive fixation on Russia did not go unnoticed by the White House press corps. During the 10 March 1993 press briefing, the media asked White House Press Secretary George Stephanopoulos why "the President is focusing so narrowly on aid to Russia and not the Ukraine, Georgia, some of the other republics."⁶⁹⁶ The Press Secretary responded by suggesting that this focus on Russia does not "preclude the possibility of aid to the other republics."⁶⁹⁷

The fixation on Russia, and more precisely on Moscow, was even more evident in Strobe Talbott's 15 March Memorandum breathlessly entitled "A Strategic Alliance with Russian Reform."⁶⁹⁸ The Memorandum's key passages are reproduced here:

The prospect of your summit with Boris Yeltsin has concentrated all our minds on the challenge of dealing with a muscle-bound, palsied and demoralized giant. Russia has preoccupied your predecessors for nearly half a century because of its presumed strength. It threatens to complicate

⁶⁹⁵ News Conference with Russian ForMin, "U.S.-Russia Summit and Invitations To Middle East Peace Talks Announced," Opening statement, Geneva, Switzerland, Office of the Spokesman, 25 February 1993.

⁶⁹⁶ William J. Clinton, Press Briefing by George Stephanopoulos Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269207>.

⁶⁹⁷ William J. Clinton, Press Briefing by George Stephanopoulos Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269207>.

⁶⁹⁸ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 52.

your presidency because of its evident weakness...Until now most Americans have understood their government's policy toward the former Soviet Union primarily in terms of what we do *not* want to happen there. We don't want the economic and political turmoil to trigger a civil war...We don't want a nuclear Yugoslavia in the heart of Eurasia. Nor do we want to see the rise of a new dictatorship that represses its own subjects, threatens its neighbors and requires the United States and its allies to return to a cold war footing...Our objective and our policy can – and should – be put more positively...Russia is on the path toward becoming a modern state, at peace with itself and the world, productively and prosperously integrated into the international economy, a source for raw materials and manufactured products, a market for American goods and services, and a partner for American diplomacy. It should be U.S. policy not just to prevent the worst but also to nurture the best that might happen in the former Soviet Union.⁶⁹⁹

In a remarkably prescient 21 March article by its editorial board, which of course did not have the benefit of reading the above-referenced document, the *Ukrainian Weekly* called on the Clinton Administration “to be wary of a Russo-centric policy” and to take “an objective look at Russia’s treatment of Ukraine and other new independent states.”⁷⁰⁰ The newspaper warned that Russia “now aims to undermine Ukraine’s independent

⁶⁹⁹ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 52.

⁷⁰⁰ “Caution: High Stakes,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 21 March 1993.

statehood and to skew the world's perception of Ukraine via disinformation.”⁷⁰¹ It also urged the White House “to take a good look at the whole picture” because “it is folly to support assistance for Russia without also making it clear that a certain standard of conduct in international affairs must be adhered to in order to be accepted into the world community.”⁷⁰²

The Clinton Administration had its own ideas, however. The next day after the above article appeared in print, Secretary Christopher delivered an address in Chicago on “Securing U.S. Interests While Supporting Russian Reform.”⁷⁰³ In a speech that easily rivaled – and arguably eclipsed – the most Moscow-centric pronouncements of the previous Administration, the Secretary laid out the case for why “helping the Russian people build a free society and a market economy” is “the greatest strategic challenge of our time.”⁷⁰⁴ As if to drive the point home, Secretary Christopher added that “For America and the world, the stakes are just monumental.”⁷⁰⁵

In making his case, the Secretary appears to have avoided making too many references to Yeltsin by name, probably in part to deflect from growing criticism of focusing too much on one rather flawed personality. The White House Press Secretary, taking questions the same day as Secretary Christopher's speech, took a different tack.

⁷⁰¹ “Caution: High Stakes,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 21 March 1993.

⁷⁰² “Caution: High Stakes,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 21 March 1993.

⁷⁰³ Address by Secretary of State Warren Christopher before the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Executives' Club of Chicago and Mid-America Committee, “Securing US Interests While Supporting Russian Reform,” Chicago, Illinois, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 22 March 1993.

⁷⁰⁴ Address by Secretary of State Warren Christopher before the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Executives' Club of Chicago and Mid-America Committee, “Securing US Interests While Supporting Russian Reform,” Chicago, Illinois, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 22 March 1993.

⁷⁰⁵ Address by Secretary of State Warren Christopher before the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Executives' Club of Chicago and Mid-America Committee, “Securing US Interests While Supporting Russian Reform,” Chicago, Illinois, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 22 March 1993.

When asked about Yeltsin's role in Russian reform, George Stephanopoulos asserted that "Yeltsin is the leader of the reform process. **He personifies it.** We support him."⁷⁰⁶

As it turned out, the Press Secretary was foreshadowing President Clinton's news conference, which took place on 23 March and which focused on the President's top two priorities: reforms in Russia and the U.S. economy.⁷⁰⁷ Right off the bat, President Clinton underscored Washington's support for "the historic movement toward democratic political reform in Russia," a questionable assertion given the then already ongoing effort to concentrate more and more power in Yeltsin's hands.⁷⁰⁸ And speaking of Yeltsin, the President once again repeated the trope that the former is not only "the leader of that process" but also "the first democratically elected President in a thousand years of Russian history(sic)."⁷⁰⁹

President Clinton then asserted that "Russia is, and must remain, a democracy," and referred to this assertion as the basis for "the hopes of all humanity for a more peaceful and secure world."⁷¹⁰ The President also used the news conference to remind Congress that "our people too have demanded a new direction in our economy: cutting

⁷⁰⁶ William J. Clinton, Press Briefing by George Stephanopoulos Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269362>.

⁷⁰⁷ According to President Clinton's memoirs, his national security team cautioned restraint in his support for Yeltsin given his "stretching the limits of his constitutional authority," but the President disagreed. Bill Clinton, *My Life*, pp. 505-506.

⁷⁰⁸ William J. Clinton, The President's News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219337>.

⁷⁰⁹ William J. Clinton, The President's News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219337>.

⁷¹⁰ William J. Clinton, The President's News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219337>.

the deficit, investing in our people, and creating high-skill, high-wage jobs for working men and women and for our children.”⁷¹¹

President Clinton’s apparent fixation on Yeltsin led a member of the White House press corps to ask whether “there [is] a danger in putting too much American weight behind Boris Yeltsin.”⁷¹² Sensing a growing perception of parallels with President Bush’s personalization of policy toward Moscow, the President gave a rambling and largely unconvincing response:

I don’t think so. Some people say, well, what’s the difference in this and the Gorbachev situation before, and is this the same sort of problem? I tried to answer that question earlier about what the United States interests are and how we would pursue them. And I’ve tried to be supportive of reformers throughout Russia and, indeed, throughout all the former Communist countries and the former Republics of the Soviet Union. But he is, after all, the first elected President in a thousand years. He has the mandate of having been voted on in a free and open election where people were free to vote and free to stay home, something that was not true previously. And that is something you would expect me to do.⁷¹³

The President did relatively better two days later, on 25 March, when asked about the results of the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Anatoliy Zlenko’s visit to Washington and

⁷¹¹ William J. Clinton, The President’s News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219337>.

⁷¹² William J. Clinton, The President’s News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219337>.

⁷¹³ William J. Clinton, The President’s News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219337>.

prospects for the Rada's ratification of START, perhaps because he relied on an oft-stated, well-established talking point. Specifically, President Clinton asserted that the treaty's ratification is "a precondition to a long-term, successful [bilateral] relationship."⁷¹⁴ He added that "[w]e don't need any more nuclear states."⁷¹⁵

The President did acknowledge that there was "some opposition at home in Ukraine because of uncertainty in Russia," but also appeared to dismiss these concerns by asserting that "we had to have them sign on."⁷¹⁶ President Clinton then tried to put on some charm by claiming that he "wanted very much to be close to the Ukraine. We have a big stake in their success, and we've got a lot of commercial potential there and they here, as well as a lot of ties. We have a lot of Ukrainian-Americans, as you know."⁷¹⁷ The next day, during a joint press availability with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the President stated that "we are committed to doing everything we possibly can to **keep alive** democracy and reform in Russia, and we believe it is in the immediate interests and the long-term interest of all of our people."⁷¹⁸⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁴ William J. Clinton, Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Dorsey High School Students Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219379>.

⁷¹⁵ William J. Clinton, Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Dorsey High School Students Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219379>.

⁷¹⁶ William J. Clinton, Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Dorsey High School Students Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219379>.

⁷¹⁷ William J. Clinton, Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Dorsey High School Students Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219379>.

⁷¹⁸ William J. Clinton, The President's News Conference With Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219390>.

⁷¹⁹ Bolded for emphasis.

President Clinton stuck to this theme during his 1 April remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis, where he claimed that “[n]othing could contribute more to global freedom, to security, to prosperity than the peaceful progression of this rebirth of Russia.”⁷²⁰ He went on to praise Moscow’s cooperation in the “search for peaceful solutions” around the world, including by cooperating on Iraq at the UN, cosponsoring “promising peace talks in the Mideast,” and fostering reconciliation in Cambodia and El Salvador.”⁷²¹ The President also referenced joining forces with Russia to protect the global environment.

President Clinton then laid out his argument for striking “a strategic alliance with Russian reform,” as per Strobe Talbott’s 15 March Memorandum, which is what he said he would attempt to do during his upcoming meeting with Yeltsin in Vancouver.⁷²² In terms of substance, the President mentioned talking to Yeltsin “about steps we can take together to ensure that denuclearization continues in Russia and **her neighboring states.**”⁷²³⁷²⁴ As part of this effort, President Clinton disclosed that he and his Russian counterpart will “explore new initiatives to reassure Ukraine so that it embraces the START Treaty, and to move toward the goal of the Lisbon Protocol agenda, which was

⁷²⁰ William J. Clinton, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219456>.

⁷²¹ William J. Clinton, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219456>.

⁷²² William J. Clinton, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219456>.

⁷²³ William J. Clinton, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219456>.

⁷²⁴ Bolded for emphasis, in this case to underscore the apparent Russia-focused perspective.

intended to ensure that Russia is the only nuclear-armed successor state to the Soviet Union.”⁷²⁵

The President closed by arguing that “[n]ow, as in the past, America's future is tied in important ways to Russia’s(sic).”⁷²⁶ He then added that “Fifty years ago, in a different period of historic challenge for Russia(sic), the great Russian(sic) poet Anna Akhmatova wrote, ‘We know what lies in the balance at this moment and what is happening right now. The hour for courage strikes upon our clocks, and the courage will not desert us.’”⁷²⁷ While it is difficult to prove, chances are that it was Strobe Talbott who slipped this cultural reference into the President’s speech based on his studies of Slavic literature at Oxford.⁷²⁸ Anna Akhmatova was from Ukraine.

During their working dinner on 3 April, President Clinton told Yeltsin that he wants “to put together a program to build on what you are doing and what you think is important.”⁷²⁹ As mentioned during the next day’s background briefing, the two presidents agreed on “a series of American initiatives to support economic and political

⁷²⁵ William J. Clinton, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219456>.

⁷²⁶ William J. Clinton, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219456>.

⁷²⁷ William J. Clinton, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219456>.

⁷²⁸ This assertion is based in part on President Clinton’s evasive response to a Russian journalist when the latter asked the President at the 4 April 1993 news conference why he referenced Akhmatova in his 1 April speech. President Clinton responded that he has been “personally fascinated with the history, the music, and the culture and the literature of Russia,” but did not reference Akhmatova by name. William J. Clinton, Question-and-Answer Session With Russian Reporters in Vancouver Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219554>.

⁷²⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Working Dinner with President Boris Yeltsin, 3 April 1993, Vancouver, Canada, declassified 13 March 2018, National Security Archive, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

reform in Russia, and it's valued at \$1.6 billion."⁷³⁰ The Administration officials participating in the briefing cryptically referred to this assistance as a "package...designed to support Russian reformers."⁷³¹ On denuclearization, President Clinton and Yeltsin reaffirmed their commitment to only having Russia emerge as a nuclear successor state of the USSR. According to President Clinton's memoirs, he left Vancouver "with more confidence in Yeltsin and a better understanding of the magnitude of his challenges and his visceral determination to overcome them. And I liked him."⁷³² On 6 April, the Clinton Administration put together a proposal for \$2.5 billion in assistance, of which "about two-thirds would go to Russia **on the theory** that success there would help lift the other former republics out of their own troubles."⁷³³⁷³⁴

Meanwhile, just four days later after the Vancouver meeting the White House press corps picked up on rumor that President Clinton would not be available for meetings with Ukrainian President Kravchuk until Ukraine ratifies START and accedes to the NTP as a non-nuclear state. When asked directly if this is indeed the case, Deputy Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers essentially confirmed it by stating that the President is "very interested in seeing that the Ukraine sign, ratify SALT II(sic) and sign onto the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and we'll continue to press for that."⁷³⁵ When asked

⁷³⁰ William J. Clinton, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/272288>.

⁷³¹ William J. Clinton, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/272288>.

⁷³² Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 508.

⁷³³ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 69.

⁷³⁴ Bolded for emphasis.

⁷³⁵ William J. Clinton, Press Briefing by Dee Dee Myers Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/272206>.

separately about this dynamic, Secretary Christopher said “The United States is always anxious to meet with representatives of Ukraine.”⁷³⁶

This issue was, of course, picked up by the *Ukrainian Weekly*, whose editorial board condemned the “arms control ‘theology’ [that] is the driving force at the State Department.”⁷³⁷ It also spared no criticism in response to “predictions by a senior U.S. diplomat, widely reported in the press, that Washington and Moscow would soon begin turning screws on Ukraine through diplomatic and economic pressure if Ukraine did not act on its commitments to become a nuclear-free state.”⁷³⁸ The newspaper even went as far as to suggest that “the Clinton State Department [is] even worse than under President George Bush.”⁷³⁹

Speaking of the Department of State, Secretary Christopher’s 20 April testimony provided additional granularity on the Clinton Administration’s Russia policy. The Secretary started his testimony by billing it as an update on “our single-most important foreign policy priority: the effort to help reform succeed in Russia.”⁷⁴⁰ He went on to describe the Vancouver meeting between President Clinton and Yeltsin as “the first truly post-Cold War summit.”⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁶ “Strong-Arming Ukraine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 18 April 1993.

⁷³⁷ “Strong-Arming Ukraine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 18 April 1993.

⁷³⁸ “Strong-Arming Ukraine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 18 April 1993.

⁷³⁹ “Strong-Arming Ukraine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 18 April 1993.

⁷⁴⁰ Statement by Secretary of State Warren Christopher before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Testimony on Assistance to Russia & Foreign Affairs Budget, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 20 April 1993.

⁷⁴¹ Statement by Secretary of State Warren Christopher before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Testimony on Assistance to Russia & Foreign Affairs Budget, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 20 April 1993.

Secretary Christopher next took the Administration's full-court press on Moscow's behalf to the 26 April Fourth World Conference of the National Endowment for Democracy, held the day after the Yeltsin referendum, where Christopher asserted that "[g]reat strides can be made for democracy and human rights in this new era, nowhere more so than in Russia."⁷⁴² He went on to argue that "Ensuring the success of the Russian people in building an open society and a free and vibrant economy: in my judgment, this is the pre-eminent security challenge of our time."⁷⁴³ The Secretary then went on to praise the 25 April Russian referendum that strengthened Yeltsin's hand against the Russian parliament as "a victory for democracy."⁷⁴⁴

Secretary Christopher's characterization was echoed at that day's Department of State press briefing, at which Richard Boucher announced the U.S. Government welcomed "the successful conduct of the referendum as a further step in Russia's movement towards full democracy."⁷⁴⁵ The Department Spokesperson then proceeded to repeat the core of the Clinton Administration's Russia policy: "The success of reform in Russia is important for the world and for the Russian people themselves, and we look forward to continuing to work with President Yeltsin and all the other reformers in Russia to help build a new relationship based on trust and partnership."⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴² Remarks by Secretary of State Warren Christopher at the reception for the Fourth World Conference of the National Endowment for Democracy, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 26 April 1993.

⁷⁴³ Remarks by Secretary of State Warren Christopher at the reception for the Fourth World Conference of the National Endowment for Democracy, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 26 April 1993.

⁷⁴⁴ Remarks by Secretary of State Warren Christopher at the reception for the Fourth World Conference of the National Endowment for Democracy, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 26 April 1993.

⁷⁴⁵ Daily Press Briefing #60, Department of State, 26 April 1993.

⁷⁴⁶ Daily Press Briefing #60, Department of State, 26 April 1993.

What Richard Boucher may not have been aware of, and certainly would not be authorized to allude to, is that Yeltsin's referendum gambit was not without its controversy even within the narrow policy-making circle centered on the White House. According to Strobe Talbott's own recollections, "the question posed by [Yeltsin's speech announcing the referendum] was whether Yeltsin's brinkmanship was sufficiently within the bounds of democratic and constitutional rule to justify our continued support....[Warren Christopher] spoke for the rest of us in warning the president...[to] limit ourselves to support for 'principles and process,' not Yeltsin himself."⁷⁴⁷

Based on this exchange, this high-level group went to National Security Advisor Tony Lake's office "to craft a press statement that endorsed democracy rather than Yeltsin's move per se. When we took it back to the president, he did some editing to make it less equivocal and more encouraging than admonishing in its message to Yeltsin. Once he was satisfied, he dismissed us again, more cheerfully than before: 'Go with it! And don't worry, guys. Yeltsin may be down, but he's not out!'"⁷⁴⁸

In any event, emboldened by President Clinton's unequivocal and highly personalized support, Yeltsin wrote to Kravchuk at the end of April 1993 that "procrastination by Ukraine on the issue of ratification of START-1 and accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a nonnuclear state is alarming."⁷⁴⁹ Yeltsin then warned that "Russia cannot recognize Ukraine's ownership

⁷⁴⁷ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 55.

⁷⁴⁸ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 56.

⁷⁴⁹ "Letter, Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation, to L.M. Kravchuk," April 30, 1993, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, fond 1, delo 7063. Obtained by Mariana Budjeryn and translated by Volodymyr Valkov, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208195>.

rights to the nuclear weapons located on the Ukrainian territory, regardless of the way this right is formulated verbally.”⁷⁵⁰

Yeltsin then went on to argue rather misleadingly that “[s]uch recognition would constitute a violation by Russia of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, particularly in relation to its key obligation not to transfer to any party nuclear weapons, or other nuclear explosive devices, or control over such weapons, or explosive devices, neither directly nor indirectly,” conveniently and willfully ignoring the fact that Ukraine inherited the nuclear weapons on its territory from the now defunct USSR and not from Russia.⁷⁵¹

It is easy to see why Yeltsin felt comfortable increasing pressure on Kravchuk, and the space to do so created for him by the Clinton Administration continued to expand. Secretary Christopher’s 5 May testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on START II ratification showcased the Administration’s increasingly strident rhetoric when it came to its support for Moscow. The Secretary’s offerings this time around included the view that “[w]hile the era of confrontation has ended, the central importance of Russia(sic) to US foreign policy continues.”⁷⁵²⁷⁵³ He also repeated

⁷⁵⁰ “Letter, Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation, to L.M. Kravchuk,” April 30, 1993, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, fond 1, delo 7063. Obtained by Mariana Budjeryn and translated by Volodymyr Valkov, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208195>.

⁷⁵¹ “Letter, Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation, to L.M. Kravchuk,” April 30, 1993, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, fond 1, delo 7063. Obtained by Mariana Budjeryn and translated by Volodymyr Valkov, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208195>.

⁷⁵² Statement by Secretary Christopher before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Testimony to SFRC on START II Treaty Approval Urged, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 11 May 1993.

⁷⁵³ Secretary Christopher continued the well-established practice of conflating Russia with the Soviet Union.

the now standard assertion that “[n]o relationship is more important to the long-term security of the United States than our **strategic relationship** with Russia.”⁷⁵⁴⁷⁵⁵

Secretary Christopher did dangle the carrot of a “broader agenda for cooperation” with Ukraine once it acted on its promise to become a nuclear-free state, a message the Secretary said Strobe Talbott was concurrently delivering to his interlocutors in Kyiv, where he stopped as part of his regional tour.⁷⁵⁶ The Secretary even referred to Ukraine as “a major European nation” during his testimony.⁷⁵⁷

This change in rhetoric vis-à-vis Ukraine, however superficial, did not go unnoticed by the *Ukrainian Weekly*, whose editorial board asserted that the Clinton Administration “has finally begun changing its tune regarding bilateral relations with Ukraine.”⁷⁵⁸ It praised Strobe Talbott’s visit to Kyiv at the head of a “high-powered delegation,” which appeared willing to discuss the nuclear issue in the broader context of “Ukraine’s very legitimate requirements for maximum security,” as the Ambassador-at-Large put it.⁷⁵⁹ He also called his visit “a new start” in bilateral relations and referenced an ongoing review of U.S. policy toward Ukraine.⁷⁶⁰ At the same time, the newspaper reminded its leaders that “[w]ords are words, but it is Mr. Clinton’s deeds that will

⁷⁵⁴ Statement by Secretary Christopher before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Testimony to SFRC on START II Treaty Approval Urged, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 11 May 1993.

⁷⁵⁵ Bolded for emphasis.

⁷⁵⁶ Statement by Secretary Christopher before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Testimony to SFRC on START II Treaty Approval Urged, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 11 May 1993.

⁷⁵⁷ Statement by Secretary Christopher before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Testimony to SFRC on START II Treaty Approval Urged, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 11 May 1993.

⁷⁵⁸ “A New Beginning?,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 16 May 1993.

⁷⁵⁹ “A New Beginning?,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 16 May 1993.

⁷⁶⁰ “A New Beginning?,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 16 May 1993.

demonstrate this new approach in U.S. relations with Ukraine.”⁷⁶¹ Echoing the *Ukrainian Weekly*’s sentiments, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) welcomed the Clinton Administration’s new approach to American-Ukrainian relations and its “growing recognition of the complexities of Ukraine’s nuclear disarmament.”⁷⁶²

Steve Pifer, a former Foreign Service Officer, Clinton National Security Council staffer, key drafter of what became known as the Trilateral Statement, and Ambassador to Ukraine, provided an invaluable description of the policy dynamics underpinning the Ukraine policy review process, including the search for more carrots to incentivize Kyiv to denuclearize. According to Amb. Pifer:

No one in the U.S. government questioned the basic nuclear approach...But Defense Department officials and others pressed for more, making the case that a broader relationship could be leveraged on the nuclear question. In the end, the review concluded that the U.S. government should **hold out the prospect** of a broader relationship that would include political, economic, and security links. That kind of relationship would become possible as the nuclear arms issue was resolved.⁷⁶³⁷⁶⁴

On 25 May, Ukrainian diaspora leaders met with Strobe Talbott to discuss the Clinton Administration’s seemingly evolving policy toward Ukraine and the broader region. As recounted by those present, Amb. Talbott underscored that Washington was seeking to

⁷⁶¹ “A New Beginning?,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 16 May 1993.

⁷⁶² The Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, *Ukraine’s Nuclear Disarmament*, June 1993.

⁷⁶³ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 26.

⁷⁶⁴ Bolded for emphasis.

work with Kyiv “on an array of issues, treating it as a sovereign, independent and important state.”⁷⁶⁵ However, he spent “50 minutes of the hour allotted” on nuclear issues.⁷⁶⁶ During a discussion of U.S. assistance to the region, it became clear “that the bulk of the aid would in fact continue to be provided to Russia.”⁷⁶⁷

The diaspora representatives complained that there was virtually no time left to discuss “the Russo-centric policy of the United States; Ukraine's security needs; economic and technical assistance programs, as well as other types of foreign aid; and the importance of Radio Liberty.”⁷⁶⁸ Most importantly, the meeting participants reportedly came away with the impression that “while the Clinton administration’s rhetoric on Ukraine had changed, its policy had not,” and that “what appears to have occurred is a simple repackaging of an old product,” a reference to Bush Administration policy.⁷⁶⁹ This last assertion appeared to be given considerable credence when President Clinton told a gathering of foreign journalists on 2 July that “the greatest security challenge we have faced in my judgment in the last 5 months was the threat to democracy in Russia. And...[w]e rallied behind Yeltsin.”⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁵ “Multidimensionality,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 6 June 1993.

⁷⁶⁶ “Multidimensionality,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 6 June 1993.

⁷⁶⁷ “Multidimensionality,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 6 June 1993.

⁷⁶⁸ “Multidimensionality,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 6 June 1993.

⁷⁶⁹ “Multidimensionality,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 6 June 1993.

⁷⁷⁰ William J. Clinton, Interview With Foreign Journalists Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219494>.

Revamped Ukraine policy seamlessly introduced

Meanwhile, the Clinton Administration continued to try to put flesh on the bones of the revamped Ukraine policy. This effort came through in late June 1993, when Strobe Talbott testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs. Amb. Talbott's testimony included a stated commitment to broadening U.S. relations with Ukraine and outlined five key themes that "would underpin the new phase of the bilateral relationship: 1) Ukraine had a crucial geopolitical role to play in Central and Eastern Europe, and developments there would affect the security of the region; 2) an independent, sovereign, and prosperous Ukraine was important to U.S. interests; 3) **the United States would conduct its relationship with Ukraine independent of its relationship with Russia**; 4) Ukraine had legitimate security concerns that could be addressed by a series of bilateral and multilateral links; and 5) implementation of the May 1992 Lisbon Protocol, in which Ukraine agreed to implement START and accede to the NPT, would advance Ukraine's security."⁷⁷¹⁷⁷²

Five days later, on 7 July, on the margins of the Tokyo G-7 summit to which Yeltsin was invited – and around the same time that the parliament in Kyiv was in the process of approving a foreign policy doctrine incorporating ownership of the nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory – a senior Administration official was asked by a member of the traveling press pool about complaints from Ukraine and some of the other republics that all the attention given to Yeltsin overlooks their needs.⁷⁷³ The official

⁷⁷¹ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁷² Bolded for emphasis.

⁷⁷³ Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 46-47.

responded that “[t]he Clinton administration made a very calculated decision at the outset to give quite a bit of priority to the relationship with Russia.”⁷⁷⁴ President Clinton’s memoirs are also quite unambiguous in this regard. The President wrote that he went to Tokyo “with an agenda: to...send a clear, unified signal of [G7] financial and political support for Yeltsin and Russian democracy.”⁷⁷⁵

The day after, Strobe Talbott gave a more nuanced answer, skillfully grafting a by-name reference to Ukraine onto the standard response: “[The President] made clear at the outset of his administration that support for reform in Russia and Ukraine and the other new independent states of the former Soviet Union was going to be the number one foreign policy priority of his administration.”⁷⁷⁶ When asked about what the Western taxpayer is getting in return for the \$3 billion assistance package to Russia, Amb. Talbott argued that once Russia completes its transition, “it will be a very important partner for the United States and its allies around the world.”⁷⁷⁷

What Strobe Talbott said publicly and what he thought at the time were not quite the same, based on his memoir. Writing in *The Russia Hand*, Amb. Talbott recalled that “[t]he Tokyo summit got off to a good start, largely because Yeltsin was on his best behavior...[b]ut [President Clinton] was still fretting about whether **pesky problems** –

⁷⁷⁴ William J. Clinton, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/272292>.

⁷⁷⁵ Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 526.

⁷⁷⁶ William J. Clinton, Press Briefing by Secretary of Treasury Lloyd Bentsen Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269346>.

⁷⁷⁷ William J. Clinton, Press Briefing by Secretary of Treasury Lloyd Bentsen Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269346>.

[Russian proliferation of missile technology to] India and Ukraine – would get in the way of what was shaping up to be a successful summit.”⁷⁷⁸⁷⁷⁹

But speaking of “pesky problems” and Ukraine, it was in Tokyo that Yeltsin, with Kravchuk’s acquiescence, first pitched to the United States the idea of using a trilateral American-Russian-Ukrainian format to secure Ukraine’s denuclearization. According to Amb. Talbott, President Clinton “agreed on the spot,” thinking that such a trilateral approach would have a higher chance of succeeding “if Yeltsin had a personal stake in the outcome.”⁷⁸⁰ For his part, Yeltsin probably calculated that the desire to leave Ukraine without a nuclear arsenal more than outweighed the downside of involving the Americans on this front. From Kyiv’s perspective, it probably saw the engagement of the United States, no matter how Russia-focused, as a better dynamic than having to negotiate one-on-one with the former imperial center. In any event, Amb. Talbott and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Georgiy Mamedov “began fleshing out the contents of a U.S.-Russian-Ukrainian accord that the three presidents would sign.”⁷⁸¹

Russia’s notional transition referenced by Strobe Talbott on 8 July in Tokyo was increasingly difficult to imagine in the fall of 1993. When Yeltsin scheduled early parliamentary elections for 12 December 1993 in violation of existing law, the Clinton Administration nevertheless jumped to the Kremlin’s defense. Speaking at a 21 September press conference “On the Situation in Russia,” Secretary Christopher put the most positive spin possible on Yeltsin’s move by arguing that the latter “set forth his plan

⁷⁷⁸ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 82.

⁷⁷⁹ Bolded for emphasis.

⁷⁸⁰ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 83.

⁷⁸¹ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 83.

for new parliamentary elections as a means of resolving the political impasse that has blocked reform and impeded constitutional change.”⁷⁸²

The Secretary also reaffirmed the Clinton Administration’s support for “Yeltsin and his program for democratic reform.”⁷⁸³ Secretary Christopher did, however, acknowledge that the U.S. Government was seeking assurances from Moscow that the elections will be free and fair. When asked if Yeltsin’s actions are consistent with the Russian constitution, the Secretary – a well-practiced lawyer – said he would not “get into a discussion of Russian constitutional or legal principles today.”⁷⁸⁴

As the situation went from bad to worse in Moscow with Yeltsin pressing his advantage, the Clinton Administration worked feverishly to mobilize international support for Yeltsin. This included pressuring the governments of the other post-Soviet states to “seek their assurances that they will support...what the reformers are trying to do.”⁷⁸⁵ Senior Administration officials also announced that there would be no delay in the provision of U.S. assistance to Russia. When pressed by the White House press corps to address the constitutionality of Yeltsin’s move, the officials adopted the Christopher line from the day before and stated that it would be inappropriate “to enter into that debate.”⁷⁸⁶ Moreover, when asked about possible secessionist moods in Russia’s regions,

⁷⁸² Press Conference on Situation in Russia, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 21 September 1993.

⁷⁸³ Press Conference on Situation in Russia, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 21 September 1993.

⁷⁸⁴ Press Conference on Situation in Russia, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 21 September 1993.

⁷⁸⁵ William J. Clinton, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269117>.

⁷⁸⁶ William J. Clinton, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269117>.

one official stated that “[w]e fully support the principle of the Russian Federation as a unitary(sic) state.”⁷⁸⁷

Five days later, on 27 September, President Clinton brazenly told the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly that “[w]e see Russia's first popularly elected President, Boris Yeltsin, leading his nation on its **bold democratic journey**.”⁷⁸⁸⁷⁸⁹ He also told what must have been a rather skeptical audience that “a thriving and democratic Russia not only makes the world safer, it also can help to expand the world's economy.”⁷⁹⁰ President Clinton admitted in his memoirs that he used the crisis in Moscow “to increase [Congressional] support for our Russian aid package.”⁷⁹¹

On 4 October, exactly six months after the presidential meeting in Vancouver, Secretary Christopher found himself answering questions on the MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour about U.S. support for Yeltsin with images of the Russian parliament on fire in Moscow after tank crews loyal to Yeltsin fired on the building. The Secretary asserted that Yeltsin “did everything he could to avoid it” and that he “withheld the use of force for as long as he could.”⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁷ William J. Clinton, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269117>.

⁷⁸⁸ William J. Clinton, Remarks to the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/217952>.

⁷⁸⁹ Bolded for emphasis.

⁷⁹⁰ William J. Clinton, Remarks to the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/217952>.

⁷⁹¹ Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 549.

⁷⁹² Interview on PBS-TV “MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour,” Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 4 October 1993.

Secretary Christopher proceeded to swat away a question about whether the use of force “will change the character of this democratic revolution [Yeltsin] has been trying to lead.”⁷⁹³ He concluded the interview by claiming that “it’s very important at this time for the United States to be firmly supportive of President Yeltsin in his **democratic track.**”⁷⁹⁴⁷⁹⁵ It was no doubt comments like these that led the *Ukrainian Weekly* to argue that the Clinton Administration needed a reality check, and to ridicule then Assistant Secretary of Defense Graham Allison for arguing that “Ukraine’s security problem will be solved once Ukraine gives up its nuclear arsenal.”⁷⁹⁶

Secretary Christopher’s and others’ public comments notwithstanding, the early October events in Moscow were found to be troubling, even at the White House. According to Amb. Talbott’s recollections, “[President] Clinton, too, was shaken by the latest turn of events in Russia.”⁷⁹⁷ The President recognized that “the shelling of the White House was a political setback of considerable proportions and potentially lasting consequences for a leader who had claimed...to have introduced ‘civilized’ politics to Russia.”⁷⁹⁸

Later than month later, on 20 October 1993, U.S. Charge in Moscow, Jim Collins, who would later replace Strobe Talbott as Ambassador-at-Large for the Newly Independent States, cabled the Department of State his preview of Secretary

⁷⁹³ Interview on PBS-TV “MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour,” Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 4 October 1993.

⁷⁹⁴ Interview on PBS-TV “MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour,” Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 4 October 1993.

⁷⁹⁵ Bolded for emphasis.

⁷⁹⁶ “A Reality Check,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 17 October 1993.

⁷⁹⁷ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, pp. 90-91.

⁷⁹⁸ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, pp. 90-91.

Christopher's 21-23 October visit to Russia. Collins's key piece of advice was to "avoid pushing Yeltsin and Kozyrev to do anything likely to come back to haunt them in the December elections."⁷⁹⁹ According to the Charge, this meant helping the Russian president and foreign minister "defending Russian interests vigorously [and] not caving to Western demands."⁸⁰⁰

Charge Collins then proceeded to offer a spirited – and especially in retrospect quite ignorant – defense of Moscow's neo-imperial behavior toward the other post-Soviet states by stating that:

Moscow's political and military policies toward the so-called "near abroad" have been variously interpreted as efforts to regenerate the USSR, Russian nationalist neo-imperialism, or the normal reaction of any sovereign state to armed turmoil along its border.... You will find the Russians sensitive to being singled out for any criticism that they are trying to reestablish the Soviet or Russian empires.... The Russians are growing impatient with finger-wagging warnings about Russian actions along the periphery.⁸⁰¹

In a further effort to bend the already Moscow-focused policy in the region toward Russia's interests, Jim Collins asserted that:

⁷⁹⁹ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 9524, For the Secretary from Charge Collins, Your October 21-23 Visit to Moscow: Key Foreign Policy Issues, 20 October 1993, released in part.

⁸⁰⁰ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 9524, For the Secretary from Charge Collins, Your October 21-23 Visit to Moscow: Key Foreign Policy Issues, 20 October 1993, released in part.

⁸⁰¹ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 9524, For the Secretary from Charge Collins, Your October 21-23 Visit to Moscow: Key Foreign Policy Issues, 20 October 1993, released in part.

[Ukraine] is **an area** where the Russians alternate between appreciation for the U.S. stance on a non-nuclear Ukraine and worry that the U.S., by accident or design, is encouraging Ukrainian pretensions to retain nuclear weapons as a counter to **Moscow's presumed imperial ambitions**. Currently, the Russians seem to be tilting toward angst. Your pre-departure statement that you will be urging the Ukrainians to fulfill their arms control obligations, however, has played well in Moscow. It will be important that you brief the Russians fully on the approach you intend to take with the Ukrainians.⁸⁰²⁸⁰³

It is important to note that the rest of the above paragraph was blacked out, as is most of the next paragraph, suggesting it focused more explicitly on bilateral cooperation with Moscow on the issue of Ukraine. In any event, Charge Collins proceeded to pass along Moscow's "deep appreciation" for the new trilateral approach the United States had taken to resolve the Ukrainian-Russian impasse on Ukraine's denuclearization.⁸⁰⁴

But Jim Collins saved the most important point for last, suggesting that Secretary Christopher "leave the Russians with the clear understanding that America continues to support the Yeltsin government and its pro-reform efforts," adding that "you will want the Russians to know that the U.S. is actively promoting Russia's complete **reintegration**

⁸⁰² Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 9524, For the Secretary from Charge Collins, Your October 21-23 Visit to Moscow: Key Foreign Policy Issues, 20 October 1993, released in part.

⁸⁰³ Bolded for emphasis.

⁸⁰⁴ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 9524, For the Secretary from Charge Collins, Your October 21-23 Visit to Moscow: Key Foreign Policy Issues, 20 October 1993, released in part.

into the family of Western states.”⁸⁰⁵ Charge Collins also suggested that the Secretary’s visit would send “a definitive signal that Yeltsin is not being held to blame for the [recent] bloodshed [in Moscow].”⁸⁰⁶⁸⁰⁷

Jim Collins’s effort maximize Washington’s praise for Moscow did not end there. He advised Secretary Christopher “to emphasize U.S.-Russian cooperation, especially when discussing the Middle East Peace Process,” as “[k]eeping the Russians in the limelight as co-sponsors of the negotiations pays off in keeping the positive aspects of our partnership front and center.”⁸⁰⁸ During that visit to Moscow and while speaking at the Academy for National Economy, Secretary Christopher stayed true to this advice and underscored that it is “in our shared interest to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons within the former Soviet Union” as “proliferation would increase both the risks and the costs of conflict among the new independent states.”⁸⁰⁹

U.S.-Russian cooperation on Ukraine continued to deepen, acquiring a conspiratorial tinge to it in the process, as evidenced by the following write-up of an exchange between Andrey Kozyrev and Strobe Talbott at the former’s 25 October 1993 meeting with Secretary Christopher:

⁸⁰⁵ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 9524, For the Secretary from Charge Collins, Your October 21-23 Visit to Moscow: Key Foreign Policy Issues, 20 October 1993, released in part.

⁸⁰⁶ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 9524, For the Secretary from Charge Collins, Your October 21-23 Visit to Moscow: Key Foreign Policy Issues, 20 October 1993, released in part.

⁸⁰⁷ Bolded for emphasis. The question of whether “Russia” was ever integrated into the family of Western states is, of course, debatable.

⁸⁰⁸ Embassy Moscow cable, Moscow 9524, For the Secretary from Charge Collins, Your October 21-23 Visit to Moscow: Key Foreign Policy Issues, 20 October 1993, released in part.

⁸⁰⁹ Speech by Secretary of State Warren Christopher at the Moscow Academy for the National Economy, “A New Generation of Russian Democrats,” Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 23 October 1993.

Kozyrev, discussing the missiles, said that the Ukrainians were making a distinction in their minds between the solid fuel SS-24s and the liquid propellant SS-19s...Ambassador Talbott said that what we want to do is achieve certain specific steps to immobilize or dismantle the SS-24s in a stated time. If we succeed, we will want to keep those steps with respect to the SS-24s private **in order to bring the Ukrainians along.**⁸¹⁰⁸¹¹

Much of the referenced cable's section dealing with Ukraine was not approved for public release. The only released part of this section's summary sounds tantalizing: "On Ukraine, Secretary Christopher and Ambassador Talbott briefed Kozyrev on our...."⁸¹²

Meanwhile, Secretary Christopher took advantage of his meeting with Yeltsin the same day, 25 October, to convey President Clinton's "congratulations on how President Yeltsin had handled recent events [in Moscow]."⁸¹³ The Secretary added that the President admired both Yeltsin's "superb handling of the crisis" and "the restraint which [Yeltsin] practiced."⁸¹⁴ He also told Yeltsin that "[w]e were greatly relieved when you re-established control."⁸¹⁵

Though of course not privy to the U.S.-Russian discussions on Ukraine, the *Ukrainian Weekly* was remarkably on target when it questioned whether Secretary

⁸¹⁰ Department of State cable, Secretary Christopher's Meeting with Foreign Minister Kozyrev: NATO, Elections, Regional Issues, 25 October 1993, released in part.

⁸¹¹ Bolded for emphasis.

⁸¹² Department of State cable, Secretary Christopher's Meeting with Foreign Minister Kozyrev: NATO, Elections, Regional Issues, 25 October 1993, released in part.

⁸¹³ Department of State cable, Secretary Christopher's Meeting with President Yeltsin, 25 October 1993, released in full.

⁸¹⁴ Department of State cable, Secretary Christopher's Meeting with President Yeltsin, 25 October 1993, released in full.

⁸¹⁵ Department of State cable, Secretary Christopher's Meeting with President Yeltsin, 25 October 1993, released in full.

Christopher's visit to Kyiv was truly reflective of the Clinton Administration's ostensibly new approach to relations with Ukraine. Its educated guess on the visit's true focus – nuclear weapons – was not only correct, but gave it grounds to assert that the United States continued “to ignore Ukraine's legitimate calls for international security guarantees.”⁸¹⁶

As if trying to underscore the *Ukrainian Weekly's* clairvoyance, Secretary Christopher told an audience in Los Angeles on 2 November that after protecting the vital interests of the United States, the U.S. Government's “second vital interest is to promote good relations with Russia.”⁸¹⁷ The Secretary added that he thought “the President's foreign policy team [has] done that well.”⁸¹⁸ His remarks left little doubt that there had been no meaningful debate within the Administration about changing its course – or even significantly adjusting its course – on Russia policy. Speaking before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee two days later, Secretary Christopher spent a considerable amount of time on Russia, but only mentioned Ukraine in the denuclearization context.⁸¹⁹ Two and a half weeks later, the Rada ratified START with significant unilateral conditions, including not following through on Kyiv's commitment to accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear state.⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁶ “Reality Check II,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 31 October 1993.

⁸¹⁷ Remarks of Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Los Angeles Foreign Affairs Council and Los Angeles Town Hall, Los Angeles, California, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 2 November 1993.

⁸¹⁸ Remarks of Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Los Angeles Foreign Affairs Council and Los Angeles Town Hall, Los Angeles, California, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 2 November 1993.

⁸¹⁹ Statement of the Honorable Warren Christopher, Secretary of State, Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Priorities of U.S. Foreign Policy, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 4 November 1993.

⁸²⁰ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 November 1993.

Meanwhile, the Russian government made public a new military doctrine that included first-use of nuclear weapons in certain cases. When asked whether this issue was discussed during Secretary Christopher's recent visit to Moscow, Department of State spokesperson Mike McCurry responded that "[i]t's clearly something that was in the process of being formulated."⁸²¹ When pressed further, McCurry claimed that the issue "was alluded to by Foreign Minister Kozyrev...but it was not discussed in any great detail."⁸²²

Upon further scrutiny, the Department Spokesperson took the assembled press corps on another ride by suggesting that "the posture of the strategic forces of Russia" was only "briefly touched upon because there was not specificity that I'm aware of that was offered about the emerging doctrine."⁸²³ In other words, the new Russian military doctrine's first-use provisions came as a surprise to the Clinton Administration and most of the bilateral conversations in Moscow did indeed focus on the denuclearization of Russia's neighbors.

Mike McCurry's job did not get any easier two days later, on 10 November, when he was asked about Yeltsin's new constitution and the accompanying disqualification of eight political parties from taking part in the December parliamentary elections. The Department Spokesperson's response that "[w]e are still studying the draft of the constitution as it's been promulgated" provoked a series of follow-up and more hard-

⁸²¹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 8 November 1993.

⁸²² Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 8 November 1993.

⁸²³ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 8 November 1993.

hitting questions about the Yeltsin government reformist commitments and democratic credentials.⁸²⁴

This obvious discrepancy between reality and wishful thinking did not prevent the Clinton White House from accepting an invitation to make a state visit to Russia 12-15 January 1994. According to the 2 December 1993 announcement by Dee Dee Myers, “[t]he summit will further strengthen the new democratic partnership established between the United States and Russia during the Vancouver meetings in April of 1993.”⁸²⁵ Meanwhile, Kyiv indicated it would give up the nuclear weapons on Ukraine’s territory in exchange for U.S.-brokered assurances from Moscow on Ukrainian sovereignty.⁸²⁶

Three days later, the *Ukrainian Weekly* editorial board accused the United States and Russia of “acting in concert, each applying pressure on Ukraine to disarm...[t]he U.S. by withholding economic aid and diplomatic niceties, Russia via economic and nuclear blackmail, halting deliveries of fuel supplies and announcing suspension of nuclear weapons maintenance.”⁸²⁷ The newspaper went to predict that “[j]ust as President George Bush’s warnings against ‘suicidal nationalism’ backfired, so too is President Clinton’s accommodationist stance toward Russia at the expense of the other successor states to the USSR bound to fail.”⁸²⁸

Moreover, the newspaper asserted that “Russia is not the guarantor of stability...[i]t is the obstacle to stability,” a claim that was only strengthened by the

⁸²⁴ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 10 November 1993.

⁸²⁵ William J. Clinton, Press Briefing by Dee Dee Myers Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269269>.

⁸²⁶ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 108.

⁸²⁷ “Nuclear Double Standard,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 5 December 1993.

⁸²⁸ “Nuclear Double Standard,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 5 December 1993.

results of the 12 December 1993 Russian parliamentary elections, which saw a strong showing by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and the so-called Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia headed by nationalist demagogue and anti-Western mouthpiece Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.⁸²⁹ For his part, Department of State Spokesperson Mike McCurry chose to deflect a question about the negative impact of the Russian electoral results on Ukraine's denuclearization calculations, restating the Administration's view that it is in Ukraine's interest "to immediately proceed with ratification of the NPT, START I, without reservations, and to adhere to the commitments they've made."⁸³⁰

Meanwhile, the *Ukrainian Weekly* continued with its "Reality Check" series, this time focusing on the Clinton White House and its (lack) of reaction to Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's electoral success. The editorial board argued that more shocking than that success was the Administration's announcement that it does not "envision a change of policy toward Russia."⁸³¹ The board then made the case that a reappraisal was indeed necessary, particularly on the question of security guarantees and "the matter of putting pressure on Ukraine to immediately, unquestionably, give up all its nukes to Russia."⁸³²

These concerns were echoed by the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), whose early January 1994 press release alleged that "In the year following U.S. recognition of Ukraine, relations between the two countries have not reached an optimum level for a variety of reasons." UCCA suggested that "[c]hief among these is the United

⁸²⁹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 14 December 1993.

⁸³⁰ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 14 December 1993.

⁸³¹ "Reality Check III," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 19 December 1993.

⁸³² "Reality Check III," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 19 December 1993.

States propensity for treating U.S.-Ukraine relations as a subset of relations between the United States and Russia.”⁸³³

About the same time as the UCCA appeal, the United States began hosting trilateral talks with Russia and Ukraine on the question of the latter’s denuclearization. Department of State Spokesperson Mike McCurry told the assembled press corps that the three delegations are “working closely and intensely.”⁸³⁴ Three days later, on 6 January, Mike McCurry told the Department of State press corps that the three delegations have “certainly narrowed the differences on some of the issue.”⁸³⁵ Another three days later, President Clinton told his traveling press pool that “we’ve made a terrific amount of progress.”⁸³⁶

Trilateral process bears fruit

The next day, on 10 January, a senior Administration official told the press pool that an agreement had taken shape, the first public acknowledgement of this fact, and its main feature would be the full deactivation of the nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory, financial assistance with the dismantlement process, removal of the warheads to Russia, compensation for the highly enriched uranium collected, and security assurances related to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. When asked to describe the security assurances, the official admitted that these are essentially repackaged commitments as

⁸³³ Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, January 1994.

⁸³⁴ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 4 January 1994.

⁸³⁵ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 6 January 1994.

⁸³⁶ William J. Clinton, Exchange With Reporters in Brussels, Belgium Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219028>.

provided by the CSCE (OSCE) and the NPT. He added that there are “no new guarantees or obligations as part of this agreement.”⁸³⁷

All in all, the agreement would pave the way for the removal of 176 ICBMs and some 1,5000 nuclear warheads from Ukraine. With the agreement essentially in hand, President Clinton stated during a press event in Brussels, also on 10 January, that the United States will now be in a position to open “a new era in our relationship with Ukraine, an important country at the center of Europe.”⁸³⁸ He added that he was looking forward “to Ukraine’s playing an important role in efforts to move toward the integration of a broader Europe.”⁸³⁹

Two days later, on 12 January, while making a brief “refueling stop” in Ukraine for a meeting with Kravchuk in the VIP departure lounge at Boryspil airport outside of Kyiv, President Clinton went out of his way to reference Ukraine in ways usually reserved for Russia, praising Ukraine as “a nation with a rich heritage, enormous economic potential, and a very important position in European security” and adding that “[f]rom America’s birth to the present day, Ukrainian immigrants have helped to shape my nation’s history.”⁸⁴⁰⁸⁴¹ He commended Kravchuk for “his courage and his vision” in

⁸³⁷ William J. Clinton, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269382>.

⁸³⁸ William J. Clinton, The President’s News Conference in Brussels Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/218867>.

⁸³⁹ William J. Clinton, The President’s News Conference in Brussels Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/218867>.

⁸⁴⁰ William J. Clinton, The President’s News Conference With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine in Kiev Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/218389>.

⁸⁴¹ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 112.

negotiating this agreement.⁸⁴² Kravchuk finally got a Presidential visit to Ukraine, though the circumstances were probably not what he had envisioned.

According to Strobe Talbott, the U.S. Government refused to confirm President Clinton's stop in Ukraine "unless every word and punctuation mark in the trilateral deal was agreed in advance."⁸⁴³ During the meeting at Boryspil, the President and Secretary Christopher "told Kravchuk in the bluntest of terms that if he backed out of the deal...it would be a major setback for Ukraine's relations with both Russia and the U.S."⁸⁴⁴ Based on Amb. Talbott's description, "a visibly shaken Kravchuk promised Clinton he would stick with the agreements in hand."⁸⁴⁵

The three presidents, including the "stoical but unhappy Kravchuk," signed the so-called Trilateral Statement, as the agreement became known, at the Kremlin in Moscow on 14 January.⁸⁴⁶⁸⁴⁷⁸⁴⁸ It led to the issuance of the so-called Budapest

⁸⁴² William J. Clinton, The President's News Conference With President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine in Kiev Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/218389>.

⁸⁴³ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 112.

⁸⁴⁴ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 112.

⁸⁴⁵ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 112.

⁸⁴⁶ William J. Clinton, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Official Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269478>.

⁸⁴⁷ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 114.

⁸⁴⁸ When asked by the press if a statement is less than an agreement, one Administration official said "It's a different kind of diplomatic mechanism." Seeing skepticism in response, another official jumped in and, arguably, made matters worse: "It is in writing called a statement. But when three presidents sit in front of the whole world and all of you and sign something and commit themselves to it -- and we've gone through months of negotiations that are represented in a very detailed annex, that have very specific commitments that need to be matched, that is an agreement, that is a commitment that one country makes to another. In this case, the three countries make to each other. So what's lying in back of your question as I hear it is, is there some way that this is kind of less than an agreement that countries have to agree to? No, it's not. This is something -- this is an agreement between three countries represented in a statement, if you will, that all three of the countries expect will be adhered to. And we take that seriously and Kravchuk does, as well." The still skeptical member of the press corps asked if NAFTA and NATO would be taken as seriously if they were named, respectively, the North American Free Trade Statement and the North Atlantic Statement Organization. In reality, a statement is, of course, quite different from an agreement, with the latter requiring legislative consent and having legal force. William J. Clinton, Background Briefing by Senior

Memorandum, which laid out Ukraine's security assurances in somewhat more concrete terms, a document that was violated by Russia when it invaded Ukraine 20 years later.⁸⁴⁹

The *Ukrainian Weekly's* reaction to the Trilateral Statement was both predictable and prophetic:

The U.S. has once again permitted Moscow to draft American foreign policy. And, once again Ukrainians are, in effect, being told that the U.S. and Russia know better what is good for Ukraine. It's great power politics as usual, and the result is a bad deal for Ukraine.⁸⁵⁰

The newspaper's editorial board was much more complimentary to former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney's thoughts on the subject, which he shared with the press the same day the three presidents signed the Trilateral Statement:

I think there is a tendency for us to still operate the way we always did in the past. We used to have one-stop shopping when you dealt with the Soviet Union. You could go to Moscow and whatever arrangements you worked out with them applied to everybody, and of course, that's no longer the case. I think we need to recognize that we ought to support reforms, not get tied too closely to any one particular individual and recognize that we've got a vested interest in building strong relationships with all the republics of the former

Administration Official Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/269478>.

⁸⁴⁹ According to Amb. Pifer, "there was a failure, both in Washington and Kyiv, to anticipate anything like Putin in 2014." Correspondence with author, 29 November 2020.

⁸⁵⁰ Clinton in Kyiv, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 16 January 1994.

Soviet Union, especially, for example, Ukraine, and not let what happens in Moscow affect or shape our relationship with Ukraine.

That ought to be an independent relationship.⁸⁵¹

Kravchuk lost his re-election bid in July 1994 after being forced to accept an early election date by the growing economic crisis in the country. He was replaced by his former prime minister, Leonid Kuchma, who had little leeway in changing the outcome of the trilateral negotiations. The last nuclear warhead left Ukraine in mid-1996.

The Moscow factor's presence and its impact

Based on the above evidence, the Moscow factor was present, often quite explicitly, in the question of U.S. policy relating to Ukraine's denuclearization, both directly and, more often, indirectly, particularly in the context of Washington's approach to its perceived Russian equities. Unlike in the previous case reviewed, the Moscow factor did not at all play a positive role in terms of Ukraine. Rather, the Moscow factor played a negative role vis-à-vis Ukraine and its interests.

All in all, there was little to distinguish the Bush and Clinton policies toward Ukraine during this period. Both looked at Ukraine through the denuclearization lens. Both fixated on Moscow. Moreover, the broadening of relations with Ukraine attempted by the Clinton Administration after its spring 1993 policy review arguably built on the initial steps taken in that direction by the Bush Administration. And even with this

⁸⁵¹ "Cheney: U.S. Policy Toward Ukraine Must be Independent of Moscow," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 23 January 1994.

broadening, evidence points to an engagement with Ukraine that was shallow, still driven largely by considerations associated with denuclearization, and a general view of Ukraine as a distraction rather than a key post-Soviet state in Eastern Europe deserving of a policy that was not a function of Washington's interaction with Moscow.

The Clinton Administration does deserve credit for introducing incentives into U.S. efforts to secure Ukraine's post-Soviet denuclearization, itself largely a policy outgrowth of Washington's fixation on Moscow, whether Soviet or Russian. Despite Strobe Talbott's assertion that Washington's Ukraine policy would be conducted independently of its relationship with Russia, rightly or wrongly, the heavily Russia-laden nuclear question remained a prism through which the United States viewed its relations with Ukraine, a focus that came at the expense of other dimensions, including the question of post-Soviet transformation and reform. And the nuclear question was, in turn, seen through the prism of, in the first instance, Yeltsin's standing, and, more broadly, non-proliferation considerations.

In the end, the Ukrainian government acquiesced to full denuclearization because it ran out of both time and options. Washington's ability to understand Kyiv's concerns was limited, while the range and seriousness of the problems facing Ukraine at home and vis-à-vis Moscow seemed unfathomable. This mix of new incentives introduced by the Clinton Administration combined with the disincentive of losing favor with the United States at a time of a once again increasingly assertive Russia proved sufficient for Kyiv to follow through on its denuclearization commitment.

Interplay with selected independent variables

Relative importance of domestic priorities: Throughout the presidential campaign, Bill Clinton criticized incumbent President Bush for not paying enough attention to America's domestic challenges, despite the latter's own emphasis on domestic issues, including the growing socio-economic dislocation. "It's the economy, stupid," while not a phrase coined by Bill Clinton, is certainly associated with the Clinton campaign's ultimately successful efforts to unsettle George H. W. Bush in the midst of an economic recession. As foreshadowed in several key speeches, the Clinton Administration focused on job creation, the related issue of support for small businesses, and welfare reform.

Relative importance of other foreign policy priorities: In a number of ways, the Clinton Administration's foreign policy became even more focused on Moscow and the occupant of the Kremlin than its predecessor, whose other foreign policy priorities are referenced in the previous chapter. This Moscow fixation played a significant role in a range of both perennial and new topics, including arms control and non-proliferation, the Middle East Peace Process, the wars in the former Yugoslavia, and the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO), as sought by Poland and a number of other countries in the space between NATO and Russia.

Relative commitment to "Europe whole and free" policy: As referenced in Chapter 1, the Clinton Administration both normalized the use of the phrase "Europe whole and

free” and expanded its notional geographical reach beyond the parameters already utilized by the Bush Administration. This expansion began to include, however rhetorically, not only the countries of the old Eastern Europe (Poland, Czechia, et al) but also those in the new Eastern Europe (e.g., Belarus, Ukraine, and, arguably, even Russia). This issue played especially crucially in the context of the NATO enlargement issue referenced above.

Congressional role and posture: Unlike on the issue of U.S. recognition of Ukraine’s independence, the Congressional posture and role on the denuclearization issue largely mirrored and complemented the Bush and Clinton Administrations’ objectives and policies. The reason for this overlap was the strong focus in both the executive branch and on the Hill on the issue of nuclear security and non-proliferation. Underpinning this collaboration was the notion that the most important front in the effort to confront these challenges was the former Soviet space, with Russia being the most operative interlocutor. No discussion of Congress and denuclearization can be had without mentioning the role of Senators Lugar and Nunn in appropriating funds for a robust approach to securing nuclear materials and preventing so-called “loose nukes.”

Extent of Ukrainian diaspora activism: The Ukrainian diaspora in the United States saw the delayed U.S. recognition of Ukraine’s independence by the Bush Administration as further and unmistakable proof of the Bush Administration’s fixation on Moscow and ignorance about the broader region. These negative – and well-founded – perceptions

carried over to the Bush Administration's handling of the denuclearization issue, with the diaspora staying active in its efforts to present Ukraine's side of the story and warn about Moscow's post-imperial appetites. While hope ran high among the diaspora that the Clinton Administration's approach would be more equitable, the community was quickly disappointed, energizing it to educate or, at least shame, the White House into what it saw as a more justified and sustainable policy.

Moscow's behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities: With the transference from Gorbachev to Yeltsin, and from the USSR to Russia completed toward the end of the Bush Administration and solidified at the start of the Clinton Administration, Washington was quite willing to give more weight to Yeltsin's real or imagined positive behavior, while discounting Russian policies that increasingly challenged Western norms and values, both at home and abroad. The White House could still point to arms control and Baltic withdrawals, for example, as areas in which Moscow was cooperative, but there were also other instances, e.g., proliferation activities and Russia's protection of the Milosevic regime in Belgrade, which were not consistent with Western, including U.S., preferences. There was still a third category that involved Russian actions that were destructive, but were not seen as such by the White House, either under President Bush or under President Clinton. These included Russian stoking of conflicts in neighboring countries, e.g., in Georgia and Moldova. In any event, both of the U.S. Administrations in question were loathe to pressure Yeltsin for fear of making him more vulnerable to domestic opponents.

Kyiv's behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities: In the context of Washington's fixation on Moscow and its desire to see only one nuclear state emerge from the ruins of the Soviet Union, whether during the Bush Administration or the Clinton Administration, the United States Government saw all Ukrainian behavior meant to demonstrate, advocate for, and defend Ukraine's own independent interests unhelpful, provocative, and even worthy of ridicule and outright bullying. The American attitude once again brought into question the extent to which the United States took seriously Ukraine's independence.

Executive branch policy champions: As was the dynamic in the previously described case focusing on the issue of Ukraine's independence, the key policy champions in the context of Ukraine's denuclearization were the two pertinent Presidents, Bush and Clinton, and they both came out strongly and clearly on the side of policies that were largely constructed based on their understanding of Moscow's interests and preferences. While no one reportedly argued formally against the concentration of Soviet-era nuclear weapons in Russia, there were individuals in the Department of Defense under both Administrations who appeared to understand Ukraine's importance beyond the nuclear question, including in the context of a possibly actively revanchist policy in Moscow. These also happened to be the individuals who most welcomed the spring 1993 review of Washington's Ukraine policy.

Summary

Even more so than in the previous case, the most important factor that played itself out on the question of the U.S. policy on Ukraine's denuclearization was President Bush's and then President Clinton's strong personal involvement in both the formulation and implementation of America's Russia policy, including on the question of the disposition of former Soviet nuclear weapons. This was especially true of the Clinton Administration, in which the Commander-in-Chief was involved to such an extent that he was dubbed "the Russia hand."

As was the case with President Bush, his successor also preferred to have a counterpart in the Kremlin who would be less likely to divert White House attention from domestic priorities. Washington therefore saw Ukraine's efforts to secure for itself the best terms possible in quite negative terms. And while the diaspora once again did its best to influence U.S. policy, with modest results, Congress did not play a significant dissenting role on this issue set.

Chapter 5

U.S. Posture vis-à-vis the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine

The George W. Bush presidency context

With Soviet-era nuclear weapons removed from Ukraine under the terms of the Trilateral Statement and the associated Budapest Memorandum, U.S.-Ukrainian relations did take on a broader agenda beyond the denuclearization focus of their earlier years. In a number of ways, the latter part of the Clinton Administration marked the then high-water mark of the bilateral relationship, even if Washington’s largely positive view of Leonid Kuchma and his presidency was quite unfounded.

This view began to sour in 1999, when Kuchma arguably set the stage for what would become known as the Orange Revolution by manipulating the electoral process to hold on to the presidency, including by marginalizing one of his likely toughest opponents in a runoff. The death of another top opponent in a car accident as the campaign was revving up also served to improve Kuchma’s chances. Though the United States was relatively slow to call out Kuchma as his authoritarian tendencies began to manifest themselves, the quality of the bilateral relationship began to deteriorate.

International, including U.S., perceptions of Kuchma took another major hit, though arguably not enough, with the September 2000 murder of investigative journalist Heorhiy Gongadze. His mutilated body was found in a forest outside Kyiv.

Surreptitiously made recordings pointed to Kuchma and other senior officials in his immediate circle. Ukraine also began to lose relative ground in American perceptions as the increasingly sick and erratic Yeltsin was replaced by a former middling KGB officer from Leningrad.

Vladimir Putin was quick to reach out to new U.S. President George W. Bush after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, something that the White House understandably appreciated and perhaps over-interpreted.⁸⁵² Putin agreed to reach out to the leaders of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to agree to U.S. overflights of their countries on the way to Afghanistan, something that Gen. Tommy Franks told President Bush he needed to support anti-Taliban operations.⁸⁵³ In any event, this positive interaction built on top of the President's initial impression of Putin from their first meeting in Slovenia in June 2001 when the President claimed he was able to look into Putin's soul and liked what he saw.⁸⁵⁴

Ukraine's stock took a further plunge when the above-referenced recordings, which were being transcribed, began to paint a picture of unbridled corruption and lawlessness at the very top of the country's political leadership. Of particular interest to the United States was a recording that captured Kuchma's July 2000 conversation with another senior official in which the two discussed, and Kuchma approved, providing an

⁸⁵² President Bush thought his 22 September 2001 conversation with Putin was "amazing." According to the President's memoirs, he told Putin he "appreciated his willingness to move beyond the suspicions of the past." George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, pp. 196-197.

⁸⁵³ George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 195.

⁸⁵⁴ Years later, President Bush wrote that his "goal [at his first meeting with Putin] had been to cut through any tension and forge a connection...I placed a high priority on personal diplomacy." George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 195.

advanced early-warning system, the Kolchuga, to Saddam's Iraq in violation of UN sanctions.

With Kuchma's reputation in Washington quite gutted as a result and Kuchma essentially declared persona non grata, the formal bilateral relationship barely registered in the scope of the U.S. Government's other priorities. And it was one of these other priorities, the U.S.-led war to dislodge the Iraqi regime that gave Kuchma his best opportunity to curry favor with the Bush Administration by agreeing to contribute a Ukrainian contingent to the international force in Iraq.

This opportunity carried an additional benefit – the ability to favorably differentiate Ukraine from Putin's Russia, at least in the context of Moscow's opposition to Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S.-led intervention in Iraq. But with Moscow playing a generally constructive role in facilitating the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and on a number of other issues, at least from Washington's perspective, Kyiv's efforts to differentiate could only go so far. Ukrainian troops eventually began to deploy to Iraq in August 2003.

Six days before the 19 March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs testified on U.S. priorities in Europe before the House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on Europe. Assistant Secretary Beth Jones's testimony, which was the Bush Administration's clearest statement of policy toward the region in some time, underscored the extent to which Russia was perceived in positive terms, despite its poor human rights and democracy record, and the degree of Ukraine's decline in Washington's eyes as a result of Kuchma's

track record, even as Washington slowly began to appreciate Ukraine's strategic importance.

On Russia, Beth Jones emphasized the "broad spectrum" of issues inherent to the U.S.-Russia relationship, while highlighting arms control and the mutual ratification of the Moscow Treaty, which "radically reduc[ed] strategic offensive weapons."⁸⁵⁵ She told the Subcommittee that "Russia continues to be a key partner in the global war on terror," and praised Moscow's cooperation on a broad range of "key regional problems," including the Middle East Peace Process and India-Pakistan tensions.⁸⁵⁶ In reference to Iraq, Assistant Secretary Jones was quite diplomatic, saying that the Russians "have not been helpful on Iraq in the UN."⁸⁵⁷ She identified the DPRK's nuclear program as an area in which Moscow could "engage more actively."⁸⁵⁸

Assistant Secretary Jones's largely positive assessment of Russia continued when she shifted gears to the economic sphere, stating that "the Russian Government has made progress on market reforms."⁸⁵⁹ Remarkably, Jones told the Subcommittee that "[l]arge Russian companies are adopting more Western practices and becoming more transparent," even as she admitted that "much remains to be done" on fighting corruption,

⁸⁵⁵ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁵⁶ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁵⁷ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁵⁸ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁵⁹ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

enforcing the rule of law, and otherwise improving the business climate.⁸⁶⁰ She concluded this section by throwing Moscow a significant bone, claiming that “there is a natural fit between Russia’s desire to play a greater role in providing oil and gas to global energy markets and our interest in diversifying supply.”⁸⁶¹

Speaking of U.S. relations with Ukraine, Assistant Secretary Jones acknowledged that bilateral ties have “gone through a difficult period,” citing, *inter alia*, Kuchma’s recorded authorization of the Kolchuga transfer to Iraq.⁸⁶² In response to Kuchma’s behavior, Washington began “to shift assistance resources from programs benefiting the central government to those that more directly support civil society,” most importantly those supporting media freedom.⁸⁶³ Jones singled out this aspect in her testimony, citing the need to help “ensure free and fair presidential elections” scheduled for late 2004.⁸⁶⁴ She warned that “[w]e will be watching closely the Ukrainian authorities’ treatment of independent journalists and media outlets, particularly as the 2004 elections draw closer.”⁸⁶⁵

At the same time, Assistant Secretary Jones acknowledged Ukraine’s strategic importance, asserting that “its future will have a significant impact on the future of its

⁸⁶⁰ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁶¹ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁶² Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁶³ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁶⁴ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁶⁵ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

neighbors and Europe as a whole.”⁸⁶⁶ As a result, the United States would “continue to deepen the good cooperation we have with Ukraine on strategic issues.”⁸⁶⁷ At the top of Beth Jones’s list was Ukraine’s cooperation in the war on terror. She pointed out that the Ukrainians “have allowed more than 5,000 overflights connected with Operation Enduring Freedom, and have fully equipped a battalion in the Afghan National Army.”⁸⁶⁸

Six months later, President Bush’s 23 September 2003 address to the UN General Assembly underscored Washington’s continued focus on prosecuting the war on terror. In this context, the President underscored two other important aspects – helping the people of Afghanistan and Iraq “build free and stable countries” and confronting “together...the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.”⁸⁶⁹ It was on the latter that he mentioned the U.S. experience in working with “Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union” in destroying or securing weapons and dangerous materials.⁸⁷⁰ President Bush did not mention Ukraine or the other two countries that gave up their nuclear arsenals by name.

Ukraine was mentioned, however, by the President in his 20 January 2004 State of the Union address when he listed all the countries that were contributing troops to the

⁸⁶⁶ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁶⁷ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁶⁸ Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Statement Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. Priorities in Europe, 13 March 2003.

⁸⁶⁹ George W. Bush, Address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/216889>.

⁸⁷⁰ George W. Bush, Address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/216889>.

U.S.-led international contribution in Iraq.⁸⁷¹ This direct reference suggested that Kuchma's attempt at image laundering in Washington by sending Ukrainian troops to Iraq was beginning to pay dividends. Among other priorities, President Bush mentioned tax reform, job creation, and immigration reform.

Assistant Secretary Jones's 18 March testimony before the House International Relations Committee, just over a year since her previously cited testimony above, provided significant insight into the Bush Administration's thinking about the Russia and the broader region. Jones alluded to "remarkable progress with the Russians on a broad range of issues on which we share a common interest," among which she included eliminating "the threat of global nuclear annihilation" and securing "nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction-related materials."⁸⁷²

Assistant Secretary Jones also asserted that "Russia and the United States have become strong allies in the global war on terrorism."⁸⁷³ She added that "in the Middle East and South Asia, for example, we and the Russians are headed in the same direction, **despite occasional divergences of view on tactics.**"⁸⁷⁴⁸⁷⁵ Seemingly as a reward for

⁸⁷¹ George W. Bush, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/211969>.

⁸⁷² A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin's Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁷³ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin's Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁷⁴ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin's Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁷⁵ Bolded for emphasis.

Moscow's allegedly good behavior, Jones stated that the Bush Administration is "working hard to develop NATO's partnership with Russia."⁸⁷⁶

But perhaps Assistant Secretary Jones's most interesting testimony was reserved for the Administration's views of Russia's behavior vis-à-vis the other post-Soviet countries, in which she referenced key aspects of Moscow's violations of neighbors' sovereignty but did so in a circumspect way and without actually clearly condemning these violations. Instead, Assistant Secretary Jones stated that the "United States recognizes that Russia has legitimate interests in Eurasia based on geography, economics and history."⁸⁷⁷ The fact that the history referenced was largely one of Russia dominating its neighbors, subjugating them, and attempting to destroy their cultures was apparently not enough for the U.S. Government not to repeat this misleading Russian trope.

Almost as an afterthought, Assistant Secretary Jones's testimony called on "Russia to respect the sovereignty and independence of the other former Soviet states," an appeal that seemed quite inadequate in the context of Moscow's behavior in Georgia and Moldova, and its attempt in the fall of 2003 to take control of a Ukrainian island in the Kerch Strait separating Russia from Ukraine's Crimean peninsula.⁸⁷⁸ On this last

⁸⁷⁶ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin's Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁷⁷ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin's Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁷⁸ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin's Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

move, Jones said “[w]e are still scratching our heads,” a unique admission considering the obvious attempt by Russia to test Ukraine’s resolve and the West’s reaction.⁸⁷⁹

On domestic developments in Russia, Assistant Secretary Jones noted “the pattern of official pressure on journalists and the independent broadcast media, **irregularities** in the Duma elections as noted by the OSCE, missed opportunities from last year’s referendum and presidential election in Chechnya, and the arrest and lengthy pre-trial detention of Mikhail Khodorkovskiy,” which she said “have **raised questions** about the strength and depth of Russia’s commitment to democracy and the rule of law.”⁸⁸⁰⁸⁸¹ She added that “[a] ll of these factors give us pause.”⁸⁸²

In summation though, Assistant Secretary Jones stated that she believed “we are on the right track with Russia, though the track is not without its bumps and occasional setbacks.”⁸⁸³ She added that “[o]n balance our mutual interests outweigh our differences and our relations hold great potential.”⁸⁸⁴ Jones then committed a cardinal mistake when speaking about Moscow, especially in public, conflating Russia and the USSR by noting

⁸⁷⁹ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin’s Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁸⁰ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin’s Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁸¹ Bolded for emphasis.

⁸⁸² A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin’s Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁸³ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin’s Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁸⁴ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin’s Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

that “[t]he U.S.-Russian relationship is already much more broadly based than at any time since the end of World War II.”⁸⁸⁵⁸⁸⁶

The notion of Russia as a flawed but generally constructive partner capable of even greater cooperation was further reinforced – and even advanced – by National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, the Bush Administration’s senior-most Russia expert.⁸⁸⁷⁸⁸⁸ Speaking on CBS’s *60 Minutes* on 28 March, Rice asserted that it was “a good thing that we [built a good relationship] with Russia, because, after all, our ability to function in Central Asia [to support the war on terror] was very much dependent on that good relationship with Russia.”⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁵ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin’s Second Term, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, 18 March 2004.

⁸⁸⁶ As referenced elsewhere, this is not simply a matter of nomenclature or semantics. A Russia that is just a smaller Soviet Union is a rather different interlocutor than a Russia that, like the others, rose from the ruins of the USSR. While Western interlocutors may not be in a position to change how Russia and Russians view themselves, it is arguably foolhardy to add to the former perception, especially when – or perhaps, if – considering the interests of the other post-Soviet countries and their ability to withstand neo-imperial pressure from Moscow and survive the immediate post-colonial period.

⁸⁸⁷ There is case to be made that quite a few of the U.S. experts on Russia and the USSR were first and foremost arms control experts who made their names in negotiations with Moscow, whether Soviet or Russia, and not regional experts strictly speaking. If this is true, it would explain why Washington seemed to be wearing blinders, especially when it came to issues that had to do with Russia outside Moscow, not to mention other post-Soviet countries.

⁸⁸⁸ Further to the above point, Secretary Rice’s expertise is not a forgone conclusion, as demonstrated by the following paragraph from her memoirs: “The shock waves that Ukraine’s Orange Revolution produced in Moscow can be understood only in the context of how disoriented most Russians felt after Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union in August 1991. It has been said that, for Russia, losing Ukraine was like the United States losing Texas or California. But that doesn’t begin to capture it; it would be like losing the original thirteen colonies. Slavdom, including the Cyrillic alphabet, had roots in Kiev and had spread to Russia. Ukraine had belonged to Poland during the near collapse of the Russian Empire in the seventeenth century and Germany had recognized Ukraine’s short-lived independence at the end of World War I. Some Nazi leaders had also dangled independence in exchange for collaboration in World War II. For the Russians, that proved simply that only in weakness had Moscow been unable to defend the unity of the Slavic people – Ukrainians and Russians.” Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 357.

⁸⁸⁹ George W. Bush, Interview of National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice By Ed Bradley, CBS, “60 MINUTES” Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/281884>.

Two months later, Amb. Steven Pifer, then a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, referenced many of the issues that ailed Ukraine and, often by extension, the U.S.-Ukrainian relationship. Deputy Assistant Secretary Pifer listed a “democracy and human rights record [that] reflects significant problems,” arbitrary application of the rule of law, and harassment and intimidation of the independent media.⁸⁹⁰

In this context, Steve Pifer called for “a credible and transparent investigation” into the Gongadze murder.⁸⁹¹ Deputy Assistant Secretary Pifer also referenced the Kolchuga transfer approval as a particular setback for bilateral relations. At the same time, he expressed appreciation for “the important contribution that Ukraine is making to the stabilization effort in Iraq,” where the Ukrainian brigade served as part of the Polish-led division.⁸⁹²

With this rather mixed grade for Kyiv’s performance from the perspective of the U.S. Administration, Deputy Assistant Secretary Pifer identified the 31 October 2004 presidential election as “the single most important issue now on our bilateral agenda,” assessing that conduct of this election “will affect Ukraine’s strategic course for the next

⁸⁹⁰ Steven Pifer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Ukraine’s Future and U.S. Interests, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, 12 May 2004.

⁸⁹¹ Steven Pifer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Ukraine’s Future and U.S. Interests, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, 12 May 2004.

⁸⁹² Steven Pifer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Ukraine’s Future and U.S. Interests, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, 12 May 2004.

decade.”⁸⁹³ Steve Pifer also emphasized that “[t]he U.S. Government does not back any particular candidate in the election” and that Washington “would be prepared to work closely and eagerly” with whomever is elected democratically.⁸⁹⁴

Ukrainian presidential election in focus

The democratic nature of the upcoming Ukrainian presidential election was already very much in doubt. The authorities routinely and systematically harassed opposition politicians and their supporters even during the early stages of the campaign. Even when initially approved, opposition rallies were disrupted, and businesses that funded opposition or even civic activities faced significant pressure from the tax authorities and the various state inspection services. In several cases, opposition-minded activists were physically assaulted.

Moreover, several Rada by-elections and other local races held that spring yielded dubious “victories” by regime-friendly candidates. The most notorious of these was the 18 April mayoral election in Mukacheve, where the territorial election commission disqualified almost one-third of the votes for the opposition candidate and declared the pro-regime candidate the winner. An investigation promised by the central authorities in response to international, including U.S., criticism yielded no corrective outcome. These

⁸⁹³ Steven Pifer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Ukraine’s Future and U.S. Interests, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, 12 May 2004.

⁸⁹⁴ Steven Pifer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Ukraine’s Future and U.S. Interests, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, 12 May 2004.

facts flew in the face of U.S. demands for, and Ukrainian commitments, to a free and fair electoral process.

For its part, the U.S. Government worked hard to press this point home, including the impact of a bad election on prospects for Ukraine's integration with the West. According to Deputy Assistant Secretary Pifer's testimony, "[i]n late March, Deputy Secretary Armitage carried a letter from President Bush to President Kuchma on the importance of a free and fair election for U.S.-Ukraine relations, Kuchma's political legacy, and the future of Ukraine."⁸⁹⁵ The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv coordinated with other Western missions to deliver a consistent message.

Also according to the same testimony by Pifer, "[t]he interplay of U.S., Russian and Ukrainian interests has been one of our most complicated and delicate policy concerns for the region in the post-Soviet era," as direct a reference as any of the "Moscow factor" playing out in the conduct of U.S. policy by one of America's best diplomats.⁸⁹⁶ In this context, Deputy Assistant Secretary Pifer referenced the tension between the U.S. desire to cooperate with Russia in addressing the region's problems and Moscow's unwillingness to treat its neighbors as fully sovereign states.

Speaking to the UN General Assembly on 21 September, President Bush returned to a number of the themes he mentioned in the same hall the year before, including fighting international terrorism. He also spoke about fighting AIDS, confronting human

⁸⁹⁵ Steven Pifer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Ukraine's Future and U.S. Interests, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, 12 May 2004.

⁸⁹⁶ Steven Pifer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Ukraine's Future and U.S. Interests, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, 12 May 2004.

trafficking, and combatting poverty. But he also called for “peaceful nations [to] stand for the advance of democracy,” a notion that would become central to his foreign policy agenda in his second presidential terms.⁸⁹⁷

Meanwhile, the Bush Administration was being subjected to growing scrutiny on the question of anti-democratic practices in Putin’s Russia, especially in view of the President’s speech at the UN. During the 29 September daily press briefing at the Department of State, Richard Boucher was asked if the lack of criticism on this front meant that Putin “is getting a blank check from Washington.”⁸⁹⁸ The question was apparently prompted by a letter signed by more than 100 former and current elected U.S. and foreign officials, including Senators John McCain and Joe Biden, calling out the Administration’s silence on the matter. The Department Spokesperson deflected the question by suggesting that the letter was addressed to the Russian government, in the first instance. Richard Boucher also asserted that the “U.S. policy on these matters has been expressed quite clearly in recent weeks.”⁸⁹⁹

Boucher’s assertion was significantly undermined by Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage’s 9 October speech to the U.S.-Russia Business Council, in which the Deputy Secretary stated that “it has been the consistent policy of the United States to seek a strategic partnership with Russia, based on our shared democratic values.”⁹⁰⁰ Moreover,

⁸⁹⁷ George W. Bush, Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/214748>.

⁸⁹⁸ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 29 September 2004.

⁸⁹⁹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 29 September 2004.

⁹⁰⁰ Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Russia Business Council, 9 October 2004.

he added that “today, we can say that the economic outlook for Russia is promising, as are the trade and investment ties between our two nations.”⁹⁰¹ The Deputy Secretary did appear to signal some caution by asserting that “the health of any economy is not just about good indicators. For a steady rhythm of growth over time, the underlying political system also has to be sound and security has to be good,” but the import of these words of caution were likely lost on the Kremlin, given the other, more positive signals from Washington.⁹⁰²

The Department of State was more forward leaning in criticizing the then ongoing election campaign in Ukraine, which was entering the homestretch and which pitted Western-looking former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko – poisoned in August with prodigious amounts of dioxin that left him disfigured – and sitting Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, former “governor” of Donetsk region and a decidedly Russia-oriented political figure. Specifically, the Department Spokesperson underscored the importance of Ukraine holding free and fair elections according to OSCE standards.

At the same time, Richard Boucher praised Ukraine’s contribution to the international coalition in Iraq, pointing out that the Ukrainian contingent is one of the largest in Iraq with “approximately 1,600 troops.”⁹⁰³ But the Spokesperson did add that “the contributions to the security endeavors...don’t exonerate Ukraine’s leadership from the responsibility that they have to Ukrainian citizens to uphold democracy and human

⁹⁰¹ Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Russia Business Council, 9 October 2004.

⁹⁰² Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Russia Business Council, 9 October 2004.

⁹⁰³ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 14 October 2004.

rights commitments.”⁹⁰⁴ When asked about Russia’s role in supporting Yanukovych, Richard Boucher demurred, referencing instead an earlier statement that focused on domestic Ukrainian dynamics.⁹⁰⁵

A little over a week later, Richard Boucher’s deputy, Adam Ereli, was asked about the “continued...repression” against the opposition candidate, i.e., Viktor Yushchenko, and his supporters. The Deputy Spokesperson was also asked about the “rather massive Russian financial intervention in the Ukrainian campaign.”⁹⁰⁶ All Adam Ereli could say in response is that he did not “have much beyond what we’ve said before,” adding that “we, as well at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, are following the campaign closely.”⁹⁰⁷ On the question of Russian involvement, the Deputy Spokesperson appeared equally unprepared, stating that “[t]here are, as you suggest, reports that raise concerns.”⁹⁰⁸⁹⁰⁹ He assured the questioner that [w]e take [these reports] seriously and that “our people on the ground are certainly keeping a close eye on how the campaign is proceeding.”⁹¹⁰

⁹⁰⁴ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 14 October 2004.

⁹⁰⁵ It was around this time that the Yanukovych camp, most likely with Moscow’s connivance, came up with the term “Bushchenko” (a combination of Bush and Yushchenko) to suggest that the latter is an American stooge. Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution*, p. 95.

⁹⁰⁶ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 October 2004.

⁹⁰⁷ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 October 2004.

⁹⁰⁸ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 October 2004.

⁹⁰⁹ A passage from Secretary Rice’s memoirs is quite telling about where the Kremlin stood on this matter: “It was several months before the presidential election in Ukraine. Putin took me on a tour of his newly refurbished office. Within a few minutes Viktor Yanukovych emerged from a side room. ‘Oh, please meet Viktor,’ Putin said. ‘He is a candidate for president of Ukraine.’ I greeted the pro-Russian politician and took the message that Putin had intended: the United States should know that Moscow had a horse in the race to defend its interests.” Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 358.

⁹¹⁰ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 October 2004.

One reason Adam Ereli and others may have been reticent to pursue the Russian angle may have been Deputy Secretary Armitage's pending visit to Russia. While in Moscow on 27-28 October, the Deputy Secretary met with Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Kislyak, later the Russian ambassador to the United States during the Obama-Trump transition, to "discuss **our common efforts** to rid the world of the scourge of terrorism."⁹¹¹⁹¹² He promised "[t]he United States will stand side-by-side with Russia...until we end this scourge."⁹¹³ Deputy Secretary Armitage praised Russia's role in the "Global War on Terrorism" and expressed confidence that this "partnership will continue."⁹¹⁴

Just a day later and two days before the presidential election in Ukraine, the Financial Times published an Op-Ed in Deputy Secretary Armitage's name entitled "U.S. Watches Ukraine Elections with Concern."⁹¹⁵ The article underscored that "a free and fair election will deepen Ukraine's relationship with Europe and its institutions [but] a bad election...will force us to re-examine our relationship, especially with individuals who engage in election fraud and manipulation."⁹¹⁶ The Op-Ed did not reference the negative role being played by Moscow as it worked to skew the outcome in Viktor

⁹¹¹ Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, Rizhskaya Metro Station, Moscow, Russia, 27 October 2004.

⁹¹² Bolded for emphasis.

⁹¹³ Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, Rizhskaya Metro Station, Moscow, Russia, 27 October 2004.

⁹¹⁴ Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, Rizhskaya Metro Station, Moscow, Russia, 27 October 2004.

⁹¹⁵ Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, Op-Ed Published in the Financial Times, "U.S. Watches Ukraine Election with Concern," 29 October 2004.

⁹¹⁶ Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, Op-Ed Published in the Financial Times, "U.S. Watches Ukraine Election with Concern," 29 October 2004.

Yanukovich's favor. Moreover, the U.S. threat to review relations with Kyiv in the event of an undemocratic election must have been music to Putin's ears.

That same day, on 31 October, the Department of State was given another opportunity to address the ongoing Russian meddling in the Ukrainian presidential election.⁹¹⁷ Department Spokesman Boucher at first gave a stock response, citing U.S. messaging to the Ukrainian government on the need to hold a free and fair election. Richard Boucher even referenced the aforementioned Op-Ed by Deputy Secretary Armitage. The Spokesperson did acknowledge that the ongoing campaign "has fallen short of international democratic standards," and once again underscored that the United States does not have a preferred candidate in the election.⁹¹⁸

When pressed on the Russia angle, Richard Boucher acknowledged "reports of Russian involvement in the presidential campaign," adding that the U.S. Government has "often discussed the subject of Ukraine with officials in Moscow and obviously, consistently urge[d] them to support free and fair elections in Ukraine."⁹¹⁹ The Spokesman then asserted that a democratic election "is very much in [Moscow's] interest, as it is in ours," an assertion that held no water on any practical level.⁹²⁰⁹²¹

⁹¹⁷ Putin made several visits to Ukraine during the presidential campaign, most prominently to stand next to Yanukovich during the 28 October military parade in Kyiv just three days prior to the first round of the election. Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, pp. 94-95.

⁹¹⁸ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 29 October 2004.

⁹¹⁹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 29 October 2004.

⁹²⁰ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 29 October 2004.

⁹²¹ According to David Kramer, at that time a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff and later Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Moscow's malign role in trying to stifle Ukrainian democracy was "clearly known at that point" (from 27 November 2020 interview by author). A/S Kramer's claim that the U.S. Government was aware of Moscow's anti-democratic activities in Ukraine is supported by responses provided by other former senior officials Amb. Daniel Fried, Amb. John Herbst, Amb. Beth Jones, and Amb. John Tefft (interviews and email correspondence, 29 and 30 November 2020).

The day of the election in Ukraine, the *Ukrainian Weekly* published responses from the George W. Bush campaign to questions posed by the newspaper's editorial board. On the question of what the U.S. role should be "in helping Ukraine proceed on the path toward full democracy," the campaign responded that "the single most important issue now on our bilateral agenda is the conduct of the Ukrainian presidential campaign and election."⁹²² The Bush campaign then suggested that the presidential election in Ukraine provides that country "an opportunity to demonstrate that it...shares Western values of democracy and human rights."⁹²³

Moscow's role downplayed in election fraud collusion

Despite the international community's warnings, the 31 October presidential election in Ukraine witnessed a massive abuse of the so-called "administrative resources" on behalf of Viktor Yanukovich, including the purging of electoral commissions of anti-regime members. As noted by Department of State Deputy Spokesperson Adam Ereli, the election "did not meet a considerable number of international standards for democratic elections."⁹²⁴ The Deputy Spokesperson expressed hope that the runoff election, scheduled for 21 November, would be "an opportunity for Ukraine to affirm its

⁹²² "The United States Presidential Campaign, Responses from George W. Bush," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 31 October 2004.

⁹²³ "The United States Presidential Campaign, Responses from George W. Bush," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 31 October 2004.

⁹²⁴ Daily press briefing, U.S. Department of State, 1 November 2004.

commitment to democratic principles.”⁹²⁵ The Department did not mention Russia’s role or warn against foreign interference in the run-up to the second round.⁹²⁶

Worse yet, at least in terms of how the Russian government may perceive such statements, Amb. Nick Burns, the U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO, used his 4 November remarks at the U.S. ambassador’s residence in Moscow to highlight the dubious notion that “North America, Europe, and Russia are engaged in a common struggle against terrorism.”⁹²⁷ In this context, and after asserting that the United States needs Russia in this “common struggle,” Amb. Burns announced that the Alliance is ready to take its “partnership with Russia to a new level of cooperation, engagement, and effectiveness.”⁹²⁸ After referring to Russia as a “one-time adversar[y],” Nick Burns asserted that NATO and the United States “need a strong and stable Russia...to counter many transnational threats.”⁹²⁹⁹³⁰

Amb. Burns then completed his remarks with a bombshell by stating that while “[o]ur enemies consider democracies weak[,] NATO and the NATO-Russia Council [have] effectively demonstrate[d] we are just the opposite,” an apparent claim that Putin’s

⁹²⁵ Daily press briefing, U.S. Department of State, 1 November 2004.

⁹²⁶ As Amb. Tefft put it years later, “Putin tried to manage the presidential succession in Ukraine” (interview with author, 30 November 2020).

⁹²⁷ R. Nicholas Burns, U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO, *The NATO-Russia Council: A Vital Partnership in the War on Terror*, Moscow, Russia, U.S. Department of State, 4 November 2004.

⁹²⁸ R. Nicholas Burns, U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO, *The NATO-Russia Council: A Vital Partnership in the War on Terror*, Moscow, Russia, U.S. Department of State, 4 November 2004.

⁹²⁹ R. Nicholas Burns, U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO, *The NATO-Russia Council: A Vital Partnership in the War on Terror*, Moscow, Russia, U.S. Department of State, 4 November 2004.

⁹³⁰ As Amb. Fried explained on 30 November 2020 in response to this author’s question, “at the time...the Bush Administration still hoped for a constructive relationship with Putin’s Russia.” Amb. Fried also pointed out that he and his team “had darker views of Putin’s intentions.” For her part, Amb. Jones told the author on 30 November 2020 that “it was clear from public statements that Moscow was putting incredible pressure on Kyiv.”

Russia is a democracy.⁹³¹ This claim flew in the face of not only Putin's increasingly authoritarian record at home, but also its efforts to subvert the democratic forces in neighboring Ukraine. Moreover, Amb. Burns's comments may explain why Washington routinely avoided mentioning Moscow's malign influence in the then ongoing Ukrainian presidential campaign.

A similar logic appeared to prevail in Assistant Secretary Beth Jones's 9 November remarks at a press roundtable in Tallinn, Estonia. When asked about Russia policy in President Bush's second term, which he secured a week earlier, Assistant Secretary Jones predicted little if any change. Moreover, she called on Moscow to work more actively to resolve the "broad range of issues on the frozen conflicts" in the former Soviet space, suggesting, contrary to most available evidence, that it is in "Russia's interest to resolve the[se] issues."⁹³²

When queried directly why the United States Government has avoided criticizing Moscow, including on its "deteriorating" human rights record, Assistant Secretary Jones explained that:

[O]ur goal is to get the kind of improvements that the international community seeks in Russia. The question then is how best to get those improvements? Is it better to have quiet conversations or is it better to say things publicly? We try to find the balance with that so that in public we say some things and we have a much more extensive conversation in

⁹³¹ R. Nicholas Burns, U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO, The NATO-Russia Council: A Vital Partnership in the War on Terror, Moscow, Russia, U.S. Department of State, 4 November 2004.

⁹³² A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Improving Relations with Europe, Tallinn, Estonia, U.S. Department of State, 9 November 2004.

private in order to accomplish our goals. That's always the key. Are we trying to make statements or are we trying to get things done?⁹³³

The above remarks, both by Amb. Burns and Assistant Secretary Jones, created a relatively sharp contrast with those delivered on 17 November by Alexander Vershbow, the U.S. Ambassador to Russia. Amb. Vershbow's comments amounted to a long list of Moscow's transgressions on the human rights front, and they were delivered at a public event. Among the lowlights he chose to mention were the Kremlin's campaign against Mikhail Khodorkovskiy and his Yukos company, which "has raised questions about personal and property rights in Russia," the "use of the courts to shut down media outlets" critical of the Kremlin, "which strongly undermines democratic rights, principles, and institutions," and the "harassment" of nongovernmental organizations.⁹³⁴

The next day, on 18 November, the White House took the somewhat unusual step of issuing a statement on the upcoming runoff election in Ukraine. The statement repeated the President's view that "the United States has no greater responsibility than to support the spread of freedom throughout the world," and recommitted the United States to "support[ing] those countries in Eastern Europe which began down the path of democracy nearly fifteen years ago."⁹³⁵ The

⁹³³ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, *Improving Relations with Europe*, Tallinn, Estonia, U.S. Department of State, 9 November 2004.

⁹³⁴ Alexander Vershbow, U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation, *Remarks upon the Acceptance of the ABA/CEELI Ambassadors' Award*, Moscow, Russia, 17 November 2004.

⁹³⁵ George W. Bush, *Statement by the Press Secretary on Upcoming Ukrainian Elections Online* by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/281229>.

statement also referenced President Bush's request that Senator Richard Lugar travel to Ukraine to "convey our support for Ukraine's democratic prospects."⁹³⁶ Finally, it repeated the warning that "Ukraine's aspirations would suffer" if the election falls short of democratic standards.⁹³⁷ The statement did not explicitly mention Russia or its malign role in Ukraine.

The warnings fell on deaf ears, as the Kuchma Administration, the Yanukovich campaign, and the Kremlin went for broke in trying to keep Yushchenko out of power by securing an electoral "victory" for Yanukovich.⁹³⁸ According to the OSCE's preliminary statement, "the second-round vote did not meet a considerable number of OSCE commitments and Council of Europe and other European standards for democratic elections."⁹³⁹ Sen. Lugar's report was even more explicit in describing what had occurred. He described the second round as a "concerted and forceful program of electoral fraud and abuse" that was enacted "with either the leadership or cooperation of Ukrainian governmental authorities."⁹⁴⁰

⁹³⁶ George W. Bush, Statement by the Press Secretary on Upcoming Ukrainian Elections Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/281229>.

⁹³⁷ George W. Bush, Statement by the Press Secretary on Upcoming Ukrainian Elections Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/281229>.

⁹³⁸ Amb. Pifer described the travesty of the 21 November second round the following way: "The second round of balloting took place on November 21. Foreign and domestic election monitors reported massive irregularities, including abuse of the absentee ballot system, ballot stuffing, and falsified voting counts... On November 22, the Central Electoral Commission's chair issued an unofficial count showing that Yanukovich had won the runoff, polling 49.7 percent compared to Yushchenko's 46.7 percent. These results contradicted an exit poll released the night before by three respected Ukrainian institutes, which gave Yushchenko 54 percent of the vote to Yanukovich's 43 percent. Moreover, analysts began to question the Central Electoral Commission's reports of voter turnout, which showed significantly larger numbers taking part in the second round than in the first in pro-Yanukovich areas, with turnout in some areas exceeding 100 percent." Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, pp. 268-269.

⁹³⁹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 November 2004.

⁹⁴⁰ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 November 2004.

For its part, the Department of State, in addition to referencing the above conclusions, said “the United States is deeply concerned over the elections in Ukraine” because of the “widespread abuse and fraud in the second round.” Deputy Spokesperson Adam Ereli on 22 November called on “the Ukrainian authorities to curb additional abuse and fraud...and to ensure an outcome that reflects the will of the Ukrainian people.”⁹⁴¹

Given the broad knowledge of Moscow’s support for Yanukovich, a member of the Department’s press corps asked whether the U.S. Government has discussed the issue with the Russians, eliciting a response from Adam Ereli that he is “not aware of any conversations that have taken place with the Russians.”⁹⁴² When the reporter followed up referencing Russian activism on this front, the Deputy Spokesperson said that he doesn’t “have any comment on Russian activities” and referred the press to “the Russians for their position on these elections.”⁹⁴³

Push comes to shove with attempted theft of runoff

Also on 22 November, Assistant Secretary Jones called in Russian ambassador Yuriy Ushakov to discuss the election in Ukraine.⁹⁴⁴ The story first broke when the Russian foreign ministry referenced it in Moscow. When asked about this meeting at the Department daily press briefing on 23 November, Deputy Spokesperson Ereli could not

⁹⁴¹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 November 2004.

⁹⁴² Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 November 2004.

⁹⁴³ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 22 November 2004.

⁹⁴⁴ In the view of Georgetown University Professor and former National Intelligence Officer for Russia and Eurasia Angela Stent, the U.S. Government “was caught off guard by the Orange Revolution. Few experts and officials believed that the entrenched elites could be brought down by a group of committed opposition protestors.” Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, p. 115.

confirm it.⁹⁴⁵ Asked whether the United States has any views on President Putin’s call to congratulate Yanukovych with his “victory,” Adam Ereli referred the question “to the Russians.”⁹⁴⁶ When pressed, the Deputy Spokesperson uttered that he doesn’t “have any comments on particular actions by particular governments at this point.”⁹⁴⁷⁹⁴⁸

Later that day, the White House issued a statement on the second round of the Ukrainian presidential election:

The United States is deeply disturbed by extensive and credible indications of fraud committed in the Ukrainian presidential election. We strongly support efforts to review the conduct of the election and urge Ukrainian authorities not to certify results until investigations of organized fraud are resolved. We call on the government of Ukraine to respect the will of the Ukrainian people and we urge all Ukrainians to resolve the situation through peaceful means. The government bears a special responsibility not to use or incite violence, and to allow free media to

⁹⁴⁵ The meeting did in fact take place, though the Department would not later disclose the particulars of the conversation. Taken Questions, Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 23 November 2004.

⁹⁴⁶ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 23 November 2004.

⁹⁴⁷ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 23 November 2004.

⁹⁴⁸ Adam Ereli’s evasive response may be explained, in this case at least, by Deputy Secretary Armitage’s preference for the United States to “stand down and stay out” of the unfolding election drama in Kyiv, based on David Kramer’s recollection, as shared with this author on 27 November 2020. According to A/S Kramer, the Deputy Secretary thought Washington should “not pick a fight” with the Russians over Ukraine because “they are closer” and “they have more influence.” When asked whether at any point there was serious consideration given to going along with a Yanukovych “victory,” the others’ responses ranged from “absolutely not” (Amb. Jones on 30 November 2020) to “I don’t think so” (Amb. Tefft also on 30 November 2020).

report accurately on the situation without intimidation or coercion. The United States stands with the Ukrainian people in this difficult time.⁹⁴⁹

The day after, on 24 November, Secretary Colin Powell joined the press briefing to personally deliver a statement on the fraudulent second round of the presidential election in Ukraine. The Secretary warned the Ukrainian leadership that “this is a critical moment” and that if it does not act responsibly, “there will be consequences for our relationship.”⁹⁵⁰ Most famously, Secretary Powell announced that the U.S. Government “cannot accept this result as legitimate” and called for “a full review of the conduct of the election and the tallying of election results.”⁹⁵¹ At the same time, the Secretary acknowledged that he had spoken about the Ukrainian election earlier that day with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov. And while Secretary Powell said he “underscored our strong support for a fair investigation of the election” to Lavrov, he did not disclose what the latter said.⁹⁵²

Moreover, when asked by a member of the Department press corps about Moscow’s overt support for Yanukovych and the fraud that was committed on his behalf, the Secretary asserted that the United States and Russia are “both interested in...finding a solution to this problem.”⁹⁵³ He added that the U.S. Government is “not looking for a contest with the Russians over this.”⁹⁵⁴ In response to a question about what the

⁹⁴⁹ George W. Bush, Press Gaggle by Claire Buchan Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/272414>.

⁹⁵⁰ Briefing by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, U.S. Department of State, 24 November 2004.

⁹⁵¹ Briefing by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, U.S. Department of State, 24 November 2004.

⁹⁵² Briefing by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, U.S. Department of State, 24 November 2004.

⁹⁵³ Briefing by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, U.S. Department of State, 24 November 2004.

⁹⁵⁴ Briefing by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, U.S. Department of State, 24 November 2004.

Department of State should do about Moscow's interference in the Ukrainian electoral process, Secretary Powell stated that he "would rather concentrate on how we get out of...the difficult situation," adding that "[a]t a later time, one can talk about how we got into this situation."⁹⁵⁵

This theme of avoiding any explicit criticism of Moscow carried over into President Bush's 26 November press opportunity. When asked if "President Putin overstepped his bounds," the President referenced "a lot of allegations of vote fraud," but made no direct mention of either Putin or Russia in general.⁹⁵⁶ For its part, the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* acknowledged "the quick and resolute response of the U.S. government to the dramatic developments in Ukraine," but also asserted that "we must not let up in our efforts to...secure a reversal of the fraud perpetrated by the authorities in Ukraine."⁹⁵⁷ It called on the readership to "press the Bush administration and our members of Congress to demand a just resolution to this crisis."⁹⁵⁸ That same weekend, on 27 November, the Ukrainian parliament acknowledged that the official results of the second round of the presidential election did not reflect the will of the people, thereby shifting the conversation to a possible rerun of the runoff.⁹⁵⁹

Meanwhile, the press continued to ask uncomfortable questions of Richard Boucher at the Department of State. One journalist pointed out that "the President's good friend...President Putin, totally ignored [the falsified results of the runoff election], and

⁹⁵⁵ Briefing by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, U.S. Department of State, 24 November 2004.

⁹⁵⁶ George W. Bush, Exchange With Reporters in Crawford, Texas Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/215186>.

⁹⁵⁷ "Ukraine Demands a Fair Count," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 28 November 2004.

⁹⁵⁸ "Ukraine Demands a Fair Count," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 28 November 2004.

⁹⁵⁹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 29 November 2004.

in fact, twice congratulated the pro-Moscow candidate” and asked whether this aspect came up in Secretary Powell’s conversations with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov.”⁹⁶⁰ The Department Spokesperson’s evasive answer – “I don’t know if it’s come up” – only served to provoke a more pointed follow up asking Boucher if Secretary Powell is “convinced after speaking to Lavrov, that you and the Russians are on the same page regarding the election.”⁹⁶¹ After stating that he does not want “to try to characterize Russian views,” the Spokesperson added more fuel to the fire by appearing to give the same weight to Secretary Powell’s conversations with the Ukrainian president and the Russian foreign minister in the context of looking for a resolution to the electoral crisis in Ukraine.⁹⁶²⁹⁶³

The press did not let up the next day, 30 November. A journalist again asked Richard Boucher if the Department of State has told the Russians “or signaled in any way any impact that their involvement in the election in Ukraine might have on your relationship with Russia.”⁹⁶⁴ Again the Spokesperson demurred, instead suggesting that the United States and Russia are interested in working together to “see a peaceful resolution of these problems in Ukraine.”⁹⁶⁵ And once again, Richard Boucher chose not to reference Moscow’s central role in creating “these problems,” despite being called out

⁹⁶⁰ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 29 November 2004.

⁹⁶¹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 29 November 2004.

⁹⁶² Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 29 November 2004.

⁹⁶³ Speaking at a 17 February 2005 hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on “Democracy in Retreat in Russia,” Dr. Anders Aslund, then with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was less hesitant to characterize Moscow’s interference in the Ukrainian presidential election. Dr. Aslund asserted that Putin’s blatant financial and political support for Yanukovych “only made sense as an action against democracy and against the West.” He added that “[i]n Ukraine, Mr. Putin proved himself poorly informed, anti-democratic, anti-Western and ineffective.”

⁹⁶⁴ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 30 November 2004.

⁹⁶⁵ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 30 November 2004.

on the fact that “[t]he Russians have been involved in the campaign without hiding it.”⁹⁶⁶ When asked directly if “the Russians intervened inappropriately in this [electoral] process, both before the election and before the runoff,” the Spokesperson responded “I don’t have anything on that today.”⁹⁶⁷⁹⁶⁸

During his joint news conference with Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin the same day, President Bush essentially took the same tack in response to a question on Moscow’s interference in the Ukrainian election. Despite the fact that the journalist from the Associated Press directly referenced Putin in his question, the President’s otherwise extensive response did not mention Putin or Moscow or Russia by name a single time. It instead focused on the ongoing international mediation efforts. Perhaps desiring to square the circle, Prime Minister Martin added that he “absolutely agree[s] that elections within Ukraine have got to be free from outside influence, and that includes Russia.”⁹⁶⁹

In its early December testimony before the House International Relations Committee on the situation in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) criticized the Ukrainian authorities for their complicity in the falsifying the official results of the second round, but also found “the involvement of the Russian Federation...in the election process in Ukraine...most disturbing.”⁹⁷⁰ It went on to state that “[t]he open endorsement of Mr. Yanukovych by President Vladimir Putin and large

⁹⁶⁶ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 30 November 2004.

⁹⁶⁷ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 30 November 2004.

⁹⁶⁸ The reality, of course, is that not only Moscow had interfered, but it was also applying tremendous pressure on Yanukovych not to relent. Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution*, p. 136.

⁹⁶⁹ George W. Bush, The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Paul Martin of Canada in Ottawa, Canada Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/215198>.

⁹⁷⁰ Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, House International Relations Committee, December 2004.

sums of financial resources invested by the Kremlin into the election campaign are cause for concern.”⁹⁷¹

The UCCA suggested “[t]he international democratic community should not tolerate Russia’s open interference in the internal affairs of an independent state.”⁹⁷² The organization also suggested, with basis, that Moscow’s interference is driven by the unfavorable for the Kremlin contrast between Ukraine’s democratic awakening and the Putinist system in place in Russia, which Putin wanted to replicate in Ukraine. Finally, the UCCA argued that “[m]aintaining relations with the Russian Federation should not compromise the support of the Ukrainian people, who are struggling to overcome the Soviet legacy and install a truly open and free democracy in Ukraine.”⁹⁷³ The diaspora organization asserted that “the United States cannot remain silent for fear of compromising relations with Russia” as the latter pursues its “neo-imperial agenda in Ukraine.”⁹⁷⁴

The UCCA’s warnings appeared to fall on deaf ears. After Putin came out against the option of rerunning the second round of the presidential election, as favored by the democratic opposition in Ukraine, Richard Boucher declined to respond directly to a 2 December question whether Putin’s pronouncement constituted foreign intervention in Ukrainian deliberations. Instead, the Department Spokesperson stated that “our understanding of the Russian view is in some way similar to ours.”⁹⁷⁵ However, when

⁹⁷¹ Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, House International Relations Committee, December 2004.

⁹⁷² Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, House International Relations Committee, December 2004.

⁹⁷³ Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, House International Relations Committee, December 2004.

⁹⁷⁴ Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, House International Relations Committee, December 2004.

⁹⁷⁵ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 2 December 2004.

asked to elaborate on the areas of disagreement, Richard Boucher retorted “I’m not here to do a compare and contrast.”⁹⁷⁶

This cat and mouse game continued at President Bush’s press availability that day with Nigerian President Obasanjo. Asked pointblank if the Ukrainian election should be free of Russia interference, the President relied on broader principles, including respecting the will of the people, to respond.⁹⁷⁷ Any elaboration was left to White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan, who found his own scenic route to the same evasive bottom line: “Look, we have a good relationship with Russia. There are going to be differences from time to time. Our position on the Ukraine and the way forward is very clear: We want there to be a peaceful, democratic solution that reflects the will of the people.”⁹⁷⁸

The runoff repeat and the emergence of the Freedom Agenda

The question of what to do next in order to break the political logjam in Kyiv became somewhat academic when the Supreme Court of Ukraine on 3 December annulled the falsified official results of the 21 November vote and authorized the holding of a rerun of the second round contest between Yushchenko and Yanukovych on 26 December, a step welcomed by both the Department of State and the White House.⁹⁷⁹⁹⁸⁰

⁹⁷⁶ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 2 December 2004.

⁹⁷⁷ George W. Bush, Remarks Prior to Discussions With President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/212185>.

⁹⁷⁸ Scott McClellan, Press Briefing by Scott McClellan Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/272428>.

⁹⁷⁹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 3 December 2004.

⁹⁸⁰ Scott McClellan, Press Briefing by Scott McClellan Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/272432>.

For its part, the editorial board of the *Ukrainian Weekly* continued to call on the Western community of democracies to “forcefully protest Russia’s blatant interference in Ukraine’s election” and expressed its support for “a revote of the run-off” rather than a completely new election with new candidates, as advocated by the Kremlin.⁹⁸¹

After the U.S. ambassador to the OSCE delivered an appropriately strongly worded statement on Moscow’s ongoing interference in the Ukrainian electoral process, Department of State Deputy Spokesperson Adam Ereli attempted to put the statement in context by urging the press not to “make a mountain out of a molehill.”⁹⁸² But Adam Ereli did not stop there:

The United States and Russia have an outstanding relationship.⁹⁸³ It’s a relationship where President Bush and President Putin, Secretary Powell and his counterparts, can meet, can talk about the issues across the board that concern our two countries, can find common understanding and cooperation on a whole host of matters, whether it be arms reduction, whether it be counterproliferation, whether it be the global war on terror, whether it be other regional issues. So there are a lot of very important, very significant positives. There are also, as in any relationship, issues where we see things differently. But it is the mark of a mature, nuanced, sophisticated relationship that you can engage in international fora, such as the OSCE, or engage bilaterally, as Secretary Powell did when he – in

⁹⁸¹ “The Will of the People,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 5 December 2004.

⁹⁸² Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 7 December 2004.

⁹⁸³ Bolding added for emphasis.

the last two times he has been to Russia, on issues where you don't see eye to eye. And so, I just think that – I just caution you against pointing to one exchange, or one event, or one issue, and drawing broader characterizations about the relationship. It's just not the way things work.⁹⁸⁴

In addition to providing a detailed rundown of how Ukraine got to the point that it needed to rerun the runoff presidential election, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs (DAS) John Tefft touched on Russia's contribution to the crisis and, less directly, on the need to balance multiple policy priorities in the region.⁹⁸⁵ DAS Tefft provided a clear and convincing rundown of Moscow's open support for Prime Minister Yanukovich, pointing out that "[t]here were credible reports of Russian financial backing for his candidacy."⁹⁸⁶ John Tefft also pointed out that "President Putin visited Ukraine twice this fall, just prior to each round of voting, and underscored his support for the Prime Minister."⁹⁸⁷

DAS Tefft also pointed out that "there have been disturbing indications of a retreat from democracy in Russia, including flawed elections, greater control of the press,

⁹⁸⁴ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 7 December 2004.

⁹⁸⁵ John Tefft later served as Ambassador in both Kyiv and Moscow. He is referred to as Amb. Tefft elsewhere.

⁹⁸⁶ Ukraine's Election: Next Steps, Amb. John Tefft, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, U.S. Department of State, 7 December 2004.

⁹⁸⁷ Ukraine's Election: Next Steps, Amb. John Tefft, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, U.S. Department of State, 7 December 2004.

and selective prosecution of powerful business leaders thought to pose a threat.”⁹⁸⁸ At the same time, he indicated that the U.S. Government will pursue “balanced cooperation” with governments in the regions, a statement a number of observers understood to mean calibrating between supporting Western values, such as democracy, and not upsetting Moscow.⁹⁸⁹

Meanwhile, more senior U.S. officials continued to do their best to steer clear of any direct criticism of Putin and Russia. During his 7 December press availability in Sofia with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, Secretary Powell clearly avoided mentioning either Putin or Russia throughout his extensive response to a question about Putin’s public accusation that the United States is attempting to extend its “sphere of interest policies” into the former Soviet space.⁹⁹⁰ All the Secretary managed to say to push back on Putin’s false narrative is that the notion of spheres of influence “is a term that really isn’t relevant to the circumstances we are facing today,” something Putin would strenuously disagree with.⁹⁹¹

This apparent near-taboo apparently extended to Paula J. Dobriansky, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs and the most senior officials of Ukrainian descent in the U.S. Government at the time. Speaking on 10 December at a conference entitled “Ukraine’s Choice: Europe or Russia,” organized by the American Enterprise Institute,

⁹⁸⁸ Ukraine’s Election: Next Steps, Amb. John Tefft, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Testimony Before the House International Relations Committee, U.S. Department of State, 7 December 2004.

⁹⁸⁹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 7 December 2004.

⁹⁹⁰ Secretary Colin L. Powell, Remarks With Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy After Their Meeting, U.S. Department of State, 7 December 2004.

⁹⁹¹ Secretary Colin L. Powell, Remarks With Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy After Their Meeting, U.S. Department of State, 7 December 2004.

Under Secretary Dobriansky mentioned Russia only once – and in the context of good relations at that – and Putin and Moscow not at all. To give her credit, Paula Dobriansky did stress the importance of democratic elections in Ukraine not only for that country but also for the region as a whole.⁹⁹²

For its part, the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* welcomed the Ukrainian Supreme Court’s decision nullifying the results of the falsified second round and gleefully pointed out that the ruling was a defeat for “President Vladimir (‘What Me Meddle?’) Putin.”⁹⁹³ The newspaper seconded the criticism leveled at the Bush White House “for not speaking strongly and clearly enough in support of democracy in Ukraine and against Mr. Putin’s interference.”⁹⁹⁴

A week later, the *Ukrainian Weekly* gave ample coverage to the Senate’s 8 December passage by unanimous consent of a sense of the Senate resolution condemning “the widespread fraud in the November 21, 2004, run-off presidential election in Ukraine” and supporting “a peaceful political and legal settlement in Ukraine that is based on the principles of democracy and reflects the will of the people of Ukraine.”⁹⁹⁵ Interestingly enough, there was no reference to Russia and its negative role in the resolution’s text, perhaps a nod to the White House and its preferences.

This would not at all be surprising given the Bush Administration’s continued efforts to whitewash Putin’s increasingly – and blatantly – destructive track record. With

⁹⁹² Conference on “Ukraine’s Choice: Europe or Russia?” Paula J. Dobriansky, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Introductory remarks, American Enterprise Institute, 10 December 2004.

⁹⁹³ “A Victory for the People of Ukraine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 12 December 2004.

⁹⁹⁴ “A Victory for the People of Ukraine,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 12 December 2004.

⁹⁹⁵ Senate Unanimously Passes Resolution on November 21 presidential run-off, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 19 December 2004.

Secretary Powell's days in office counting down, he gave a series of interviews on a broad range of issues. In one such interview, with the Associated Press, the Secretary was asked about what the interviewers described as his gentle and careful criticism of Putin's democratic deficit. In response, Secretary Powell went out of his way to minimize any negative comments about Putin, instead choosing to praise what he saw as the positive side of bilateral relations:

There has been considerable improvement in Russia since the days of the Soviet Union. Human rights have improved. They do have open elections, not perhaps as open as we'd like. We'd like to see more controversy in the media, so to speak, so that all sides can be represented in the media and everybody can get full access to the media. But this is not the Russia of the old days of the Soviet Union. Now, President Putin has taken some steps that we think do not lead toward cementing his democracy properly, and when that has been the case we have spoken to him about it. We have spoken to him about it in the spirit of friendship and in the spirit of asking why some of these actions are taking place. And so Russia is not going back to being the Soviet Union. The Cold War is not coming back. And we want to encourage President Putin and our Russian colleagues to keep moving in the right direction to build their democracy on a sound

foundation, and that includes free access to media, respect for human rights, and to keep moving in the direction they had been moving.⁹⁹⁶

But the news coming out of Russia was becoming worse and worse by the day. On 18 December, the Russian government auctioned off Yukos, a privately held company built by Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, despite international warnings that such a step would have a chilling effect on foreign direct investment in Russia. The auction was won by little-known Baykal Finance Group, which came out of nowhere and which put in a bid right as the deadline was about to expire.⁹⁹⁷ Even the usually reserved Richard Boucher, the Department of State Spokesperson, acknowledged that the “[c]onduct of the case has raised serious concerns at the lack of transparency and independence of Russia’s investment and tax laws and the courts.”⁹⁹⁸

At the same time, the Spokesperson pointed out that “we have a very vast and complicated relationship with Russia and we’ll continue to work on all aspects of it,” in the process misleadingly contextualizing Moscow’s bad behavior.⁹⁹⁹ The issue also came up at the next day’s White House press briefing, where Press Secretary Scott McClellan announced a 24 February 2005 meeting between the President and Putin in Slovakia. On the question of Yukos and its confiscatory auctioning off to a clear front company, Scott McClellan said the White House found the move “disappointing.”¹⁰⁰⁰

⁹⁹⁶ Secretary Colin L. Powell, Interview With Barry Schweid, George Gedda, and Anne Gearan of the Associated Press, 17 December 2004.

⁹⁹⁷ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 20 December 2004.

⁹⁹⁸ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 20 December 2004.

⁹⁹⁹ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 20 December 2004.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Scott McClellan, Press Briefing by Scott McClellan Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/272476>.

The day after the repeat of the runoff election in Ukraine, on 27 December 2004, Trent Duffy, the Deputy White House Press Secretary, announced that the U.S. Government was “very pleased with the conduct of the election,” which met “all the international standards.”¹⁰⁰¹ This assessment was echoed by the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, which “gladly welcomed the results” of the election that saw Viktor Yushchenko defeat Viktor Yanukovich in a convincing manner.¹⁰⁰²

Meanwhile, Secretary Powell’s farewell tour continued with a barrage of additional exit interviews with the press. Throughout, the Secretary highlighted the claim that “we have good relations, improving relations, with nations that used to be our enemies – China and Russia.”¹⁰⁰³¹⁰⁰⁴¹⁰⁰⁵ In his 2 January 2005 interview with Tim Russert of NBC’s *Meet the Press*, Secretary Powell expressed particular pride in “the relationship we have put together with Russia,” while acknowledging that “yes, there are some challenges in our relationship.”¹⁰⁰⁶ The Secretary did not reference U.S. support for democracy in Ukraine, which culminated with the Orange Revolution, perhaps

¹⁰⁰¹ George W. Bush, Press Gaggle by Trent Duffy Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/272480>.

¹⁰⁰² UCCA Welcomes Victory of Democracy in Ukraine, Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, Press release, 28 December 2004.

¹⁰⁰³ Secretary Colin L. Powell, Interview on CBS’s Face the Nation With Bob Schieffer and Doyle McManus, U.S. Department of State, 2 January 2005.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Secretary Colin L. Powell, Interview on Fox’s Hannity & Colmes, U.S. Department of State, 11 January 2005.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Secretary Colin L. Powell, Interview on CNN’s Larry King Live, U.S. Department of State, 13 January 2005.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Secretary Colin L. Powell, Interview on NBC’s Meet the Press With Tim Russert, U.S. Department of State, 2 January 2005.

because doing so would offend Moscow in the scope of its zero-sum approach to the region.¹⁰⁰⁷

Later that month, Assistant Secretary Beth Jones appeared to go out of her way to praise Moscow during her 13 January digital video conference with international journalists, at one point highlighting “the good work that is underway in the NATO-Russia council.”¹⁰⁰⁸ For her part, Secretary of State-Designate Condoleezza Rice, President Bush’s first-term National Security Advisor, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 18 January that “we can work closely with Russia on common problems,” even if “the path to democracy [in Russia] is uneven.”¹⁰⁰⁹

Dr. Rice was especially effusive in highlighting supposed bilateral cooperation in the areas of counterterrorism and nonproliferation, which she went out of her way to describe as “unprecedented.”¹⁰¹⁰ She also characterized President Bush’s relationship with Putin as “good” and “strong.”¹⁰¹¹ At the same time, she called on Moscow to “show that it shares Western and international values, including a free judiciary and press,

¹⁰⁰⁷ In response to a question about the extent to which the U.S. Government tried not to show up Moscow in the context of the Orange Revolution, all of the former senior officials interviewed asserted that Washington worked hard not to come across as triumphant. According to Amb. Herbst (29 November 2020), the U.S. Government “had no desire to make Putin look bad.” As Amb. Fried put it (30 November 2020), “due to the general view that the U.S. could still do business with Putin, we were careful not to make Ukraine an issue of U.S.-Russian conflict and not to point fingers at Putin.” And according to Amb. Jones (30 November 2020), “Secretary Powell kept his Russian counterpart informed [of U.S. actions vis-à-vis Ukraine] on a regular basis.”

¹⁰⁰⁸ A. Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Digital Video Conference With Bratislava, Moscow and Rome, U.S. Department of State, 13 January 2005.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Secretary Condoleezza Rice, Opening Remarks by Secretary of State-Designate Dr. Condoleezza Rice, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Department of State, 18 January 2005.

¹⁰¹⁰ The Nomination of Dr. Condoleezza Rice to be Secretary of State, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 18 January 2015.

¹⁰¹¹ The Nomination of Dr. Condoleezza Rice to be Secretary of State, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 18 January 2015.

strong civil and governmental institutions, the rule of law, freedom of speech, assembly and religion.”¹⁰¹²

Despite these significant shortcomings, Dr. Rice asserted that “the strengthening of democracy in Russia will be critical to the pace and extent of our ability to develop a **strategic partnership** with that country.”¹⁰¹³¹⁰¹⁴ In other words, at issue is the question of how quickly and how far U.S.-Russian relations can move forward, not whether. On the other hand, Ukraine only came up twice: in Dr. Rice’s praise of the people of Ukraine for their democratic election of a new president, and while referencing “Europe’s immediate neighborhood,” a formulation that appeared to be at odds with President Bush’s vision of a “Europe whole and free” that includes Ukraine.¹⁰¹⁵

For his part, President Bush did his best to parlay what seemed like advances for democracy abroad into a sweeping statement at his 20 January 2005 second inaugural that “[t]he survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands.”¹⁰¹⁶ He added that “[t]he best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.”¹⁰¹⁷ Understandably so, the President was more explicit during his 2 February State of the Union address, in which he grouped Ukraine with

¹⁰¹² The Nomination of Dr. Condoleezza Rice to be Secretary of State, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 18 January 2015.

¹⁰¹³ The Nomination of Dr. Condoleezza Rice to be Secretary of State, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 18 January 2015.

¹⁰¹⁴ Bolded for emphasis.

¹⁰¹⁵ The Nomination of Dr. Condoleezza Rice to be Secretary of State, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 18 January 2015.

¹⁰¹⁶ George W. Bush, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/214048>.

¹⁰¹⁷ George W. Bush, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/214048>.

Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territories, and Iraq while praising supposed democratic breakthroughs around the globe.¹⁰¹⁸

Even after the democratic rerun of the runoff election and Yushchenko's subsequent inauguration on 23 January 2005 as modern Ukraine's third president, the U.S. Government continued to tread carefully when listing those against whom the people of Ukraine triumphed. Addressing the Subcommittee on European Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 8 March, Deputy Assistant Secretary John Tefft stated that "Ukraine's democratic institutions demonstrated surprising strength in the face of persistent attempts by elements within the previous government and among oligarchic clans to subvert democratic processes."¹⁰¹⁹ Moscow's explicitly destructive policies did not apparently merit a dishonorable mention in this context. But perhaps even more telling was Assistant Secretary Dan Fried's remark that "[t]he United States does not seek any sort of geopolitical advantage in Ukraine," a clear – even if futile – message to Moscow.¹⁰²⁰¹⁰²¹

Meanwhile, the Administration's non-evidence-based approach to interacting with Putin continued. President Bush continued to refer to Putin as "my friend Vladimir," as he did once again at the 16 September 2005 joint news conference with the Russian

¹⁰¹⁸ George W. Bush, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/211758>.

¹⁰¹⁹ Prepared Statement of Ambassador John F. Tefft, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Hearing before the Subcommittee on European Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, United States Senate, The Future of Democracy in the Black Sea Area, 8 March 2005.

¹⁰²⁰ Ambassador Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Testimony Before the House International Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats, Ukraine: Developments in the Aftermath of the Orange Revolution, 27 July 2005.

¹⁰²¹ Amb. Fried replaced Assistant Secretary Jones as the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs in May 2005.

leader.¹⁰²² It was also at this event that the President stated that “every time I visit and talk with President Putin, I – our relationship becomes stronger.”¹⁰²³ The apparent self-delusion did not stop there. President Bush proceeded to refer to Russia as “a strong ally” in fighting the war on terror and asserted that the United States, and Russia share “the same goal” and are “work[ing] together in Iran and North Korea.”¹⁰²⁴ Most incredibly, the President claimed Washington and Moscow will “work to advance freedom and democracy in our respective countries and around the world.”¹⁰²⁵¹⁰²⁶

It is therefore not surprising that President Bush kept to form and did not mention the nefarious Russian influence that the people of Ukraine had to overcome when congratulating Ukrainians on the first anniversary of the Orange Revolution in his 22 November 2005 press release. The President praised the people of Ukraine for showing “the world that the love of liberty is stronger than the will of tyranny.”¹⁰²⁷ References to Ukraine in President Bush’s memoirs are quite sparse, as his description of the Orange Revolution:

¹⁰²² George W. Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Vladimir Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/216329>.

¹⁰²³ George W. Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Vladimir Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/216329>.

¹⁰²⁴ George W. Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Vladimir Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/216329>.

¹⁰²⁵ George W. Bush, The President’s News Conference With President Vladimir Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/216329>.

¹⁰²⁶ President Bush claims in his memoirs that he raised his concerns about “Russia’s lack of progress on democracy” and particularly “his arrests of Russian businessmen and his crackdown on the free press” with Putin during their meeting in Bratislava. George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 432.

¹⁰²⁷ George W. Bush, Message on the First Anniversary of the Orange Revolution Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/216895>.

In November 2004, a...wave of protests broke out after a fraudulent presidential election in Ukraine. Hundreds of thousands braved freezing temperatures to demonstrate for opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko. His supporters turned out every day clad in orange scarves and ribbons until the Ukrainian Supreme Court ordered a rerun of the tainted election. Yushchenko won and was sworn in on January 23, 2005, completing the Orange Revolution.¹⁰²⁸

As in the contemporaneous pronouncements mentioned above, there are no references to Russia or to its active interference on behalf of Yanukovich. Vice President Dick Cheney's memoirs, on the other hand, leave little doubt as to what Moscow's role had been in the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine. The Vice President wrote that the Orange Revolution came about "when the Moscow-backed candidate for the presidency of Ukraine had tried to steal the election."¹⁰²⁹ He added that he "had long believed that the United States should play a more active role in integrating Ukraine and other former Soviet states into the West."¹⁰³⁰¹⁰³¹

¹⁰²⁸ George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 430.

¹⁰²⁹ Dick Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 428.

¹⁰³⁰ Dick Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 428.

¹⁰³¹ According to Angela Stent, "Like its predecessor, the Bush Administration was divided over how much its policy toward the post-Soviet states should take Russian concerns into account. The Office of Vice President Cheney advocated a tough policy toward Russia, generally supporting Russia's neighbors and expressing suspicion about Moscow's intentions...[while others, including NSC Senior Director for Russia Tom Graham] advocated a more realist and interest-based policy toward Russia, recognizing the necessity of taking Russian interests into consideration when crafting U.S. policy in the post-Soviet space." She also wrote that Amb. Fried and Deputy Assistant Secretary David Kramer "believed that U.S. policy toward Russia's neighbors should not be influenced by Russian concerns." Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, p. 101.

The Moscow factor's presence and its impact

In view of the above, the Moscow factor was present in the U.S. policy toward the fraudulent 2004 presidential election and the Orange Revolution that the falsification attempt provoked, though it manifested itself more indirectly and in less obvious ways than in the previous two cases. In this case, this factor did not prevent the sitting U.S. Administration from pursuing a policy that was at odds with Moscow's stated interests and, eventually, embracing an outcome – free and fair elections that brought to power a Western-leaning Ukrainian president – that Moscow worked hard to forestall. The fact that Moscow invested financial and other resources, most importantly Putin's personal support for the runner-up, made this a particularly consequential juxtaposition, something the U.S. Government clearly wanted to avoid.

Throughout this case, the Moscow factor primarily manifested itself through the Bush Administration's conscious and sustained failure to call out and confront malign Russian interference in the run-up to and during the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine, including through explicit support for its preferred candidate during the campaign and by extending its political support once the fraud was committed. Both the Bush White House and the Department of State routinely and consistently declined multiple opportunities to accurately characterize Moscow's clearly negative role in undermining Ukrainian democracy and, therefore, willfully misrepresented election-related

developments in Ukraine in order to avoid criticizing Moscow. This policy posture demonstrated a high degree of continuity with the preceding Administration.

Within the parameters of this case, the Moscow factor nevertheless played a de facto neutral role in effect as the Kremlin's efforts to encourage a crackdown, intimidate Ukrainian civil society, and warn off European intermediaries trying to keep the outgoing Kuchma administration in Kyiv on the straight and narrow were eventually met with a unified Western response focusing on democratic principles and process. Meanwhile, developments in Ukraine largely remained a sideshow in the context of other Administration priorities, including those pertaining to Russia directly or those in which Russia could block, complicate, or facilitate the outcomes sought, most importantly the Global War on Terror and the occupation of Iraq.

The outcome of this case was a triumph of Ukrainian civil society and of the notion of democracy genuinely taking root in post-Soviet Ukraine, however haltingly, with the will of the people eventually reflected in the rerun of the runoff election between Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich. The large protests against the falsification forced both the Kuchma regime and the international community to seek a resolution generally consistent with the OSCE principles and despite Moscow's strong but, in the end, ineffectual opposition.

After the fact, the Orange Revolution became one of the poster children for President Bush's Freedom Agenda. But Washington did not press its advantage and, actually, redoubled its efforts aimed at engaging Moscow, perhaps believing that it is possible to have it both ways and despite the mounting evidence that Putin's Russia was

utterly rejecting the liberal world order as envisioned in Washington. Though the U.S. Government went out of its way not to blame Moscow for its irresponsible behavior vis-à-vis Ukraine, the Kremlin clearly did not think this was sufficient when it came to leadership changes in the post-Soviet space, particularly in Ukraine. Moreover, the Russian leadership arguably learned all the wrong lessons, as evidenced by the events leading up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donbas almost a decade later.

Interplay with selected independent variables

Relative importance of domestic priorities: Candidate George W. Bush's preference was to focus on pressing domestic priorities, including dealing with an economic recession in the wake of the dot-com crash, and get away from the "nation-building" pursuits for which he criticized the preceding Clinton Administration, especially in the context of the Yugoslav wars. Based on his first eight months in office, he had every intention of following through on his campaign rhetoric. However, this changed with the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Homeland, the subsequent Global War on Terror, and the intervention in Iraq to unseat Saddam Hussein.

Relative importance of other foreign policy priorities: As referenced above, the Bush Administration's overarching foreign policy priority was prosecuting the Global War on Terror, provoked by the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States. This focus put a

premium on closer counterterrorism cooperation with international partners and included a concerted effort to reach out to Moscow to secure its assistance in facilitating access to the Afghan warzone, as well as broader collaboration, despite differing views of what constitutes terrorism and Moscow's own mismanaged conflict with independence-minded Ichkeriya (Chechnya). Unseating Saddam, initially for allegedly hiding his WMD programs, was another priority that more often than not complicated relations with international partners, including both NATO Allies and Putin's Russia, even as this war and the one in Afghanistan took on a veneer of advancing democracy around the globe, eventually under the guise of the Freedom Agenda. Arms control as well as the safeguarding of nuclear materials, by now perennial favorites of U.S. Administrations, were also in the Bush Administration's mix of foreign policy priorities.

Relative commitment to “Europe whole and free” policy: Though the Bush Administration's later rhetorical focus on the Freedom Agenda broadened the context in which the phrase “Europe whole and free” could be placed, there was considerable continuity between this Administration and the preceding Clinton Administration, which had normalized this policy goal's applicability to all of geographic Europe, including Ukraine. The Bush Administration's encouragement of European leaders to take the lead as intermediaries in negotiating the outcome of the Orange Revolution underscored the limits of what the policy may mean in practice, especially in the context of Washington's other foreign policy priorities and relations with Russia.

Congressional role and posture: Even more on this issue than on Ukraine's denuclearization, Congress very much took a backseat to the White House. A number of factors probably account for this relatively minor posture of the legislative branch. First, the crisis broke relatively quickly, with its peak coming during a Congressional recess. Second, the Administration's rhetorical posture on the presidential election in Ukraine, particularly its focus on a free and fair process, did not leave much space for Congressional criticism. The shared desire not to antagonize the Russians further at a time of direct U.S. engagement in both Afghanistan and Iraq was another factor that may explain the relatively passive Congressional role. One exception was the important mission undertaken by Sen. Lugar on behalf of the Bush Administration. His presence on the ground and his report on the 21 November fraudulent runoff election gave considerable legitimacy to Washington's criticism of what transpired, though he too studiously avoided referencing the negative impact of Moscow's efforts to stymie the will of the Ukrainian people. The invitation to eventual winner Viktor Yushchenko to speak to a Joint Session of Congress in April 2005 capped the Hill's positive, but hardly defining, involvement.

Extent of Ukrainian diaspora activism: For the Ukrainian diaspora, the opportunity to try to level the playing field for Viktor Yushchenko was a major mobilizing factor. Many in the diaspora saw him, somewhat erroneously, as a much-needed antidote to the (barely) post-Soviet types who have been running independent Ukraine since the USSR's collapse. Given the Bush Administration's relative fixation on Moscow – the President's

first meeting with Putin and his gaze into the latter's eyes undermined much of the credibility the Administration may have had with the Ukrainian diaspora – the community was not going to leave the issue to chance. In view of the Congressional schedule and the end-of-the-year holidays, diaspora opinion makers, including at the *Ukrainian Weekly*, maintained a steady drumbeat of advocacy, focusing on the need for the will of the Ukrainian people to be respected and the related priority of minimizing Moscow's malign influence.

Moscow's behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities: As previously referenced, the U.S. Government, and especially the White House, had a generally favorable view of Putin's Russia and its supposed willingness to pursue counterterrorism cooperation, though often on its terms and for reasons that were both nefarious and went beyond the scope of the counterterrorism struggle. The Bush Administration wanted to keep Moscow onside, at least to the extent possible, because of – rather than despite – the Kremlin's opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq. From the President's perspective, Putin had handled their disagreements over both Iraq and the 2002 NATO enlargement round, which included the Baltic States, relatively well. Between that, the 2002 Moscow treaty further reducing strategic nuclear weapons in the two countries' arsenals, and President Bush's investment in what he saw as a personal relationship with Putin, the Russia relationship was hardly easy or satisfying, but certainly important and worthwhile. It also amounted to considerable wishful thinking.

Kyiv's behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities: The U.S.-Ukrainian relationship had its own complex and consequential dynamics, even when unencumbered by the relative comparison with Washington's interactions with Moscow. Following the low points of the Gongadze abduction and murder, and the Kolchuga transfer approval, the Kuchma administration took a significant step toward getting back in Washington's good graces by sending a large Ukrainian contingent to Iraq, recognizing the importance of this issue for the Bush Administration. Those in power in Kyiv no doubt hoped that the Iraq deployment would not only improve bilateral dynamics but also serve to give them relative latitude in essentially carrying out a precooked transfer of power under the guise of the 2004 presidential election.

Executive branch policy champions: Given his investment in the relationship with Putin, President Bush played a major role in articulating and enforcing the big-picture policy backdrop for the U.S. Government's approach to the Orange Revolution. The senior bureaucrats entrusted with the day-to-day carrying out of the President's policies were keenly aware of his priorities and of the need to take measured steps and tread carefully once Kyiv's electoral shenanigans became apparent. A glimpse into what U.S. policy could look like if applied in a consistent manner was made possible by Secretary Powell's press availability in which he essentially rejected the official – and fraudulent – results of the 21 November runoff election, thereby giving much needed energy to the people protesting on Kyiv's Maydan, but the particular circumstances which made this possible are not likely to be easily replicated. The actual policy impact of Vice President

Cheney's well-known support for Ukraine's integration into the West remains understudied, but there should be little doubt that he was at the forefront of advocating for the strongest possible pushback against Moscow's interference.

Summary

As alluded to above, the most important factor that played itself out on the question of the U.S. policy toward Ukraine's Orange Revolution appears to have been President Bush's view of America's national security priorities and how both Russia and Ukraine fit into and interacted with this framework. This is consistent with the previous two cases in which other, arguably more important, foreign policy priorities, as well as the President's propensity to act as the policy champion on selected issues appear to have been dominant determinants of the policy outcome. In line with the above-mentioned reference points, the U.S. policy approach to the attempt to falsify the results of the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election, particularly the desire not to criticize Moscow directly, should be seen in the context of the Bush Administration's Global War on Terror and associated policies, and the perceived importance of Moscow's views and sensitivities.

A very much secondary role was played by Kyiv's behavior, particularly its significant backsliding on the democracy and rule of law fronts, the beating Ukraine's image took as a result of President Kuchma's approval of the sale of the Kolchuga advanced early warning system to Saddam's Iraq, and the related decision to deploy Ukrainian troops to Iraq. This latter factor probably weighed relatively heavily in the U.S. Government's policy debate, but in the end it could not overcome the fast-moving

developments on the ground in Ukraine. Here too, the diaspora did its best to influence U.S. policy, while the Congressional role was largely eclipsed by that of the executive branch.

Chapter 6

U.S. Non-Decision on Providing Lethal Assistance to Ukraine

The Obama presidency context

Then candidate Barack Obama's 21 April 2008 statement on Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty in response to Moscow's establishment of legal ties with Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions sounded promising to those who wanted to see a more robust U.S. stance on Russia's misbehavior in the former Soviet space. Sen. Obama called the Russian move "deeply troubling and contrary to Russia's obligations as a permanent member of the UN Security Council."¹⁰³² He added that he welcomes "the desire by Georgia, as well as Ukraine, to seek closer ties with NATO."¹⁰³³

Once elected, however, President Obama shifted to prioritizing good relations with Moscow even after the Russian military invaded Georgia, occupied the two regions, and established "diplomatic" relations with them. His Secretary of State-designate, Hillary Clinton, stated at her 13 January 2009 confirmation hearing that "President-elect Obama and I seek a future of cooperative engagement with the Russian government on matters of strategic importance while standing strongly for American values and

¹⁰³² Barack Obama, Statement of Senator Obama on Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/291378>.

¹⁰³³ Barack Obama, Statement of Senator Obama on Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/291378>.

international norms.”¹⁰³⁴ She added that “[w]ith both Russia and China we should work together on vital security and economic issues like terrorism, proliferation, climate change, and reforming financial markets.”¹⁰³⁵

Hillary Clinton’s words on the Hill were an early indication of the incoming Obama Administration’s desire to pursue a resetting of relations with Russia, an important reference point in the context of the lethal assistance issue some years later.¹⁰³⁶ Efforts to implement this policy started shortly after President Obama’s inauguration, with Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Bill Burns reporting to Secretary Clinton on 13 February that:

The initial Russian response to your message and the President’s letter was quite positive...In meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov...and a number of other senior figures, I emphasized (along with Mike McFaul of the NSC staff) the new Administration’s interest in “resetting” our relations on a more productive path. Lavrov [and the others] were upbeat about the possibilities for early progress on post-START and nuclear cooperation, as well as Afghanistan. They were intrigued by our

¹⁰³⁴ Barack Obama, Senate Confirmation Hearing for Secretary of State Nominee Hillary Clinton Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/285877>.

¹⁰³⁵ Barack Obama, Senate Confirmation Hearing for Secretary of State Nominee Hillary Clinton Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/285877>.

¹⁰³⁶ Hillary Clinton’s words also pointed to a perhaps unexpected continuity with the approach of the previous Administration.

willingness to consider new approaches on missile defense, but kept their cards close to the vest on Iran.¹⁰³⁷

Under Secretary Burns further passed to the Secretary that he “left Moscow convinced that we have a significant opportunity before us... Your meeting with Lavrov on March 6 will be a valuable chance to push relations in the right direction.”¹⁰³⁸ He mentioned neither the fact that Russia continued to occupy sovereign Georgian territory nor the then already obvious fact that the “significant opportunity” before the United States would serve to validate, in the first instance, the Kremlin’s aggressive behavior in the post-Soviet space and its parallel pursuit of international recognition of its sphere of privileged interest throughout the region.¹⁰³⁹

The “reset” was officially launched on 6 March in Geneva by Secretary Clinton and her Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov when the former offered the latter to press a button that was incorrectly labeled in Russian as “overload.”¹⁰⁴⁰ The Secretary asserted that “[o]ur two nations share a common interest in working constructively in areas of mutual concern, from arms control and nonproliferation to counter-piracy and counternarcotics, to Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea.”¹⁰⁴¹ She promised to “begin

¹⁰³⁷ Note for the Secretary, February 11-12 Meetings in Moscow, from P Bill Burns, 13 February 2009, released in full 21 September 2017.

¹⁰³⁸ Note for the Secretary, February 11-12 Meetings in Moscow, from P Bill Burns, 13 February 2009, released in full 21 September 2017.

¹⁰³⁹ It fell to Vice President Joe Biden to launch the first public “reset” trial balloon. He did so at the February 2009 security conference in Munich by suggesting that the United States and Russia need to push a “reset button” in bilateral relations. The “reset” was officially launched on 6 March 2009 by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Reset is “perezagruzka,” while Secretary Clinton’s button was labeled “peregruzka.”

¹⁰⁴¹ Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Remarks With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2009.

working immediately to translate our words into deeds.”¹⁰⁴² The Secretary praised Lavrov for being willing to discuss “any and all issues.”¹⁰⁴³

But it was not until President Obama’s 7 July speech at the New Economic School in Moscow that the “reset” policy was fleshed out further. Among other things, the President claimed that the two countries had significant interests in common and that these common interests could and should form a strong basis for bilateral cooperation. He delivered his punch line shortly thereafter, calling for “a reset in relations between the United States and Russia,” and adding that this “fresh start...must be a sustained effort among the American and Russian people to identify mutual interests, and to expand dialogue and cooperation that can pave the way to progress.”¹⁰⁴⁴ President Obama’s reference to Russia as a “great power” may have won him some new friends in the audience, but it also no doubt fed Putin’s misleading and self-serving narrative about Russia’s “return” to prominence on the world stage.¹⁰⁴⁵

For its part, Moscow appears to have seen the “reset” as a validation of its foreign policy course, ranging from its opposition to NATO’s eastward expansion to Russia’s aggression against Georgia.¹⁰⁴⁶ As the New Economic School’s Ilya Ulyanov put it, “[i]n

¹⁰⁴² Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Remarks With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2009.

¹⁰⁴³ Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Remarks With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2009.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Barack Obama, Remarks at a Graduation Ceremony at the New Economic School in Moscow, Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/287564>.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Barack Obama, Remarks at a Graduation Ceremony at the New Economic School in Moscow, Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/287564>.

¹⁰⁴⁶ According to Georgetown University Professor Angela Stent, Moscow saw the reset as a “course correction, an admission that the American side was responsible for the deterioration in bilateral relations.” Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, p. 212.

contrast [to the Obama Administration’s views], Russia viewed the Obama reset as a necessary American course correction of Bush’s failed policy and less as a joint project.”¹⁰⁴⁷ It was in this context and with this important – some would say debilitating – caveat that Moscow wholeheartedly welcomed Washington’s policy shift.¹⁰⁴⁸ Needless to say, the Obama Administration’s domestic critics saw the “reset” in a rather different light.¹⁰⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Washington went out of its way to make sure that its investment in the “reset” policy with Russia was not needlessly undermined by its interactions with Russia’s neighbors, especially Georgia and Ukraine. While continuing to emphasize that the United States “will continue to reject the notion of spheres of influence,” the Obama Administration also made it clear that interactions with Georgia, Ukraine, and others will not “come at anyone’s expense,” a clear reference to Russia.¹⁰⁵⁰

Perhaps more to the point, Washington’s assertions that its relations with a range of countries in the region, including Russia, are not “a zero-sum game,” as stated at a 17 July press availability by National Security Advisor to the Vice President Tony Blinken, no doubt fell on deaf ears in Moscow.¹⁰⁵¹ At the same time, a clear division of labor

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ilya Ulyanov, “Assessing the Obama-Medvedev Reset in U.S.-Russia Relations,” 3 September 2015.

¹⁰⁴⁸ The contrast in the two sides’ perceptions of the “reset” policy is one of many asymmetries at work in the complex, often distorted, and historically laden bilateral relationship.

¹⁰⁴⁹ As Ariel Cohen, then with the Heritage Foundation, put it, “[t]o uphold the reset, the Administration agreed to cut U.S. strategic nuclear forces under New START, abandoned missile defense deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic, engaged Russia in missile defense talks, pursued a policy of geopolitical neglect in the former Soviet Union, and toned down criticism of political freedom violations in Russia.”

¹⁰⁵⁰ Barack Obama, Press Briefing by National Security Advisor to the Vice President Tony Blinken on the Vice President’s Upcoming Trip to Ukraine and Georgia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/286438>.

¹⁰⁵¹ Barack Obama, Press Briefing by National Security Advisor to the Vice President Tony Blinken on the Vice President’s Upcoming Trip to Ukraine and Georgia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/286438>.

between President Obama and Vice President Biden, with the former taking on the duty of interacting with the Russian leadership and the latter responsible for dealing with others in the region, became apparent to all.¹⁰⁵²

The Yanukovych dynamic

With the retrograde Viktor Yanukovych beating out Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko for the Ukrainian presidency in February 2010, U.S. policy toward Ukraine became both instrumental and under considerably less stress to support Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, which was just fine with the Obama White House and its "reset" policy.¹⁰⁵³ Given President Obama's focus on securing fissile materials around the globe, much of Washington's interest in Ukraine boiled down to getting Kyiv to transfer its remaining holdings of highly enriched uranium – from a research institute – to Russia for reprocessing.¹⁰⁵⁴

This approach worked well for Yanukovych, who was looking to insulate himself from U.S. criticism as he launched a concerted effort to erode post-Orange Revolution checks and balances on presidential power, all while a number of Americans of various degrees of influence claimed to anyone who would listen in Washington that Yanukovych had become a different, more reformed man in the wake of the Orange

¹⁰⁵² Barack Obama, Press Briefing by National Security Advisor to the Vice President Tony Blinken on the Vice President's Upcoming Trip to Ukraine and Georgia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/286438>.

¹⁰⁵³ The incumbent, Viktor Yushchenko, did not even come close to making it into the runoff of top two finishers.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary: President Obama Will Meet with President Viktor Yanukovych of Ukraine in Washington on April 12 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/290439>.

Revolution.¹⁰⁵⁵ President Obama and Yanukovych's 12 April joint statement, issued on the margins of the Nuclear Security Summit, endorsed the multilateral summit's goal of "securing all vulnerable nuclear materials" and "recognized Ukraine's unique contribution to nuclear disarmament."¹⁰⁵⁶ Perhaps more importantly, especially in the context of what would transpire four years later, the statement "reconfirmed that the security assurances recorded in the Budapest Memorandum...remain in effect."¹⁰⁵⁷ Ukraine's remaining stock of fissile material was transferred to Russia by the end of 2010.¹⁰⁵⁸

With the transfer completed, Ukraine largely fell off the Obama Administration's radar. The President's last address to the United Nations General Assembly prior to Yanukovych's decision to backtrack on signing an Association Agreement with the EU because of Moscow's objections, Yanukovych's brutal crackdown on students protesting this decisions, and the popular uprising Yanukovych's policies provoked, did not reference Ukraine, even in the nuclear security context.¹⁰⁵⁹¹⁰⁶⁰ Instead, the 24 September 2013 address focused on a range of other issues, including President Obama's praise for

¹⁰⁵⁵ Based on the author's direct observations.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Barack Obama, Joint Statement By President Obama and President Viktor Yanukovych of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/288200>.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Barack Obama, Joint Statement By President Obama and President Viktor Yanukovych of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/288200>.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Barack Obama, Statement on the Removal of Highly Enriched Uranium From Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/289351>.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Barack Obama, Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/304410>.

¹⁰⁶⁰ As Paul D'Anieri has pointed out, the Obama Administration was able to neglect Ukraine in part because of the increased prominence of the European Union in pushing reform (16 December 2020 email exchange with author).

the then recent agreement to place Syria's chemical weapons under international control for soonest destruction.¹⁰⁶¹

As temperatures plunged and the anti-Yanukovich protests in Kyiv's Maydan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) intensified, the United States and other Western democracies were confronted with a policy challenge seemingly more intense and consequential than that during the Orange Revolution almost a decade earlier. Amb. Dan Fried's successor as the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Victoria (Toria) Nuland, was more ready than most to meet the challenge based on her previous work as Strobe Talbott's special assistant, Permanent Representative to NATO, and Deputy National Security Advisor to Dick Cheney.

Speaking at the 5 December OSCE Ministerial, held coincidentally in Kyiv, Assistant Secretary Nuland announced that the United States stands "with the people of Ukraine who see their future in Europe" and urged the Ukrainian government "to listen to the voices of its people who want to live in freedom, opportunity and prosperity."¹⁰⁶² Developments on the ground led President Obama to mention Ukraine in his 28 January 2014 State of the Union address, in which he extended his support for the Ukrainian

¹⁰⁶¹ Barack Obama, Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/304410>.

¹⁰⁶² Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Intervention at the OSCE Ministerial Council First Plenary Session, Kyiv, Ukraine, 5 December 2013.

people’s right to express themselves freely...and to have a say in their country’s future.”¹⁰⁶³¹⁰⁶⁴

Egged on by Moscow, the Yanukovich regime had other ideas, eventually deploying snipers and killing over a hundred protestors. Despite the obvious Russian role, the U.S. Government typically did not raise this aspect in press opportunities until asked.¹⁰⁶⁵ And even when asked, the references to Russia’s role were elliptical, with one Department of State official stating that “it’s very hard to have a good ability to analyze” Moscow’s machinations.¹⁰⁶⁶

On 20 February, after a particularly bloody day on the Maydan, Secretary of State John Kerry, Hillary Clinton’s replacement at Foggy Bottom, issued a statement announcing “sanctions through travel bans on Ukrainians responsible for the violence.”¹⁰⁶⁷ A statement by the White House Press Secretary that was issued in parallel announced that “[t]he United States will work with our European allies to hold those responsible for violence accountable.”¹⁰⁶⁸ Neither statement referenced Russia, which had begun its operation to seize Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula earlier that day.

¹⁰⁶³ Barack Obama, Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305034>.

¹⁰⁶⁴ The President’s addition of “peacefully” must have seemed like a bad joke to those who withstood nightly assaults by Yanukovich’s security forces and hired thugs on the Maydan.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Senior State Department Official, Background Briefing on the Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 19 February 2014.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Senior State Department Official, Background Briefing on the Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 19 February 2014.

¹⁰⁶⁷ John Kerry, Press Statement, Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 20 February 2014.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305101>.

Moscow takes advantage

That operation was already in full swing the next day, 21 February, when Yanukovich and three opposition leaders signed an agreement to end the standoff based on the return to the pre-Yanukovich constitution, the formation of a national unity government, the adoption of a new electoral law, and the holding of early presidential elections in December 2014.¹⁰⁶⁹ The agreement, which was brokered by the French, German, and Polish foreign ministers, witnessed by a Russian representative, and welcomed by the United States, was abrogated by Yanukovich the next day when he failed to follow up on an important procedural step on the Rada.¹⁰⁷⁰¹⁰⁷¹ A video recovered later showed his entourage packing hurriedly late on 21 February while the ink was still drying on the agreement. As was determined later, Yanukovich and Co., along with truckloads of cash and valuables, made it out of Ukraine with Moscow's assistance.

Also on 21 February, President Obama spoke with Putin, a call the Department of State referred to as "constructive."¹⁰⁷² Ukraine was reportedly one of several topics discussed, with Syria, Iran, and the Sochi Olympics also on the agenda.¹⁰⁷³ On Ukraine, the President and Putin "agreed that the agreement [in Kyiv] needed to be implemented quickly, that it was very important to encourage all sides to refrain from violence, that

¹⁰⁶⁹ Senior State Department Official, Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 21 February 2014.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305110>.

¹⁰⁷¹ Consistent with the then already ongoing Russian operation to seize Crimea, the Russian representative declined to sign the agreement.

¹⁰⁷² Senior State Department Official, Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 21 February 2014.

¹⁰⁷³ Senior State Department Official, Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 21 February 2014.

there was a real opportunity here for a peaceful solution.”¹⁰⁷⁴¹⁰⁷⁵ According to the Department of State readout, “Putin affirmed that Russia wants to remain part of the implementation process.”¹⁰⁷⁶¹⁰⁷⁷ When asked about Moscow’s role, the senior State Department official briefing asserted that the agreement “is in both the interest of Ukraine, the interest of Russia, the interest of Europe, and the interest of the United States, that we clearly share interests there.”¹⁰⁷⁸ Judging by the multiple follow-up questions about Moscow’s possible calculations, the Department of State press corps was quite skeptical of the rosy readout above, and rightly so.

Despite U.S. efforts to assuage Moscow when referencing the outcome of what became known as the Revolution of Dignity (Revolyutsiya Hidnosti) – or perhaps because of these, Moscow plowed ahead with its violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹⁰⁷⁹ The 26 February statement by visiting U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns promising to “firmly support Ukraine’s unity and territorial integrity, and healthy relations with all of its neighbors, including Russia,” while finally seeming to acknowledge the ongoing Russian operation in the south, were no match for the concrete steps Moscow was taking to complete the illegal occupation of Crimea.¹⁰⁸⁰ Perhaps worse yet, Bill Burns’ response to a question about a report of a Russian military buildup

¹⁰⁷⁴ Senior State Department Official, Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 21 February 2014.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Putin’s agreeable conversation with the President should have been a warning sign.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Senior State Department Official, Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 21 February 2014.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Interestingly enough, the White House readout of the Putin call was more reserved. Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of President Obama’s Call with President Putin Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305094>.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Senior State Department Official, Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 21 February 2014.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305120>.

¹⁰⁸⁰ William J. Burns, Deputy Secretary of State, Statement and Q&A at U.S. Embassy Kyiv, Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 26 February 2014.

in Crimea in violation of its agreements with Ukraine made the United States look rather clueless:

All that I would stress is what I said before, and that is that the United States strongly supports the unity and the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Separatism of the sort that you've seen some speculation about in recent days is not in Ukraine's interest and it's not in anybody's interest; and the United States will continue to reinforce that very firm position.¹⁰⁸¹

Asked a similar question, Secretary Kerry gave an even more peculiar response:

President Putin, in a telephone conversation with President Obama just the other day, committed to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine. And I think that's incredibly important. It would be very difficult for me to understand how Russia would reconcile its position on Libya, its position on Syria, its warnings against intervention in another country and then not respect the sovereignty of Ukraine and the will of the people there.¹⁰⁸²

For its part, the White House issued a cryptic statement on 26 February, the same day as Secretary Kerry's interview, urging "outside actors in the region to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."¹⁰⁸³ The statement by the Press Secretary also "remind[ed] all governments of their political commitments to transparency about

¹⁰⁸¹ William J. Burns, Deputy Secretary of State, Statement and Q&A at U.S. Embassy Kyiv, Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 26 February 2014.

¹⁰⁸² John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With Andrea Mitchell of MSNBC, U.S. Department of State, 26 February 2014.

¹⁰⁸³ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305212>.

military activities under the Vienna Document 2011 and other OSCE principles designed to ensure peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic region.”¹⁰⁸⁴

The next day, on 27 February, Russian troops without insignia seized the building of the Crimean regional legislature and hoisted the Russian tricolor, a development that was rightly raised by Secretary Kerry during his phone call with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. When asked about Lavrov’s reaction, the Secretary said the Russian foreign minister “indicated to me that he’d actually watched it on TV and he’d seen what had happened, but he disclaimed that they had anything to do with any formal Russian initiative. And on the contrary, they’re concerned about it, and he expressed a concern about it.”¹⁰⁸⁵

Meanwhile, Vice President Biden, who was quickly emerging as the Obama Administration’s pointperson on Ukraine, told Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk the same day “that the United States will offer its full support as Ukraine undertakes the reforms necessary to return to economic health, pursue reconciliation, uphold its international obligations, and **seek open and constructive relationships with all its neighbors.**”¹⁰⁸⁶¹⁰⁸⁷ The Russian operation to seize Crimea was entering its second week without significant Western, including American pushback, as was noted in the 28 February appeal by the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) to Congress.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305212>.

¹⁰⁸⁵ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks With German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier After Their Working Lunch, U.S. Department of State, 27 February 2014.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President's Call with Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308888>.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Bolded for emphasis.

The UCCA called on Congress to “condemn these latest dangerous provocations by Russia against the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine.”¹⁰⁸⁸

With Russia’s occupation of the peninsula completed, Moscow proceeded with an illegal referendum in Crimea leading to its supposed incorporation into the Russian Federation, a move that was condemned by the UN General Assembly and remains unrecognized by the international community.¹⁰⁸⁹ The purported annexation also violated a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements and treaties, most importantly the Helsinki Final Act and the UN Charter, as well the Budapest Memorandum on Ukraine’s final commitment to denuclearize two decades earlier.¹⁰⁹⁰ Flush with short-term success in Crimea and undeterred by the West’s limp response, Moscow launched thinly veiled efforts to destabilize other border regions of Ukraine, particularly Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts.¹⁰⁹¹

Lethal assistance issue broached

Meanwhile, the first individual to raise the issue of U.S. lethal assistance to Ukraine in the public record was George Stephanopoulos, who asked Secretary Kerry on 2 March if the Obama Administration “want[s] Congress to pass military aid to Ukraine”

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ukrainian Congressional Committee of America, Appeal to Congress to Contact Pres. Obama and Intervene with Putin, 28 February 2014.

¹⁰⁸⁹ The Ukrainian constitution does not allow changes to Ukraine’s borders in the absence of a national referendum.

¹⁰⁹⁰ John Kerry, Press Statement, Situation in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 1 March 2014.

¹⁰⁹¹ At one point, a crowd of Russian provocateurs stormed the Kharkiv opera house having mistaken it for the regional government building.

in addition to economic sanctions against Russia.¹⁰⁹² In response, the Secretary stated that “it may well come that we would have to engage in that kind of activity. Absolutely. I think all options are on the table.”¹⁰⁹³

For his part, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Robert Menendez (D-NJ) appeared to give the Obama Administration plenty of runway on this issue set by asserting in a 3 March statement that “Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine constitutes a clear violation of international law and demands a swift and coordinated response from the international community to support the Ukraine and counter Russian efforts to annex Ukrainian territory by force.”¹⁰⁹⁴

The same day, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) called on the United States to “lead in promoting international norms” and warned that “unless Ukraine’s territorial integrity and political independence is safeguarded...trans-Atlantic security is simply an illusion.”¹⁰⁹⁵ The UCCA urged the Obama Administration “to take a range of actions, including moving up the planned bi-annual joint NATO-Ukraine exercise and sailing the United States Sixth Fleet into the Black Sea.” These appeals were clearly at odds with where the White House was, both philosophically and practically, calling instead for “a de-escalation of the situation.”¹⁰⁹⁶

¹⁰⁹² John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With George Stephanopoulos of ABC’s This Week, Boston, Massachusetts, 2 March 2014.

¹⁰⁹³ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With George Stephanopoulos of ABC’s This Week, Boston, Massachusetts, 2 March 2014.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Chairman Menendez Statement on Developments in Ukraine and Congressional response, 3 March 2014.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, UCCA Urges U.S. Action Against Russian Invasion, 3 March 2014.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Barack Obama, Remarks on the Federal Budget and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305360>.

Feeling growing pressure to do more and increasingly aware, to a point, that Putin is not to be trusted, the White House issued a fact sheet on international support to Ukraine.¹⁰⁹⁷ This first in what would become a series of such fact sheets listed several priority areas, including critical assistance with economic reforms, conducting free, fair, and inclusive elections, combatting and recovering stolen assets, and withstanding politically motivated trade actions by Russia.¹⁰⁹⁸ There was no reference to security assistance of any kind. Meanwhile, a draft Senate resolution referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations called for working “urgently and in bipartisan fashion with the President to identify a comprehensive package of economic sanctions and other measures to compel President Vladimir Putin to remove his armed forces from Ukrainian territory and return that territory to full Ukrainian sovereign control.”¹⁰⁹⁹

Speaking before the 6 March hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Eric Rubin outlined the actions already taken by the Obama Administration in response to Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine. Among these, DAS Rubin listed suspending “participation in the G-8 Sochi preparations,” suspending “all talks with Russia on any future trade or investment agreements,” and

¹⁰⁹⁷ Though the issuance of fact sheets was not unprecedented, the Obama Administration made ample use of them throughout President Obama’s years in office.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Barack Obama, Fact Sheet: International Support for Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308756>.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine and condemning Russian military aggression in Ukraine, Senate Resolution 370, United States Senate, 113th Congress, 5 March 2014.

suspending military to military contacts.¹¹⁰⁰¹¹⁰¹ Rubin also referenced the North Atlantic Council statement “condemning the Russian military escalation in Crimea.”¹¹⁰²

Among ongoing efforts, he mentioned the State Department’s effort to place “visa restrictions on a number of officials and individuals, reflecting a policy decision to deny visas to those responsible for or complicit in threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine,” as well as the pertinent Executive Order.¹¹⁰³¹¹⁰⁴¹¹⁰⁵ A statement by the White House Press Secretary asserted that the Executive Order “is a flexible tool that will allow us to sanction those who are most directly involved in destabilizing Ukraine, including the military intervention in Crimea (sic), and does not preclude further steps **should the situation deteriorate.**”¹¹⁰⁶¹¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile, Sen. Menendez assumed quite correctly that the situation will indeed deteriorate and that it is prudent to plan accordingly. The bill he tabled on 12 March stated that “[t]he President shall, subject to the availability of appropriations, enhance security cooperation efforts and relationships amongst countries in Central and Eastern

¹¹⁰⁰ Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, 113th Congress, U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Ukraine, 6 March 2014.

¹¹⁰¹ Eric Rubin, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Testimony, U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2014.

¹¹⁰² Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, 113th Congress, U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Ukraine, 6 March 2014.

¹¹⁰³ Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, 113th Congress, U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Ukraine, 6 March 2014.

¹¹⁰⁴ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Executive Order on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305461>.

¹¹⁰⁵ Barack Obama, Executive Order 13660—Blocking Property of Certain Persons Contributing to the Situation in Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305312>.

¹¹⁰⁶ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305454>.

¹¹⁰⁷ Bolded for emphasis.

Europe and among the United States, the European Union, and countries in Central and Eastern Europe, provide additional security assistance, including defense articles and defense services and military training, to countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, and support greater reform, professionalism, and capacity-building efforts within the military, intelligence, and security services in Central and Eastern Europe, including Ukraine.”¹¹⁰⁸¹¹⁰⁹

That same day, President Obama hosted Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk at the White House in a show of support for Ukraine. The President assured the guest that “we will continue to say to the Russian Government that if it continues on the path that it is on, then not only us, but the international community—the European Union and others—will be forced to apply a cost to Russia's violations of international law and its encroachments on Ukraine.”¹¹¹⁰ President Obama also promised that Ukraine “will have our strong support as [it] move[s] forward during these difficult times.”¹¹¹¹ For his part, Yatsenyuk, while expressing gratitude for U.S. support to date, pointed out the “key challenge [facing Ukraine] today...is the military one.”¹¹¹²

¹¹⁰⁸ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, S. 2124, To support sovereignty and democracy in Ukraine, and for other purposes, 113th Congress, 12 March 2014.

¹¹⁰⁹ The Committee on Foreign Relations passed the bill by a 14-3 margin on 13 March.

¹¹¹⁰ Barack Obama, Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk of Ukraine and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305488>.

¹¹¹¹ Barack Obama, Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk of Ukraine and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305488>.

¹¹¹² Barack Obama, Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk of Ukraine and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305488>.

Perhaps sensing the growing delta between events on the ground and its posture to date, the Obama Administration issued a new fact sheet, this time entitled “Increased U.S. Cooperation with Ukraine,” containing two additions in the defense sphere. The first was the announcement that the Pentagon will hold U.S.-Ukraine Bilateral Defense Consultations “with Ukrainian counterparts in Kyiv within the next month.”¹¹¹³ The second had to do with “a Humanitarian Assistance Planning Conference” with the Ukrainian Armed Forces.”¹¹¹⁴ Wrapping up the extent to which the United States was willing to help on this front, the fact sheet also mentioned that “DoD will provide Meals Ready to Eat (MREs)” to Ukraine.¹¹¹⁵ It is not clear what specific steps the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* had in mind when it called on “the United States and the world to take action to stop the dismemberment of Ukraine in violation of international law,” but it is easy to suspect these went beyond the measures mentioned above.¹¹¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Obama White House persisted with its dual-tracked messaging aimed at Moscow, calling on the Russian leadership to take advantage of the “off-ramp” being offered by the West via “a diplomatic pathway to de-escalation” while also taking additional steps to impose costs for Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and threatening more.¹¹¹⁷ The President signed a new Executive Order expanding the scope of U.S. sanctions “to include authorization of sanctions on Russian officials, on entities operating

¹¹¹³ Fact Sheet, Increased U.S. Cooperation with Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 12 March 2014.

¹¹¹⁴ Fact Sheet, Increased U.S. Cooperation with Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 12 March 2014.

¹¹¹⁵ Fact Sheet, Increased U.S. Cooperation with Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 12 March 2014.

¹¹¹⁶ “Russia’s Acts of Aggression,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 16 March 2014.

¹¹¹⁷ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305435>.

in the arms sector in Russia, and on any individuals who provide material support to senior officials of the Russian government.”¹¹¹⁸ A senior White House official warned that Russia “will be isolated politically and economically **if it continues down this path.**”¹¹¹⁹¹¹²⁰ A colleague added that “the United States is prepared to take additional proportional and responsive steps to impose further political and economic costs.”¹¹²¹ No potential military costs were referenced despite President Obama’s statement that same day, 17 March, that the U.S. Government will “look at the range of ways we can help our Ukrainian friends achieve their universal right and the **security**, prosperity, and dignity that they deserve.”¹¹²²¹¹²³¹¹²⁴

Three days later, on 20 March, the White House announced the signing of yet another Executive Order.¹¹²⁵¹¹²⁶ This latest move allowed for the imposition of sanctions on key sectors of the Russian economy, and followed the designation of “a number of

¹¹¹⁸ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305435>.

¹¹¹⁹ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305435>.

¹¹²⁰ Bolded for emphasis.

¹¹²¹ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305435>.

¹¹²² Barack Obama, Remarks on the Situation in Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305516>.

¹¹²³ Bolded for emphasis.

¹¹²⁴ In the meantime, Secretary Kerry continued to display a remarkable ignorance of regional history, stating in one interview that the Crimean peninsula “[f]or centuries...was part of Russia.” This statement followed an earlier attempted dive into history when the Secretary said that the “Russian religion started in Kiev.” John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With Scott Thuman of Sinclair News Service, WJLA-ABC, U.S. Department of State, 18 March 2014.

¹¹²⁵ Barack Obama, Executive Order 13662—Blocking Property of Additional Persons Contributing to the Situation in Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305529>.

¹¹²⁶ Barack Obama, Remarks on the Situation in Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305534>.

Russian government officials...[and] several influential Russians who are part of the Russian leadership's inner circles, and a crony bank that handles the funds for senior Russian officials and other wealthy and influential individuals” under the previous Executive Order.¹¹²⁷ The White House Press Secretary said these steps were “only the beginning.”¹¹²⁸

When asked if the Obama Administration had considered ways the United States or NATO could help the Ukrainian military, a senior Administration official responded that “further escalating the conflict...is not something that anybody is suggesting.”¹¹²⁹ The official added that the U.S. Government has “considered what types of support we could provide to the Ukrainians, and the Pentagon has been reviewing that on a regular basis and has indicated that there are certain types of non-lethal support, for instance, that we are providing. And that is something that we’ll continue to review going forward **based on how the situation evolves.**”¹¹³⁰¹¹³¹

When pressed by another journalist why the Pentagon cannot provide “ammunition and some defensive weaponry” to the Ukrainian government, the official asserted that the United States does not “want to take steps to add to a momentum of

¹¹²⁷ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305433>.

¹¹²⁸ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305433>.

¹¹²⁹ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305433>.

¹¹³⁰ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305433>.

¹¹³¹ Bolded for emphasis.

further militarizing the situation,” adding that “nobody wants the outcome here to be a full-bore military conflict between Russia and Ukraine.”¹¹³² Sensing that the response given fell short, the official added:

We will consider on an ongoing basis these requests from the Ukrainian military. But I wouldn't want to overstate the notion that there is a timeframe under which we are going to build up the Ukrainian military to engage in a conflict with Russia. That's just simply **not the preferred outcome here.**¹¹³³

Meanwhile, the U.S. House of Representatives began consideration of H. R. 4278 on 21 March. This bill, which became known as the Ukraine Support Act, “encouraged” the President “to draw down defense articles from the stocks of the Department of Defense in order to provide non-lethal assistance, which could include communication equipment, clothing, fuel and other forms of appropriate assistance to the Government of Ukraine.”¹¹³⁴ While it was not so ambitious as to call for lethal assistance, the bill marked another important step toward the Hill's greater activism on this issue set. For its

¹¹³² Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305433>.

¹¹³³ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305433>.

¹¹³⁴ To support the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and for other purposes, U.S. House of Representatives, 113th Congress, H. R. 4278, 21 March 2014.

part, the Obama Administration welcomed the “the targeted sanctions authority” provided in the bill.¹¹³⁵ The President signed it into law on 3 April.¹¹³⁶

Speaking before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on 8 April, Secretary Kerry condemned and called “unacceptable” the sending of “Russian provocateurs and agents [into eastern Ukraine] to create chaos.” The Secretary said this effort by Moscow “to destabilize a sovereign state and create a contrived crisis with paid operatives” is both “illegal and illegitimate.”¹¹³⁷ He also asserted that “[n]o one should be fooled, and believe me, no one is fooled by what could potentially be a contrived pretext for military intervention just as we saw in Crimea,” adding that “[i]t is clear that Russian special forces and agents have been the catalyst behind the chaos of the last 24 hours.”¹¹³⁸ Stating once again that “our preference...is de-escalation and a diplomatic solution,” Secretary Kerry warned that “the United States and our allies will not hesitate to use 21st century tools to hold Russia accountable for 19th century behavior.”¹¹³⁹ The Secretary added that “Russia should not for a single solitary second mistake the expression of that

¹¹³⁵ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305228>.

¹¹³⁶ Chairman Menendez Statement on President Obama Signing Ukraine Legislation into Law, 3 April 2014.

¹¹³⁷ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Testimony, Opening Statement Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, National Security and Foreign Policy Priorities in the FY 2015 International Affairs Budget, 8 April 2014.

¹¹³⁸ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Testimony, Opening Statement Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, National Security and Foreign Policy Priorities in the FY 2015 International Affairs Budget, 8 April 2014.

¹¹³⁹ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Testimony, Opening Statement Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, National Security and Foreign Policy Priorities in the FY 2015 International Affairs Budget, 8 April 2014.

preference [for de-escalation] as an unwillingness to do what is necessary to stop any violation of the international order.”¹¹⁴⁰

The definition of doing “what is necessary” became a little clearer two days later when the Senate Subcommittee on European Affairs held a hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe.”¹¹⁴¹ In his opening statement, Senator Christopher Murphy (D-CT) asserted that “our strategy must remain as always to make Europe whole, free, and at peace,” and called on those testifying to address the question of how to deter further Russian aggression.¹¹⁴² The ranking member, Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI), made the case that the United States “need[s] to change Vladimir Putin’s calculus now so that he does not go any further,” adding that Putin “responds to only one thing, action.”¹¹⁴³

Responding to the implied criticism of Administration policies, Assistant Secretary Nuland underscored in her remarks that “[t]he United States stands with Ukraine in its effort to forge its own path forward” and asserted that Ukraine “is a frontline state in the struggle for freedom and all the principles that the transatlantic community holds dear,” a clear statement in terms of what is at stake in Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.¹¹⁴⁴ In this context, Nuland claimed that “Russia is paying a

¹¹⁴⁰ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Testimony, Opening Statement Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, National Security and Foreign Policy Priorities in the FY 2015 International Affairs Budget, 8 April 2014.

¹¹⁴¹ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁴² Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁴³ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁴⁴ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

very high price already for its actions, and that cost will go up if its pressure on Ukraine does not abate,” adding that “we are not considering further measures in response to Russia’s continued pressure on Ukraine.”¹¹⁴⁵ In terms of U.S. policy, Nuland outlined “four basic pillars,” including bilateral and multilateral support for Ukraine, imposing costs on Russia, de-escalating the crisis diplomatically, and an “unwavering commitment” to NATO Allies “on the front lines of this crisis.”¹¹⁴⁶ She did not specifically mention security assistance for Ukraine.

For his part, Amb. Nuland’s Pentagon counterpart Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Derek Chollet told the Subcommittee that the United States had “taken prompt action to support our NATO partner” by working with Ukraine “to review, prioritize, and grant its defense assistance request for materials and supplies.”¹¹⁴⁷ Assistant Secretary Chollet pointed out that the United States had already delivered 300,000 Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) to the Ukrainians. He also announced that the United States “has also maintained senior level dialogues with Ukrainian counterparts throughout this crisis.”¹¹⁴⁸ Derek Chollet closed his remarks by asserting that “Russia’s illegal military action against Ukraine challenges our vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace.”¹¹⁴⁹

¹¹⁴⁵ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁴⁶ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁴⁷ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁴⁸ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁴⁹ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

Sen. Johnson in particular found the testimony lacking, asking Assistant Secretary Chollet when the United States would reconsider “our willingness to help Ukraine militarily” with items the Ukrainians actually need, per his conversation with Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk.¹¹⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, Chollet’s response was quite circuitous:

[A]s we are looking out at this immediate crisis that we are in and thinking of the medium and the long term, which is what we talked about last week in Kiev, as they are seeking to further modernize their military, and they are seeking to further professionalize their military – by the way, efforts that we have tried to work very closely with them on in the last several years, long before this crisis. And they still have a long way to go on professionalization and modernization, ways that we can be helpful in.¹¹⁵¹

The third panelist to testify was Ian Brzezinski, a predecessor of Chollet’s at the Pentagon.¹¹⁵² Former Assistant Secretary Brzezinski accused NATO and the United States of “refus[ing] Ukraine’s request for weapons that would help it better defend itself” forcing Ukraine “to fend for itself.”¹¹⁵³ Brzezinski asserted that Ukraine’s request should be “immediately granted, and antitank and anti-aircraft weapons should be included.”¹¹⁵⁴ He added that by helping Ukraine in meaningful ways, the United States

¹¹⁵⁰ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁵¹ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁵² Ian Brzezinski is the oldest son of Zbigniew and is quite familiar with Ukrainian dynamics, having spent considerable stretches of time advising the Ukrainian government in the early to mid-1990s.

¹¹⁵³ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁵⁴ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

would ensure that the vision of a Europe whole and free would be “neither weakened nor perceived as having been derailed by Moscow’s intimidation.”¹¹⁵⁵ Otherwise, “the West’s self-imposed redline,” the former Assistant Secretary argued, “only reassures Vladimir Putin and his military planners.”¹¹⁵⁶

The 17 April joint statement and its aftermath

Perhaps motivated in part by President Obama’s warning during their 14 April phone call that “the costs Russia already has incurred will increase” if Russian actions aimed at destabilizing Ukraine persist, Moscow signed on to a joint statement issued on 17 April by the United States, the European Union, Ukraine and Russia.¹¹⁵⁷¹¹⁵⁸ The parties agreed that “[a]ll illegal armed groups must be disarmed; all illegally seized buildings must be returned to legitimate owners; all illegally occupied streets, squares and other public places in Ukrainian cities and towns must be vacated.”¹¹⁵⁹ There was no explicit reference to Russia’s illegal occupation of Crimea.

When asked by the assembled press corps about the timeframe for the steps outlined above, Secretary Kerry, standing next to EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, stated that “we expect in the next few days, over the course of this weekend and

¹¹⁵⁵ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁵⁶ Subcommittee on European Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Hearing on “Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe,” 113th Congress, 10 April 2014.

¹¹⁵⁷ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President Putin Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305266>.

¹¹⁵⁸ Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, Geneva Statement on Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 17 April 2014.

¹¹⁵⁹ Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, Geneva Statement on Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 17 April 2014.

the earliest part of next week, some of these steps need to begin to be seen and be evident.”¹¹⁶⁰ The Secretary added that “[t]hey don’t have to all be accomplished by then...but if there’s a clear indication that this is moving in the right direction...our President will make his decision [if these moves by Russia are sufficient].”¹¹⁶¹

President Obama’s press conference that same day provided additional insights into the Administration’s thinking. The President too expressed hope that the steps outlined in the statement would begin to be implemented within days. He also pointed out that “[o]ver the last week, we have put in place additional consequences that we **can** impose on the Russians if we do not see actual improvement of the situation on the ground.”¹¹⁶²¹¹⁶³ At the same time, President Obama sidestepped a question about providing lethal assistance to Ukraine by stating that he had “been very clear that military options are not on the table in Ukraine because this is not a situation that would be amenable to a clear military solution.”¹¹⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the official White House readout of the President’s phone conversation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel earlier in the day underscored that they “agreed that the United States and Europe are prepared to take further measures if

¹¹⁶⁰ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks With EU High Representative Catherine Ashton After Their Meeting, Geneva Switzerland, 17 April 2014.

¹¹⁶¹ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks With EU High Representative Catherine Ashton After Their Meeting, Geneva Switzerland, 17 April 2014.

¹¹⁶² Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305918>.

¹¹⁶³ Bolded for emphasis.

¹¹⁶⁴ Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305918>.

this de-escalation does not occur in short order.”¹¹⁶⁵ The editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* was not impressed, stating in its 20 April editorial that “we pray that the thus far weak-kneed West” will stand up to Putin.¹¹⁶⁶

Four days later, on 21 April, with Vice President Biden flying to Kyiv to “send a very clear message of...support for Ukraine’s democracy,” a senior Administration official accompanying the Vice President was asked by a member of the traveling press pool for an update on where the agreement’s implementation stands.¹¹⁶⁷ The defensive official said he would not “put a precise timetable on it.”¹¹⁶⁸ He did assure the press that “this is not going to be an open-ended process,” adding that the Administration would “determine in the relatively near term what our next step should be.”¹¹⁶⁹ In the meantime, the official admitted that “[w]e haven’t seen the kind of progress...we would like.”¹¹⁷⁰

The assistance fact sheet that the Administration issued the next day in connection with Vice President Biden’s visit for the first time included a section on security assistance in addition to assistance focusing on economic, energy, and electoral issues.

¹¹⁶⁵ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305259>.

¹¹⁶⁶ “The West’s Weak Response,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 20 April 2014.

¹¹⁶⁷ Barack Obama, Background Press Briefing by a Senior Administration Official on Vice President Biden’s Trip to Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305449>.

¹¹⁶⁸ Barack Obama, Background Press Briefing by a Senior Administration Official on Vice President Biden’s Trip to Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305449>.

¹¹⁶⁹ Barack Obama, Background Press Briefing by a Senior Administration Official on Vice President Biden’s Trip to Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305449>.

¹¹⁷⁰ Barack Obama, Background Press Briefing by a Senior Administration Official on Vice President Biden’s Trip to Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305449>.

The U.S. security assistance being announced amounted to \$8 million of non-lethal military assistance designed “to allow the Ukrainian armed forces and State Border Guard Service to fulfill their core security missions.” The specific materiel to be provided to Ukraine included explosive ordinance disposal equipment, handheld radios, engineering equipment, and non-lethal individual tactical gear. The fact sheet claimed “[t]he United States will continue to actively review requests for additional support as Ukraine’s government further modernizes its armed forces and deals with evolving threats.”¹¹⁷¹

On April 24, one week after the joint statement was issued in Geneva, Secretary Kerry personally came down to the State Department Press Briefing Room to express exasperation over his discovery that Moscow had no intention of keeping its word. The Secretary’s comments spoke volumes about his previous naïveté about dealing with the Russians:

Every day since we left Geneva...the world has witnessed a tale of two countries, two countries with vastly different understandings of what it means to uphold an international agreement. One week later, it is clear that only one side, one country, is keeping its word. What we agree to in Geneva is as simple as it is specific. From day one, the Government of Ukraine started making good on its commitments...For seven days, Russia has refused to take a single concrete step in the right direction...President

¹¹⁷¹ Barack Obama, Fact Sheet: U.S. Crisis Support Package for Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308480>.

Putin and Russia face a choice. If Russia chooses the path of de-escalation, the international community – all of us – will welcome it. If Russia does not, the world will make sure that the cost for Russia will only grow. And as President Obama reiterated earlier today, we are ready to act.¹¹⁷²¹¹⁷³

Four days later, the Obama Administration unveiled additional designations under Executive Order 13661 in a move to demonstrate its seriousness to the Kremlin. All told, the additional set of sanctions targeted seven Russian government officials and 17 entities.¹¹⁷⁴ When word got out that some Ukrainian officials were unhappy with the limited scale of the new sanctions and that Kyiv would seek more robust action, including the provision of lethal military assistance, a senior Administration official dismissed the notion, adding that “[t]his is not the type of action that usually has the most significant deterrent on Russia’s calculus.”¹¹⁷⁵¹¹⁷⁶

The official also suggested that it is important “to recognize that there’s not a silver bullet of some type of military assistance that is going to level this playing

¹¹⁷² John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks on Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 24 April 2014.

¹¹⁷³ The President told Chancellor Merkel, French President Hollande, Italian Prime Minister Renzi, and British Prime Minister Cameron that “the United States is prepared to impose targeted sanctions.” Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President Hollande, Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Renzi, and Prime Minister Cameron Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305318>.

¹¹⁷⁴ Barack Obama, Background Conference Call by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Sanctions Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305420>.

¹¹⁷⁵ Barack Obama, Background Conference Call by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Sanctions Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305420>.

¹¹⁷⁶ It is not clear what reference points the official had in mind when making this blanket statement.

field.”¹¹⁷⁷¹¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Secretary Kerry told the audience at the Atlantic Council’s “Toward a Europe Whole and Free” conference that Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine was “a defining moment for our transatlantic alliance” in view of Moscow’s efforts “to change the security landscape of Eastern and Central Europe.”¹¹⁷⁹

A significant number of Senators appear to have shared the Secretary’s view of the significance of Moscow’s actions but not the Administration’s negative view of providing lethal military assistance to embattled Ukraine. Almost two dozen Republican Senators co-sponsored a bill on 1 May aimed at “prevent[ing] further Russian aggression toward Ukraine and other sovereign states in Europe and Eurasia.”¹¹⁸⁰ The bill authorized the President “to provide to the Government of Ukraine...in a manner consistent with the capabilities and needs of the armed forces of Ukraine” a list of defense articles, services, and training.¹¹⁸¹ This rather comprehensive list included anti-tank weapons and ammunition, anti-aircraft weapons and ammunition, crew weapons and ammunition, small arms and ammunition, body armor, mine-resistant vehicles, fire control equipment, mine detection equipment, and communication equipment.¹¹⁸²

¹¹⁷⁷ Barack Obama, Background Conference Call by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Sanctions Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305420>.

¹¹⁷⁸ This statement also suggested a certain degree of ignorance since Kyiv was looking to impose greater costs on the Russians across various domains, including the security domain. There was no expectation of a “silver bullet.”

¹¹⁷⁹ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks at the Atlantic Council’s “Toward a Europe Whole and Free” Conference, U.S. Department of State, 29 April 2014.

¹¹⁸⁰ Senate Bill 2277, To Prevent Further Russian Aggression Toward Ukraine and Other Sovereign States in Europe and Eurasia, and For Other Purposes, United States Senate, 113th Congress, 1 May 2014.

¹¹⁸¹ Senate Bill 2277, To Prevent Further Russian Aggression Toward Ukraine and Other Sovereign States in Europe and Eurasia, and For Other Purposes, United States Senate, 113th Congress, 1 May 2014.

¹¹⁸² Senate Bill 2277, To Prevent Further Russian Aggression Toward Ukraine and Other Sovereign States in Europe and Eurasia, and For Other Purposes, United States Senate, 113th Congress, 1 May 2014.

The bill also called for a quick 15-day assessment by the Secretary of Defense of Ukraine's defense-related needs and capabilities, and authorized \$100 million for fiscal year 2014 to fund the identified materiel transfers.¹¹⁸³ Of note was the bill's provision for enhanced intelligence sharing to provide the Ukrainian government with "appropriate intelligence...to determine the location, strength, and capabilities of the military and intelligence forces of the Russian Federation located on the eastern border of Ukraine and within the territorial borders of Ukraine, including Crimea."¹¹⁸⁴ Separately, the bill called for granting Ukraine, as well as Georgia and Moldova, the status of Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA).¹¹⁸⁵

The day after the above-referenced bill was introduced in the Senate, President Obama and Chancellor Merkel held a joint press conference in which the President stated that the people confronting Ukrainian security forces in the east of the country are "**heavily armed** militants who are receiving **significant support from Russia**."¹¹⁸⁶¹¹⁸⁷ President Obama repeated the now standard formulation that Moscow "will face increasing costs" if the Russian leadership "does not change course."¹¹⁸⁸ In addition to clarifying that these costs would be diplomatic and economic in nature, the President

¹¹⁸³ Senate Bill 2277, To Prevent Further Russian Aggression Toward Ukraine and Other Sovereign States in Europe and Eurasia, and For Other Purposes, United States Senate, 113th Congress, 1 May 2014.

¹¹⁸⁴ Senate Bill 2277, To Prevent Further Russian Aggression Toward Ukraine and Other Sovereign States in Europe and Eurasia, and For Other Purposes, United States Senate, 113th Congress, 1 May 2014.

¹¹⁸⁵ The list of MNNAs includes Australia, Israel, Japan, Jordan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Pakistan. Fact Sheet, Major Non-NATO Ally Status, U.S. Department of State, 30 January 2020.

¹¹⁸⁶ Barack Obama, The President's News Conference With Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305335>.

¹¹⁸⁷ Bolded for emphasis.

¹¹⁸⁸ Barack Obama, The President's News Conference With Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305335>.

warned the Kremlin that “we have a range of tools at our disposal, including sanctions that would target certain sectors of the Russian economy.”¹¹⁸⁹ He reminded the assembled press corps that “[o]ur preference is a diplomatic resolution to this issue,” a formulation that sent Moscow a mixed signal at best.

Four days later, on 6 May, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State.”¹¹⁹⁰ While Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Toria Nuland once again led off the testimony, much of the Committee’s focus fell on Dr. Evelyn Farkas, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia. In her testimony, Farkas told the Senators that the Departments of State and Defense “are working with Ukraine to review, prioritize, and respond to its defense capability needs,” adding that [o]ur aim is to provide reassurance, deterrence, and support without taking actions that would escalate the crisis militarily.”¹¹⁹¹ She assured those assembled that “[l]ooking ahead, we will utilize **all available tools** to provide meaningful, cost-effective support to Ukraine’s security institutions.”¹¹⁹²¹¹⁹³ When pressed, however, DASD Farkas

¹¹⁸⁹ Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference With Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305335>.

¹¹⁹⁰ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹¹⁹¹ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹¹⁹² Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹¹⁹³ Bolded for emphasis.

admitted that “with regard to lethal assistance...we do not want to escalate the situation militarily.”¹¹⁹⁴¹¹⁹⁵

The Senators’ reactions to this testimony was quite critical across the board. Sen. Corker (R-TN) accused the Obama Administration of “talking tough and doing nothing,” while Sen. Boxer (D-CA) asserted that “[w]e have told them they have to defend themselves” and suggested that the U.S. Government lacked credibility on this front.¹¹⁹⁶ Sen. Johnson (R-WI) asked Amb. Nuland point blank why the Administration is only considering non-lethal military assistance to Ukraine and, when hearing an unsatisfactory response, followed up by asking “what else could we do that actually would change [Putin’s] calculus because sanctions will not do it because we will never institute the types of sanctions that might.”¹¹⁹⁷ Sen. Barrasso (R-WY) quipped “[t]he Ukrainians are battling to free themselves of Russian domination and build a European democracy. They deserve more than Spam in a can from America.”¹¹⁹⁸

Sen. McCain (R-AZ) asked, largely rhetorically, “how it might be provocative [to Putin] to provide some body armor to soldiers whose countries are being invaded by Russian special forces?”¹¹⁹⁹ Sen. Corker used his concluding remarks to state:

¹¹⁹⁴ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹¹⁹⁵ Dr. Farkas resigned in late October 2015 after advocating for a tougher approach to Moscow.

¹¹⁹⁶ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹¹⁹⁷ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹¹⁹⁸ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹¹⁹⁹ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

[F]rom a national security standpoint and a global stability standpoint, I almost wish this testimony today was blocked and the rest of the world could not see what took place. This is the kind of testimony I would expect in a third world country, not the United States...I think what we are seeing today is that we have no strategy and no policy toward what is happening in Ukraine, that we are reacting with as little as we can possibly react with...I am very disappointed that...you had to come up here and act as witnesses when there is no policy to really discuss.¹²⁰⁰

During a later session reserved for outside experts, Sen. Corker asked Freedom House president and, more importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor David Kramer “if there is really nothing we can do to change Russia’s behavior?”¹²⁰¹ Former Assistant Secretary Kramer stated that he disagreed with that assessment, underscored Ukraine’s critical role in the “decades-long vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace,” and asserted that “[t]he implications of [Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine] are enormous.”¹²⁰² He went on to argue that “if we do not respond and come to Ukraine’s defense through providing military support and the necessary means by which Ukraine can defend itself,

¹²⁰⁰ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹²⁰¹ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹²⁰² Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

then I do have concerns about what signal that sends to other countries that might be interested in acquiring nuclear weapons.”¹²⁰³

Later in May, Ukraine held a presidential election that met international standards for democracy, freedom, and fairness. Voting did not take place in Russian-occupied Crimea and the parts of eastern Ukraine held by Moscow and its proxies. The Obama Administration welcomed the successful holding of the election, which saw oligarch and former Economy and Foreign Affairs Minister Petro Poroshenko emerge victorious with a broad mandate. The White House issued a statement emphasizing U.S. support for “Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity” and restating its commitment “to working with Ukraine and other partners to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.”¹²⁰⁴

During his congratulatory call to newly elected President Poroshenko, President Obama offered “the full support of the United States as [Poroshenko] seeks to unify and move his country forward.”¹²⁰⁵ What “full support” may have meant was perhaps clarified in the President’s 3 June press conference in Warsaw with his Polish counterpart Bronisław Komorowski when the former announced the United States “will be stepping up our partnerships with friends like Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia as they provide for their own defense.”¹²⁰⁶ President Obama also suggested that Moscow’s “influence can

¹²⁰³ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Ukraine: Countering Russian Intervention and Supporting a Democratic State,” 6 May 2014.

¹²⁰⁴ Barack Obama, Statement on the Presidential Election in Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305500>.

¹²⁰⁵ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President-elect Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306444>.

¹²⁰⁶ Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference With President Bronisław Komorowski of Poland in Warsaw, Poland Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305653>.

be extraordinarily important” in addressing the “chaos” in eastern Ukraine, still apparently not recognizing or choosing not to recognize that the “chaos” there was being orchestrated by the Russians.¹²⁰⁷ The next day, the White House announced a new tranche of \$5 million for “the provision of body armor, night vision goggles, and additional communication equipment,” a move the President referenced in his press conference with Petro Poroshenko, also in Warsaw.¹²⁰⁸¹²⁰⁹

In his 5 June testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Amb. Steven Pifer, then Brookings Institution Senior Fellow and former Ambassador to Ukraine, suggested that “[o]ne area where Washington should do more [to help Ukraine] is military assistance.”¹²¹⁰¹²¹¹ In this context, Pifer suggested that the United States “consider providing light anti-armor weapons and man-portable air defense systems, particularly since the Ukrainian military, at United States and NATO request, eliminated many of its stocks of MANPADS.”¹²¹²

¹²⁰⁷ Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference With President Bronisław Komorowski of Poland in Warsaw, Poland Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305653>.

¹²⁰⁸ Barack Obama, Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Assistance to Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306815>.

¹²⁰⁹ Barack Obama, Remarks Following a Meeting With President-Elect Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine in Warsaw, Poland Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305647>.

¹²¹⁰ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Developments in Ukraine,” 5 June 2014.

¹²¹¹ Amb. Pifer deserves credit for making it clear in his testimony that he was addressing the “Ukraine-Russia crisis” and not the misleading “Ukraine crisis,” as though the causes of the conflict were all or even largely endogenous. His mention of the negative impact on non-proliferation efforts of Moscow’s violation of the Budapest Memorandum as a result of its actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine is also quite noteworthy. Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Developments in Ukraine,” 5 June 2014.

¹²¹² Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Developments in Ukraine,” 5 June 2014.

Meanwhile, the White House continued to warn Moscow that it will be subjected to dire consequences if it doesn't "cease the support of separatists (sic) and the flow of arms."¹²¹³ During a 5 June press conference, President Obama stated that "if Mr. Putin takes those steps, then it is possible for us to begin to rebuild trust between Russia and its neighbors and Europe. Should he fail to do so, though, there are going to be additional consequences."¹²¹⁴ More than seven weeks after the Geneva agreement, the President asserted that "[w]e will have a chance to see what Mr. Putin does over the next 2, 3, 4 weeks. And if he remains on the current course, then we've already indicated the kinds of actions that we're prepared to take."¹²¹⁵ Three days later, the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* shared its views under the rather telling title of "Another Stern Warning? Shameful."¹²¹⁶ The article asserted that "[i]t seems we can expect the West to do little to stop Russia's advances into Ukraine and the dismemberment of the country."

The "stern warnings" continued, however. On 23 June, President Obama spoke with Putin about "the situation in Ukraine."¹²¹⁷ Ironically, the President warned Putin that "words must be accompanied by actions," adding that the United States "remains

¹²¹³ Barack Obama, The President's News Conference With Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom in Brussels, Belgium Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305659>.

¹²¹⁴ Barack Obama, The President's News Conference With Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom in Brussels, Belgium Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305659>.

¹²¹⁵ Barack Obama, The President's News Conference With Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom in Brussels, Belgium Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305659>.

¹²¹⁶ "Another Stern Warning? Shameful," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 8 June 2014.

¹²¹⁷ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with President Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306464>.

prepared to impose additional sanctions **should circumstances warrant.**”¹²¹⁸¹²¹⁹¹²²⁰

Tellingly, the call readout provided by the White House mentioned that the President and Putin “also discussed the removal of chemical weapons from Syria and ongoing efforts to reach a comprehensive solution to ensure that Iran’s nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful.”¹²²¹ A week and a half later, on 3 July, President Obama and Chancellor Merkel “agreed that the United States and Europe should take further coordinated measures to impose costs on Russia if it does not take steps toward de-escalation **in short order.**”¹²²²¹²²³

Testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 9 July, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Derek Chollet told the assembled Senators that the United States had delivered 2,000 sets of body armor, first aid kits, tactical radios, and 5,000 uniforms.”¹²²⁴ Assistant Secretary Chollet added that the U.S. Government “will soon send night-vision devices, thermal imagers, EOD robots, Kevlar helmets, and additional radios.”¹²²⁵ When Chairman Menendez asked Amb. Nuland,

¹²¹⁸ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306464>.

¹²¹⁹ According to Ben Rhodes, “There was something awkward about sitting in the Oval Office for these Putin phone call sessions...Putin was lying about what he was doing and flouting international law.” Ben Rhodes, *The World As It Is*, p. 273.

¹²²⁰ Bolded for emphasis.

¹²²¹ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306464>.

¹²²² Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306201>.

¹²²³ Bolded for emphasis.

¹²²⁴ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Russian and Developments in Ukraine,” 9 July 2014.

¹²²⁵ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on “Russian and Developments in Ukraine,” 9 July 2014.

who was also called to testify, what the Obama Administration was waiting for in terms of imposing additional costs on Russia in view of Moscow's refusal to meet its obligations under the Geneva agreement, Nuland told him that "we are continuing to consult with our European allies... We are continuing to prepare the next round of sanctions. As we have said repeatedly... these sanctions will be more effective, they will be stronger, if the United States and Europe work together."¹²²⁶¹²²⁷ Neither Assistant Secretary indicated that the United States was moving toward providing much-needed lethal military assistance to Ukraine.

The next day, Vice President Biden told Poroshenko that "United States was discussing with its partners in the international community the need to hold Russia accountable for its continued support for the separatists (sic), including its provision of heavy weapons and equipment across the border."¹²²⁸ Two days later, on 12 July, after a particularly bloody day at the front, Poroshenko was on the phone with the Vice President once again. According to the White House call readout, Vice President Biden "informed Poroshenko of ongoing U.S. diplomatic efforts to work with our international partners to impose costs on Russia if it continues on its current course of providing the separatists (sic) with heavy weapons and equipment."¹²²⁹ Three days later, the two were

¹²²⁶ Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 113th Congress, Hearing on "Russian and Developments in Ukraine," 9 July 2014.

¹²²⁷ EU perceptions of the U.S. sanctions posture was an important factor in its own right, but it was also quite explicitly connected to the overall expectations of Moscow's possible reactions to tougher Western policies.

¹²²⁸ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President's Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309289>.

¹²²⁹ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President's Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309284>.

on the phone again discussing “Russia’s ongoing support for the separatists (sic) and apparent escalation of the conflict over the last few days.”¹²³⁰ The Vice President told Poroshenko that “the United States was engaging with European leaders to discuss the imposition of costs on Russia for its continued escalation of the conflict.”¹²³¹

That same day, on 15 July, President Obama and Merkel did indeed discuss “the situation in Ukraine.”¹²³² The result of their conversation was a reiteration of “their agreement that Russia must take immediate steps to de-escalate the situation in eastern Ukraine...including by ending the flow of heavy weapons, equipment, and fighters from Russia to the separatists (sic).”¹²³³ Moreover, the President and Merkel “agreed that to date neither the United States nor Germany has seen Russia fulfill these required actions.”¹²³⁴ They also “reaffirmed their commitment to work together...to ensure that Europe and the United States remain closely coordinated on measures to impose costs on Russia, **as necessary**.”¹²³⁵¹²³⁶

¹²³⁰ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President’s Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308557>.

¹²³¹ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President’s Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308557>.

¹²³² Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306253>.

¹²³³ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306253>.

¹²³⁴ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306253>.

¹²³⁵ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306253>.

¹²³⁶ Bolded for emphasis.

The question of what is necessary is more often than not a subjective one, and the Obama Administration remained hesitant to impose new costs on Russia until Moscow's behavior reached new egregious levels or the Administration's credibility was on the verge of exhausting itself, or both. In any event, its sanctions against Russia tended to lag well behind Moscow's misdeeds. Three months after the April agreement, and following multiple promises to do so, the White House finally unveiled a range of new steps it was taking after once again warning Moscow that it "must halt the flow of weapons and fighters across the border into Ukraine."¹²³⁷ The 16 July measures included freezing the assets of several Russian defense sector enterprises, blocking new financing for several of Russia's largest banks and energy companies, and designating "selected sectors of the Russian economy as **eligible for sanctions**."^{1238 1239 1240}

That same day, a senior Administration official attempted to highlight increased support for Ukraine "through the provision of nonlethal assistance to their military" while highlighting Ukraine's pursuit of "a diplomatic path" to resolve the conflict.¹²⁴¹ In

¹²³⁷ Barack Obama, Remarks on United States Foreign Policy Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305716>.

¹²³⁸ Barack Obama, Remarks on United States Foreign Policy Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305716>.

¹²³⁹ Bolded for emphasis.

¹²⁴⁰ The two banks were Gazprombank and VEB, and the two energy companies were Rosneft and Novatek. Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307315>.

¹²⁴¹ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307315>.

contrast, the official asserted, Russian “support for separatists (sic) has increased.”¹²⁴²¹²⁴³ The official’s response to a question about the nature of Moscow’s support left little doubt that what was happening in parts of eastern Ukraine was, by and large, irregular Russian warfare against a sovereign neighbor. The official said Moscow was “organizing the separatists (sic) and supporting them and funneling money to them, as well as operational expertise and supporting the recruitment inside of Russia.”¹²⁴⁴

The White House readout of President Obama’s 17 July phone call with Putin underscored just how much effort it took for the U.S. Government to move forward with the announced sanctions. According to the readout, the President “emphasized that he remains committed to a diplomatic solution and that sanctions were not his preferred course of action.”¹²⁴⁵ He did warn Putin that “Russia would face continued costs and isolation” unless it takes concrete steps toward ending the conflict, including ceasing its “provision of heavy weapons to separatists (sic) in Ukraine.”¹²⁴⁶ The readout concluded

¹²⁴² Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307315>.

¹²⁴³ The Obama Administration continued to refer to supposed “separatists” even though it clearly knew that the three “separatist” leaders designated were all Russian citizens. Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307315>.

¹²⁴⁴ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307315>.

¹²⁴⁵ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306260>.

¹²⁴⁶ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306260>.

by noting that “President Obama and President Putin agreed on the need for a peaceful resolution to the **Ukraine crisis** achieved through diplomatic means.”¹²⁴⁷¹²⁴⁸

The MH17 shootdown

It was in this context that the 17 July shootdown of Malaysian Airline Flight 17 (MH17) over the Russian-occupied parts of eastern Ukraine should be seen. The next day, President Obama confirmed that the U.S. Government knew that “these separatists (sic) have received a steady flow of support from Russia. This includes arms and training. It includes heavy weapons, and it includes anti-aircraft systems.”¹²⁴⁹ The President noted that “everybody needs to make sure that we’re holding accountable those who committed this outrage.”¹²⁵⁰ This notion came through in his 18 July conversation with Merkel in which the two leaders agreed to “continue efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the current crisis” and “reaffirmed their determination to remain in close contact as they consider what additional actions **may be** required.”¹²⁵¹¹²⁵²¹²⁵³

¹²⁴⁷ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306260>.

¹²⁴⁸ Bolded for emphasis.

¹²⁴⁹ Barack Obama, Remarks on the Crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in Ukraine and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305736>.

¹²⁵⁰ Barack Obama, Remarks on the Crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in Ukraine and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305736>.

¹²⁵¹ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306180>.

¹²⁵² Bolded for emphasis.

¹²⁵³ As Paul D’Anieri has correctly pointed out, it was the shootdown of MH17 more than the ongoing Russian brutalization of Ukraine that arguably galvanized support for additional European sanctions against Russia (16 December 2020 email exchange with author).

Meanwhile, Secretary Kerry asserted in an interview that the shutdown is “really a moment of truth for Russia to step up and be part of the solution, not part of the problem.”¹²⁵⁴ In another interview, the Secretary admitted that there was reluctance in the Obama Administration to lead the way in confronting Moscow over its aggression against Ukraine. As he put it, “[t]he fact is we live in an extremely complicated world right now where everybody is working on ten different things simultaneously. Russia is working with us in a cooperative way on the P5+1,” a reference to the international negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program.¹²⁵⁵

In yet another interview, Secretary Kerry was taken to task for the U.S. refusal to provide lethal military assistance to Ukraine, including in the wake of the MH17 shutdown, as a way to “impose a greater cost on Vladimir Putin.”¹²⁵⁶ In response, the Secretary asserted that President Obama “is prepared to take additional steps,” adding that “I don’t think anything except American troops going there – other things are on the table.”¹²⁵⁷ When asked whether the United States is prepared to go beyond “military rations” in its assistance to Ukraine in view of the introduction of Russian surface-to-air missiles and tanks into eastern Ukraine, Secretary Kerry disclosed that “[w]e are currently in discussions with our European allies with respect to...next steps” and stated

¹²⁵⁴ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With George Stephanopoulos of ABC’s This Week, U.S. Department of State, 20 July 2014.

¹²⁵⁵ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With David Gregory of NBC’s Meet the Press, U.S. Department of State, 20 July 2014.

¹²⁵⁶ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With Chris Wallace of Fox News Sunday, U.S. Department of State, 20 July 2014.

¹²⁵⁷ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With Chris Wallace of Fox News Sunday, U.S. Department of State, 20 July 2014.

that “the President is going to do this in a thoughtful way...rather than shoot from the hip.”¹²⁵⁸

Meanwhile, pressure for a stronger U.S. response continued to build, with Senate Committee Chairmen Menendez, Feinstein and Levin, all from the President’s Democratic Party, calling for additional measures that should not necessarily be held back by slower action by America’s European Allies.¹²⁵⁹ For its part, the House of Representatives on 24 July began to consider H.R. 5190, the counterpart to Senate Bill 2277, which would authorize the provision of lethal military assistance to and strengthen intelligence sharing with Ukraine.¹²⁶⁰ Congressional momentum for providing lethal assistance to Ukraine continued to grow as evidence mounted that Ukrainian troops began to come under direct fire from positions on the Russian side of the border and that Moscow continued to transfer arms and fighters into eastern Ukraine even in the wake of the MH17 shootdown.¹²⁶¹¹²⁶²

Feeling the increased pressure, the Obama Administration on 29 July announced the imposition of additional sanctions against Russia. In addition to targeting more

¹²⁵⁸ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With Chris Wallace of Fox News Sunday, U.S. Department of State, 20 July 2014.

¹²⁵⁹ Senate Committee Chairmen Menendez, Feinstein and Levin Call for Broad Sanctions Against Russia’s Defense Sector, Energy and Financial Industries in Letter to President Obama, United States Senate, 22 July 2014.

¹²⁶⁰ To Authorize Assistance for Ukraine, and for Other Purposes, H.R. 5190, U.S. House of Representatives, 113th Congress, 24 July 2014.

¹²⁶¹ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President’s Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308621>.

¹²⁶² Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Video Teleconference with Prime Minister Cameron of the United Kingdom, President Hollande of France, Chancellor Merkel of Germany, and Prime Minister Renzi of Italy Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305874>.

Kremlin-affiliated individuals as well as three additional banks, the new measures included suspending all USDA bilateral export credit and development finance for Russia, OPIC suspending consideration of any new financing and insurance transactions with Russia, and the Export-Import Bank imposing a hold on all new transactions for exports to Russia. In parallel, the Obama Administration continued to remind Moscow that its off-ramp toward de-escalation remained available.¹²⁶³ Speaking of ramps, the White House continued to take credit for “ramp[ing] up our non-lethal support” for Ukraine, even as the Administration acknowledged that Russia’s campaign in eastern Ukraine was intensifying.¹²⁶⁴¹²⁶⁵

During his 1 August conversation with Putin, President Obama once again expressed his preference for a diplomatic solution “to the crisis in Ukraine,” arguably a self-debilitating approach when dealing with someone like Putin.¹²⁶⁶ During his press conference later that same day, the President asserted that “we have done everything that we can to support the Ukrainian Government,” adding that “short of going to war, there

¹²⁶³ Barack Obama, Background Conference Call by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307258>.

¹²⁶⁴ Barack Obama, Background Conference Call by Senior Administration Officials on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307258>.

¹²⁶⁵ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305932>.

¹²⁶⁶ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with President Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/305932>.

are going to be some constraints in terms of what we can do.”¹²⁶⁷¹²⁶⁸ President Obama displayed his normative flair when completing his argument by stating that “Putin should want to resolve this diplomatically.”¹²⁶⁹ But with “increasing prevalence of artillery and rocket fire coming from the Russian side of the border” into Ukraine, Putin clearly was not listening.¹²⁷⁰

Nor was the White House scoring points with the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States. The editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* asserted that “Ukraine today needs military assistance – and we don’t mean MREs. Ukraine needs weapons in order to defend itself...from continuing Russian aggression.”¹²⁷¹ Needless to say, the newspaper strongly endorsed the Ukrainian Security Assistance Act of 2014, introduced in the House of Representatives. But the White House continued to make head-scratching excuses for its inaction, with the President stating on 6 August that:

[T]he Russian Army is a lot bigger than the Ukrainian Army. So the issue here is not whether the Ukrainian Army has some additional weaponry. Now, if you start seeing an [outright] invasion by Russia, that’s obviously a different set of questions. We’re not there yet. What we have been doing is providing a whole host of assistance packages to the Ukrainian

¹²⁶⁷ Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306097>.

¹²⁶⁸ The Obama Administration rather disingenuously pretended that the policy options available to the United States were either sanctions or American boots on the ground, using the latter non-option to stiff arm any serious discussion about providing lethal assistance to Ukraine.

¹²⁶⁹ Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/306097>.

¹²⁷⁰ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President’s Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309595>.

¹²⁷¹ “Sanctions Not Enough,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 3 August 2014.

Government and to their military, and we will continue to work with them to evaluate on a day-by-day, week-by-week basis what exactly they need in order to be able to defend their country and to deal with the separatist (sic) elements that currently are being armed by Russia. But the best thing we can do for Ukraine is to try to get back on a political track.¹²⁷²

Nine days later, on 15 August, President Obama appeared to be given another opportunity to reevaluate what Ukraine may need in its struggle with Russia when NSC Spokesperson Caitlin Hayden referred to ongoing Russian operations in eastern Ukraine, including the movement of multiple-rocket launchers across the international border to fire on Ukrainian positions, as a “Russian military intervention.”¹²⁷³ The next day, the White House readout of Vice President Biden’s phone call with Ukrainian President Poroshenko suggested that “Russia’s sending military columns across the border into Ukraine and its continued provision of advanced weapons to the separatists (sic) was inconsistent with any desire to improve the humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine.”¹²⁷⁴

A week later, the State Department’s Ukrainian Independence Day message expressed firm U.S. support for “the right of all Ukrainian people to choose your own

¹²⁷² Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307077>.

¹²⁷³ Barack Obama, Press Release - Statement from NSC Spokesperson Caitlin Hayden on Reports of Russian Armored Military Column in Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308821>.

¹²⁷⁴ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President’s Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308816>.

path,” but did not mention the ongoing Russian aggression.¹²⁷⁵ That same day, on 22 August, the readout of the President’s phone call with Merkel focusing on the “ongoing crisis in Ukraine” mentioned the leaders “express[ing] concern” about the “presence of Russian military personnel in Ukraine and Russian shelling of Ukrainian territory,” which they called a “dangerous escalation.”¹²⁷⁶

Overt Russian invasion

Meanwhile, the White House continued to avoid using the word “invasion,” including when asked by a reporter if the entering of Ukrainian territory by a large Russian military column to attack Ukrainian forces constituted an invasion of Ukraine. Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes responded by stating that “we see this as part of a pattern of flagrant violation of Ukrainian sovereignty; a direct incursion into their territory.”¹²⁷⁷ Speaking of incursions, President Obama on 28 August warned that the “ongoing Russian incursion into Ukraine will only bring more costs and consequences for Russia.”¹²⁷⁸ At the same time, the President asserted that “a military solution to this problem is not going to be forthcoming.”¹²⁷⁹

¹²⁷⁵ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Ukraine National Day, U.S. Department of State, 22 August 2014.

¹²⁷⁶ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President’s Call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/255687>.

¹²⁷⁷ Barack Obama, Press Briefing by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz and Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307281>.

¹²⁷⁸ Barack Obama, Remarks on the National Economy and the Situations in Iraq and Ukraine and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/242670>.

¹²⁷⁹ Barack Obama, Remarks on the National Economy and the Situations in Iraq and Ukraine and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/242670>.

The late August announcement that President Obama will host Poroshenko at the White House on 18 September to discuss “efforts to pursue a diplomatic resolution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine” made no reference to Russia or its ongoing attacks in eastern Ukraine.¹²⁸⁰ Senator Menendez, on the other hand, zeroed in on Russia and its actions in Ukraine in his 3 September statement calling for “expand[ed] assistance to include equipment and weapons that will allow Ukrainian soldiers to defend themselves.”¹²⁸¹ He also “strongly encourage[d] President Obama...to commit meaningful military support to Ukraine.”¹²⁸² Perhaps partly in response to this stance by Senator Menendez, the White House two days later issued a new assistance fact sheet that was to demonstrate the U.S. Government’s responsiveness to Ukrainian requests “for non-lethal security assistance to **address the instability in Ukraine.**”¹²⁸³

That same day, President Obama told the press on the margins of the NATO summit in Wales that “Russia’s aggression against Ukraine threatens our vision of a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.”¹²⁸⁴ Unlike the U.S. Government, the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* had no problem describing Moscow’s actions accurately when it called on NATO to “take a stronger stand against Russia’s invasion of

¹²⁸⁰ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary on the Visit of President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307582>.

¹²⁸¹ Chairman Menendez Statement on Ukraine Developments, NATO Summit in Wales, United States Summit, 3 September 2014.

¹²⁸² Chairman Menendez Statement on Ukraine Developments, NATO Summit in Wales, United States Summit, 3 September 2014.

¹²⁸³ Barack Obama, Fact Sheet: NATO and U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Partners, Including Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308636>.

¹²⁸⁴ Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference in Newport, Wales Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308256>.

Ukraine.”¹²⁸⁵ The newspaper’s leadership no doubt welcomed the announcement by Speaker Boehner that Poroshenko would address a joint session of Congress during his upcoming visit to Washington.¹²⁸⁶ A week later, the editorial board called on the diaspora community to contact the White House “to press for lethal military assistance to Ukraine.”¹²⁸⁷

The day of Poroshenko’s speech on the Hill, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted unanimously (18-0) to pass the Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 2014 increasing lethal and other assistance to Ukraine, including \$350 million for the former category.¹²⁸⁸ Sensing the buildup of yet more pressure to help arm the Ukrainians, even in the aftermath of the 5 September ceasefire agreement that the Russians and their proxies would routinely violate in the coming weeks and months, the White House issued yet another fact sheet, this time focused on helping Ukraine “as it works to establish security and stability.”¹²⁸⁹

The 18 September fact sheet, timed to the meeting with Poroshenko, referenced a new assistance package totaling \$53 million, including \$46 million in security assistance. For the first time, the list of items to be provided to Ukraine included night and thermal vision devices, and, at least as importantly, counter-mortar radars.¹²⁹⁰ Intriguingly, the

¹²⁸⁵ “The Semantics of Invasion,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 7 September 2014.

¹²⁸⁶ Chairman Menendez Statement on President Poroshenko’s Address to Congress Next Week, United States Senate, 10 September 2014.

¹²⁸⁷ “Back to School. Back to Work!,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 14 September 2014.

¹²⁸⁸ Senate Foreign Relations Committee Unanimously Passes Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 2014, United States Senate, 18 September 2014.

¹²⁸⁹ Barack Obama, Fact Sheet: U.S. Support for Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308670>.

¹²⁹⁰ Even the provision of non-lethal assistance was not without controversy, though of a different kind. The United States modified the counter-battery radars provided to Ukraine by limiting their range and thereby preventing the Ukrainian military from looking across the border with Russia, where Russian units

fact sheet claimed “[t]he U.S. government will continue to work with Congress to identify additional opportunities for U.S. assistance...to help build Ukraine’s capacity to provide for its own defense and increase interoperability with U.S. and Western forces.”¹²⁹¹¹²⁹²

While an improvement, this expanded list was clearly not enough for Poroshenko, who again called on the United States to provide lethal military assistance to Ukraine, this time during his address to the 18 September joint session of Congress and with enthusiastic support from both sides of the aisle. Memorably, Poroshenko stated that while “[b]lankets and night vision goggles are important...one cannot win a war with a blanket,” a statement that was reportedly not appreciated by the Obama White House.¹²⁹³¹²⁹⁴

After the Oval Office meeting that followed, a more reserved Poroshenko stated that he is “satisfied with the level of our cooperation with the United States of America in the defense and security sector,” adding that he “cannot say more.”¹²⁹⁵ In his remarks, President Obama seemed to go out of his way to emphasize that the United States is “providing additional assistance...to make sure that [the Ukrainians are] able to continue

were being staged for operations within Ukraine. See Julian Barnes and Gordon Lubold, “U.S. to Ship Modified Radar Systems to Ukraine,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 October 2015.

¹²⁹¹ Barack Obama, Fact Sheet: U.S. Support for Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308670>.

¹²⁹² It may come as a surprise to some that Congress is part of the U.S. Government.

¹²⁹³ Julie Pace with Nedra Pickler, “Ukraine’s Pleas for Lethal Aid from U.S. Go Unmet,” Associated Press, 18 September 2014, <https://apnews.com/3625313d1b54411ea0753387ccbd36b2>, accessed 25 February 2020.

¹²⁹⁴ According to Steven Pifer, Poroshenko’s request for lethal assistance “irritated White House officials.” Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident*, p. 307.

¹²⁹⁵ Julie Pace with Nedra Pickler, “Ukraine’s Pleas for Lethal Aid from U.S. Go Unmet,” Associated Press, 18 September 2014, <https://apnews.com/3625313d1b54411ea0753387ccbd36b2>, accessed 25 February 2020.

to build up an effective security force to defend themselves from aggression.”¹²⁹⁶ True to form, the President also promised “to continue to help to mobilize the international community towards a diplomatic solution.”¹²⁹⁷

Speaking at the UN General Assembly on 24 September, President Obama accused Russia of challenging “the postwar order” through its actions in Ukraine, and even made the case that “right makes might” and not the other way around, but he also talked about a “different path” available to Moscow than the one it was on.¹²⁹⁸ The *Ukrainian Weekly* editorial board was not impressed, asserting that “[a]mbivalent is the word being used more and more often to describe Mr. Obama’s foreign policy.”¹²⁹⁹ Meanwhile, with the 5 September ceasefire agreement (aka, the Minsk agreement) already fraying as a result of multiple and regular Russian violations, Secretary Kerry called the agreement “a ramp to de-escalate and hopefully move away from conflict.”¹³⁰⁰

In early November, the White House reminded Moscow that it “has a choice...Should Moscow continue to ignore the commitments that it made in Minsk and continue its destabilizing and dangerous actions, the costs to Russia will rise.”¹³⁰¹

¹²⁹⁶ Barack Obama, Remarks Following a Meeting With President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307712>.

¹²⁹⁷ Barack Obama, Remarks Following a Meeting With President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307712>.

¹²⁹⁸ Barack Obama, Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/307980>

¹²⁹⁹ “Poroshenko’s Message,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 28 September 2014.

¹³⁰⁰ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks With German Chancellor Angela Merkel Before Their Meeting, U.S. Department of State, Berlin, Germany, 22 October 2014.

¹³⁰¹ Barack Obama, Press Release - Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on the Illegal Separatist Elections in Eastern Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309647>.

Moscow's response came several days later, when large Russian convoys laden with tanks and other heavy weapons started moving toward the line of contact in eastern Ukraine, prompting NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on 9 November to "call on **all sides** to strictly adhere to the cease-fire."¹³⁰²¹³⁰³ The Spokesperson's statement also called on Russia "to honor all of the commitments it made in Minsk."¹³⁰⁴ During Vice President Biden's phone call with Poroshenko the next day, the two talked about "increased shelling of Ukrainian government positions" and the need "for Russia **to begin honoring** its [Minsk] commitments."¹³⁰⁵¹³⁰⁶ According to the call's readout, the Vice President "noted that if Russia continued to willfully violate the terms of the Minsk agreement, the costs to Russia will rise."¹³⁰⁷

In a joint statement issued two months after Poroshenko's 18 September address to a joint session of Congress, Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC) charged that the Obama Administration's policy on providing lethal assistance to Ukraine "effectively amounts to an arms embargo on victims of aggression."¹³⁰⁸ They further argued that "[p]roviding Ukrainians with the ability to defend themselves would

¹³⁰² Barack Obama, Press Release - Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on the Situation in Eastern Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309596>.

¹³⁰³ Bolded for emphasis.

¹³⁰⁴ Barack Obama, Press Release - Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on the Situation in Eastern Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309596>.

¹³⁰⁵ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President's Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309590>.

¹³⁰⁶ Bolded for emphasis.

¹³⁰⁷ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President's Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309590>.

¹³⁰⁸ "McCain, Graham call for U.S. to arm Ukrainians," *The Hill*, 18 November 2014.

impose a far greater cost on Putin than he has paid thus far.”¹³⁰⁹ Finally, the two Senators asserted that Russia’s renewed escalation in eastern Ukraine “demand more than additional empty rhetoric and threats of lowest-common-denominator sanctions.”¹³¹⁰

Congressional activism on this issue set did not go unnoticed by the media, which asked a senior aide to Vice President Biden on 20 November if the White House was coming around to the Hill view on the question of providing lethal assistance to Ukraine. The official responded by stating that “we looked at the conflict and saw that no matter how many weapons we provided to Ukraine, they were going to get outgunned by the Russians,” an assertion that was both not incorrect but also misleading in the context of raising costs for Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine.¹³¹¹ Perhaps sensing the inadequacy of the response, the official also stated that “we certainly believe that the Ukrainians have every right to defend...themselves,” adding that “we continue to look at other options.”¹³¹² The readout of the 21 November meeting between the Vice President and Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk mentioned that “the United States would work with its European and G-7 partners to increase the costs to Russia **if it continues** on its

¹³⁰⁹ “McCain, Graham call for U.S. to arm Ukrainians,” *The Hill*, 18 November 2014.

¹³¹⁰ “McCain, Graham call for U.S. to arm Ukrainians,” *The Hill*, 18 November 2014.

¹³¹¹ Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on the Vice President’s Trip to Morocco, Ukraine and Turkey Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308625>.

¹³¹² Barack Obama, Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on the Vice President’s Trip to Morocco, Ukraine and Turkey Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308625>.

current course of blatantly violating Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”¹³¹³¹³¹⁴

Speaking at NATO Headquarters on 2 December, Secretary Kerry made public the fact that Russia “has funneled several hundred pieces of military equipment and material – including tanks, armored personnel carriers, and heavy artillery pieces – directly to pro-Russian separatists (sic) in Ukraine.”¹³¹⁵¹³¹⁶ He added that “Russian military forces still operate in eastern Ukraine, where they provide command-and-control support for the separatists (sic).”¹³¹⁷ The Secretary’s disclosure prompted a question from the assembled press corps regarding the wisdom and effectiveness of the Obama Administration’s policy, which, the journalist asserted, had not changed Moscow’s behavior vis-à-vis Ukraine. A more pointed question followed, asking directly if the United States is willing to provide lethal assistance to Ukraine to deter further Russian aggression. In response, Secretary Kerry went through the growing list of non-lethal articles already sent or promised to Ukraine and then voiced the nutshell version of the Administration’s policy, managing in the process not to refer to Moscow or Russia or Russians:

¹³¹³ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President’s Meeting with Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309801>.

¹³¹⁴ Bolded for emphasis.

¹³¹⁵ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Solo Press Availability at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, U.S. Department of State, 2 December 2014.

¹³¹⁶ The Obama Administration continued to use the term “separatist” despite clear evidence, including the command-and-control aspect, that this was a Russian operation throughout. Perhaps, this approach was designed to make it easier for Moscow to take the notional off-ramp the Administration continued to reference.

¹³¹⁷ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Solo Press Availability at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, U.S. Department of State, 2 December 2014.

[W]e have been very clear there is no military solution to the crisis. Our focus on the outset – from the outset has been on supplying and supporting Ukraine and on pursuing a diplomatic solution that respects Ukraine’s sovereignty and its territorial integrity. But any other possibility is on the table. No option has been taken off the table, but at this moment, no decision has been made, and that is not the direction we are moving at this moment.¹³¹⁸

Two days later, Secretary Kerry told his colleagues at the OSCE Ministerial Plenary Session in Basel, Switzerland that “Russia continues to supply new weapons and increased support for armed separatists (sic),” adding that in doing so, Moscow “fails to meet its international and OSCE obligations and to live up to an agreement that it actually negotiated and signed.”¹³¹⁹ The Secretary also mentioned the “hundreds of Russian soldiers” who have lost their lives “in a country where they had and have no right to be,” a reference that made it clear that Moscow’s role went well beyond the command-and-control aspect.¹³²⁰ He then sent a mixed signal to the Russians when he added that “[t]he United States and countries that support Ukraine’s sovereignty...do not seek confrontation. No one gains from this confrontation.” Moscow clearly had – and still has – a different view.¹³²¹

¹³¹⁸ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Solo Press Availability at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, U.S. Department of State, 2 December 2014.

¹³¹⁹ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks at OSCE Ministerial Plenary Session, Basel, Switzerland, U.S. Department of State, 4 December 2014.

¹³²⁰ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks at OSCE Ministerial Plenary Session, Basel, Switzerland, U.S. Department of State, 4 December 2014.

¹³²¹ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks at OSCE Ministerial Plenary Session, Basel, Switzerland, U.S. Department of State, 4 December 2014.

Meanwhile, the editorial board at the *Ukrainian Weekly* was doing its best to mobilize the diaspora community to support the Ukraine Freedom Support Act, which would authorize lethal assistance to Ukraine, then before Congress. In calling on Americans of Ukrainian heritage to contact Congress, the newspaper urged particular focus on the House of Representatives rather than the Senate, where “the prospects for... passage are better.”¹³²²¹³²³ According to the editorial board, “[i]f the U.S. truly supports Ukraine’s independence and sovereignty... it must heed Kyiv’s repeated requests for more substantive and effective assistance.”¹³²⁴ The bill passed the full Senate on 11 December and, with subsequent adoption by the House of Representatives, became law on 18 December.¹³²⁵

When signing the Ukraine Freedom Support Act into law, President Obama made it clear that while “the Act gives the administration additional authorities that could be utilized **if circumstances warranted**... the administration does not intend to impose sanctions under this law.”¹³²⁶¹³²⁷ The President again called on Russia “to end its occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea, cease support to separatists (sic) in eastern Ukraine, and implement the obligations it signed up to under the Minsk agreement.”¹³²⁸ Perhaps in an effort to make up for the obvious deficiencies of the above

¹³²² “Action Needed Now!,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 7 December 2014.

¹³²³ The Senate version, S 2828, was unanimously supported by the Foreign Relations Committee.

¹³²⁴ “Action Needed Now!,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 7 December 2014.

¹³²⁵ Public Law 113-272, U.S. Congress, 18 December 2014.

¹³²⁶ Barack Obama, Statement on Signing the Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 2014 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308405>.

¹³²⁷ Bolded for emphasis.

¹³²⁸ Barack Obama, Statement on Signing the Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 2014 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308405>.

policy stance, President Obama on 19 December issued a new Executive Order designed to take “additional steps to address the Russian occupation of the Crimea region of Ukraine.”¹³²⁹ The order “prohibits new investment by United States persons in the Crimea region of Ukraine; the importation of goods, services, or technology into the United States from the Crimea region of Ukraine; and the exportation, reexportation, sale, or supply of goods, services, or technology from the United States or by a United States person to the Crimea region of Ukraine.”

The new 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States, unveiled by the Obama Administration in early January, asserted that “[t]he United States maintains a profound commitment to a Europe that is free, whole, and at peace.”¹³³⁰ The document also expressed support for “the aspirations of countries in the Balkans and Eastern Europe toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration,” and took credit for leading “an international effort to support the Ukrainian people as they choose their own future.”¹³³¹ The NSS also committed the U.S. Government to imposing “significant costs on Russia through sanctions and other means.”¹³³² The latter were left unspecified.

Meanwhile, the Administration continued to refer to ongoing Russian-directed attacks in eastern Ukraine, including the rocketing of a civilian bus at a checkpoint, “as separatist violence” and called for “full and prompt implementation of the Minsk agreement” without specifying who was behind the vast majority of the ceasefire

¹³²⁹ Barack Obama, Letter to Congressional Leaders on Blocking Property of Certain Persons and Prohibiting Certain Transactions With Respect to the Crimea Region of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/308416>.

¹³³⁰ 2015 National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, January 2015, p. 25.

¹³³¹ 2015 National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, January 2015, p. 25.

¹³³² 2015 National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, January 2015, p. 25.

violations.¹³³³ Perhaps of greater consequence, at least from Moscow's perspective, was the White House shift from at least rhetorical and now long-standing readiness to impose additional costs on Russia for failing to implement its obligations under the Minsk agreement to "the need to maintain sanctions against Russia," as expressed by President Obama during his 20 January phone conversation with French President Hollande.¹³³⁴

Moscow strikes again

With Russian troops engaged in an unprovoked assault on the city of Debaltseve on the Ukrainian government-controlled side of the ceasefire line agreed to the previous September, Secretary Kerry, with EU High Representative Federica Mogherini by his side following their 21 January meeting, called on "all sides to end the fighting and to implement the Minsk agreement." The Secretary also referred to the ongoing Russian operation as a "very blatant land grab," but did not indicate what costs Moscow may be forced to pay for this additional act of aggression, even in the most general of terms.¹³³⁵

Three days later, on 24 January, volleys of rockets struck a residential neighborhood in the Ukrainian government-held city of Mariupol about 25 kilometers from the Minsk ceasefire line. Secretary Kerry condemned this "blatant violation of the Minsk agreement," which he said was "aided and abetted by Russia's

¹³³³ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with Chancellor Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/310136>.

¹³³⁴ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with President Hollande of France Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/310126>.

¹³³⁵ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks With EU High Representative Federica Mogherini After Their Meeting, U.S. Department of State, 21 January 2015.

irresponsible...decision to resupply...in recent weeks with hundreds of new pieces of advanced weaponry, including rocket systems, heavy artillery, tanks, armored vehicles, in addition to continuing operational command and control.”¹³³⁶ The Secretary called on Russia “to end its support for separatists (sic) immediately, close the international border with Ukraine, and withdraw all weapons, fighters and financial backing.”¹³³⁷ During his conversation with Poroshenko the next day, Vice President Biden “expressed grave concern” over Russia’s “blatant disregard for its [Minsk agreement] commitments” and “unilateral escalation of the conflict.”¹³³⁸

The day after that, on 25 January, a reporter asked President Obama during his joint press conference with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi if, with “pro-Russian rebels...again launching new offensives” and with the Minsk agreement “all but failed,” a different approach to pushing back on Russia’s aggression may not be warranted. In response, and true to form, the President proceeded to deliver a lecture on the subject, starting with the grossly misleading statement that he has been “very clear that it would not be effective for us to engage in a military conflict with Russia on this issue,” something no one on either side of the aisle had advocated with any degree of seriousness.¹³³⁹ Seemingly reverting to his prepared points, President Obama expressed

¹³³⁶ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Attacks in Ukraine by Russia-Backed Separatists, U.S. Department of State, 24 January 2015.

¹³³⁷ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Attacks in Ukraine by Russia-Backed Separatists, U.S. Department of State, 24 January 2015.

¹³³⁸ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President’s Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309116>.

¹³³⁹ Barack Obama, Remarks With Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India in New Delhi, India, and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309156>.

deep concern about “the latest break in the cease-fire and the aggression that these separatists – with Russian backing, Russian equipment, Russian financing, Russian training, and Russian troops – are conducting.”¹³⁴⁰ He promised to “look at all additional options that are available to us short of a military confrontation in trying to address this issue,” conveniently skipping over the option of providing lethal assistance to Ukraine.¹³⁴¹

Other members of the Administration were much more forward leaning in their views on the issue of lethal assistance and Ukraine’s strategic importance in general. The aforementioned Toria Nuland, then Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, used her 27 January speech at the Brookings Institution to make the case that the notion of Europe whole, free and at peace “rises and falls with Ukraine,” adding that “Ukraine’s frontline for freedom is ours as well.”¹³⁴² And while Nuland did not have the remit to advance the Administration’s lethal assistance policy on her own, her rendition of the policy itself made it clear where she stood:

We must...help Ukraine staunch the bleeding. That means continuing to support Ukraine with defensive security support. The United States committed \$118 million in 2014 in security assistance for Ukraine, with

¹³⁴⁰ Barack Obama, Remarks With Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India in New Delhi, India, and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309156>.

¹³⁴¹ Barack Obama, Remarks With Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India in New Delhi, India, and an Exchange With Reporters Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309156>.

¹³⁴² Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Unity in Challenging Times: Building on Transatlantic Resolve, Remarks at the Brookings Institution, U.S. Department of State, 27 January 2015.

\$120 million more in additional training and equipment on the way in 2015... [A]fter the past week of flagrant violations of Minsk, on both sides of the Atlantic we are talking about the need to increase the costs to Russia...[Bilateral] cooperation can't continue when Russia tramples on the rules of the international system from which it seeks to benefit – when it bites off pieces of its neighbors' territory and tries to bully them into economic and political submission.¹³⁴³

Amb. Nuland was not alone in her views. In response to a question from Sen. McCain (R-AZ) about whether the United States “should be supplying arms, defensive arms to Ukrainians,” Ash Carter, President Obama’s nominee to replace Chuck Hagel as Defense Secretary, responded that he is “very much incline[d] in that direction...including...lethal arms.”¹³⁴⁴ Dr. Carter also asserted that “we need to support the Ukrainians in defending themselves,” adding that he rejects “the notion that Russia should be afforded a sphere of influence” in the region.¹³⁴⁵

A senior official accompanying Secretary Kerry to Kyiv on 4 February told the press that “[w]e continue to evaluate, as the situation on the ground changes, the security needs of the Ukrainians, particularly as they try to defend the Minsk ceasefire line against

¹³⁴³ Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, *Unity in Challenging Times: Building on Transatlantic Resolve*, Remarks at the Brookings Institution, U.S. Department of State, 27 January 2015.

¹³⁴⁴ Nomination Hearing Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, United States Senate, 114th Congress, 4 February 2015.

¹³⁴⁵ Nomination Hearing Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, United States Senate, 114th Congress, 4 February 2015.

increasingly lethal weapons sent over the border from Russia.¹³⁴⁶¹³⁴⁷ In response to a question about “how bad does the violence have to get for the U.S. to consider [providing] lethal” assistance to Ukraine, the official declined to speculate as to the possible threshold, stating instead that “no decisions have been made.”¹³⁴⁸

For his part, President Obama stated at his 9 February press conference that “if in fact diplomacy fails, what I’ve asked my team to do is to look at all options – what other means can we put in place to change Mr. Putin’s calculus – and the possibility of lethal defensive weapons is one of those options that’s being examined...to see whether or not there are additional things we can do to help Ukraine bolster its defenses **in the face of separatist aggression.**”¹³⁴⁹¹³⁵⁰ At the same time, the President went out of his way to emphasize that Russia has “actually served a constructive role” in the negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program.¹³⁵¹

It is not clear to what extent U.S. (and European) mixed signals such as the above contributed to what transpired next in the warzone, but an affirmative argument can certainly be made. On 12 February, the warring sides in eastern Ukraine agreed to a new ceasefire, which became known as Minsk II or the second Minsk agreement. Under the

¹³⁴⁶ Senior State Department Officials, Office of the Spokesperson, Background Briefing En Route Kyiv, Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 4 February 2015.

¹³⁴⁷ Bolded for emphasis.

¹³⁴⁸ Senior State Department Officials, Office of the Spokesperson, Background Briefing En Route Kyiv, Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 4 February 2015.

¹³⁴⁹ Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference With Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309454>.

¹³⁵⁰ Bolded for emphasis.

¹³⁵¹ Barack Obama, The President’s News Conference With Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309454>.

agreement's terms, which were facilitated by Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande, the sides were to cease all combat by 15 February and withdraw their heavy weapons away from the line of contact. The agreement was welcomed by the international community, including by the United States.¹³⁵² A statement by the White House Press Secretary that same day asserted that the "agreement must now be followed by immediate, concrete steps to fulfill the commitments by all parties."¹³⁵³

But rather than scale down their attacks with the signing of the agreement, Russian forces in eastern Ukraine intensified their assault on the aforementioned city of Debaltseve, a key railroad hub held by Ukrainian government forces. And rather than take Moscow to task, the White House readout of the 14 February phone call between the President and Merkel referenced the "need for all signatories to implement the cease fire agreement."¹³⁵⁴ There was no reference to Russia in the readout. A readout of another phone call that day, this time with Poroshenko, likewise did not mention Russia and simply expressed "deep concern about the ongoing violence."¹³⁵⁵ The Russian attacks continued even after the 15 February ceasefire deadline came and went, with the Russian side retroactively claiming that the agreement did not apply to Debaltseve.¹³⁵⁶

¹³⁵² John Kerry, Secretary of State, Ukraine Cease-Fire Agreement, U.S. Department of State, 12 February 2015.

¹³⁵³ Barack Obama, Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309380>.

¹³⁵⁴ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309494>.

¹³⁵⁵ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309500>.

¹³⁵⁶ Jen Psaki, Spokesperson, Cease-fire Violations in Ukraine, U.S. Department of State, 16 February 2015.

The scale of Russian duplicity and the seeming lack of meaningful reaction by the Obama Administration prompted Senators McCain and Graham to charge in a joint 17 February statement that “[t]he Chancellor of Germany and the President of France, with the support of the President of the United States, are legitimizing the dismemberment of a sovereign nation in Europe for the first time in seven decades.”¹³⁵⁷ The Senators asserted that “it is long past time to provide defensive weapons to Ukraine” and called on the White House to “do so immediately, rather than hide behind a failed attempt to negotiate with an aggressor.”¹³⁵⁸

As though the Administration already did not look inept enough, all State Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki could say the same day in response to a question about imposing additional sanctions on Russia for its action in Ukraine was “I have nothing to announce right now.”¹³⁵⁹ Recovering somewhat, the Department Spokesperson added rather cryptically that “[w]e certainly believe that a diplomatic approach and a political approach is the right approach here, but the same options that were on the table two weeks ago remain on the table.”¹³⁶⁰ She assured the assembled press corps that “[w]e’ll continue to have internal discussions, as we’ve been having, about the appropriate assistance.”¹³⁶¹

¹³⁵⁷ Guy Taylor, “Top GOP Senators Blast Obama Admin’s Waffling on Arming Ukraine Military,” *The Washington Times*, 17 February 2015.

¹³⁵⁸ Guy Taylor, “Top GOP Senators Blast Obama Admin’s Waffling on Arming Ukraine Military,” *The Washington Times*, 17 February 2015.

¹³⁵⁹ Jen Psaki, Spokesperson, Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 17 February 2015.

¹³⁶⁰ Jen Psaki, Spokesperson, Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 17 February 2015.

¹³⁶¹ Jen Psaki, Spokesperson, Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, 17 February 2015.

Two days later, White House Principal Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz did better in form if not substance when he called “on all parties, including Russia, to abide by” the agreement, adding that “[w]hat was agreed to last week was not a shopping list” from which one decides “which items you’re going to abide by.”¹³⁶² Apparently, that’s essentially what Moscow thought of the agreement, in line with a whole series of other agreements it violated when it invaded Ukraine the previous year. As the 20 February readout of Vice President Biden’s phone calls with President Poroshenko and Prime Minister Yatsenyuk correctly pointed out, the assault on Debaltseve was in violation of both Minsk agreements.¹³⁶³ According to the readout, the Vice President again “strongly condemned” the offensive by “Russian-backed separatists (sic)...which was directly supported by Russian regular troops.”¹³⁶⁴

Non-decision solidifies as policy

The next day, on 21 February, Secretary Kerry stated in response to a question about lethal assistance to Ukraine that “[n]o decision has been made by the President at this point in time, and I think we have to see what happens in the next few days with respect to the events that are taking place now on the ground.”¹³⁶⁵ The Secretary added

¹³⁶² Barack Obama, Press Gaggle by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309611>.

¹³⁶³ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President’s Calls with Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309637>.

¹³⁶⁴ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President’s Calls with Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/309637>.

¹³⁶⁵ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks at Press Availability, London, United Kingdom, U.S. Department of State, 21 February 2015.

that “there is serious discussion taking place between us and our European allies as to what those next sanction steps ought to be and **when they perhaps ought to be implemented.**”¹³⁶⁶

Perhaps one reason for this less than robust formulation was the perceived traction the Obama Administration was seemingly getting with Moscow on other foreign policy priorities. During his 2 March joint press conference with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, Secretary Kerry appeared to go out of his way to underscore Moscow’s supposedly cooperative stance on a range of issues other than Ukraine.¹³⁶⁷ In particular, the Secretary stated that “Russia has been helpful in the context of the P5+1 talks [on the Iranian nuclear issue]. Russia was **extremely engaged and essential** in our success in getting chemical weapons out of Syria...Russia is sitting with us even now...talking about ways we might...be able to try to make some progress with respect to Syria and with respect to Daesh [aka, ISIL].”¹³⁶⁸¹³⁶⁹ He praised Moscow for its “willingness to try to find ways to cooperate notwithstanding [the] fundamental disagreement over Ukraine,” apparently misunderstanding that Moscow’s cooperation, limited as it was in practice, was driven at least in part by its desire to move past the disagreement over its ongoing aggression against Ukraine.¹³⁷⁰

¹³⁶⁶ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks at Press Availability, London, United Kingdom, U.S. Department of State, 21 February 2015.

¹³⁶⁷ Secretary Kerry’s memoir, *Every Day is Extra*, makes no direct mention of the lethal assistance issue.

¹³⁶⁸ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks at a Press Availability, Geneva, Switzerland, U.S. Department of State, 2 March 2015.

¹³⁶⁹ Bolded for emphasis.

¹³⁷⁰ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Remarks at a Press Availability, Geneva, Switzerland, U.S. Department of State, 2 March 2015.

For its part, Congress and especially the Senate continued to press the Obama Administration on the lethal assistance issue. In their 9 March letter to the President, Senators Corker (R-TN) and Menendez (D-NJ), the Chairman and the Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called on the Administration to “submit a report to Congress on a plan for providing defensive lethal assistance to Ukraine,” in the process reminding the White House that the report, which was required by law under the Ukraine Freedom Support Act, was due on 15 February.¹³⁷¹ The Senators added that “[n]ow is the time for the United States to provide Ukraine with the means to defend itself from continued Russian aggression,” adding that the United States “should not be misled by Vladimir Putin’s repeated efforts to exploit nominal ceasefire agreements.”¹³⁷² Separately, Senator Corker called the “refusal of the administration to step up with more robust support for Ukraine and further pressure on Russia...a blight on U.S. policy and 70 years of defending a Europe that is whole, democratic, and free.”¹³⁷³

Meanwhile, the White House continued to try to have it both ways, making the case against the provision of lethal assistance to Ukraine while also claiming that no final policy decision has been made. The latest iteration of this balancing act took place on 10 March when White House Principal Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz attempted to fend off direct questions about the Administration’s policy and the rationale behind it.

As Eric Schultz put it:

¹³⁷¹ Corker, Menendez Seek Obama Administration Report on Defensive Lethal Assistance for Ukraine, United States Senate, 9 March 2015.

¹³⁷² Corker, Menendez Seek Obama Administration Report on Defensive Lethal Assistance for Ukraine, United States Senate, 9 March 2015.

¹³⁷³ Failure to Deliver on Commitments to Ukraine a Blight on U.S. Policy, United States Senate, 10 March 2015

The President believes, first and foremost, that this is a situation that is going to have to be resolved diplomatically. That's for a couple of different reasons. First, increasing arms and lethal aid to the region would only increase bloodshed; two, nobody doubts Russia's military capacity to expand its military presence in the region; and three, we don't want to see increased bloodshed...But the President has also said we are constantly reevaluating the situation there, constantly looking at new options.¹³⁷⁴

To give the Obama Administration credit, Vice President Biden's regular calls with the Ukrainian leadership continued on a regular basis, even as the White House policy focus was elsewhere, most critically the Iran nuclear issue. On 20 April, just three days removed from the anniversary of the 17 April 2014 agreement committing Russia to ending its destabilizing actions and restoring Ukraine's sovereignty in the east, the Vice President and Poroshenko "welcomed efforts by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to negotiate permanent ceasefires...where fighting is still ongoing, and called on Russia to...stop the transfer of heavy weapons into Ukraine."¹³⁷⁵

Several weeks later, with Secretary Kerry on his way to Russia to address a range of issues, the traveling press pool pointed out that Moscow had moved new military systems into the Russian-occupied parts of eastern Ukraine and questioned the timing of the meeting with Putin in Sochi. The senior State Department official briefing the press

¹³⁷⁴ Barack Obama, Press Gaggle by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/310390>.

¹³⁷⁵ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the Vice President's Call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/311080>.

gave a response that made it clear where Ukraine stood in the Obama Administration's priority matrix:

[T]here are a number of issues where we are involved with Russia now that are quite hot. So the first one, obviously...the Iran negotiations; [it is] important to stay aligned [with Russia]. The Secretary...wants to ensure that President Putin has a good sense of President Obama's requirements as we head into the endgame here, and that we stay tightly aligned...With regard to ISIS...we are involved in a global coalition. The Russians, while formally not members of that coalition, are important players...We have, when the U.S. and Russia have worked together, made progress on Syria. We made progress on the chemical weapons. There's more to do...Yemen is at a critical moment. We've had intensive conversations with the players; compare notes with Russia on that. Libya – there may be UN Security Council action required in near days and weeks. It'll be important to have Russia aligned with us and on side supporting the UN talks. And on Ukraine...it's important for the main decision maker on Ukraine, President Putin, to hear directly from the United States that we are firmly committed to Minsk implementation and we want to support those steps that need to be taken now to make it work.¹³⁷⁶

¹³⁷⁶ Senior State Department Official, Background Briefing to Preview Secretary Kerry's Travel to Russia and Turkey, U.S. Department of State, 11 May 2015.

When asked “whatever happened to the idea of helping the Ukrainians with defensive weapons? Is that still sitting in the White House?,” the official predictably stated “I don’t have anything new to announce.”¹³⁷⁷ At the same time, the Obama Administration strongly objected on 2 June to the language inserted into the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 stipulating that “no more than 50 percent of the \$300 million in authorized funds may be obligated until at least 20 percent is spent on lethal assistance or counter-battery radars.”¹³⁷⁸ The White House argued that “[t]his limitation forces the hand of the Administration in providing lethal assistance to the government of Ukraine – a decision that should rest with the Executive Branch.”¹³⁷⁹

For his part, Secretary Kerry continued to look for a silver lining in the darkest of clouds. In response to a reporter’s account of the Russians moving even more heavy weaponry across the border into Ukraine, coinciding with numerous violations of the Minsk agreements, the Secretary pointed out that several recent meetings of the mixed ceasefire observation commission “have been a little bit more productive than meetings heretofore.”¹³⁸⁰ It is not clear whether he truly believed what he was saying or was just trying to put a positive spin on a deteriorating situation, likely made so in part by Moscow’s perception that the United States was more focused on securing a deal on

¹³⁷⁷ Senior State Department Official, Background Briefing to Preview Secretary Kerry’s Travel to Russia and Turkey, U.S. Department of State, 11 May 2015.

¹³⁷⁸ Barack Obama, Statement of Administration Policy: S. 1376 - National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2016 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/310830>.

¹³⁷⁹ Barack Obama, Statement of Administration Policy: S. 1376 - National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2016 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/310830>.

¹³⁸⁰ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Secretary Kerry’s Press Availability, U.S. Department of State, 16 June 2015.

Iran's nuclear program. This perception certainly was not without basis, as evidenced by President Obama's 25 June conversation with Putin in which the two leaders "underscored the importance of continued P5+1 unity in ongoing negotiations to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon," according to the White House readout of the call.¹³⁸¹

Throughout the rest of 2015 and well into 2016, the Obama Administration prioritized Syria and other Middle Eastern issues over ending Russia's aggression against Ukraine, with references to the latter no longer mentioning possible negative consequences for Moscow.¹³⁸²¹³⁸³¹³⁸⁴ Moreover, Ukraine did not merit a single mention in Secretary Kerry's end-of-year Op-Ed entitled "Building on 2015 as We Look Ahead," suggesting the Obama Administration was ready to leave the ongoing war in the geographic center of Europe in the rearview mirror.¹³⁸⁵ At the same time, the Secretary told one of the Kremlin-controlled Russian television channels that the United States is "obviously very anxious to work more effectively [together]," a statement that is arguably at the top of the list of what not to say to the Russians.¹³⁸⁶ President Obama's

¹³⁸¹ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with President Vladimir Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/310446>.

¹³⁸² Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with President Vladimir Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/311442>.

¹³⁸³ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of Vice President Biden's Calls with Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/312041>.

¹³⁸⁴ Barack Obama, Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with President Vladimir Putin of Russia Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/314409>.

¹³⁸⁵ John Kerry, Secretary of State, "Building on 2015 as We Look Ahead," Op-Ed, *The Boston Globe*, U.S. Department of State, 29 December 2015.

¹³⁸⁶ John Kerry, Secretary of State, Interview With Mikhail Gusman of Rossiya 24, Moscow, Russia, U.S. Department of State, 23 March 2016.

statement in an April 2016 interview with the Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg that "Ukraine, which is a non-NATO country, is going to be vulnerable to military domination by Russia no matter what we do" deserves an honorable mention on that list.¹³⁸⁷¹³⁸⁸

The Moscow factor's presence and its impact

Based on the above-listed reference points, the Moscow factor was present and loomed large throughout the Obama Administration's consideration of whether to provide lethal assistance to Ukraine in the face of ongoing Russian aggression. The lethal assistance policy issue materialized in the immediate aftermath of Russia's illegal takeover of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and its occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in eastern Ukraine. It gained further steam in August 2014 when undisguised Russian regular units crossed the international border and dealt the Ukrainians a heavy defeat in the environs of the town of Ilovaysk. Calls for helping arm Ukraine reached a new crescendo in February 2015 when regular Russian army units significantly degraded Ukrainian forces around Debaltseve, despite the earlier signing of a ceasefire agreement in the context of the so-called Minsk process.

While the Obama Administration cited, in the first instance, the possible costs of escalation in the east of Ukraine – and being perceived in Moscow as waging a proxy war against Russia and its interests – as the reasons for the Administration's caution, its reticence appears to have had even more to do with wanting to avoid worsening the

¹³⁸⁷ Jeffrey Goldberg, "Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016.

¹³⁸⁸ As written by David Kramer, "it was hard to believe that a sitting president would make such remarks, essentially letting Putin know he had a green light to do whatever he wanted in Ukraine." David Kramer, *Back to Containment*, pp. 102-103.

already poor relations with the Kremlin and to see other, relatively more important White House priorities addressed. Early on, these priorities were headlined by the efforts to secure a negotiated end to Iran's nuclear program, which, in the eyes of the Administration, could be facilitated by Moscow. Later, the list of top of priorities also became populated by finding an end to the war in Syria and the related issue of the challenge posed by the so-called Islamic State. The Administration dismissed the arguments made by the numerous proponents of lethal assistance, who also suggested that inaction on this front also carried a heavy – and they would argue even heavier – price.

In any event, Washington's policy continued to focus on the implementation of the Germany- and France-facilitated Minsk agreements despite clear signs that these are not implementable. While international sanctions against Russia have hurt the Russian economy, they have not been of the scale necessary to force Moscow out of Ukraine. Nevertheless, the Obama Administration decided not to provide lethal assistance to Ukraine without making a formal decision to this effect. In practice, this has meant that the Administration used the moneys authorized by Congress to send non-lethal military assistance to Ukraine. The impact of this policy in the Ukrainian context was to signal the limits of U.S. support for Ukraine even as the latter was seeking leverage, both kinetic and potential, to stall Moscow's ongoing aggression and deter any expansion of this aggression's scope.

Interplay with selected independent variables

Relative importance of domestic priorities: Candidate Barack Obama harshly criticized President George W. Bush's expenditure of blood and treasure in open-ended military and other commitments abroad, particularly in Iraq. Once in office, President Obama followed through on his promise to focus more on domestic priorities, including the economy, healthcare, and education. His preference for what his detractors described as retrenchment meant that he was less likely to pursue policies that would require direct American leadership where responsible regional actors could fill any void left by the United States.

Relative importance of other foreign policy priorities: As referenced above, preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power was the Obama Administration's top foreign policy priority, followed by the war in Syria and the rise of the so-called Islamic State. While the White House made it clear that Russia's aggression violated not only Ukraine's sovereignty but also the agreed standards of international behavior, the Administration also made it clear that there was a limit to how much the United States would confront Russia over Ukraine in view of Washington's other, more pressing priorities. In addition to the seemingly perennial priority of arms control, this latter category also included stabilizing Afghanistan and promoting nuclear non-proliferation. In short, the President wanted to engage Russia to prevent it from acting as a spoiler for U.S. interests he deemed vital. Throughout, the Administration worked to assure that no

significant daylight appeared between the United States and the EU, particularly German leader Merkel.

Relative commitment to “Europe whole and free” policy: There was significant rhetorical continuity on the policy of “Europe whole and free” between the Obama Administration and its predecessor. This included the geographic reach of this policy, which clearly and explicitly included Ukraine. However, the Obama White House did not devote significant time and other resources to the practical demonstration of this policy, especially in the east of the continent, with the President only visiting Russia from among the 12 post-Soviet countries during his eight years in office. Furthermore, there was a perception that while the policy was a worthy one, it was largely for the Europeans to pursue, at least in the first instance. As a result, this policy was more often than not referenced by Administration critics rather than the Obama Administration.

Congressional role and posture: Unlike during the Orange Revolution, Congress worked hard not take a backseat to the Obama Administration on the question of providing lethal assistance to Ukraine, with members of both major parties working to pressure the White House to move forward with such assistance. The Ukraine Freedom Support Act, which authorized \$350 million in arms to Ukraine, including anti-armor missiles and other munitions, became the key piece of legislation that challenged the Obama Administration most directly on the issue of more robust support for Ukraine in the face of ongoing Russian aggression. Congressional support for lethal assistance was

both bipartisan and overwhelming, giving the White House the authorities, the resources, and the political support – some would even argue, imperative – to move forward.

Extent of Ukrainian diaspora activism: Sensing the very real danger to Ukrainian statehood, the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States played an active role trying to directly pressure the Obama Administration to relent and proceed with the provision of lethal assistance to Ukraine. The diaspora also worked closely with the many likeminded members of Congress to advocate for legislation that increasingly pushed the envelope on this issue set, in the process increasingly constraining the Administration’s maneuver room. As in the previous cases examined, the *Ukrainian Weekly* played a leading diaspora role in making clear what the community’s policy preferences were on this important and dynamic issue. However, the diaspora’s impact may have been dulled by the timing of the crisis in the context of the Obama Administration’s timeline and the related electoral cycle.¹³⁸⁹

Moscow’s behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities: In view of the Obama Administration’s other foreign policy priorities, as referenced above, Moscow’s willingness to appear – and occasionally actually be – constructive on the P5+1 efforts on the Iranian nuclear program continued to pay dividends for the Kremlin, both in terms of giving it a seat at a major negotiating table and, as a consequence, breaking the international isolation Western countries attempted to impose on Russia for its invasion

¹³⁸⁹ As helpfully pointed out by Paul D’Anieri (16 December 2020 email correspondence with author).

of Ukraine. The fact that Moscow actually contributed quite little on the Iranian front – and on the Syrian and Islamic State fronts as well – did not seem to appreciably faze the Obama Administration. Unlike his predecessor, President Obama did not appear to have any expectations of a genuinely good relationship with Russia under Putin.

Kyiv’s behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities: Following Yanukovich’s flight to Russia in February 2014, the new Ukrainian government made clear its Western orientation. Faced with outright Russian aggression, including occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, Kyiv went out of its way to please the West, particularly the United States. Its willingness to make potentially painful compromises to end Russia’s aggression in the east of the country to satisfy Western policy preferences underscored the Ukrainian government’s Euro-Atlantic avocation. That Kyiv’s pleading for more help, including Poroshenko’s call for lethal assistance during his address to the joint session of Congress, complicated the Obama Administration’s interactions with both the Hill and Moscow is hardly Ukraine’s fault in the final analysis.

Executive branch policy champions: With the exception of National Security Advisor Susan Rice, no prominent Obama Administration official shared the President’s opposition to providing Ukraine lethal assistance to help it defend itself against Russian aggression.¹³⁹⁰ Away from the public eye, even Secretary Kerry reportedly was in favor

¹³⁹⁰ According to a former senior official in the Obama Administration, the provision of lethal assistance to Ukraine was looked upon favorably by the Deputies Committee after the policy’s advocates made the case that the anti-tank systems being sought by the Ukrainian government were defensive in nature. For his part, President Obama continued to oppose giving lethal assistance to Ukraine because he thought such

of providing lethal assistance to Ukraine, as were several other key Cabinet members as well as Vice President Biden.¹³⁹¹¹³⁹²¹³⁹³ The then NATO commander, Gen. Philip Breedlove, came out in support of providing defensive weapons to Ukraine.¹³⁹⁴ Gen. Joe Dunford, President Obama's nominee to become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, came out in support of providing lethal assistance to Ukraine during his confirmation hearing in early July 2015.¹³⁹⁵ As referenced above, Ash Carter publicly endorsed the idea of sending lethal assistance to Ukraine during his confirmation hearing.

Summary

The debate that ensued over the right U.S. posture on the question of providing lethal assistance to Ukraine raged not only between the executive branch and Congress, but also within the executive branch. Based on its domestic agenda and other, more important foreign policy priorities in which Moscow could in theory play a constructive role, as identified by the President, the Obama White House pursued a cautious policy toward the question of helping Ukraine defend itself against Russian aggression. Despite the broadly based support for providing lethal assistance to Ukraine, including on both sides of the aisle and within the executive branch, the President's personal view prevailed

assistance would constitute a slippery slope that could make the United States a "co-combatant" and further damage U.S.-Russian relations. Interview with former senior official, 7 December 2020.

¹³⁹¹ For Secretary Kerry's alleged private views on this issue, see Josh Rogin's "Kerry Tells Lawmakers He's for Arming Ukraine" in *Bloomberg View*, 9 February 2015.

¹³⁹² David Kramer, "U.S. Policy Toward Ukraine in Need of Urgent Fix," *The American Interest*, 4 December 2015.

¹³⁹³ It does not appear, however, that Secretary Kerry actively pushed this issue.

¹³⁹⁴ Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Considers Supplying Arms to Ukraine Forces, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, 1 February 2015.

¹³⁹⁵ Gordon Lubold, "Joint Chiefs Chairman Nominee Says Russia is Top Military Threat," *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 July 2015.

in the policy formulation process, even on those occasions when Russian military units operated overtly in eastern Ukraine.

In the end, therefore, it was the President's role as policy champion – the most important factor in play – that succeeded in stymying an activist Congress, stiff arming the concerned Ukrainian diaspora, compartmentalizing Moscow's retrograde behavior at home and abroad, suppressing the policy of "Europe whole and free," and dismissing the needs of a European country – Ukraine – whose sovereignty and territorial integrity the United States "assured" in the Budapest Memorandum as part of its post-Soviet denuclearization and whose future NATO membership was agreed to in the 2008 Bucharest summit communique.¹³⁹⁶

¹³⁹⁶ For a detailed discussion of the implications of Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territory in the context of the Budapest Memorandum, see David Yost's "The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's Intervention in Ukraine" in *International Affairs*.

Chapter 7

Cross-Case Findings, Conclusions, and Areas for Future Research

Theoretical underpinning for cross-case comparisons

One of the key benefits of pursuing a multi-case study is the opportunity to further explore cross-case findings and draw initial conclusions. This is especially operative in the context of utilizing Alexander George's structured, focused comparison method in which the same questions are applied to all of the cases being examined, as referenced in Chapter 1. As Robert Yin put it, these cross-case conclusions are typically presented in the final chapter of a work, often as part of an attempt to draw broader conclusions.¹³⁹⁷ This chapter represents an attempt to do so.

This effort takes into account apt warnings about the downsides of drawing cross-case conclusions because, as Robert Stake put it, "the unique vitality of each case" may be lost.¹³⁹⁸ To avoid such a loss, Stake recommends that researchers focus not only on the commonalities among cases but also the differences, which I also attempt to do below. As a reminder of the importance of preserving case specificity, Stake underscores the need for findings "to keep their contextual meaning during the authoring of the multicase report."¹³⁹⁹

¹³⁹⁷ Robert Yin, *Case Study Research*, p. 18.

¹³⁹⁸ Robert Stake, *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, p. 39.

¹³⁹⁹ Robert Stake, *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, p. 47.

In his *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, Joseph Maxwell also warned about the dangers of over-generalization, which he refers to as “over-categorization” – and conversely of the benefits of the case study approach – by arguing that categorizing “replaces the original set of contextual relationships...with a different, categorical structure.”¹⁴⁰⁰¹⁴⁰¹ The case study approach allows the researcher to understand the data being analyzed in its proper and natural context, one of the key differences between “connecting analysis,” i.e., connecting data points in their natural settings, and “categorizing analysis,” i.e., imposing often-distorting legibility on those data points.

Cross-case findings based on the key research questions

With these reference points in mind – and as stated in Chapter 1 – this study set out to explore whether, how, with what impact, and under what circumstances have Washington’s Moscow-related considerations factored in policy formulation and implementation toward Ukraine as – and since – the latter regained its independence, focusing on the recognition of Ukraine’s independence from the USSR, the pursuit of Ukraine’s denuclearization, on support for the so-called Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the non-provision of lethal military assistance to Ukraine in the face of Russia’s occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and aggression in eastern Ukraine.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2013, p. 78.

¹⁴⁰¹ Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*, p. 112.

Based on the exploratory case findings above, the **Moscow factor was present** in all four of the cases examined. This factor was most explicitly and directly present in the first case – that focusing on U.S. policy relating to Ukraine’s independence – and the fourth case, which deals with the U.S. policy on providing lethal assistance to Ukraine in the context of ongoing Russian aggression. In terms of the first case, the Administration of George H. W. Bush pursued a policy in which support for Moscow, first in the guise of Soviet leader Gorbachev and later in terms of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, was the top priority in the context of the U.S. Government’s approach to the Soviet Union and later the post-Soviet region. While the Obama Administration policy in question did not formally cite the Moscow factor in its Ukraine policy, this factor was referenced regularly and even routinely when explaining why the United States was not ready to ship much-needed lethal assistance to Ukraine.

When it came to the second case, Moscow’s preference for seeing Soviet-era nuclear weapons removed from independent Ukraine dovetailed with Washington’s policy pursuing Ukraine’s post-Soviet denuclearization, under both President George H. W. Bush and President Bill Clinton. The Moscow factor was therefore not quite as explicit as in the first and fourth cases examined, though it still played a rather direct role in this case as well. The Moscow factor manifested itself in both a less explicit and a less direct way in the third case, which focused on U.S. policy toward the 2004 Orange Revolution during the Administration of President George W. Bush. Nevertheless, the Moscow factor played an important role in this case as well, as is discussed in greater detail below.

The **Moscow factor manifested itself** in a range of ways across the cases. For the George H. W. Bush Administration, there was no Ukraine policy separate from, or arguably even in addition to, its interaction with Moscow, largely because the USSR's continued existence was an implicit assumption for the bulk of this Administration. As a result, the Bush White House willfully ignored Ukraine's steps toward greater recognition of its aspirations, most notably the 16 July 1990 sovereignty declaration and the 24 August 1991 declaration of independence. As already stated elsewhere, the Bush Administration did not seek nor did it encourage the USSR's collapse. Quite the contrary, the Bush Administration went to extraordinary lengths to help the leadership in Moscow stave off the Soviet Union's dissolution for as long as possible.

The George H. W. Bush Administration's initial approach to Ukraine and its independence set the stage for Washington's policy toward Ukraine's denuclearization, one in which Russia was to emerge as the only nuclear successor state of the USSR. All in all, there was little to distinguish the Bush and Clinton policies toward Ukraine during this period, with both looking at Ukraine through the denuclearization lens, and both working with Moscow to attain the shared objective. Even with the important broadening of relations with Ukraine attempted by the Clinton Administration after its spring 1993 policy review, the Moscow factor contributed to an engagement with Ukraine that remained rather shallow and based on a general view of Ukraine as essentially a distraction from the important business to be conducted with Moscow.

In the third case, the Moscow factor primarily manifested itself through the George W. Bush Administration's conscious and sustained failure to call out and

confront malign Russian interference in the run-up to and during the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine, including through explicit support for its preferred candidate during the campaign and by extending its political support once the fraud was committed. Both the Bush White House and the Department of State routinely and consistently declined multiple opportunities to accurately characterize Moscow's clearly negative role in undermining Ukrainian democracy and, therefore, willfully misrepresented election-related developments in Ukraine in order to avoid criticizing Moscow and to maintain what the U.S. Government hoped was space for cooperation on other fronts – an example of the indirect application of the Moscow factor – as described below. The presence of the Moscow factor did not, however, prevent Washington from joining, over time, a unified Western response focusing on democratic principles, despite at one point allegedly considering letting Moscow have its way.

The fourth case examined, that of the Obama Administration, saw the Moscow factor manifest itself primarily through U.S. Government efforts aimed at avoiding worsening the already poor relations with the Kremlin and to see other, relatively more important White House priorities addressed. More often than not, this approach meant that the Obama Administration was slow to acknowledge the Russian role in the fighting in eastern Ukraine, preferring to incorrectly refer to the forces fighting against the Ukrainian government as “separatists” and even “rebels.”¹⁴⁰² Later on, the Moscow factor also manifested itself in the Obama Administration's unwillingness to follow

¹⁴⁰² According to the British investigative journalism website Bellingcat, tens of thousands of Russian military personnel have taken part in the war in eastern Ukraine. See “Russian Soldiers in Ukraine: The Devil is in the Medals,” 31 August 2016.

through consistently on its threats to increase costs to Russia for its aggression against Ukraine.

The **policy impact of the Moscow factor** also varied across the cases, with a seemingly strong connection to how explicitly present this factor was in the U.S. policy toward Ukraine. As a result of the stated policy priorities of the George H. W. Bush Administration, the impact of the presence of the Moscow factor in this Administration's views of and approach to Ukraine was both significant and omnipresent. Though this factor manifested itself most acutely in President Bush's perhaps appropriately named "Chicken Kiev" speech, it also came through in the Administration's regular and purposeful devaluing of Ukraine's independence aspirations and, with time, the reluctant and heavily conditioned extension of U.S. recognition – and only with Moscow's consent and with the USSR already gone for most intents and purposes.

Despite the Clinton Administration's introduction of incentives into U.S. efforts to secure Ukraine's post-Soviet denuclearization and its assertion that the Administration's Ukraine policy would be conducted independently of its relationship with Russia, the nuclear question remained a prism through which the United States viewed its relations with Ukraine. In turn, Washington saw the nuclear question, in part, through the prism of Yeltsin's political standing in Russia, and, more broadly, non-proliferation considerations. In the end, the Moscow factor left Kyiv little room for maneuver, particularly since Washington's ability to understand Kyiv's Moscow-related concerns was limited and the range and seriousness of the problems facing Ukraine, including vis-à-vis Moscow, seemed unfathomable.

While the Moscow factor in the U.S. policy toward what became known as the Orange Revolution arguably had the least policy impact of the four cases examined, this is only a relative measure, particularly when one considers Washington's efforts not to call out Moscow on its potentially decisive interference in the run-up to the first and second rounds of voting. The fact that the Orange Revolution became one of the poster children for President Bush's Freedom Agenda, largely after the fact, had more to do with the desire of Ukrainians to be heard than with U.S. policy per se. In any event, Washington redoubled its efforts aimed at engaging Moscow, despite the mounting evidence that Putin's Russia was utterly rejecting the liberal world order as envisioned in Washington. For its part, the Kremlin arguably learned all the wrong lessons, as evidenced by the events leading up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine almost a decade later.

The Obama Administration's de facto policy of not providing lethal assistance to Ukraine without making a formal decision to this effect was driven, by and large, by the Moscow factor. In practice, this meant that the Administration used the funds authorized by Congress to send non-lethal military assistance to Ukraine, a policy that had knock-on effects on other countries' policies and amounted to a de facto arms embargo against Ukraine, a denuclearized country in the geographic center of Europe trying to defend itself against an invasion by a larger, neo-imperial neighbor. The impact of this policy in the Ukrainian context was to signal the limits of U.S. support for Ukraine even as the latter was seeking leverage, both kinetic and potential, to stall Moscow's ongoing aggression and deter any expansion of its scope.

Analysis of the independent variables across the cases

What follows is a comparison of the earlier identified independent variables across the four cases examined. Just to recapitulate, these variables were: domestic priorities; other foreign policy priorities; the importance of the policy of Europe whole and free; Kyiv's behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities; Moscow's behavior in the context of U.S. policy priorities; the role of Congress; the role of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States; and the role of policy champions.

The relative focus on **domestic priorities** at the expense of foreign ones has tended to play a constraining role in the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy toward Ukraine while giving the Moscow factor greater prominence. As President George H. W. Bush made clear during his inaugural speech and his State of the Union addresses, among other occasions, he wanted to begin to tackle the myriad domestic problems facing America. These problems included an unbalanced federal budget and a ballooning deficit. The President hoped to benefit from the end of the Cold War to secure a "peace dividend" that could be used to help address – and fund – these domestic challenges, especially with his 1992 re-election bid looming.

Throughout that presidential campaign, Bill Clinton criticized incumbent President Bush for not paying enough attention to America's domestic challenges, despite the latter's own emphasis on domestic issues, including the growing socio-economic dislocation. "It's the economy, stupid," while not a phrase coined by Bill Clinton, is certainly associated with the Clinton campaign's ultimately successful efforts to unseat George H. W. Bush in the midst of an economic recession. As foreshadowed in several

key speeches, the Clinton Administration focused on job creation, the related issue of support for small businesses, and welfare reform.

Candidate George W. Bush's preference was to focus on pressing domestic priorities, including dealing with an economic recession in the wake of the dot-com crash, and get away from the "nation-building" pursuits for which he criticized the preceding Clinton Administration, especially in the context of the Yugoslav wars. Based on his first eight months in office, he had every intention of following through on his campaign rhetoric. However, this changed with the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Homeland, the subsequent Global War on Terror, and the intervention in Iraq to unseat Saddam Hussein.

In turn, candidate Barack Obama harshly criticized President George W. Bush's expenditure of blood and treasure in open-ended military and other commitments abroad, particularly in Iraq. Once in office, President Obama followed through, perhaps more than the other Presidents in question, on his promise to focus more on domestic priorities, including healthcare, education, and "building democracy at home." His preference for what his detractors described as retrenchment meant that he was less likely to pursue policies that would require direct American leadership where (hopefully) responsible regional actors could fill any void left by the United States.

The impact of **other Administration foreign policy priorities** has also tended to give greater prominence to the Moscow factor, both indirectly in terms of how much time an Administration could devote to the post-Soviet space and directly when Moscow, typically, could play a more significant role than Kyiv in the context of these other U.S.

foreign policy priorities. In addition to ending the standoff in Europe, most importantly the complex issue set pertaining to German reunification, the George H. W. Bush Administration's other foreign policy priorities pertained to arms control, countering Saddam's threat to Iraq's neighbors, especially Kuwait, and the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process. For its part, the Clinton Administration's foreign policy became even more focused on Moscow and the occupant of the Kremlin than its predecessor. This Moscow fixation played significantly in a range of both perennial and new topics, including: arms control and non-proliferation; the Middle East Peace Process; the wars in the former Yugoslavia; and the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO), as sought by Poland and a number of other countries in the space between NATO and Russia.

As referenced above, the George W. Bush Administration's overarching foreign policy priority was prosecuting the Global War on Terror, provoked by the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States. This focus put a premium on closer counterterrorism cooperation with international partners and included a concerted effort to reach out to Moscow to secure its assistance in facilitating access to the Afghan warzone. Unseating Saddam, initially for allegedly hiding his WMD programs, was another priority that more often than not complicated relations with international partners, including both NATO Allies and Putin's Russia, even as this war and the one in Afghanistan took on a veneer of advancing democracy around the globe, eventually under the guise of the Freedom Agenda. Arms control as well as the safeguarding of nuclear materials – by now perennial favorites of U.S. Administrations – were also in the Bush Administration's mix of foreign policy priorities.

Also as referenced above, preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power was the Obama Administration's top foreign policy priority, followed by the war in Syria and the rise of the so-called Islamic State. While the White House made it clear that Russia's aggression violated not only Ukraine's sovereignty but also the agreed standards of international behavior, the Administration also made it clear that there was a limit to how much the United States would confront Russia over Ukraine in view of Washington's other, more pressing priorities. In addition to the seemingly perennial priority of arms control, this latter category also included stabilizing Afghanistan and promoting nuclear non-proliferation.

The U.S. commitment to the policy of "**Europe whole and free**," however rhetorical, does not appear to have varied significantly over time in the wake of the George H. W. Bush Administration, for which this concept was directly related to the issue of German re-unification but did not extend to the nations of the inner Soviet empire, e.g., Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. For its part, the Clinton Administration both normalized the use of the phrase and expanded its notional geographical reach to the new Eastern Europe, including the aforementioned countries and, arguably, even Russia.

Though the George W. Bush Administration's later rhetorical focus on the Freedom Agenda broadened the context in which the phrase "Europe whole and free" could be placed, there was considerable continuity between this Administration and the preceding Clinton Administration, which had normalized this policy goal's applicability to all of geographic Europe, including Ukraine. There was also significant rhetorical continuity on the policy of "Europe whole and free" between the Obama Administration

and its predecessor. However, the Obama White House did not devote significant time and other resources to the practical demonstration of this policy, especially in the east of the continent.

Kyiv's behavior has varied over time, as has its alignment with U.S. interests and objectives. The George H. W. Bush Administration did not view Ukrainian aspirations to independence favorably as they challenged the President's fixation on Moscow, Gorbachev, and, later, Yeltsin. During both the Bush Administration and the Clinton Administration, the United States Government saw Kyiv's efforts to use the nuclear issue to demonstrate, advocate for, and defend Ukraine's own interests as unhelpful, provocative, and even worthy of outright bullying.

Following the low points of the Gongadze abduction and murder, and the Kolchuga transfer approval, the Kuchma administration took a significant step toward getting back in Washington's good graces by sending a large Ukrainian contingent to Iraq, recognizing the importance of this issue for the George W. Bush Administration. The positives of the troop commitment were significantly eroded by the effort to steal the 2004 election, with Yushchenko's election providing important fodder for the President's Freedom Agenda, even as Yushchenko decided to withdraw the Ukrainian contingent from Iraq.

Faced with outright Russian aggression following the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity, including the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, Kyiv went out of its way to please the West, particularly the United States. Its willingness to make potentially painful compromises to end Russia's aggression in the east of the country to satisfy

Western policy preferences underscored the Ukrainian government's Euro-Atlantic avocation. These efforts were generally welcomed by the Obama Administration, but they did not change the President's mind on the provision of lethal assistance to Ukraine.

The more aligned **Moscow's behavior** with U.S. interests and objectives, the more the Moscow factor has tended to play a constraining role in the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy toward Ukraine. Moscow's behavior has varied over time, as has its alignment with U.S. interests and objectives, but the United States has seemed eager to have even an expectation of possible alignment of Washington's and Moscow's interests. With Gorbachev at the helm in Moscow, the USSR became more open to arms control initiatives, including in the conventional sphere. It also became less adventuresome abroad, forsaking leftist revolutionary movements in far-flung places.

Gorbachev also made perestroika and glasnost the core of his domestic policy approach. These changes, however nascent, exceeded most expectations, even if Gorbachev pursued these policies to save rather than destroy the Soviet system. With the transference from Gorbachev to Yeltsin, the White House could still point to arms control and Baltic withdrawals as areas in which Moscow was cooperative, but there were also other instances, e.g., Russia's support for the Milosevic regime in Belgrade, which were not consistent with U.S. preferences.

As previously referenced, the George W. Bush Administration had a generally favorable view of Putin and his willingness to pursue counterterrorism cooperation, though often on its terms and for reasons that were both nefarious and went beyond the scope of the counterterrorism struggle. The Bush Administration wanted to keep

Moscow onside, at least to the extent possible, because of the Kremlin's opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq. From the President's perspective, Putin had handled their disagreements over both Iraq and the 2002 NATO enlargement round, which included the Baltic States, relatively well. Between that, the 2002 treaty further reducing strategic nuclear weapons in the two arsenals, and President Bush's investment in what he saw as a personal relationship with Putin, the Russia relationship was hardly easy or satisfying, but certainly important and worthwhile from the Administration's perspective.

Similarly, Moscow's willingness to appear – and occasionally actually be – constructive on the P5+1 efforts on the Iranian nuclear program continued to pay dividends for the Kremlin, both in terms of giving it a seat at a major negotiating table and, as a consequence, breaking the international isolation Western governments, including the Obama Administration, attempted to impose on Russia for its 2014 invasion of Ukraine.

Based on a variety of factors, most importantly the relative clout of the bipartisan Ukraine Caucus and the absence of a formal Russia-focused analogue, **Congress** has largely played a countervailing role vis-à-vis the impact of the Moscow factor in the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy toward Ukraine.¹⁴⁰³ For example, members of Congress of both major U.S. political parties were often ahead of the George H. W. Bush Administration on the question of supporting Ukraine's aspirations. On the question of Ukraine's denuclearization, however, the Congressional posture largely

¹⁴⁰³ The role of less formal, Moscow-connected influencers in lobbying Congress on behalf of the Kremlin's agenda remains understudied.

mirrored and complemented the Bush and Clinton Administrations' objectives and policies. The reason for this overlap was the strong focus in both the executive branch and on the Hill on the issue of nuclear security and non-proliferation.

On the Orange Revolution too, Congress took a backseat to the White House. A number of factors probably account for this relatively minor posture of the legislative branch, including the shared executive-legislative desire not to antagonize the Russians further at a time of direct U.S. engagement in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The invitation to eventual winner Viktor Yushchenko to speak to a Joint Session of Congress in April 2005 provided an important venue to showcase America's support for Ukrainian democracy. Unlike during the Orange Revolution, Congress worked hard not to take a backseat to the Obama Administration on the question of providing lethal assistance to Ukraine, with members of both major parties working to pressure the White House to move forward with such assistance, an effort that culminated in the passage of the Ukraine Freedom Support Act authorizing \$350 million in arms to Ukraine.

Though the **Ukrainian diaspora's** support for a strong U.S. relationship with Ukraine appears to have been quite consistent over the four cases examined, it has applied its clout most intensely in situations where Ukraine's statehood was being denied or was under threat. In this context, the diaspora has played a countervailing role vis-à-vis the application of the Moscow factor in the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy toward Ukraine. Emboldened by President Reagan's willingness to confront the Soviets over their human rights abuses, the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States was riding considerable momentum entering the George H. W. Bush years. When it became

clear that the Bush White House not only would not show the same degree of attention to diaspora causes but actually demonstrate significant support for the central Soviet government, the community worked hard to encourage Congress to a higher level of activism on Ukraine's behalf.

The diaspora's skepticism of the George H. W. Bush Administration carried over to the Bush Administration's handling of the denuclearization issue, with the diaspora staying active, but with less intensity, in its efforts to present Ukraine's side of the story and warn about Moscow's post-imperial appetites, a warning which has been borne out in recent years. While hope ran high among the diaspora that the Clinton Administration's approach would be more equitable, the community was quickly disappointed. For the Ukrainian diaspora, the opportunity to defend the will of the people in the 2004 presidential election became a significant mobilizing factor. Given the Bush Administration's relative fixation on Moscow, the community maintained a steady drumbeat of advocacy.

Sensing the very real danger to Ukrainian statehood in the wake of the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity, the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States played an active role trying to directly pressure the Obama Administration to approve the provision of lethal assistance to Ukraine. The diaspora also worked closely with the many likeminded members of Congress to advocate for legislation that increasingly pushed the envelope on this issue set, in the process increasingly constraining the Administration's maneuver room.

The championing of this or that position by the **key executive branch policy champions** involved over the periods in question has had a direct, explicit, and perhaps outsized impact on whether, how, and with what impact the Moscow factor has played out in the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy toward Ukraine.¹⁴⁰⁴ This was especially true of the pertinent Presidents in question, whose preferences carried the day even in the face of broadly based opposing views, e.g., in the case of the lethal assistance issue examined in the fourth case.

As stated earlier, the center of gravity in the George H. W. Bush White House was clearly in the camp that thought it prudent to support Moscow and Gorbachev. This camp included not only Secretary Baker and National Security Advisor Scowcroft, but most importantly President Bush. Similarly, the key policy champions in the context of the U.S. policy on Ukraine's post-Soviet denuclearization were the two Presidents, Bush and Clinton, and they both came out strongly and clearly on the side of policies that were constructed based both on U.S. national interests, as defined by them, as well as on their understanding of Moscow's interests and preferences.

Given his investment in the relationship with Putin, President George W. Bush played a major role in articulating and enforcing the big-picture policy backdrop for the U.S. Government's approach to the Orange Revolution. The senior bureaucrats entrusted with the day-to-day carrying out of the President's policies were keenly aware of his

¹⁴⁰⁴ As Eugene Wittkopf and James McCormick put it, “[w]hat the nation chooses to do abroad is more often the product of an intense political struggle among the prominent players in the policymaking process, the policymaking positions or roles occupied by the key decision makers, and the characteristics of those individuals.” See Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick (Eds.), *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, p. 144.

priorities and of the need to take measured steps and tread carefully not to get in the way of the President's interaction with Putin. With the exception of National Security Advisor Susan Rice, no prominent official of the Obama Administration shared the President's opposition to providing Ukraine lethal assistance to help it defend itself against Russian aggression. And yet, it was the President's view that prevailed, leading to the de facto decision not to supply lethal military assistance to Ukraine.

In summation, the most impactful independent variable that played across the four cases examined was the role played by policy champions and especially by the sitting President. In terms of the Presidents involved, their foreign policy portfolios have seemingly automatically included managing Moscow, whether Soviet or Russian. For George H. W. Bush, it was his relationship with his friend Gorbachev. For Clinton, it was being "the Russia hand," as he sought to keep Yeltsin on the straight and narrow. For George W. Bush, it was looking into Putin's eyes and seeing something redeemable there, at least in the policy sense. And for Barack Obama, it was offering off-ramps not sought by the Kremlin.

Domestic priorities, as well as the postures adopted by Congress and the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States appear to have played constraining roles vis-à-vis Administration policies, though not often in complementary ways. In terms of the domestic priorities, the Presidents have preferred a counterpart in the Kremlin who would be less likely to divert White House attention from pressing needs at home; this was especially true of the U.S. interactions with Gorbachev and Yeltsin. On the other hand,

the Ukrainian diaspora worked to secure a more activist U.S. posture abroad, especially on behalf of what it saw as Ukraine's immediate needs.

Other foreign policy priorities, often deemed more consequential by the contemporaneous Administration, seemed to play an important contextual role for the U.S. policy toward Ukraine across the board, especially when this or that White House team determined that Moscow could play an important positive role in advancing those other priorities or, conversely, could play a spoiler's role to stymie the U.S. agenda. As a result, the U.S. Government has tended to avoid criticizing Moscow directly, if at all possible, and has generally given more than a nod to Moscow's views and sensitivities. In this context, the broad U.S. commitment to a "Europe whole and free" only appeared to matter in practice when not at odds with other Administration priorities.

In terms of Kyiv's and Moscow's behavioral patterns in the context of stated Administration objectives, the former seemed to be relatively more impactful in a negative sense, i.e., when at odds with U.S. interests. Kyiv's good behavior, on the other hand, did not seem to move the needle appreciably in terms of Washington's support. As referenced above, perceptions of Moscow's good – or at least, constructive – behavior appeared to matter more, while its bad behavior was often judged in practice in the context of Moscow's ability to impact other priorities, even when the rhetorical criticism of Moscow's actions was significant.

Overarching conclusions and areas for future research

Based on the provisional evidence collected in this exploratory study, whether, how, and with what impact Moscow-related considerations (the Moscow factor) have shaped the formulation and implementation of U.S. policy toward sovereign Ukraine across the range of identified Administrations are correlated to and can potentially be explained by the circumstantial interplay of the identified independent variables. The specific combinations and relative weights in which these independent variables have come together to provide the context for and affect Ukraine policy formulation and implementation have varied from Administration to Administration and even from major decision point to major decision point within an Administration.

For a variety of reasons, including the pragmatic – but often enough short-sighted – realism of international relations, Ukraine has rarely been the focus of any U.S. Administration in the absence of an instrumental reason, e.g., its post-Soviet denuclearization, despite Ukraine’s early identification by Sherman Garnett as the “keystone in the arch” of Central and Eastern European security. It is also important to keep in mind that generations of U.S. policymakers have been affected by the dominant cultural encounter with “Russia” in which Americans were acclimated over the decades to think of Russia and the USSR, including its various component parts, as one and the same. The impact of the enduring conflation of these two terms has been so great that even the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of twelve independent countries, including Russia and Ukraine, from its rubble have yet to erode the notion of interchangeability between “Russia” and the “Soviet Union.”

There are several potentially fruitful avenues for future research based on this dissertation. One of these avenues could involve adding even more revealing data points to the evidence presented as the U.S. Government declassifies more and more of its holdings. Another avenue could include exploring additional Ukraine-related policies within a given Administration. Yet another study could take on these Administrations – rather than individual policies – as units of analysis, potentially allowing researchers to consider within-Administration variations. Any future study could be enriched by adding or adjusting the independent variables considered. Finally, a future study could add the Trump Administration to the lineup of those considered.¹⁴⁰⁵ And of course, any newly available evidence could help transform this study from an exploratory one to one that even more rigorously examines the causal relationships present.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Though the Trump Administration's approach to the region is beyond the scope of this project, it almost certainly would provide ample fodder for an additional case study focusing on the Moscow factor in the U.S. policy toward Ukraine.

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Biography

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