

CHAPTER 1

Establishing Relations

On the evening of December 1, 1991, Larry Napper, one of the State Department's foremost Soviet experts and destined to be the last director of its Office of Soviet Union Affairs, walked the streets of Kyiv. He had accompanied Assistant Secretary of State for European affairs Thomas M. T. Niles to observe the independence referendum that the Ukrainians had held earlier that day. The results of the vote streamed in, and they sent a resounding message. In the end, with a large turnout, more than 90 percent of the voters had opted for an independent state. Independence won even in Crimea, garnering 54 percent of the vote in the only part of Ukraine where ethnic Russians constituted a majority of the population. As Napper tracked the incoming vote tally and watched the reaction of Ukrainians in the capital, he quietly admired their inspirational act of self-determination and thought to himself: "It's clear; the jig is up for the Soviet Union." Washington now had to prepare urgently for the final collapse of its Cold War rival and the emergence of the New Independent States, including Ukraine. And, after that happened, the U.S. government needed to get about the business of establishing a relationship with the new nation.

Ukraine's Long and Complex History

At its height in the early eleventh century, Kyivan Rus' was the largest state in Europe. It entered a period of decline and fragmentation in the latter part of that century, culminating in collapse after the Mongol invasion. The Golden Horde sacked Kyiv in 1240. The city would not become a major population, political, and commercial center again until the 1800s.

Parts of present-day Ukraine fell under the dominion of various other entities in the centuries after 1240: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Ottoman Empire, Muscovy, the Crimean Khanate, Poland, the Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire.¹ As a result, the western regions of what is present-day Ukraine were affected by the political, religious, and cultural influences that swept across Central Europe; what is now eastern Ukraine was not similarly affected. This history produced a country of regional differences. Ethnic Ukrainians and Russians constitute the largest groups today, but Crimean Tatars, Belarusians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Jews, Poles, and Romanians also make up sizable parts of the population. The Cossacks created a Hetmanate in what is now central Ukraine in 1648, which enjoyed a brief period of independence but did not develop the institutions of a contemporary state. Following the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav, much of modern Ukraine became part of the Russian Empire, while parts of western Ukraine found themselves in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, then the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and later again Poland. Crimea and the south remained a part of the Crimean Khanate until conquered by the Russian Empire in the late eighteenth century. The bulk of Ukraine would remain a piece of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union from 1654 until 1991, with the exception of the brief period from 1918 to 1921 in the chaotic aftermath of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution.²

The twentieth century was not kind to Ukraine or its people. World War I and the Russian civil war between the Reds and the Whites were followed by the Great Famine under Joseph Stalin—Ukrainians called it the Holodomor (killing by starvation)—in which millions died. And few parts of the Soviet Union suffered more during World War II than the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which lost some 15 percent of its population.³

One of the remarkable things about Ukraine is that the national identity stayed alive for so long—hundreds of years—absent a physical nation-state. As noted, for much of the time after the Golden Horde’s sacking of Kyiv, Ukraine was a part of the Russian Empire, which further solidified the intertwined historical, religious, and cultural links between Ukrainians and Russians, links that dated back to when both claimed the Kyivan Rus’ as their starting point. Those historical ties affected the views of both the Ukrainians and the Russians. Russians came to think of Ukraine as an integral part of their country, often referring to Ukrainians as “little Russians.” Indeed, when Russian president Vladimir Putin visited Kyiv in 2013 to mark the 1,025th anniversary of the Kyivan Rus’s acceptance of Christianity, he pointedly said that Ukrainians and Russians were all one people. Putin’s comment, like the term “little Russians,” infuriated Ukrainian nationalists, who liked to point out that it was a grand prince of Kyiv who founded Moscow in 1147.⁴

Views in Ukraine were more diverse. Those in the western part of the country tended to look toward Europe. The west was where Ukrainian nationalism was strongest, and those holding the memory of the Holodomor often continued to regard Moscow as an adversary. In eastern Ukraine, where a higher proportion of the population was ethnic Russian—though Crimea is the only part of modern Ukraine in which ethnic Russians constitute a majority—the population had a more positive view of Russia and of Russians, and they tended to see their identity linked more closely to Russia. Language reflected Ukraine’s mix: Ukrainian was more common in the west, while Russian—the language of the Soviet Union—was heard more frequently in the east and south. The number of those who regarded Russian as their first language far exceeded the number of ethnic Russians, but most people in Ukraine, if they could not speak both languages, had a basic understanding of the other language. As will be seen, however, regional, linguistic, and ethnic differences were swamped by the scale of the vote in favor of independence in 1991.

In the early 1990s, many saw Ukraine as divided into two parts: the west and center was one region, the east and south (including Crimea) the other. This division was based partially on language, though most Ukrainians were practical when it came to bridging language differences; it was not uncommon to hear two people in conversation on the

street in which one spoke Russian and the other responded in Ukrainian. The perceived east-west difference also reflected the fact that the bulk of ethnic Russians, some 17 percent of the population in 1991, resided in the east and south. The east-west divide has some value for understanding Ukraine, but it is a useful prism only up to a point. In the years after 1991 the line between east and west began to blur; for example, political parties based in the east began to make some inroads in the west and center in the 2000s, and vice versa. Although residents of the eastern areas such as Donetsk and Luhansk wanted good relations with Russia, polls in April 2014 showed that a large portion of the population in the east wished to remain part of Ukraine.

An Empire Collapses

In the run-up to its quiet end, the Soviet Union underwent dramatic changes during Mikhail Gorbachev's time in the Kremlin. Perestroika and glasnost—restructuring and openness—were his watchwords when he became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985. They foreshadowed his willingness to allow greater political space and a degree of democracy and autonomy internally. The external changes in Soviet policy from 1985 to early 1991 were even more striking: conclusion of a treaty banning all U.S. and Soviet land-based intermediate-range missiles; withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan; acceptance of German unification and agreement to withdraw Soviet forces from the former German Democratic Republic; allowance of greater latitude for Warsaw Pact countries to determine their own political course, including no longer insisting on a leading role for the communist parties in those states; and then the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact itself.

Gorbachev did not intend to bring down the Soviet Union, but the forces he unleashed did so. In the Caucasus, the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh weakened Moscow's hold. The strongest push for independence arose in the three Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—whose incorporation into the Soviet Union had never been recognized by the United States. As the Baltic states pushed for greater sovereignty and ultimate independence,

so did other Soviet republics. That included Ukraine, where Volodymyr Shcherbytskiy, head of the Ukrainian Communist Party and a conservative opponent of Gorbachev's reforms, had resigned in 1989. The democracy movement, including the pro-independence Rukh Party, won an impressive 25 percent of the vote in the March 1990 election for the Verkhovna Rada (the Supreme Council of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which would become Ukraine's parliament; it is also referred to simply as the Rada). On July 16, 1990, the Rada adopted a declaration of state sovereignty, one month after a similar declaration had been approved by the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, under the chairmanship of Boris Yeltsin. Among other things, the Rada's declaration asserted the primacy of Ukraine's laws over those of the Soviet Union.

If anything, most of Washington was slow to pick up on the strength of the centrifugal forces gaining momentum within the Soviet Union. In the spring of 1991, however, debate began within the U.S. government on the future of the Soviet Union and the appropriate policy. Views differed in interagency discussions. It was not clear at the White House that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse, and it leaned toward supporting Gorbachev. President George H. W. Bush valued personal relationships with foreign leaders and had developed a close and productive relationship with Gorbachev, including on issues important to Bush, such as German reunification and reducing strategic nuclear arms. The White House view was also shaped by the unfavorable impression that Yeltsin had left in a September 1989 visit to Washington. There was little enthusiasm among those closest to Bush for encouraging the secession train. The Pentagon, in contrast, saw geostrategic advantages in the weakening of the Soviet center and a shift of power to the republics. Defense Department officials, including Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, believed Gorbachev's authority was ebbing, favored engaging Yeltsin, and regarded an independent Ukraine as a positive development, one that could serve as a check on Russian power. Some even seemed open to the idea of a nuclear-armed Ukraine, the better to serve as a block on possible Russian ambitions. A breakup of the Soviet Union, moreover, could push any conventional military threat 600 miles back from NATO territory. Secretary of State James Baker and his team recognized that change was under way but worried

that a Soviet collapse could follow the violent course of the Yugoslavia breakup and lead to a much messier situation; the fate of thousands of Soviet nuclear weapons was high among their concerns.⁵

The U.S. government had eyes on the ground in Kyiv. Foreign service officers Jon Gundersen and John Stepanchuk (from the State Department) and Mary Kruger (from the U.S. Information Agency) arrived in the Ukrainian capital in February 1991 to establish a consulate general. Earlier attempts to open a consulate there had been derailed, first in 1979 by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and then in 1986 by the explosion at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant, just sixty miles north of Kyiv. The three arrived with a mandate to report on developments and gently encourage democracy and market economy reforms but to do nothing that would be seen as encouraging Ukrainian independence. Their reporting, however, reflected the growing popular sentiment for independence and for Ukraine's reestablishing itself as a sovereign state free of the Soviet Union. Since the consulate had no classified communications ability, Gundersen and Stepanchuk made regular trips to Moscow, where they could draft and send classified reporting at the embassy. They found the embassy skeptical about developments in Ukraine and what they might portend for the future of the Soviet Union, but they continued to believe the political trend in Ukraine was very clear. As questions regarding the Soviet Union's future grew, the consulate managed a stream of visits by congressional delegations and former senior officials, including Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

At the State Department, Napper saw two possible policy courses. The U.S. government could conclude that Gorbachev was finished—either because he would ultimately turn out to be at heart committed to the Soviet system, or because he would be overthrown by Soviet hardliners—and turn the focus of American attention to Yeltsin and leaders of the other republics. (In Ukraine, that would be Leonid Kravchuk, then chairman, or speaker, of the Rada.) Alternatively, Washington could stick with Gorbachev and the Soviet Union while engaging the republics—with the exception of the Baltic states, which were a separate issue—in other ways, for example, by establishing consulates. By the summer, many within the U.S. government had come around to the idea of some level of engagement with the republics. The United

States' ability to shape events within the Soviet Union was limited, however. The prevailing wisdom recognized that and argued for riding things out and seeing what would happen.

Bush paid his last visit to the Soviet Union at the end of July 1991. Following a two-day stop in Moscow, he traveled to Kyiv on August 1. Hundreds of thousands lined the streets of the president's motorcade route, giving him an enthusiastic welcome. Bush met briefly at Mariinskyy Palace with Kravchuk (as Rada speaker, he was the nominal head of state of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic). Kravchuk had been born in 1934 in a Polish town that became part of Ukraine after World War II. He joined the Communist Party at an early age and rose as an apparatchik through the ranks, ultimately becoming a member of the Politburo and ideology secretary. Smart, and with good political instincts, he had a sense that things were changing, particularly after the July 1990 declaration of state sovereignty. He adapted accordingly. In the first part of 1991, he sought to be seen as the leader of a new, if not necessarily independent, Ukraine. At the same time, he showed caution, eschewing any anti-Russian lines in public.

Kravchuk told Bush that he was proceeding on the basis of Ukraine's declaration of state sovereignty, cited the difficult economic issues that Ukraine faced, and welcomed the establishment of a U.S. consulate in Kyiv. He indicated his desire to press for greater autonomy though did not raise independence. Acting prime minister Vitold Fokin asked for most-favored-nation trading status. He also sought investment, including in the privatization of Ukraine's industries. Bush said he saw a new opening for relations between the United States and Ukraine, though he added that Washington would "deal officially with the center [Moscow]." But he expected more direct dealings with Ukraine and other republics, as would be allowed by the union treaty that the Soviet republics were in the process of working out.⁶ Moscow, which had become increasingly nervous about political developments in Ukraine and had tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the White House to drop the Kyiv visit, sent Soviet vice president Gennadiy Yanayev to take part in the meeting. Consulate head Gundersen was tasked to pull Yanayev away for a few minutes so that Bush and Kravchuk could have a private word.

Following his meeting with Kravchuk, Bush stuck with a cautious approach in his speech to the Rada, reflecting White House concern

that a sudden or violent breakup of the Soviet Union could adversely affect U.S. interests, in particular the security of Soviet nuclear weapons. Nearly one-quarter of the seats were empty, though Kravchuk told the president that it was a relatively large gathering for the body. While expressing support for “the struggle in this great country for democracy and economic reform,” Bush dismissed as a “false choice” having to pick between “supporting President Gorbachev and supporting independence-minded leaders throughout the USSR.” He warned, “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.”⁷ His speech won polite applause in the Rada, but Ukrainian nationalists panned it, and William Safire in the *New York Times* dismissingly dubbed it the “chicken Kyiv” speech.

Less than three weeks later, on August 19, eight senior Soviet officials (including Yanayev), constituting a self-proclaimed State Committee for the State of Emergency, claimed to have assumed power after asserting that Gorbachev had taken ill in Crimea. The attempted coup lasted just four days, falling apart in almost comical fashion. Gorbachev returned to Moscow as Soviet president. But the failed coup triggered reverberations throughout the Soviet Union, weakening the center and Gorbachev’s authority. On August 24, the Rada declared independence.⁸

Not yet fully convinced that Gorbachev’s days were numbered, Washington waited for what would happen next. State Department officials saw Kyiv as central. If Ukraine indeed broke away, other republics would follow, and the Soviet Union would fall apart. If Ukraine stayed, the Soviet Union might have a chance to survive. The White House believed the U.S. government should not intervene in any overt way. Bush sought to carefully modulate his relationships with Gorbachev and Yeltsin, as the former’s influence waned while the latter’s was on the rise. Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia were the exception. Bush quietly encouraged Gorbachev to recognize their independence. The Kremlin did so in September.

Kravchuk traveled to Washington on September 25. He told Bush at the White House that Ukraine had begun developing its own governmental institutions and expressed confidence that the public would endorse independence in a referendum set for December 1. He noted

that Ukrainian structures had assumed authority as the Soviet Union was “virtually disintegrating.” Ukraine intended to be a non-nuclear weapons state and wanted “direct, diplomatic relations” with the United States. Bush said America would “be on the side of democracy and reform of the economic system.” On some issues, Washington had to deal with the center, “but not to the exclusion of the republics.” Bush indicated that U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union Robert Strauss would have responsibility for the consulate general in Kyiv. He welcomed Kravchuk’s statement on nuclear weapons. He asked Kravchuk whether there had to be an economic union among the Soviet republics “with a center or not.” Kravchuk dismissed the idea: “The center is incapable of doing anything.”⁹

Washington watched as the Soviet government tried to work out an arrangement with the republics. The tea leaves became clearer over the course of the autumn. The consulate in Kyiv predicted a strong majority vote for independence.

The Ukrainian American community, which had organized to support the Rukh movement’s call for independence, increased its push for diplomatic recognition of Ukraine in the fall. Three groups—Ukraine 2000, the Ukrainian National Association, and the Ukrainian National Information Service, assisted by the *Ukrainian Weekly* paper—mobilized letters and petitions from across the country targeted at building congressional interest in and support for Ukraine. Robert McConnell, a political consultant who had served in the Reagan administration, became Ukraine 2000’s government relations committee chairman, drawing on his contacts in the executive branch and on Capitol Hill. The effort produced a draft congressional resolution calling on the administration to recognize Ukraine, with ninety House sponsors and nearly thirty from the Senate. Congress did not pass the resolution as a stand-alone measure, but it did pass it as an amendment to an appropriations bill in November.

The executive branch felt pressure as well. Bush met with a group of Ukrainian Americans at the White House on November 27, just four days before the Ukrainian referendum, and said the United States would “salute independence, and then we will start to take the steps leading to recognition.” He noted 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. With the referendum,

the Ukrainian people will have spoken. “The only question now is how the Ukrainian people can peacefully get what they want.”¹⁰ (Although Bush adjusted his policy, the Ukrainian American community and other Central and Eastern European constituencies saw the president as clinging too long to Gorbachev and slow to accept the Soviet Union’s demise. That would have political consequences for Bush in November 1992.)

The December 1 referendum asked voters whether they supported the August 24 declaration of independence adopted by the Rada. Coincident with the referendum, the voters would also choose among Kravchuk, whom the Rada had appointed acting president, and five other candidates for the presidency. All six made it clear that they favored independence. When Sherman Garnett and Thomas Graham from the Defense Department paid a visit to Kyiv in late November, they found broad support for independence, including among pensioners who hoped for a better economic future.

The State Department dispatched Niles and Napper to Kyiv to observe the referendum. At polling sites, they watched enthusiastic crowds voting yes. The overwhelming vote for independence—90 percent in favor, with turnout exceeding 80 percent of the electorate—surprised the consulate staff as well as many Ukrainians. A serious argument within the U.S. government for sticking with Gorbachev was no longer possible. On December 3, Bush placed a congratulatory call to Kravchuk, who had handily won the presidential election. The U.S. government, however, still held back from formal recognition. As Napper recalled, no one seemed especially enthusiastic about the turmoil that might be unleashed by “plunging a stake into the heart of the [Soviet] beast.”

Kravchuk, Yeltsin, and Belarusian Supreme Soviet chairman Stanislav Shushkevich took care of that. The three met on December 7 and 8 at Belavezhskaya Pushcha in Belarus. The three announced the end of the Soviet Union as “a subject of international law” and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, an as-yet-undefined institution that would link the post-Soviet republics. U.S. officials began communicating with Ukrainian leaders and proposed key principles that would form a basis for recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations, including democracy, respect for human rights, no use of force against political opponents, and market economy reforms.

Baker made a quick December 15–19 trip to Moscow, Kyiv, Minsk, and Central Asia. In meetings with Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Kravchuk, Baker focused on the fate of the large Soviet nuclear arsenal, stressing that it should remain under a single authority and that the post-Soviet states other than Russia should be non-nuclear and accede to the 1968 Nonproliferation Treaty as non-nuclear weapons states. This approach tracked with Washington’s decision to back Russia as the “continuation state” in legal terms, which meant, for example, that Russia would assume the Soviet Union’s permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Baker also described a slightly amended set of principles that would serve as guidelines for U.S. recognition: “self-determination, respect for borders, support for democracy, safeguarding of human rights, and respect for international law.”¹¹

Meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on December 21, leaders of eleven of the Soviet republics endorsed the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Four days later the Soviet Union formally ceased to exist. Yeltsin’s military advisers took charge of the briefcase with the nuclear codes, and the hammer and sickle came down over the Kremlin, replaced immediately by the Russian tricolor. Later that day, on Christmas evening, Bush gave a short televised address to the American people. He announced recognition of Russia, Ukraine, and ten other now independent republics. He noted that Ukraine and several of the other republics had given the United States assurances of their commitment to responsible nuclear security policies and to democratic principles.

Relations Get Started

Baker turned to the Office of Soviet Union Affairs (about to be renamed the Office of Independent State and Commonwealth Affairs) with an urgent tasking. The secretary believed treating the post-Soviet republics as independent states required establishing embassies in each, and he wanted missions on the ground within ninety days. The State Department began assembling small teams of five to seven personnel, who were sent to the capitals of the post-Soviet states with a satellite radio and thin stacks of \$100 bills (credit cards were useless where there were no real banks, and no one knew if Soviet rubles would have any

value). The teams set up working areas in hotel rooms while searching for appropriate office space. U.S. military aircraft delivered pallets with startup kits, including office furniture, office equipment, and—given uncertainties about what awaited in some cities—meals-ready-to-eat and other emergency rations. If an unassigned foreign service officer spoke Russian, he or she could not be slotted into a new job unless Napper confirmed the officer was not needed in one of the new embassies.

The American presence in Kyiv had a head start, given the consulate team already on the ground. Things moved quickly. On January 23, 1992, Gundersen met with Foreign Minister Anatoliy Zlenko and conducted an exchange of diplomatic notes that formally established diplomatic relations. As acting head of what had now become an embassy, Gundersen became the *chargé d'affaires*. Shortly thereafter, the White House announced the president's nomination of Roman Popadiuk to serve as the first U.S. ambassador to Ukraine. A Ukrainian team arrived in Washington in February to set up its embassy. In April, Oleh Bilorus, Ukraine's first ambassador to the United States, took up his post.

Among other tasks, Gundersen and Bilorus set about finding permanent offices for their missions. Gundersen's team worked out of a small office in a run-down apartment building across the Dnipro River from downtown Kyiv until the Ukrainian government made available a former local Communist Party headquarters building located a short drive from the foreign ministry and downtown. An administrative team from Washington agreed to lease the building because it could comfortably accommodate between sixty and seventy-five American and Ukrainian employees, which the State Department envisaged as the maximum size of the official U.S. presence, an estimate that turned out to be wildly off the mark. Gundersen moved into his office, which still contained propaganda posters and multiple direct phone lines to party functionaries. One thing that had to go immediately: the large wall bust of Vladimir Lenin that dominated the building's meeting room, which would later house the embassy's political section (the bust ended up in the bar at the quarters of the embassy's Marine Security Guard detachment). The Ukrainians gave the Russians an identical former local party headquarters building for use as their embassy. But while the U.S. building was centrally located, the Russians found themselves much farther out, on the road to Zhulyany airport. Ukrainian diplomats in Washington spent a year in temporary facilities before relocating to

what became their permanent embassy in Georgetown, near the Key Bridge. It was purchased largely with funds raised by the Ukrainian American community.

The single-minded American focus in the first years of U.S.-Ukraine relations centered on eliminating the nuclear weapons that were located on Ukrainian territory when the Soviet Union collapsed. At the beginning of 1992 almost 2,000 strategic nuclear warheads for intercontinental ballistic missiles and air-launched cruise missiles were in Ukraine, on top of the 2,500 tactical nuclear weapons that were already in the process of being withdrawn by Russia. Early on, Ukraine had stated its intention to denuclearize and become a nuclear-weapon-free state. Washington wanted to make that a reality as soon as possible. The nuclear weapons issue dominated Baker's mid-December 1991 stop in Kyiv as well as visits in early 1992 by Under Secretary of State for International Security Affairs Reginald Bartholomew.

Kyiv understood the importance of the nuclear arms question but had many more items on its wish list for the bilateral relationship—not surprisingly, since the Ukrainians were in the process of founding a state with a full foreign policy agenda. Facing a daunting set of reform needs, Ukrainian officials sought economic assistance and support at the International Monetary Fund and World Bank for low-interest credits. They wanted to expand trade and investment, so they asked for most-favored-nation trading status to increase export possibilities to the United States as well as for a program with the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), which might encourage U.S. investment in Ukraine. Kyiv also wanted U.S. political support in general, which it viewed as an important counterweight to what the Ukrainians anticipated would be a difficult relationship with Russia.

Washington feared that crippling food shortages could lead to hunger and even political unrest in the post-Soviet states in early 1992. The Bush administration organized an international conference of donors to provide humanitarian and other assistance, pledged to provide \$500 million, and put Pentagon veteran Richard Armitage in charge of the U.S. assistance program. As part of this effort, U.S. military aircraft flew food and medical supplies into Kyiv, generating a fair amount of positive local publicity.

Dennis Ross, director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, led a senior interagency team to Kyiv in April 1992. The delegation

included Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz and National Security Council senior director Ed Hewett (Hewett's Directorate for Soviet Affairs had become the Directorate for Russia and Eurasian Affairs; it would later be renamed again, this time the Directorate for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasian Affairs). Whereas Bartholomew's visits focused on the disposition of nuclear weapons, the Ross team had a broad mandate to discuss the overall relationship. In meetings with Kravchuk and other senior officials, Ross and the others conveyed a message of U.S. interest in an independent Ukraine and said the United States was prepared to aid the country's development. They talked about how the bilateral relationship could grow, noting that it could proceed in a way that was not anti-Russia. They described certain principles for Ukraine's development, such as democratic norms, a strong civil society, a market economy, and good civil-military relations; and they encouraged the Ukrainians to move away from a statist model and undertake economic and political reform.

Kravchuk made an official working visit to Washington in early May, the first trip by the president of independent Ukraine to America. The timing was important, as Bush had received Yeltsin for a summit visit in early February, and the administration wanted to balance that with a meeting with Kravchuk. The Ukrainians sought, and Ukrainian American groups lobbied for, a state visit, which would have added some diplomatic bells and whistles, such as a state dinner at the White House. They did not get that, but Bush invited Kravchuk to Camp David. The Ukrainian president also met with Vice President Dan Quayle, Baker, and other Cabinet secretaries, as well as members of Congress and the business community. As expected, nuclear weapons dominated the discussions with executive branch officials. Baker, Kravchuk, and Zlenko discussed the terms for a protocol that would be signed shortly thereafter in Lisbon, in which the Soviet Union's commitments under the 1991 U.S.-Soviet Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) would be undertaken by Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

Kravchuk spent considerable time discussing his concern about Russia and Russian readiness to accept Ukraine as an independent state. He singled out the status of Crimea, whose parliament had just declared independence from Ukraine, subject to a referendum to be held in the summer. Kravchuk called the referendum unconstitutional and accused Russia of stirring up problems, citing Russian vice president Aleksandr

Rutskoy as having made “aggressive statements” when visiting the Crimean Peninsula, where ethnic Russians—many of them retired military—constituted about 60 percent of the population. Bush asked about the status of the Black Sea Fleet, most of which was based in Crimea, including at its main port, Sevastopol. Kravchuk said Kyiv did not want the entire fleet, but Russian negotiators insisted that all the ships belonged to Russia. Kravchuk agreed with Bush on the importance of the United States staying engaged with Russia and said Ukraine also wanted relations with Russia, but “equal” relations.¹² Russian behavior regarding Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet clearly raised deep concern in Kyiv.

U.S. officials also raised the need for economic reform in order to attract trade and investment. Kravchuk and his team seemed uncertain about what types of reform to undertake, which left their American interlocutors uncertain about how hard they should push.

The two presidents issued a joint declaration, “U.S.-Ukrainian Relations and the Building of a Democratic Partnership.” It noted the two countries’ commitment to democratic values and advancing economic freedom. The declaration asserted U.S. readiness to use technical assistance programs “in areas like defense conversion and food distribution” to assist reform and recovery, and noted the conclusion of a trade agreement conferring most-favored-nation trading status. (Kyiv, however, remained subject to the Cold War–era Jackson-Vanik amendment to the Trade Act of 1974 and would have to wait until 2006 for Congress to grant it permanent most-favored-nation status.) The presidents stated that their two countries could work together to promote a more secure and democratic Europe, and would regularize a bilateral dialogue on such questions. The declaration attached priority to nonproliferation and reaffirmed Kyiv’s previously stated decision to eliminate all nuclear weapons on its territory, with assistance from the United States. The presidents concluded by noting that “the United States and independent Ukraine have laid the foundation for a strong and special partnership.”¹³

The joint declaration captured the nascent nature of the relationship less than four months after the formal establishment of diplomatic relations. It recorded Ukraine’s specific commitment on denuclearization—the key issue for Washington—while laying out a framework for issues that could fill out the U.S.-Ukrainian agenda. The reference to U.S.

assistance in defense conversion and food distribution reflected the fact that Congress had just begun to consider legislation for broader assistance. The FREEDOM Support Act would not be enacted until October 1992. Likewise, the declaration noted the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council as the multilateral venues for discussing questions of security and democracy in Europe. NATO had not yet begun to think seriously about how it would engage Central European countries, let alone former Soviet states.

In addition to the joint declaration and trade agreement, Kravchuk's visit produced other minor agreements that began to add some limited substance to the framework of the U.S.-Ukraine relationship. It was agreed that OPIC would open its programs for Ukraine and that the Peace Corps would begin sending volunteers. The sides also agreed on extending agricultural credits under guarantee by the Commodity Credit Corporation for use in purchasing American foodstuffs.

While the embassies in Washington and Kyiv went about the day-to-day business of bilateral relations, the Bush-Kravchuk summit in May was the last high-level engagement of 1992. Kravchuk faced a host of problems at home: the basic tasks of nation building and creating the institutions of an independent state; dealing with a faltering economy on the verge of freefall; and sorting out what was becoming an increasingly messy divorce from the Soviet Union. He would have welcomed more high-level American attention in the second half of 1992, but Bush focused on his campaign for a second term, a campaign in which domestic economic questions constituted the dominant issue. Baker, who had driven U.S. policy on denuclearization, left the State Department for the White House in August to assist in Bush's reelection effort.

In June, Popadiuk arrived in Kyiv, presented his credentials, and took up his post. He and the small embassy staff spent considerable time reporting on political and economic developments. Popadiuk discussed economic reform with a variety of senior Ukrainian officials. They saw the need for reforming the economy but had little idea how to move forward or how to overcome the communist economic legacy. In one meeting with a visiting U.S. official, Fokin said he was pushing the cabinet of ministers on building a market economy but that the government still had to determine the correct market prices for

commodities—a statement that hardly reflected an understanding of how markets worked. Embassy interlocutors continued to express concern about Russia and the political, military, and economic threat it could pose to newly independent Ukraine.

Popadiuk also set about building a full-service embassy. By the end of the summer, the consular section began issuing visas, so Ukrainians no longer had to apply at the embassy in Moscow. The first contingent of Peace Corps volunteers—slated to do small-business training—arrived in November. (By the end of the 1990s, Ukraine would host one of the largest contingents of Peace Corps volunteers in the world.) The U.S. Agency for International Development established a mission at the embassy, although in its first months it could provide only limited technical and humanitarian assistance, since Congress did not appropriate significant funds for the FREEDOM Support Act until the second half of 1993. Working with the International Finance Corporation, it was able to launch the first small-scale privatization effort in Lviv at the beginning of 1993.

The Clinton Administration

Bill Clinton took office as the forty-second president of the United States in January 1993. He spoke by phone to Kravchuk almost immediately, addressing not just nuclear weapons but also the economic and political elements of the bilateral relationship. However, while the Ukrainians might have hoped for a different approach (on both nuclear arms and the overall relationship), the new administration quickly made clear that it shared the Bush administration's priority: for Ukraine to eliminate the nuclear weapons on its territory and accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear weapons state. Ukraine had committed to these objectives, but by the end of Bush's term in office not a single strategic nuclear warhead had actually moved out of Ukraine, nor had Kyiv begun the internal legislative process of accession to the NPT. Secretary of State Warren Christopher wrote Zlenko about this in February, and the issue topped the agenda when Zlenko visited Washington in March. During Zlenko's meeting with Clinton at the White House, the president stressed the need for Ukraine to ratify START as part of its denuclearization commitment, calling the treaty a

“precondition” for a “successful” bilateral relationship. As if to underscore the point, the White House let it be known that, if Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma came to Washington in April, a meeting with Clinton would not be possible. Kuchma should instead defer the visit until after Ukraine had delivered on denuclearization by ratifying START and acceding to the NPT. (Kuchma ended up canceling his trip.)¹⁴

In the spring, ambassador at large for the New Independent States Strobe Talbott oversaw an administration review of policy toward Ukraine. Talbott, who had once shared a house with Clinton when both were students at Oxford University, had a long and passionate interest in the Soviet Union. He translated and edited Nikita Khrushchev’s memoirs, published as *Khrushchev Remembers* in the 1970s, and had a lengthy career as a reporter at *Time* magazine, where he covered Europe and U.S. foreign policy. He wrote extensively about arms control, publishing several books documenting U.S.-Soviet negotiations on nuclear weapons. While the National Security Council chaired most interagency groups in the Clinton administration, Talbott ran the group managing policy toward the New Independent States. In addition to Talbott, Napper from State, Under Secretary of the Treasury Lawrence Summers, deputy assistant secretaries of defense Ashton Carter and Graham Allison, and Nicholas Burns and Rose Gottemoeller from the National Security Council took part in the review. No one in the U.S. government questioned the basic nuclear approach. Ukraine could not keep nuclear weapons; it had to deliver on its commitment to denuclearization. Washington would continue to push Kyiv on this. 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 (non-nuclear) security links. That kind of relationship would become possible as the nuclear arms issue was resolved.¹⁵

With the policy review complete, Talbott previewed the basic conclusion to Deputy Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk in early May. Tarasyuk was an intelligent and experienced diplomat who had served at the Ukrainian mission to the United Nations in the early 1980s. A nationalist who held a deep skepticism about Russia and its intentions toward his country, he robustly defended Ukraine’s positions and

prerogatives—sometimes overplaying his hand, to the annoyance of U.S. officials. Their positions at times annoyed Tarasyuk as well. He nevertheless became a key shaper of Ukraine's policy toward the United States and later of its effort to draw closer to the European Union and NATO, which won him few fans in Moscow. For most of the 1990s (and later in the 2000s), he would be an important interlocutor for senior U.S. officials.

Talbott set off for Kyiv to share the review's conclusions there. The embassy succeeded in arranging a meeting with Kravchuk, which took some effort, as the Ukrainians were still smarting over Kuchma's inability to get a meeting at the White House. Talbott handed over a letter from Clinton, in which the U.S. president described his desire to expand the U.S.-Ukraine relationship and stated that Talbott could talk about the full range of issues that would constitute such a relationship. Talbott made clear that the U.S. government was ready to discuss political, economic, and security questions. He also told Kravchuk that Washington was prepared to help Kyiv and Moscow find solutions to some of the problems between them.¹⁶

As Washington began to consider how it would allocate FREEDOM Support Act assistance, one question was how much would go to Ukraine, to Russia, and to the other New Independent States. The Ukrainians understandably argued that, as the largest of the states (other than Russia), they should receive an appropriate share of the assistance. The administration was sympathetic to that view but mindful that the other states also had dire needs. U.S. officials viewed the allocation of the new funding for Cooperative Threat Reduction assistance, launched by senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar to provide funds to help reduce the former Soviet nuclear arsenal, as a useful card in getting Ukraine to move on the nuclear agenda. Those funds became available before FREEDOM Support Act assistance.

In late June, Talbott testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs. He said the U.S. government sought to broaden its relationship with Kyiv and laid out five themes underlying the American approach: Ukraine had a crucial geopolitical role to play in Central and Eastern Europe, and developments there would affect the security of the region; an independent, sovereign, and prosperous Ukraine was important to U.S. interests; the United States would conduct its relationship with Ukraine independent of its relationship

with Russia; Ukraine had legitimate security concerns that could be addressed by a series of bilateral and multilateral links; and implementation of the May 1992 Lisbon Protocol, in which Ukraine agreed to implement START and accede to the NPT, would advance Ukraine's security.¹⁷

Denuclearization as soon as possible remained the major issue for Washington. From the summer of 1993 onward, however, nuclear weapons no longer figured as the only big question for discussion between the two governments. Another such question was the Ukraine-Russia relationship. It was not going well.

The Challenge of Russia

Most could see from the beginning that there would be tensions between Kyiv and Moscow. Many in Moscow seemed to believe that they could simply bluff and pressure Ukraine. Given that and Kyiv's desire to build stronger links to the United States and the West, it came as no surprise that Russia would consistently find a place in the U.S.-Ukrainian dialogue. Ukrainian presidents regularly and openly described to their American counterparts the ups and downs in Ukraine-Russia relations, as Kyiv sought to manage tensions in Crimea, regularize the status of the Black Sea Fleet, secure Russian acknowledgment of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and enlist U.S. support for its positions on these issues. Popadiuk found Russia a regular subject of his conversations around Kyiv.

Above and beyond the nuclear weapons issue, the Ukrainian government faced a series of challenges in dealing with its large neighbor. The links between Kyiv and Moscow were not only historical and cultural. Much of the Soviet leadership came from or spent significant time in Ukraine, which made a vital economic contribution to the Soviet gross domestic product. Despite the devastation caused by forced collectivization and World War II, Ukraine's fertile black earth made up the Soviet bread basket. Until the discovery of the gas fields in western Siberia, Poltava in central Ukraine was the prime production area for Soviet natural gas. Ukrainian cities such as Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk became centers of heavy industry production, with the Donetsk-

Luhansk region becoming the most economically prosperous in the Soviet Union after Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). Ukrainian industry made a special contribution to Soviet military production, accounting for some 30 percent of arms and arms-related manufacturing, including missiles and rockets, aircraft, and aircraft engines.

The breakup was difficult for many Russians to accept. As a senior Russian foreign ministry official remarked to me in 1994, “In my head, I understand that Ukraine is an independent country; in my heart, it will take time.” For some, it plainly would take a lot of time. Many Russians, particularly those who aspired to retain, or regain, great power status for Moscow, felt the loss of Ukraine far more painfully than the loss of the other republics. Ukraine figured prominently in Russian domestic politics in the early 1990s, as nationalists came to view the outcome of the December 1991 referendum as an enormous loss for Russian state interests. (Years later, President Vladimir Putin would describe the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century.)

All this only served to feed fears in Kyiv that Russia did not accept Ukraine’s independence. As the smaller party, Ukrainians lacked confidence in dealing with Moscow and showed great suspicion of almost any Russian proposal, particularly Moscow’s efforts to build the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a transnational institution in the post-Soviet space. Ukrainian diplomacy strived to keep the CIS a weak mechanism, concerned that Russia would dominate it in ways that would undermine Ukraine’s interests. When the Rada ratified the agreement on the CIS, it did so with multiple reservations, and Ukraine never ratified the subsequent, more formal charter. This reflected in part the importance that Ukraine attached to its sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. Ukrainian officials preferred to deal with Moscow bilaterally rather than within the context of the CIS and sought early negotiation of a bilateral treaty of friendship and cooperation that would include a reaffirmation of those three key points.

Kyiv showed a tendency early on, which continued through most of the 1990s, to worry that the United States would shape its policy toward Ukraine as a component of its Russia policy. To be sure, Washington had major interests in dealing with Moscow. Among other things, Russia still held most of the Soviet Union’s nuclear weapons, had to

complete withdrawal of Russian military forces from Germany and the Baltic states, had assumed the Soviet Union's permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and maintained remnants of the Soviet global role. On big questions, such as German reunification, START, and the 1991 Gulf War, the Kremlin had proven a helpful partner. U.S. officials, however, sought to deal with Ukraine and Russia on their own merits, while recognizing the many issues that connected the two. On a number of issues regarding Ukraine, Washington took positions that left Moscow unhappy.

A second big question between Kyiv and Moscow concerned Crimea and Sevastopol, the largest city in Crimea and homeport of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet. Ethnic Russians, including a large number of retired military, constituted about 60 percent of the population on the Crimean Peninsula and nearly 70 percent of the population in Sevastopol. Crimea had been part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic until 1954, when First Secretary of the Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev had the peninsula transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic to mark the three hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Pereyaslav. When the Soviet Union collapsed and the United States recognized the New Independent States on December 25, 1991, Washington's recognition of each republic in its existing borders reflected the belief that any attempt to redraw borders could lead to an unraveling of many lines on the map and cause geopolitical chaos. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this aspect of U.S. policy toward the post-Soviet states. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations worried that territorial, ethnic, and even confessional tensions could plunge the region into conflict. In the American view, Crimea unquestionably belonged to Ukraine. Although Yeltsin usually quietly accepted that view—indeed, he had already recognized the other republics in their existing borders—there was no coherent line in the Russian capital because the government itself was in some disarray. Others supported separatist elements on the peninsula, and the Supreme Soviet (later, the Duma) raised questions about Crimea's status almost from the beginning.

U.S. officials closely followed the situation in Crimea, recognizing its potential as a tinderbox between Kyiv and Moscow. They had a lot to follow. In January 1992, Yevgeniy Ambartsumov, chair of the Supreme Soviet's Committee on Foreign Affairs, questioned the legality of Crimea's transfer in 1954, and other parliamentarians proposed a

draft resolution to nullify the decision. In April, Rutskoy traveled to Crimea and said the peninsula should be part of Russia. In May, the Supreme Soviet declared the transfer had been made “without juridical force” and several months later asserted that Sevastopol had not been part of Crimea because a 1948 decree had given it the status of an “independent administrative-economic center,” though the 1954 transfer clearly superseded the 1948 decree in practice. On regular visits to Sevastopol, Moscow’s mayor Yuriy Luzhkov continually claimed it to be a Russian city.

Yeltsin wished to avoid a domestic political dispute over the question but periodically reaffirmed, as did his foreign ministry, that Sevastopol and Crimea belonged to Ukraine. The issue flared up again in mid-1993. On July 9, the Supreme Soviet voted unanimously to assert Russian ownership of Sevastopol, as well as to call for the preservation of “a single, united, glorious Black Sea Fleet.”¹⁸ Yeltsin distanced himself from the Supreme Soviet’s action the next day, saying, “There is no better way to make war with Ukraine. It is not a responsible decision. We must return to a cautious policy and negotiations with Ukraine.”¹⁹ The dispute between Yeltsin and his nationalist and communist critics over Ukraine represented a subset of the broader tensions that would erupt into violence in October 1993, leading to the infamous Russian army shelling of the parliament building where Yeltsin’s opponents held out.

The Ukrainian government immediately denounced the Supreme Soviet vote. The American embassy in Kyiv prepared a statement that referred to Sevastopol and Crimea as “integral parts” of Ukraine, which became the U.S. government line. That stance won appreciation from Ukrainian officials, and it encouraged supportive statements for Ukraine by Britain and other European countries. The Ukrainian government appealed to the UN Security Council, which on July 20 produced—with tacit support from the Russian delegation—a statement by the president of the Security Council reaffirming the Security Council’s support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity.

A third major issue, closely related to the question of Sevastopol and Crimea, was the disposition of the Black Sea Fleet. In 1992 the fleet comprised some 240 major warships and submarines, small combatant vessels and support ships, as well as shore-based supporting air units and naval infantry. Although some extremists in the Supreme

Soviet proposed that Russia assert full control of the fleet—and of the entire Soviet military structure—the Russians offered to negotiate. Kyiv and Moscow reached a tentative agreement in summer 1992 on a fifty-fifty split of the Black Sea Fleet's vessels. Since the Ukrainian navy did not need its full allotment, Kyiv agreed to transfer almost two-thirds of its ships back to Russia in exchange for a debt write-off, an arrangement that some in Kyiv challenged but which ultimately held.

The more vexing problem proved to be finding agreement on the terms for continuing to base the Russian portion of the fleet in Sevastopol and other Crimean ports. Sevastopol possessed the finest harbor on the Black Sea and had been founded by the Tsarist military in 1783 specifically to serve as home port for the Black Sea Fleet. The post-Soviet Russian navy lacked facilities at Novorossysk and other Russian ports to accommodate all its ships. Russian negotiators sought a long-term lease that, in effect, would give Russia sovereignty over the entire city of Sevastopol. That was absolutely unacceptable to Ukrainian negotiators, who instead proposed to lease specific facilities and made clear that Kyiv intended to maintain full sovereignty over the city.

A fourth issue concerned economics. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian and Russian economies were closely intertwined and would remain so for years to come. Ukraine remained in a common ruble zone with Russia until 1993, which had an impact. As Russia liberalized its prices, prices rose in Ukraine, contributing to the country's hyperinflation in 1993. Ukraine also amassed large ruble debts to Russia.²⁰ Russia in the 1990s provided Ukraine its largest export market. The two economies were particularly linked by Ukraine's energy needs. Ninety percent of the oil for Ukraine's six large refineries came from Russia, as did all of the fuel rods for its nuclear power reactors, a Russian monopoly that would take almost twenty years to break. As for natural gas, Ukraine's largest energy source, more than 75 percent was imported from Russia or from Central Asia on pipelines that transited through Russia. Given the economic dislocation in Ukraine at the beginning of the decade, Kyiv often had trouble paying for its energy imports. Kyiv also disputed Moscow's claim to all of the Soviet international debts and assets.

All of these issues combined to make a full and problematic agenda between Ukraine and Russia. Wanting good relations with both coun-

tries, and hoping that a serious contretemps between the two might be avoided, Washington paid close attention. Later, it would actively involve itself in an attempt to resolve some of the problems.

Reflections

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. An earlier understanding and acceptance in the U.S. government of the coming end might have affected U.S. policy somewhat. It could have positioned U.S. policymakers to begin dealing earlier with the aftermath of the collapse. But an earlier understanding would not have affected the dynamics of the process that led to the end of the Soviet Union and to Ukraine regaining its independence.

Once Washington saw that the collapse was inevitable, it moved quickly to establish relations with Ukraine and the other New Independent States. The State Department moved with uncommon speed to get embassies in place in each of the new capitals. Still, putting in place the tools to engage the new states took time. For example, the FREEDOM Support Act, which would become the primary channel for moving U.S. assistance to the post-Soviet states, was not enacted until October 1992, and initial funding was not approved by Congress until autumn 1993, almost two years after the end of the Soviet Union. Thus the kinds of assistance that Washington could offer the new Ukrainian state were limited.

Kravchuk eagerly worked to develop relations with the West, and the United States in particular, as he sought a counterweight to Russia. He recognized that Ukraine faced a difficult set of issues with its eastern neighbor, including what to do about former Soviet nuclear weapons and military forces such as the Black Sea Fleet; how to divide up Soviet assets and liabilities; and how to structure the myriad post-Soviet economic and energy relationships between Ukraine and Russia. And he had to deal with these issues while facing a Russian political elite,

including many in the leadership, that did not fully accept the idea of Ukraine as an independent state.

The U.S. government focused its attention primarily on the nuclear arms issue and ensuring the elimination of the nuclear weapons and strategic delivery vehicles in Ukraine. This topic, which I discuss in detail in chapter 2, 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.

In retrospect, the U.S. government erred during the first two years of its engagement with Ukraine in focusing so heavily on the nuclear weapons issue. 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 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.

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. In any event, 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.

Many in Washington saw Ukraine as one of the post-Soviet states best positioned to succeed, but the new country faced difficult challenges. First, it had to develop the political institutions, ideally democratic, of an independent state. Second, it had to build a market economy from the crumbling remains of the Soviet command economy. Third, it had to devise an independent foreign and security policy appropriate for a country of Ukraine's size and geopolitical circumstances. Any one of these challenges would have been tough to tackle. Kyiv had to face all three, at a time of great uncertainty and with its economy—like virtually every other post-Soviet economy—about to go into a severe contraction. Washington might not have fully appreciated the depth of these challenges. It looked to help Kyiv move forward on all three challenges but did not define priorities among them; doing so, in any case, would have been a hard call. How could one compare the importance of building working political institutions with building the institutions of a functioning market economy?

Moreover, Ukraine had to tackle these tasks without undergoing a revolution of the kind that brought new leaders to positions of power in Central European countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic. For the most part, the “new” Ukrainian political elite—including the presidents, prime ministers, and many cabinet ministers during the decade of the 1990s—emerged from the nomenclature that had occupied positions of power in Soviet times. Indeed, had one been asked to project in 1989 who would be running the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1999 (had it lasted that long), many of the names would have been the same as those who ran independent Ukraine in the 1990s. It should not have been a surprise that Vitold Fokin, who had headed the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic's government planning agency before becoming prime minister of an independent Ukraine, would note that the state—not supply and demand—still had to determine the correct market prices for commodities. Like many of the others assuming key positions in the Ukrainian government, his background hardly prepared him to shape a modern, democratic, market-oriented European state. A clearer understanding of this might have tempered American expectations for early progress.

At the same time, the U.S. government's machinery and funding to promote and assist reform in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states needed time to develop. Had Washington had the tools in place to press Kyiv on economic reform immediately after Ukraine regained independence and before the economic decline accelerated and new patterns of corruption took hold, could it have succeeded in encouraging Ukraine's leadership to move more rapidly to implement real change?

In the first months and first years after Ukraine regained independence, the country's domestic politics and economic policy were marked by a fair degree of chaos, perhaps understandably. Kravchuk focused his attention on state building. Absent a skilled elite familiar with the workings of a market economy and a democratic political system, and with limited policy capacity, Kyiv's ability to make dramatic reforms had constraints. At the same time, unfortunately for the country, a number of the elite saw opportunity in the chaos and the weakened rule of law. Oligarchs who would come to dominate so much of economic and political life in the country began to build their power.