

US-Ukraine Relations In The Post-Soviet Era

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Abstract

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 radically altered the world order. The Cold War was over, and the USSR became 15 independent states. This interdisciplinary research focuses on the political history of the bi-lateral relationship between the US and Ukraine in the post-Communist Era, primarily by analyzing executive-level interactions between both states. The purpose of this study is to explain how US-Ukrainian relations have evolved from Ukraine's independence from the USSR to the present day in an effort to determine the future of US-Ukrainian relations in the short- and long-term future. This study includes an analysis of US government documents, official communications by the US, Ukrainian, and Russian governments, media reports from all three states, and the integration of numerous academic publications on the subject. Our central argument is that the policies pursued by the United States and Ukraine in this time frame reflect what International Relations scholars term "realism". In sum, all of the realism criteria are met in the case of US-Ukraine Relations. This leads us to conclude that as states, the US and Ukraine will continue to act in a rational self-interested manner, for their own self-preservation, without regard to the expressions of international organizations.

Keywords: United States-Ukraine Relations, Ukraine, United States, International Relations, Realism, Former USSR, Russia, Donbas, Crimea, Orange Revolution, Maidan, US Foreign Policy, Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma, Victor Yushchenko, Viktor Yanukovich, Petro Poroshenko, Vladimir Putin

Introduction

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 radically altered the world order. The Cold War was over, and the USSR became 15 independent states. The United States of America was then faced with reinventing its foreign policy in the region, and began the process of establishing formal political relations with each newly independent state of the former-USSR. Among these is Ukraine, a state that has undergone tremendous changes over the past twenty-five years.

This interdisciplinary research focuses on the political history of the bi-lateral relationship between the US and Ukraine in the post-Communist Era, primarily by analyzing executive-level interactions between both states. Therefore, the subject matter is neatly divided into the following eight historical periods of US-Ukraine Relations that mirror the executives elected to the presidency of each state:

1. 1991-1992: Leonid Kravchuk & George H.W. Bush

Relations between the US and Ukraine begin with Ukraine's transition to democracy and the election of longtime Communist Party Leader Leonid Kravchuk as the newly independent state's first democratically elected president. Then-US President George H.W. Bush assisted Ukraine's transition with an eye toward dismantling the country's nuclear arsenal.

2. 1993-1994: Leonid Kravchuk & Bill Clinton

Bill Clinton pressured Ukraine to become a non-nuclear state to sign a Non-Proliferation Treaty and establishing a Trilateral Statement between the US, Ukraine and Russia to guarantee Ukraine's security.

3. 1994-2000: Leonid Kuchma & Bill Clinton

During Clinton's second term in office, which coincided with Leonid Kuchma's reign of power in Ukraine, the pursuit of NATO membership for Ukraine, the resolution between Ukraine and Russia over the stationing of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, the adoption of the Trilateral Statement and Budapest Memorandum that was to guarantee Ukraine's territorial integrity, and funding to shut down the Chernobyl plant were all major themes.

4. 2001-2004: Leonid Kuchma & George W. Bush

By the time George W. Bush ascended to the US presidency, Kuchma's scandalous involvement in the Heorhiy Gongadze murder and Ukrainian sales of military equipment to Iraq were beginning to unravel and had dire effects on US-Ukrainian relations.

5. 2004-2008: Victor Yushchenko & George W. Bush

The Orange Revolution popular movement that brought Victor Yushchenko to power, and George W. Bush's reelection set the tone for a revival in US-Ukraine relations.

6. 2009-2010: Victor Yushchenko & Barack Obama

The demise of the Orange Revolutionaries resulting in the ironic election of Victor Yanukovich, and the shift in US foreign policy objectives brought upon by the election of Barack Obama to the US presidency resulted in a new era for both Ukraine and the United States.

7. 2010-2014: Viktor Yanukovich & Barack Obama

Ultimately, Yanukovich's rejection of the EU Association Agreement would bring US-Ukraine relations to the forefront of politics in both states. Unlike the Orange Revolution a decade before, the protest movement that came to be known as the Euromaidan would turn violent, serving as a catalyst that would result in a dramatic series of events including Yanukovich's self-exile to Russia, the Russian annexation of Crimea, revolts by pro-Russian forces in the Donbas; US economic and military assistance to Ukraine, the downing of a Malaysia Airlines by pro-Russian forces acting in Ukraine, and a series of US economic sanctions on Russia.

8. 2014-Present: Petro Poroshenko & Barack Obama

Eventually, the election of chocolate magnate Petro Poroshenko to the Ukrainian presidency, and the pursuit of the Minsk I & II ceasefires between Ukrainian and Pro-Russian forces would lead the US and Ukrainian foreign policies to become intertwined.

The purpose of this study is to explain how US-Ukrainian relations have evolved from Ukraine's independence from the USSR to the present day in an effort to determine the future of US-Ukrainian relations in the short- and long-term future. This study includes an analysis of US government documents, official communications by the US, Ukrainian, and Russian governments, media reports from all three states, and the integration of numerous academic publications on the subject. Our central argument is that the policies pursued by the United States and Ukraine in this time frame reflect what International Relations scholars term "realism".

US-Ukraine Relations 1991-1992: Leonid Kravchuk & George H.W. Bush

Following Ukraine's independence, the US and in particular the 41st US President George H. W. Bush administration (1989-1993, referred to hereafter as Bush I to avoid confusion with his son and 43rd President George W. Bush), viewed Ukraine as a delicate area with a potential to ignite and disrupt relative peace in the region. Therefore, American authorities initially backed Russia as a regional power because they believed Russia's central power could maintain democracy and peace in the region and had agreed to continue the track towards the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) (Yekelchuk 2015, 69).

The Bush I administration initially preferred to deal with Russia and not so much Ukraine because it had a prior history of negotiation with the USSR (Kubicek 1999, 548). The 1991 Nunn-Lugar Act was initiated to secure and dismantle nuclear weapons in the former USSR. The 1991 act also provided funding and expertise for former Soviet states, including Ukraine to dismantle their nuclear weapons (Gak 2004, 106-135).

The Ukrainian Parliament declared its independence from the USSR on August 24, 1991, Leonid Kravchuk was elected as Ukraine's first president as an independent nation, and on December 25 1991, the USSR was dissolved. A month later, the US approved a memorandum for the Secretary of Defense for humanitarian assistance to provide the former USSR, including Ukraine (US Government Publishing Office 1992a). On January 22, 1992, President Bush I stated, "As we begin a new year and chart our course for the rest of this decade, let us bring equal commitment to the challenge of helping to build and sustain democracy and economic freedom in the former USS.R., just as we did in winning the cold war. Let us help the people throughout the Independent States to make the leap from communism to democracy, from command economies to free markets, from authoritarianism to liberty. And then let us pull together to win the peace in this post-Cold-war era (US Government Publishing Office 1992b)."

The nuclear weapons stationed in Ukraine, and Ukraine's inability to negotiate with its former partner Russia, meant the US would have to assist in negotiating an agreement between the three in order to reduce and disarm some of the nuclear weapons located in the former Soviet Union (Fink 1997, 12). Roman Popadiuk became the first US ambassador to Ukraine on March 27, 1992, and the first US embassy was established in the country (American Reference Library 2001, 1) Following Popadiuk's installment, Bush sent a letter to congressional leaders stating "we have already seen an improvement in the willingness of these new governments to adhere to arms control obligations (US Government Publishing Office 1992c).

President Kravchuk then visited the US on May 6, 1992 and met with Bush I to sign agreements on economic and security issues. After the "successful meeting", Bush I voiced his opinion on the outcome of the negotiations, "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 (US Government Publishing Office 1992d)." Kravchuk said that about 50% of the nuclear tactical weapons had been withdrawn and the rest would be removed by July 1, 1992 (US Government Publishing Office 1992d). The meeting also included talks about economic assistance from the US to help rebuild and establish a new currency in Ukraine through a commodity credit of \$110 million dollars to allow the sale of American commodities that could possibly strengthen the

free market system and expand trade with Ukraine (US Government Publishing Office 1992d). After the meeting, Bush I thanked Kravchuk for the agreements signed by both governments and changed Ukraine's status to a most-favored nation, which was a long way from its status only two years prior, and hinted toward the establishment of future agreements. President George H. W. Bush expressed the US stand to support a "democratic" Ukraine, which sent a clear signal that Ukraine should remain on a road towards democracy or face losing US assistance.

Ukrainian concerns over the heavily ethnic-Russian population regions in Ukraine became apparent soon after the USSR's dissolution. Significantly, Kravchuk addressed his concerns over the issue of Ukrainian security during a joint press conference with Bush I by discussing political forces in Russia and their attempted territorial claims to parts of Ukraine. Kravchuk wanted some form of guarantee to ensure the national security of Ukraine, specifically from Russia. There was a question on whether Ukraine was afraid of losing the Crimea region to Russia. Kravchuk responded that the 1954 Act to transfer Crimea to the Republic of Ukraine from the USSR was "totally legitimate", but that there are "some forces from the outside that stimulate and instigate separatist moods" (US Government Publishing Office 1992d). Kravchuk provided the Russian vice-president Alexander Rutskoy's statement that "Crimea is Russian" as an example and proclaimed his wish for peace in the region (US Government Publishing Office 1992d). The highly ethnic Russian populated Crimea region has been vastly contested by ethnic Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, and Russians alike. In sum, while Bush I's concerns dealt specifically with the NPT, President Kravchuk was more focused on the territorial and economic issues that revolved around the future security of an independent Ukraine. On July 2 1992, Bush I submitted a yearly report on NPT and thanked the presidents of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus for their cooperation to fulfill the withdrawals of tactical nuclear weapons from the former Soviet Republics (US Government Publishing Office 1992e).

US-Ukraine Relations 1993-1994: Leonid Kravchuk & Bill Clinton

William Jefferson Clinton (Bill Clinton) became president of the United States of America in January 1993 and served two terms until January 2001. The Clinton administration believed that improving relations between the US and Ukraine was critical because if Ukraine returned to Russia it would also mean the return of Russia as an empire (Yekelchuk 2007, 195). In addition, Ukraine's nuclear armament was a threat to the US and world peace in general. Therefore, the Clinton administration switched from the "pressure" tactic mostly used by the previous Bush I administration and focused more on making Ukraine a partner in the negotiations in order to

gain international security through the NPT. The strategy pursued early on by the Clinton Administration illustrates a change from the previous administration, and was more inclusive of Ukraine in its negotiations.

On January 8 1994, President Clinton sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on the assistance to the states of the former Soviet Union (US Government Publishing Office 1994a). In the memorandum, President Clinton expressed the importance in assisting Ukraine and the region to improve security for the US and the world in general. President Clinton stated, “The political and economic transformation of the Newly Independent States (NIS) of the former Soviet Union into peaceful market-oriented democracies will directly reduce the security threat to the United States and lead to substantial savings in the cost of the defense of the United States (US Government Publishing Office 1994a).” In a news conference held in Kyiv on January 12, 1994, President Clinton spoke about the willingness of all three presidents (Clinton, Kravchuk, and Russian President Boris Yeltsin) to sign the agreement that would commit Ukraine to eliminate its nuclear arsenal and how the agreement would increase Ukraine’s security as well as the entire world. Their meeting centered around the strategic importance of the Ukrainian territory, a US invitation for Ukraine to participate in NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PFP), and the enhancement and expansion of economic relations between both countries (US Government Publishing Office 1994b). President Clinton also announced an enterprise fund set up for the region to assist new small businesses and existing firms that sought to privatize and he expressed that US policy guarantees to assist Ukraine economically and in terms of security, depended on Ukraine’s pledge to follow through with its plan denuclearize. President Kravchuk recognized nuclear weapons as the most important problem facing the world during that time period and acknowledged the importance of economic support to Ukraine as well as his willingness to participate in NATO’s PFP (Clark and McGwire 2008, 1281-1287).

The process to make Ukraine a Non-Nuclear State would become closer following the signing of the Trilateral Statement between US, Russia, and Ukraine. On January 14, 1994, the Trilateral Statement was signed by all three leaders at a meeting in Moscow. After the signing ceremony, President Kravchuk said that Ukraine was also guaranteed compensation for the enriched uranium once the nuclear warheads had been dismantled as well as security assurances from both US and Russia (US Government Publishing Office 1994c).

In March 1994, President Clinton informed Congress about his resolution to add Ukraine to the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which would allow Ukraine access to the US market by adding it to the list of developing countries (US Government Publishing Office 1994d). At a

news conference to welcome President Kravchuk and his delegation at the White House, President Clinton expressed his contentedness with Ukraine's signing of the TA, which allowed the removal of 1,800 nuclear warheads from Ukraine and also ratified START I (US Government Publishing Office 1994d). President Clinton thanked and praised the Kravchuk administration and Ukrainians for their ability to move forward with democracy in Ukraine.

Notably, President Clinton re-assured Ukraine of US support for the independence, economic stability and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Clinton also hinted at additional economic support from international financial institutions, Nunn-Lugar funds and G-7 nations that totaled to \$700 million in assistance for the year 1994 (US Government Publishing Office 1994d). Clinton was asked about Russian imperialism and whether it threatened the stability of an independent Ukraine. President Clinton responded by pointing to the "Crimean issue" as an example that things could be worked out through Ukrainian/Russian policies (US Government Publishing Office 1994d). However, President Clinton seemed more concerned for the immediate issue of the NPT and less attentive to any territorial disputes between Ukraine and Russia. When asked about additional US assistance, President Clinton reiterated the US willingness to assist Ukraine with \$700 million for denuclearization and economic assistance.

In sum, President Leonid Kravchuk left a lasting image as a great compromiser for Ukraine because of his ability to accommodate both sides of the political spectrum. President Kravchuk led the way for the independence of Ukraine and followed through with policies that appeased both the US and Russia while at the same time assuring Ukraine's place as a new democracy. During his administration, Kravchuk was able to negotiate Ukraine's deal on NPT in exchange for economic and security assistance from the US. The US was more focused on the denuclearization of the region and most of the necessary steps to remove the nuclear weapons from Ukraine had been worked out. Kravchuk succeeded in making the Ukrainian language the national standard for education and civil service that contributed to a sense of Ukrainian identity. However, the language issue, the use of the new blue and yellow Ukrainian flag and the new national anthem led to serious opposition in the heavily ethnic Russian areas of the east, which contributed to the division of Ukrainian society. This, along with blatant corruption, and economic collapse led to early presidential elections held in June and July 1994 when Kravchuk was defeated and succeeded by his Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma.

US-Ukraine Relations 1994-2000: Leonid Kuchma & Bill Clinton

During Kuchma's first presidential term, Ukraine became the first country of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to sign a

cooperation agreement with NATO as part of the Partnership for Peace Program in 1995, and announced its desire to join the European Union in 1996 (Yekelchik 2015, 70). It was also at this time that there was a coincidence of interests that inflated US-Ukraine relations to what was then called a “strategic partnership” where Ukraine was described as the “keystone in the arch” of European security (Kuzio 2003b). It seemed that during Kuchma’s first term, Ukraine was on its way to becoming a successful functioning democracy and forging strategic partnerships with other democratic countries. US-Ukraine relations improved between 1994-1996 because the US saw Kuchma as a reformer whose government program would obtain support from the IMF and World Bank; Ukraine’s reward for this was becoming the third-largest recipient of US aid (Kuzio 2003b). With the US by its side, it was hopeful that Ukraine in the 1990s could become a functioning democratic state and a future member of NATO.

Five months after Leonid Kuchma was elected president of Ukraine, Kuchma met with US President Bill Clinton on November 22, 1994, to discuss economic and nuclear reform. During the November 1994 meeting, President Clinton assured President Kuchma that the United States would continue to work with Ukraine to dismantle its nuclear arsenal while providing foreign aid (Clinton & Kuchma 1994). Kuchma and Clinton signed the Charter of Ukrainian-American Partnership, Friendship, and Cooperation and the Agreement of Cooperation on Space Research for Peaceful Purposes. As for Ukraine’s interest in joining NATO during Kuchma’s presidency, Clinton encouraged it economically, politically, and in terms of security; and assured that he would not get in the way or do anything that would exclude the possibility of Ukrainian membership to NATO (Clinton & Kuchma 1994). The Ukrainian parliament voted overwhelmingly to make Ukraine a nuclear-free country and agreed to carry out two major arms control agreements on December 5, 1994.

Ukraine’s parliament placed a few conditions on the treaty, known as the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, whereby the US, Russia, and the United Kingdom agreed they would respect Ukraine’s borders and never use nuclear weapons against it (Greenhouse 1994). The Budapest memorandum was reaffirmed in 2009 by the United States and the Russian Federation. Within the memorandum, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States express their commitment to respect the independence, sovereignty, and the existing borders of Ukraine. The US, Russia, and UK agreed to refrain from economic coercion designed to subordinate Ukraine’s sovereignty and also stated that the three countries would seek immediate United Nations Security Council action to provide assistance to Ukraine if Ukraine should become a victim of aggression or an object of a threat of aggression in which nuclear weapons are used. Finally,

Russia, the US, and the UK agreed not to use any nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear weapon state of the NPT, except in the case of an attack on themselves, their territories or dependent territories, their armed forces, or their allies (Budapest Memorandums on Security Assurances 1994).

In February 1996, Freedom House honored Kuchma as the 43rd recipient of the Freedom Award for contributions to world peace, regional security, and inter-ethnic cooperation. The organization had strong ties to Ukraine in 1996 and chaperoned Kuchma's trip to the US, where he met with President Clinton and spoke about Ukraine's painful transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system of government, and the importance of Ukraine's new constitution that would help deepen the democratic development of Ukrainian society and legally provide safeguards against the threat of returning to authoritarian political control (Lew 1996).

On May 31, 1997, Russian President Boris Yeltsin visited Kuchma in Kyiv to sign a Friendship Treaty. Yeltsin specifically stated that within this treaty, Russia would respect and honor the territorial integrity of Ukraine, despite the urging of Russian leaders to try to claim the city of Sevastopol in the Crimea as Russian (Specter 1997). The main points of the treaty stress political and commercial cooperation between the two countries, and it includes a joint statement on the Black Sea Fleet that permitted Russia to operate on Ukrainian territory. The Agreement on Status and Conditions of Deployment of the Russian Black Sea Fleet on the Territory of Ukraine established the terms of the Russian Black Sea Fleet presence in Ukraine for 20 years, and stipulated that its activity would be carried out in accordance with universally accepted norms of international law (Ukrainian Weekly 1997). It also assured the people of Sevastopol that their social well-being would remain important to the leaders of both countries and that the city would not become a military annex of Russia (Specter 1997).

That same year, the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus was founded in the US House of Representatives. The creation of the Caucus was announced to the public at a reception held at the Embassy of Ukraine in the US, commemorating the first anniversary of the adoption of the Ukrainian Constitution written under Kuchma. The Caucus is aimed at expanding bilateral Ukraine-US cooperation, including authoring legislation, disseminating information to members of Congress about current political, economic, social, and cultural events occurring in Ukraine, as well as drafting recommendations on the further development of US policy toward Ukraine (Embassy of Ukraine in the United States of America 2012). The main goal of the Caucus is to support Ukraine in democratization and market-oriented reforms, as well as to shape the US Congress official position regarding Ukraine's success in their implementation.

President Kuchma narrowly won a second term as president in 1999 thanks to his control of the media and his willingness to engage in political manipulation, including ballot stuffing (Yekelchik 2015). The following year, President Bill Clinton visited Kyiv to advance and deepen the strategic partnership between the US and Ukraine. Clinton announced that President Kuchma would shut down the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and the US would pledge \$78 million for the Chernobyl Shelter Fund to contain any radiation from the destroyed reactor, and another \$2 million to expand efforts to improve safety at Ukraine's other power plants (Clinton 2000). Clinton announced a 5-year, \$25 million business development program to help small and medium-sized businesses in Ukraine to participate in the growing economy. It was also mentioned that because of Ukraine's efforts to prevent missile proliferation, the US eliminated commercial space quotas to expand US cooperation with Ukraine's space program (2000).

Ukraine's record on human rights and democratization since the late 1990s has been negatively assessed by many Western governments and think tanks (Kuzio 2003a, 23). This is due, in part, by a stream of allegations on the inner workings of the Kuchma regime known as "Kuchmagate" that were publicized in the Western media. On September 16, 2000, a journalist named Heorhiy Gongadze disappeared. Gongadze was known for speaking out openly against the government and used his popular radio show and website to expose the widespread corruption in Kuchma's cabinet (Bailey 2013). Gongadze's body was found decapitated and burned in November 2000. The questionable handling of the body and the autopsy reports created the impression that someone was trying to hide something, and suspicion focused on Kuchma's government (D'Anieri 2007). Gongadze's body was found the same month the tapes were released that contained a recording of Kuchma ordering his Interior Minister, Yuriy Krawchenko, to deal with Gongadze. Krawchenko is then heard on the tapes telling Kuchma that this was to be undertaken using his "White Eagles" special police unit (Kuzio 2003a, 23). Due to this political scandal, the Committee to Protect Journalists, based in the US, ranked President Kuchma in the top ten worst "enemies of press freedom" in 1999 and 2001 (Kuzio 2003a, 23). The Kuchmagate scandal was also one of the first scandals that led to a decline in the relationship between the US and Ukraine. Beginning around the year 2000, the US-Ukraine strategic partnership that had developed under President Clinton floundered and Ukraine's relationship with the US fell to its lowest level by the end of Clinton's presidency; Kuchma became isolated in the West (Kuzio 2003a, 26).

US-Ukraine Relations 2001-2004: Leonid Kuchma & George W. Bush

On December 15, 2000, student protesters known as the Pora Youth Group gathered in Kyiv's Independence Square and demanded accountability from their government, calling on Kuchma to step down from office (Bailey 2013). By February 2001, the opposition parties that ran in the 1999 elections joined the protesters, and the European Union began an inquiry into the Gongadze murder case (Bailey 2013). The movement also gained support from the Ukrainian Socialist party, represented by Oleksandr Moroz, and a selection of other marginalized political groups in Ukraine. Protesters carried signs and created slogans to protest the corruption and oppression of their government, calling their movement "Ukraine Without Kuchma." On March 9, 2001, the government ended the crisis by forcibly removing the protesters, arresting many of them, as the Berkut (special police forces) struck protesters with batons (Bailey 2013). These violent actions by the Kuchma government solidified the Ukrainian opposition around Victor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko.

In the United States, George W. Bush (hereafter referred to as Bush II to avoid confusion with his father), assumed power on January 2001, and within two months of taking office wrote a letter to Kuchma assuring him of the important place Ukraine held in American foreign policy and the important role Ukraine had in building a stable and prosperous Europe (Bush 2001). Nevertheless, Bush II refused to meet with Kuchma until the Gongadze scandal was resolved. After the September 11 terrorist attacks on the US, everything that was not directly related to the war on terror was downgraded in the list of US foreign policy priorities, and the entire post-Soviet space found itself in that category (Dubovyk 2006, 2).

By September 2002, US-Ukraine relations took an even sharper turn for the worse as an FBI probe showed Kuchma had authorized the sale of Kolchuga aerial surveillance systems to Iraq (Kuzio 2003a, 25). In response to the military equipment sales, the US put a hold on a portion of its aid to Ukraine. US foreign assistance to Ukraine, which had been the third largest after Israel and Egypt in the 1990s, declined by nearly half from \$229 million in 2001 to \$125 million in 2002 (Kuzio 2003a, 26). After the Iraqi scandal became public, Kuchma was cold-shouldered by Western and NATO leaders at a November 2002 NATO summit (Kuzio 2003a, 25). US Congressman and co-chairman of the Ukrainian Caucus, Bob Schaffer, wrote a letter to Bush II urging him against meeting with Kuchma during the summit.

Prior to Bush II attending the 2002 NATO summit in Prague, the letter stated that Kuchma clearly expressed his intention to violate United Nations sanctions imposed in Iraq by approving the sale of Kolchuga aerial surveillance systems (Brama 2002). Schaffer wrote that Kuchma's behavior

was reckless and he directly threatened the lives of US soldiers and those of US allies. Schaffer also urged Bush II to isolate Kuchma and his associates while improving relations with other Ukrainian officials. Schaffer claimed that Ukraine is vital to the long-term security of the US and NATO allies, and it is in America's interest to support the people of Ukraine in their quest for permanent independence.

By 2003, Relations between the US and Ukraine were at their lowest level since the USSR disintegrated (Kuzio 2003a, 26). However, Kuchma sent Ukrainian troops to Iraq in September of 2003 as part of the international stabilization force to win the good graces of the US and Great Britain, and on June 5, 2003, the Ukrainian parliament approved to send 1,800 peacekeeping troops to Iraq. (Zalizniak 2003). During the Iraq War, the Ukrainian newspaper Dzerkalo Tygnia published a poll that showed 90% of Ukrainians opposed military solution to the crisis and only 4.6% approved the war; while 38% of Ukrainians agreed that Saddam Hussein was dangerous for peace in the world, 57% said the same for George W. Bush (Zalizniak 2003).

On September 11, 2004, Kuchma sent a letter to Bush II promising that Ukraine would remain true to its commitments as an active participant in the Anti-Terrorism Coalition and would do its best to counter terrorism (Ukrainian Weekly 2004). Clearly this letter was written to Bush II as a way to regain the US's trust after the Kuchmagate and Kolchuga scandals. US-Ukraine relations towards the end of Kuchma's second term were in decline, to say the least, and many US officials were hesitant to trust Kuchma's politics. The stage was now set for a *de facto* referendum on Kuchma's ten years in office marred by crises and scandals, with the presidential election scheduled for October 31, 2004 (Kuzio 2005).

US-Ukraine Relations 2004-2008: Victor Yushchenko & George W. Bush

The 2004 Ukrainian presidential election was mired in controversy. Victor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich had received 39.22% and 39.88% of the vote, respectively. Since neither gained the required 50% to win the election outright, a run-off election was scheduled to be held three weeks later. The election was serving as a benchmark for Ukrainian democracy- future relations with the United States and the West as a whole depended upon free and fair elections for the next Ukrainian president. The United States did not officially prefer either candidate, though Yushchenko was viewed as more friendly with the West. The US emphasis was on free and fair elections.

After the election, the Ukrainian Central Election Commission reported that Mr. Yanukovich had won the run-off, with 49.42 percent of the

vote in comparison to Mr. Yushchenko's 46.7 percent, though most exit polls had shown former Minister of Finance Yushchenko having a significant lead over Prime Minister Yanukovich (108 S.R. 485). Nongovernmental organizations (NGO), Ukrainian observers, and representatives for foreign governments, among them US Senator Richard Lugar, an Indiana Republican, had witnessed brazen violations of Ukrainian campaign law and "international standards for democratic elections" (108 S.R. 485). Less than a day after the election ended, before the winner had even officially been declared, tens of thousands of protesters had gathered at Independence Square (the Maidan) in Kyiv. Protests broke out across Ukraine, as more and more Ukrainians gathered at the Maidan. The United States government, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and other international actors were quick to condemn the election, with the exception of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Russian President Vladimir Putin allegedly congratulated Prime Minister Yanukovich on his win before the Central Election Commission (CEC) had even officially declared the results; the Bush administration filed a complaint with the Russian ambassador to the United States in response (Torbakov 2004). The Orange Revolution, as the protests were now being called, remained remarkably nonviolent, with neither the protestors nor Ukrainian government resorting to violent measures.

On 24 November, the Ukrainian Supreme Court barred the CEC from publishing the official election results, preventing Mr. Yanukovich's inauguration as president until the court could review the allegations of voter fraud. Eventually, both candidates agreed on the need for another election. The Ukrainian Supreme Court ruled that the November 21 election was invalid and that a new runoff election would be scheduled for December 26 (108 S.R. 487). The US Department of State was quick to respond to these developments and provided an additional three million dollars in funding for the 26 December election to "support election observers, exit polling, parallel vote tabulations, training of election commissioners, and voter education programs" in addition to the \$13.8 million in election-related assistance that had already been provided in 2004 (US House 2004). Future policy, regardless of which candidate won, depended upon a free and fair election.

After the rampant fraud of the earlier elections, early reports of the December 26 run-off by observer organizations were promising. Overall, the electoral process had improved significantly over the past month with international observers reporting more balanced media coverage, the ending of editorial instructions for journalists by the government, and less abuse and misuse of state resources in pressuring voters. As in the prior elections, CIS observers differed from their Western counterparts in their analysis of the

election. The Russian reaction was a sole voice of dissent against the other observing organizations. Yushchenko announced his victory just hours after the polls closed, though his rival Yanukovych refused to concede the election until the CEC announced the official results on January 10. Though the United States commended Ukraine for a democratic election immediately after it had taken place, it reserved its congratulations for Yushchenko's election until the official results were announced. On January 22, 2005, the evening before Yushchenko's inauguration, Bush II personally telephoned Yushchenko to congratulate him on his victory and affirm the United States support of Ukraine.

In early February 2005, Senators John McCain and Hilary Clinton, a Democrat from New York, led a delegation of 11 members of Congress to Kyiv and met with newly appointed Prime Minister Tymoshenko and other members of the Ukrainian government to discuss Ukraine's dependency on Russian energy and the normalization of trade relations between the US and Ukraine (Nuzhinskaya 2005).

In Ukraine, in contrast to the optimism of the United States, the reaction to the Orange Revolution and second run-off election was somewhat mixed. Less than six in ten Ukrainians believed that the December 26 election was "completely or mostly fair;" that number rose to 87% for Yushchenko supporters and plummeted to 13% for Yanukovych supporters (IFES 2005a, 3). More importantly, the revolution had somewhat alienated Crimea and eastern Ukraine from the rest of the country. The differences reported between Yanukovych and Yushchenko supporters were magnified in these areas. Reflecting their ethnic makeup, they were far more likely to support strengthening relations with Russia in comparison to Ukrainians in other areas. This rift would continue to grow over the upcoming years.

The next significant step in US-Ukraine relations was at the NATO Summit in Brussels in late February 2005. President Yushchenko was the only non-NATO head of state to attend, and he met with Bush II in person for the first time before the summit. President Bush stressed that "it's up to President Yushchenko and his Government and the people of Ukraine to adapt the institutions of a democratic state... but we want to help them achieve that work" (US Government Publishing Office 2005a). To that end, he announced additional funding from the United States towards NATO's newly created small arms disarmament program for Ukraine (US Government Publishing Office 2005a). Separately, a few weeks later the House authorized an additional \$33.7 million in assistance for Ukraine in an emergency appropriations act (*Cong. Rec.* 2005, 151, pt. 31, H1471), although this amount was nearly doubled after President Yushchenko's visit to the United States in April 2005.

At the summit President Yushchenko announced, “Ukraine has made its position clear about joining the Membership Action Plan” (NATO 2005). Shortly after the summit, however, the government of Ukraine announced that it was withdrawing all Ukrainian troops from the NATO mission in Iraq by the end of the year. In response, Senator Lugar stated that this withdrawal “was not a plus factor” in Ukraine’s relationship with the United States but the Yushchenko administration was handling the situation “tactfully” and he remained enthusiastic about the prospects of economic reform in Ukraine (Bihun 2005).

President Yushchenko’s visit to the United States in April 2005 was a marker of the growing relationship between Ukraine and the US. Together, Yushchenko and Bush II reiterated Ukraine’s intention to “move closer to, and ultimately join European, Euro-Atlantic and international institutions” with full US support (US Government Publishing Office 2005b). The press release announced the two presidents’ support of permanent normal trade relation status between the two nations, mirroring bills that had already been introduced in Congress (US Government Publishing Office 2005b). They announced the creation of a dialogue about Ukraine’s energy sector between the energy departments of each nation for the “restructuring and reform of Ukraine’s energy sector,” which was dependent on Russian natural gas (US Government Publishing Office 2005b). In addition to a general expansion of healthcare-related assistance for Ukraine, the United States provided an additional \$45 million towards the Chernobyl Shelter Implementation Plan, though it was noted that in the future “US assistance to Ukraine will particularly focus on solidifying democratic advances through anti-corruption and rule-of-law programs... and other steps to improve electoral institutions and practices” (US Government Publishing Office 2005b). Last, to facilitate contact between Ukraine and the United States, visa requirements in Ukraine for Americans were eliminated while the United States reduced visa fees for Ukrainians. President Yushchenko addressed a Joint Session of Congress during his visit. He stressed the reforms that Ukraine had been undertaking for the past several months, noted the increased independence of the media and the government’s commitment to judicial reform, and assured that the parliamentary elections scheduled for March 2006 would be free and fair. He reiterated his government’s intentions to strengthen ties with the West, with a “vision of the future [with] Ukraine in a united Europe” and that “Ukraine wishes to guarantee security to its citizens... it is only logical that we target our efforts towards the integration to NATO” (*Cong. Rec.* 2005, 151, pt. 38, H1785). The goal of Yushchenko’s visit to the United States was to “establish a new era in Ukraine-US relations... a new Ukraine offers the US a genuinely strategic partnership” (*Cong. Rec.* 2005, 151, pt. 38, H1785). Overall, President Yushchenko’s visit

marked the beginning of a major step forward in Ukraine-US relations that continued to manifest through the rest of 2005.

In early May 2005, at the administration's request, Congress increased the emergency appropriations allocated to Ukraine in March from \$33.7 million to \$60 million in aid earmarked for the "government of Ukraine's highest priorities for political and economic reform, including anti-corruption initiatives and support for the upcoming parliamentary elections" (*Cong. Rec.* 151, pt. 38, H3007). In June, US Senator Chuck Hagel, a Republican from Nebraska, led a high level delegation to Kyiv to meet with senior Ukrainian officials where they discussed "strengthening bilateral ties in defense and economic affairs" and he "congratulated the new Ukrainian government on its commitment to adopting market-oriented economic reforms that will promote a healthy business climate and ensure long-term prosperity" (Embassy of the United States to Ukraine 2005).

In late August, Senator Lugar, escorted by freshman Senator Barack Obama, a Democrat from Illinois, travelled to Kyiv to discuss an expansion of the 1991 Nunn-Lugar Act, which had established the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program to fund the elimination of weapons in the former Soviet Union. The new agreement brokered by Senators Lugar and Obama included initiatives to expand biological threat capabilities in Ukraine by funding the creation of "epidemiological laboratories that store biological pathogens and [to] establish a national network of epidemiological monitoring stations" that could effectively combat outbreaks of infectious disease "whether naturally occurring or as a result of bioterrorism" (Sedova 2005). The senators also discussed economic relations with the Ukrainian government. On August 31, the Office of the US Trade Representative announced that it would be ending a \$75 million sanction on Ukrainian imports to the United States in response to the Rada passing laws that improved intellectual property rights in Ukraine, further easing access to the WTO (US Trade Representative 2005).

In December 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke to students at Taras Shevchenko University in Lviv. Secretary Rice praised the political and economic reforms that had occurred over the past year, and told the students that "the United States now imagines a Ukraine that serves as an anchor of democratic stability in Europe and Eurasia. The United States will help Ukraine to implement the necessary political and economic reforms to achieve the goal of membership in the European Union and the World Trade Organization" (US Department of State 2005).

While the prospect of strengthening US-Ukraine relations and Ukrainian efforts toward democratic and economic reform remained positive in the United States throughout 2005, it was not matched by a similar enthusiasm in Ukraine. Less than four in ten respondents believed the March 2006 parliamentary elections would be somewhat or completely free and fair

and support for President Yushchenko, the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Rada had all plummeted by around 20% in only nine months (IFES 2005b, 3). The Party of Regions, the bloc of former Prime Minister Yanukovych was already taking a significant lead over the fractured Orange coalition parties by the time of the survey as well, with just under one in five respondents answering that they would vote for the Party of Regions if the election was held on the upcoming Sunday, foreshadowing the results four years later (IFES 2005b, 21).

Early in 2006, the primary focus of US-Ukraine relations was on closer economic ties between the two nations and further improvement of Ukraine's economic situation. The Generalized System of Preferences benefits for Ukraine was reinstated and Congress passed legislation normalizing trade relations with Ukraine. Bush II signed the bill into law on March 23, remarking that it was "the beginning of a new era in our history... The cold war is over, and a free Ukraine is a friend to America and an inspiration to those who love liberty," and "our nations' friendship will grow" as a result of increased trade (US Government Publishing Office 2006). Ultimately, however, these growing economic ties in early 2006 were somewhat offset by the results of the March 26 election that propelled Yanukovych's Party of Regions back into a prominent position in the Rada, leading to a cooling of relations between the United States and Ukraine. The OSCE chose Representative Alcee Hastings, a Democrat from Florida to serve as the special coordinator for the OSCE observers present during the March 26 elections, which the organization found to be free and fair (Ukrainian Weekly 2006a).

A month later, speaking in Bulgaria, Secretary of State Rice commented that "The Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian people will have to decide whether or not [joining NATO] is something that they wish to pursue," referring to the Party of Regions opposition to Ukraine's membership in NATO (Embassy of the United States 2006). In early June, Bush II's planned trip to Kyiv was "postponed," "due to the lack of a government in Ukraine" after coalition talks between the former Orange parties had still not resulted in an agreement (Ukrainian Weekly 2006b).

Relations between the United States and Ukraine continued to deteriorate in 2007. During a speech at the Embassy of Ukraine, Minister of Foreign Affairs Arseniy Yatsenyuk summarized the political infighting in Ukraine as "domestic problems... what is going on right now is part of a normal political process" (Bihun 2007). Minister Yatsenyuk extended thanks to the United States for staying out of the affair and added, "Ukrainian political problems should be resolved by Ukrainian politicians and not by the US Congress or government" (Bihun 2007). The Bush administration maintained its distance through 2007. Early in September, USAID

announced that it was cutting all funding to the US-Ukraine Foundation (USUF), a NGO that the editors of the *Ukrainian Weekly* claimed had “an excellent track record—one that may be second to none in helping Ukraine by working with what the foundation likes to call its ‘democratic modernizers’” (Ukrainian Weekly 2007). That same month, Tymoshenko replaced Yanukovich as Prime Minister after parliamentary elections, leading to warmer relations between the Bush administration and Ukraine began in 2008. The focus during this time was on Ukraine’s eventual joining of NATO. Relations with Ukraine were viewed as part of US relations with Russia. The renewed support for Ukraine joining NATO was partially in response to Russian threats against Ukraine earlier in the year (US Senate 2008, 4). In testimony before the US Senate, James Townsend, Jr. of the Atlantic Council stated, “Ukraine represents both an emotional and strategic center of gravity for Russians, and Ukrainian membership in NATO raises, for Russians, not just misplaced fears of NATO encroachment on its borders, but a shrinking of what Russian strategists see as their sphere of influence. But, Russian pressure should have no control over the decisions that a sovereign nation like Ukraine should make about what institutions it wants to affiliate with” (US Senate 2008, 69). Notably, then-Senator Obama asserted that “Russia cannot have a veto over which countries join the alliance” (US Senate 2008, 86). Overall, the hearing concluded that a MAP for Ukraine was necessary not only in recognition of the reforms over the previous years, but also simply in an attempt to curb Russian influence in the region.

In a show of public support, President George W. Bush made his first official state visit to Kyiv on March 31-April 1, 2008, on his way to NATO’s Bucharest summit. President Bush praised Ukraine’s actions continuing cooperation with NATO, noting that “Ukraine is the only non-NATO nation supporting every NATO mission,” and pledged the full support of the United States in persuading NATO to grant MAP status (US Government Publishing Office 2008). Ukraine was not extended a MAP at the summit. At the summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin allegedly snapped at President Bush, stating “Do you understand, George [W. Bush], that Ukraine is not even a state” (Burne, Rachkevych, and Marson 2010).

The Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 in support of separatist movements cast serious doubts on the ability of the West to guarantee Ukrainian territorial integrity. President Yushchenko visited Washington in September and met with Bush II, but their joint statement carefully avoided any mention of the crisis in Georgia. On December 19, 2008, Secretary of State Rice and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Volodymyr Ohryzko signed the US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership. While it was an affirmation of the renewed relations between the two nations during 2008, it was also a last attempt by the Bush II administration to curb Russian

aggression in the region without the support of NATO. The first section of the charter is concerned with maintaining Ukrainian territorial integrity, with principle 1 stating “Support for each other’s sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders constitutes the foundation of our bilateral relations” (US Department of State 2008).

US-Ukraine Relations 2009-2010: Victor Yushchenko and Barack Obama

The government of Ukraine was unsure where it stood in relation to the United States after President Barack Obama took office in January 2009. Both President Obama and Vice President Biden had been friendly with Ukraine during their tenure as US Senators. While the Obama administration would continue to oppose Russia’s zero-sum view of foreign relations, Vice President Biden stressed that “the last few years have seen a dangerous drift in relations between Russia and [NATO]... it’s time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should be working together with Russia” (The White House 2009a). To reassure Ukraine that this did not mean a similar reset for relations between the United States and Ukraine, Vice President Biden visited Kyiv in July 2009. However, Vice President Biden was careful to never state that the United States supports Ukraine joining NATO or being granted a MAP. Instead, he only brought up US support for “deepening ties” between NATO and Ukraine (Office of the Vice President 2009b). For the rest of the year, relations with Ukraine focused on economics rather than security. In December, following a visit to Washington by Foreign Affairs Minister Petro Poroshenko, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) restored its programs in Ukraine, stimulating investment by US companies (Embassy of the United States 2009).

The lead-up to the January 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine witnessed more in-fighting between former Orange allies Yushchenko and Tymoshenko, while Victor Yanukovych secured an early lead in the polls. By November 2009 he was the most popular candidate, with 31.2% of respondents saying they would vote for him, followed by 19.1% of Ukrainians supporting Tymoshenko (IFES 2009). President Yushchenko was by far the least popular of the major candidates with only 14% of Ukrainians having a positive opinion of him and less than 4% of Ukrainians claiming that they would vote for him in the upcoming election (IFES 2009).

None of the candidates received the required majority needed to win outright, but in a February 7 2010 run-off, Yanukovych defeated Tymoshenko by a margin of 3.5% (Zawada 2010). Thus, a grand irony emerged in Ukrainian politics when the people elected the candidate accused of rigging the 2004 election which sparked the Orange Revolution. To

further the ironic twist, President Obama congratulated Yanukovich three days before the official tally was announced, while Russian President Dmitry Medvedev cautiously only congratulated Yanukovich for his “election campaign, which received a high evaluation from international observers,” (The White House 2010a and Zawada 2010).

US-Ukraine Relations 2010-2014: Viktor Yanukovich and Barack Obama

Upon assuming the presidency, Yanukovich assured various European partners that accession to the European Union was one of Ukraine’s top aims, noting “European Union membership remains Ukraine’s strategic goal” (Alexe 2010). Despite Yanukovich’s promises for a healthy balance between the West and Ukraine’s neighbor to the east, his administration pulled Ukraine closer to Russia reversing various diplomatic cleavages created by Yanukovich’s predecessor, Yushchenko.

In April 2010, US President Barack Obama and Yanukovich released a joint statement reaffirming the partnership between the United States and Ukraine, vowing to uphold and build upon the United States-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership the two countries signed in December 2008. The statement was another hopeful gesture by Western actors who wished to encourage the new administration to lean further Westward and away from its historic ties with Russia (The White House 2010b). Ukraine under Yanukovich nearly fell into bankruptcy as oligarchs looted the country’s coffers and deepened decades of corruption Ukraine had yet to completely eradicate.

Though Yanukovich faced scrutiny by various international actors and Ukrainian citizens alike, the turning point in his increasingly unpopular administration came in November 2013 when he declined to sign the country’s much anticipated EU Association Agreement, an agreement that took more than two decades to secure. Described as a “miracle [that] did not happen” (Euronews 2013), Yanukovich’s government suddenly backed out of the agreement, retreating from the country’s long journey to gain closer ties to the West, instead opting to renew relations with Russia. Immediately following the decision, the US Department of State expressed its disappointment, but affirmed that the US “stand[s] with the vast majority of Ukrainians who want to see this future for their country” (US Department Of State 2013a).

In the immediate aftermath of Yanukovich bowing to Russian pressure, tens of thousands of Ukrainian citizens took to the country’s capital to protest the decision on November 21, 2013. The subsequent protests became known as the Euromaidan as demonstrators held continuous public protests in Kyiv’s main Maidan Nezalezhnosti or “Independence Square,”

the same site of the country's infamous Orange Revolution in 2004. For the second time in less than a decade, the actions of Viktor Yanukovich motivated thousands to descend upon the square in protest. The initial protests remained peaceful, with few exceptions of vandalism and outbursts of skirmishes between protestors and the Berkut, Ukraine's special police force employed by the government's Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Peaceful demonstrations turned violent on November 30 as police attacked Maidan protestors in an attempt to disperse them from the square, injuring dozens of people which triggered hundreds of thousands of protestors – roughly 700,000 according to Ukrainian media (Hanenkrat 2013) – to march toward the Maidan on December 1. Over the next few days, protestors created makeshift camps in the Maidan, complete with tents, barricades and campfires and masses gathered in downtown Kyiv in ways somewhat reminiscent of the Orange Revolution. Despite relatively peaceful demonstrations in downtown Kyiv, in the early morning of December 11, in what appeared to be a coordinated attack, Berkut police forces surrounded the Maidan where some 15,000 protestors had gathered and attempted to destroy the makeshift barricades scattered about the Maidan; protestors and police clashed violently.

The acts of violence inflicted upon protestors garnered international outrage, particularly among US representatives. Secretary of State John Kerry condemned the events, stating, “The United States expresses its disgust with the decision of Ukrainian authorities to meet the peaceful protest in Kyiv's Maidan Square with riot police, bulldozers, and batons, rather than with respect for democratic rights and dignity. This response is neither acceptable nor does it befit a democracy...” (US Department Of State 2013b). Though US officials were quick to extend their support for the protestors, the United States, particularly in terms of foreign policy, had been largely uninvolved in Eastern Europe for some time. The gesture, limited strictly to words of encouragement for the protestors, highlighted the Obama administration's tendency to prioritize issues of international concern, an administration much more hesitant to engage in conflicts that did not directly affect the nation, unlike its predecessor.

Despite the United States' verbal encouragement, Moscow outright condemned US presence and support in their former republic, calling US involvement in Kyiv “the desperate subversion of Ukraine” (Robles 2013), while Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov warned that “[United States] interference in domestic processes in Ukraine may have very serious consequences” (Interfax-Ukraine 2013a). Russia's contempt was historically consistent with its fear of western encroachment into former Soviet satellite states or republics. With thousands of protestors in Kyiv emboldened by US encouragement and upset with the increasingly corrupt

and pro-Russian Yanukovich, Ukraine, one of Russia's last strongholds in keeping the West at bay, seemed to be slipping away.

On January 16, 2014, Ukraine's parliament passed sweeping anti-protest legislation that were, in many ways, as outrageous as the process by which they were approved: a show of hands (BBC News 2014d). The United States was quick to condemn the laws, expressing concern over their shockingly undemocratic nature. US Department of State Spokesperson Jen Psaki issued a statement regarding the passage of this legislation, noting that the measures were pushed through "without adhering to proper procedures" and that "the substance of the Rada's actions...cast serious doubt on Ukraine's commitment to democratic norms" (US Department Of State 2014a). Additionally, Secretary of State John Kerry described the laws as "anti-democratic," "wrong," and "extremely disturbing" (US Department Of State 2014b).

The passage of the January 16 anti-protest laws pushed protests in a much more violent direction. Ukraine's Euromaidan rapidly descended into chaos deliberately orchestrated by far right, radical, and arguably fascist groups. The notable state-funded Russia Today (RT) published numerous stories describing the events unraveling in Kyiv as peaceful protests "usurped by masked rioters with guns" (Russia Today 2014a) and "an attempt at a coup by radicalized protestors" (Russia Today 2014c). The Russian media's continued and unwavering labeling of these radical protestors in Kyiv as fascists, anti-Semites, and neo-Nazis sparked fueled a passive-aggressive journalistic debate between Russian and western media outlets who insisted that "Euromaidan officials are not fascists, nor do fascists dominate the movement" (BBC News 2014e) and preferred to label Right Sector as a "right-wing coalition" with "unstinting nationalism" (Kramer 2014). Russia, however, did not buy into this narrative, and condemned the violent protestors attempting to seize control of government buildings in Kyiv.

In a series of phone conversations with President Yanukovich on January 23, 27, and 28, United States Vice President Joe Biden repeatedly urged Yanukovich to call for an immediate de-escalation of the violent standoff between protestors and police, and urged him to repeal the "anti-democratic laws" passed by Ukraine's Rada earlier that month (The White House 2014f, 2014g, 2014h). During an emergency session of the Rada on January 28, Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov tendered a sudden resignation and the dominant Party of Regions compromised with opposition leaders to all out repeal, or at least lessen the intensity of, the anti-protest laws passed less than two weeks prior.

In an attempt to address the clear, immediate economic needs of Ukraine, officials from the US and EU began talks of assembling an aid

package for the restless country, what *The Wall Street Journal* called the US and EU's way of "stepping up efforts to sway the outcome of the political crisis in Ukraine" (Norman, Entous, and Cullison 2014). Indeed, both the United States and key members of the EU hoped that stimulating Ukraine's economy would aid in the country eventually implementing a new, more pro-Western government. Although the bid only hinted at US efforts to influence the political environment of Ukraine, an intercepted and subsequently leaked telephone conversation between two top US officials that emerged in early February all but cemented speculation about direct US involvement in Ukraine, rather than encouragement.

In a "private" conversation between US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt the two discussed how to alleviate the political and economic crisis in Ukraine by seemingly installing opposition members as leaders in a new government. The conversation between Nuland and Pyatt laid bare "a deep degree of US involvement in affairs that Washington officially says are Ukraine's to resolve" (Gearan 2014) and Russia, predictably, condemned the US for what Moscow called a "clear breach" (Macdonald 2014) of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances which assured the United States would respect Ukraine's independent sovereignty.

Meanwhile, tensions in Kyiv continued to mount. Maidan protestors marched on Ukraine's parliament on February 18 where they were fired upon by Berkut forces using live and rubber ammunition, prompting US Vice President Biden to call Yanukovich and express his "grave concern regarding the crisis on the streets of Kyiv" (The White House 2014i). On February 21, Yanukovich and notable opposition leaders Vitali Klitschko, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, and Oleh Tyahnybok agreed to a deal that would hopefully end the crisis gripping the country. Despite the success of any compromise at all, opposition leaders speaking at the Maidan faced boos and jeers by protestors who remained dissatisfied that the proposed deal kept Yanukovich in power (BBC News 2014c). In the face of the first sign of negotiation in months, a Right Sector activist took the staged and threatened to begin armed attacks on the government if the President did not tender an immediate resignation (Higgins and Kramer 2014).

Reports soon began circulating that Yanukovich had fled Kyiv for the predominantly ethnic-Russian city of Kharkiv in the east. Less than 24 hours after Yanukovich fled Kyiv, the Rada, backed by 328 of its 447 members, voted to remove him from his presidential office, citing his guilt in various human rights violations and the desertion of his duties as Ukraine's president (Al Jazeera 2014; Booth 2014). In his place, parliament voted to elect their speaker, Oleksander Turchynov as interim president to serve until the early elections on May 25; opposition leader Arseniy Yatsenyuk was

voted in as Ukraine's new Prime Minister, replacing Serhiy Arbutov who took over as interim PM following Mykola Azarov's sudden resignation.

Although the United States did not overtly endorse the ouster of Yanukovich, Washington stated that it would work with its allies, including Russia, to support Ukraine in its efforts going forward as they pursued a path to democracy. Moscow, however, condemned Ukrainian protestors, opposition leaders, and the United States in one fell swoop. Prime Minister and former president Dmitry Medvedev criticized the legitimacy of Ukraine's interim government and warned that Moscow may not cooperate with or even recognize the government that emerged out of the more violent participants of the Euromaidan revolution.

The unexpected finale to Ukraine's months-long revolution raised questions about the constitutionality of impeaching Yanukovich who had recently been granted sanctuary in Russia. The runaway president had not tendered an official resignation, he had not been found unfit to due to illness, nor had he died. The hasty actions taken by the Rada on February 22 were somewhat murky in their constitutionality (Sindelar 2014), particularly because the Rada did not follow protocol as outlined in Ukraine's constitution regarding proper impeachment procedure.

In what appeared to be a direct response to the events in Kyiv, in the early hours of February 27, dozens of armed, masked men stormed government buildings in Crimea's administrative hub, Simferopol, barricaded themselves inside and effectively took control of the city. Though the gunmen were initially unidentifiable in their unmarked uniforms, the "little green men" patrolling the streets of Simferopol spoke Russian, carried guns issued by the Russian army, drove trucks with Russian plates, and perhaps, in the most telling display, raised the Russian flag over the parliamentary building once they seized control (Shevchenko 2014). Immediately, officials in Kyiv expressed outrage, calling the events "an armed invasion and occupation in violation of all international agreements and norms" (Reuters 2014); the recently disposed Yanukovich, however, called the occupation of Crimea "an absolutely natural reaction to the bandit coup that has occurred in Kyiv" (Ostroukh 2014; Walker 2014b). Any sense of moral high ground that Russia had in regards to the so-called hostile takeover of Kyiv by radicals completely collapsed following their armed invasion of Crimea.

President Barack Obama issued a statement on February 28 that warned Russia of the potential costs of intervening in Ukraine and noted that Russian military action in Crimea would be a "clear violation of Russia's commitment to respect the independence and sovereignty and borders of Ukraine, and of international laws" that would be "deeply destabilizing" and against the best interests of Ukraine, Russia, and Europe (The White House

2014m). Putin, however, denied that Russian troops were behind the events unfolding in Crimea, claiming it was local self-defense units who took up arms against what they felt was an illegitimate government in Kyiv, and that any presence of Russian troops was an attempt to control for any radicals that may move toward Crimea (Kelley 2014).

In response to Russia's audacity to move into Ukraine unauthorized, on March 6, President Obama authorized sanctions against individuals responsible for violating Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty (The White House 2014b) and in a phone call with President Putin, emphasized that Russia's actions in Ukraine were not internationally acceptable (The White House 2014e). Although the crisis in Crimea defined the relationship between Russia and the US, it also shed light on the relationship between the US and Ukraine that was largely defined by strategic maneuvers to counterbalance major powers in the region. The inaction of the United States in the face of the events in Crimea, a clear violation of the Memorandum, spoke volumes about the United States' bond with Ukraine. In the days and months that followed, it appeared that the only action the US was willing to take was a bit of diplomatic finger-wagging.

On March 12, President Obama and Ukraine's Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk held a bilateral meeting to discuss the ongoing events in Ukraine, particularly the threat posed by Crimea's occupation. The meeting came just days before what President Obama called a "slapdash" referendum "patched together" in Crimea in which the autonomous region would vote to secede from Ukraine - a referendum, the President added, that the United States would "completely reject" (The White House 2014l). The referendum results claimed that votes in favor of Crimea seceding from Ukraine reached 96.77 percent (Morello, Englund, and Witte 2014), but a report accidentally released by a Russian government website in May 2014 revealed that the referendum had garnered a maximum 30 percent turnout with only half of this percentage voting in favor of annexation from Ukraine (Gregory 2014). Before the international community had ample time to react to the sham of a referendum, Putin had already signed an executive order recognizing the status of the Republic of Crimea as an independent state at 10:30pm on March 17, and at 1:00pm Moscow time the following day, signed an executive order absorbing Crimea into the Russian Federation (Putin 2014a, 2014b). In response, the United States upped the ante on sanctions put in place on March 6, placing additional sanctions on Russian officials and individuals in the Russian arms sector. By March 20, Obama had imposed another set of sanctions which included Russian energy companies and banks in the hopes that Russia would de-escalate its looming presence in the east (The White House 2014a).

While the world focused on the crisis unraveling in Crimea, several oblasts in Ukraine's Donbas region were dealing with turmoil of their own. In the weeks following the conclusion of the Maidan, pro-Russian forces took to the streets of Donetsk and Luhansk to express dissatisfaction with and distrust of the new government in Kyiv. Pro-Russian demonstrators took control of buildings, burned Ukrainian-language books and posters of the regionally despised nationalist Right Sector movement, and replaced publicly flown Ukrainian flags with Russian flags (Kushch 2014). Tensions between supporters of the government in Kyiv and supporters of greater Russian presence in the country continued to escalate, made worse by so-called "protest-tourists" flowing in from Russia, suggesting that the protests were at least at some degree coordinated by Moscow (Roth 2014).

By late March, Russian forces amassing along the Russian-Ukrainian border grew to nearly 40,000 troops according to some reports by US intelligence officials (Stewart and Hosenball 2014). The Donbas region seemed to be descending into madness, with pro-Russian separatists declaring the Donetsk Oblast to be the People's Republic of Donetsk on April 6 and a similar declaration of the Luhansk People's Republic on April 27, highlighting the deep divisions at the heart of the conflict in the Donbas. To make matters worse, on May 11, 2014, Donetsk and Luhansk declared independence from Ukraine in another round of highly unrecognized referendums in their quest to join Russia (Walker and Grytsenko 2014).

US-Ukraine Relations 2014-Present: Petro Poroshenko and Barack Obama

As the Donbas effectively devolved into open revolt, Kyiv was preparing to elect a new president in the early elections scheduled for May 25. Among the candidates running were Right Sector's Dmytro Yarosh, Fatherland's Yulia Tymoshenko, Svoboda's Oleh Tyahnybok, and UDAR-backed chocolate mogul Petro Poroshenko. Poroshenko's promises to fight the debilitating corruption limiting Ukraine's growth as a democratic nation and his condemnation of the separatists in the east in part led to his victory in which he garnered over 55 percent of the popular vote (BBC News 2014a). During a meeting with Poroshenko in Warsaw, Poland, on June 4, Obama formally extended his support for the election outcome and noted that he had been "deeply impressed by [Poroshenko's] vision" for a Ukraine free of corruption and filled with democratic opportunities for all of its citizens (The White House 2014k)._Additionally, Obama pledged to provide additional assistance to the Ukraine to support its military, bringing total US assistance to Ukraine in 2014 to \$184 million, not including the \$1 billion loan agreement signed in April (The White House 2014c). Perhaps this was the

United States' way of compensating Ukraine financially in light of its inaction regarding Crimea.

Following his inauguration, Poroshenko sat down with EU representatives in Brussels on June 27 to sign the long awaited Association Agreement whose reversal had sparked months of unrest and violence in Ukraine. In a demonstration of just how violent the conflict in the east had grown, the war took a sobering turn on July 17 when pro-Russian rebels shot down passenger jet Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, killing all 298 civilians onboard. The Boeing 777 was shot down by a Buk-surface-to-air missile fired from territory controlled by separatists in Donetsk and reports surfaced that Russians had been operating a similar missile launcher in the area just hours prior to the downing of the flight (Sweeney 2014).

In early September 2014, Ukrainian government officials met with separatists leaders in Minsk, Belarus to discuss a peace plan and ceasefire. Poroshenko visited Washington later that same month to plead with Congress about granting Ukraine's military more lethal and non-lethal assistance. During a joint session of Congress held on September 14, 2014, Poroshenko noted that non-lethal equipment and supplies such as night vision goggles and blankets were crucial to Ukraine's soldiers, "but one cannot win the war with blankets" (Poroshenko 2014). Although the United States agreed to assist Ukraine with an additional \$53 million (The White House 2014d), the flow of non-lethal support to Ukraine revealed the United States' alignment with Ukraine and subsequently its hesitation to challenge Moscow by arming Ukraine with lethal equipment.

Despite hopes that the Minsk agreement would hold, hostilities between rebels and Ukrainian forces continued to mount through October, with accusations from each side that the other had violated the fragile ceasefire. Additionally, the election of pro-Western parties and officials during Ukraine's parliamentary elections on October 26 garnered high praise from Washington, but districts in the Donbas, largely excluded from voting, held presidential and parliamentary elections of their own on November 2. Tensions thickened when NATO officials confirmed reports on November 12 that a concerning number of Russian tanks, artillery, and troops had poured into eastern Ukraine over several days in what appeared to be preparations to reengage in the military conflict gripping the region (Herszenhorn 2014). By December, tensions in eastern Ukraine remained dangerously high. In fact, Ukraine appeared to be desperately clinging to the ceasefire which had failed weeks, if not months prior; the ceasefire agreed to in Minsk was effectively fictional.

In another blow to Russia's economy, suffering under the economic sanctions imposed by the US and EU, Obama signed into law the Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 2014 on December 18, which authorized the

President to “provide Ukraine with *defense* articles, services, and training in order to counter offensive weapons” [emphasis added] (Gerlach 2014). January 2015 was largely defined by increased hostilities and violent battles between separatists and Ukrainian armed forces trying to take or hold specific territories. By the end of the month, separatists leaders in the Donbas pledged that the separatists would make no effort to talk about the ceasefire and the Minsk agreement completely dissolved (Lyman and Kramer 2015). The collapse of the Minsk agreement raised alarms throughout Washington and western Europe, but on February 12, the fears raised by the failed ceasefire quelled as Ukrainian, Russian, German, and French leaders convened in Belarus for another long round of talks that resulted in a renewed ceasefire effective on February 15, the so-called Minsk II.

As the eyes of the world remained fixed on Ukraine, desperate for the renewed ceasefire to hold, in mid-March US soldiers in Germany began a long convoy through six NATO member countries to demonstrate US presence and strength in a region of the world Russia apparently sought to bring back under its sphere of influence. Additionally, the US sent 300 Army paratroopers to Ukraine to help train the country’s forces fighting in the east. Although Russia’s Defense Ministry claimed US troops were training Ukrainian forces inside the combat zone, the activity of US troops was limited to the International Peacekeeping and Security Center in Yavoriv, one of Ukraine’s westernmost cities near the border with Poland (Reuters 2015a). In response to Russia’s accusations, the Pentagon called the allegations a “ridiculous attempt to shift the focus away from what is actually happening in eastern Ukraine” and, by extension, Russia’s own involvement (Baczynska and Alexander 2015). Relations between the US and Ukraine from June to July remained amicable, with the US extending military training efforts to members of Ukraine’s regular army, a program that brought total US security assistance to Ukraine since 2014 to over \$244 million (Reuters 2015c; Siddons 2015).

As US forces continued to train members of Ukraine’s outdated and underfunded military, by July, a growing number of far-right supporters in Kyiv became increasingly vocal in their demands for a declaration of war against the rebels in the east. The seemingly fictitious ceasefire had managed to survive nearly five harrowing months of subversive attempts to undermine it, but ultra-nationalists groups like Right Sector called for an immediate dissolution of the ceasefire and an end to all diplomatic relations with Russia who was persistently backing the separatists in the Donbas (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2015b).

Characteristic of its predictably unpredictable nature, in early September an entire week passed without a single Ukrainian casualty reported in the east. As events in Ukraine continue to hurdle toward the

present day, the ongoing relationship between the US and Ukraine raises questions about the future of Ukraine. Inaction on behalf of the US in regards to the crisis in Crimea and its continued supply of non-lethal weapons to modernize Ukraine's military spoke volumes about US hesitation to challenge the largest power in the region, Russia. However, recent developments in Washington may redefine the relationship between the two countries. On November 10, 2015, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 that revived the ongoing discussion about providing lethal arms to Ukraine. Of the \$607 billion budgeted, the bill allocated \$300 million to assist Ukraine in its fight against Russia and the Russian-backed separatists in the east; of that \$300 million, Congress designated \$50 million to provide Ukraine with lethal assistance such as anti-armor weapon systems, mortars, grenade launchers, small arms and ammunition (Johnson 2015). According to reports from the White House, President Obama – despite months of careful diplomatic maneuvering to prevent arming Ukraine and subsequently infuriating Russia – is likely to sign the legislation when it reaches his desk (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2015a).

Conclusion

This research reveals how the relationship between the US and Ukraine has changed over time, and provides suggestions for what to look for in the future. United States foreign policy towards Ukraine has always reflected US national interest, and has often mirrored America's changing relationship with Russia. In the early Post-USSR days, there was hope around the world for an end to the possibility of a thermonuclear war, and for the normalization of relations between the United States and Russia along with the other former Soviet Republics. Back then, the focus of the United States and Ukraine went from democracy building to nuclear disarmament under Kravchuk, Kuchma, George H.W. Bush and Clinton. Thus, in the early 1990s, relations between the US and Ukraine, like those between the US and Russia, were fairly good. It was in the US national interest for the former Soviet republics to become democracies and form positive relations with the US from both a security and economic standpoint. Once Ukraine signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1994, the US and Ukraine could turn to other issues, such as the pursuit of NATO and EU membership. Ukraine was of geopolitical importance to the US, not only from the standpoint of its geographic location between Russia to the East and the EU to the West, but also by curbing Russia's imperial ambitions within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Because of Ukraine's geopolitical importance, it became the third largest recipient of US aid and the most active CIS state within NATO's Partnership for Peace in the 1990's.

However, the ascension of Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister or President from 1999 to the present complicated Ukraine's plans to "go west." Putin's stance toward Ukraine has always been clear: it has been –and will remain– under the Russian sphere of influence whether it wants to or not. In addition, corruption scandals, in particular the discovery of Ukraine's sale of military equipment to Iraq during the Kuchma regime would lead to a distancing between both nations.

By the end of 2004, the Orange Revolution led to a geopolitical reorientation of Ukraine toward the West's open arms. The United States was pleased with Ukraine's popular democratic movement, leading to a newfound period of goodwill. Nevertheless, infighting between the principal actors in the Orange Revolution would soon reveal their ineptitude in solving Ukraine's multitude of problems and corruption scandals of their own emerged. Widespread disillusionment led Ukraine back to an Eastern orientation under Yanukovich. The relatively new Obama Administration took a pragmatic approach toward Yanukovich, though as was the case in the previous administration, attention was far more focused on developments in the Middle East. That is, until Yanukovich reneged on his pledge to sign the EU Association Agreement in November 2013.

The violent protests and government crackdowns forced a renewed attention from the United States toward Ukraine, in a vain effort to come to a peaceful solution. Yanukovich's self-exile would be followed by Russia's eventual violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity by forcefully seizing Crimea and supporting Russian or pro-Russian forces violently occupying the Donbas regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Despite the fact that such brazen action has violated the Budapest Memorandum, the United States stood by haplessly as Ukrainian territory was seized, and the toll of death in the conflict has risen to over 8,000 as of fall 2015. This has led many to question if a Cold War redub is upon us.

There does not appear to be any end to the conflict in sight, at least one that leaves Ukraine territorially intact. The likelihood of Crimea returning to Ukraine is dismal, if not completely unthinkable at this point. Infighting and disagreements continue to plague Ukraine's politics and the politicians, such as Petro Poroshenko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk, initially thought to be the guiding hope after Yanukovich's ouster, appear to be losing steam among the population. Today, the saga continues with the United States poised to pledge more economic resources than ever to reorient Ukraine to the West under Petro Poroshenko's watch.

Realism in international relations has four main tenets: The most important actors in global politics are states; international bodies do not have the authority to force states to act (or not to act); states are rational actors that always act in their own self-interest; and finally, the most important

responsibility of the state is its self-preservation. Next, we apply these foundations of realism to US-Ukraine relations.

As summarized in this section, the most important actors have clearly been states: The United States, Ukraine, and Russia. It is not possible to discuss US-Ukrainian relations without taking into account US-Russian relations and Ukrainian-Russian Relations. Even the “officially” non-state actors that are occupying the Donbas are clearly taking their cues from Moscow, and are therefore agents of a state- the Russian state.

As for the role of international bodies, the European Union, NATO, and the United Nations Security Council, all express their opinions on events transpiring in Ukraine, mostly by condemning Russian actions and activities, yet none of these organizations can --nor want-- to try to resolve Ukraine’s territorial dispute with Russia.

It is absolutely clear that the United States has always acted in its own self-interest in its interactions with Ukraine. From democratization, to nuclear non-proliferation, to support of the Orange Revolution, to not intervening militarily in the Russian annexation of Crimea, all of the US actions have been that of a rational actor. Likewise, Ukraine has acted in its own self-interest vis-à-vis its posture toward the US. Upon independence, Ukraine was in a deeply fragile state. With a floundering economy and the transition from Communism to capitalism, it had to turn to the United States for assistance. Although Ukraine would be in a stronger position today if it had retained some of its nuclear arsenal, at the time, it pragmatically decided to sign the NPT and rid itself of nuclear warheads by 1996. Ukraine even sent troops to Iraq to appease the US, despite the fact that most Ukrainians were against it. Many elements of Ukrainian society, particularly the younger generation of people that had little or no memory of living in the Soviet Union, pressed their leaders to look West with their activities in the Orange Revolution, and after gaining office, the leadership did so.

Finally, in terms of self-preservation, that is the most important focus for Ukraine, which has seen its territorial integrity violated by its Russian neighbors, and has lost thousands of people in its fight to regain control over the Donbas. The United States, for its part, is also seeking self-preservation by *not* engaging in a military conflict with Russia over Ukrainian territory. Ukraine is frankly not sufficiently in the US national interest to go to war over, particularly considering the conflicts that still rage in the Middle East, the threat of international terrorism and the necessity of collaborating with Russia in a military campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

In sum, the four criteria of realism are not only met, but exceeded in the case of US-Ukraine Relations. The future of Ukraine hangs in the balance of the west’s welcoming, open arms and Russia’s greedy, grasping

hands. At the moment, nothing is certain. But the fact that this is a textbook case in realism leads us to conclude that the states of Ukraine and the US (and Russia) will continue to act in a rational self-interested manner, for their own self-preservation, without regard to the expressions of international organizations. Thus, we can expect the United States to provide the proposed funding for military aid and continued training of the Ukrainian military. It is simply too much of a risk to abandon or isolate Ukraine, as it would then be more likely to be forced to turn to Russia. We can expect the Ukrainian government to continue to work with the state of Russia to bring an end to the fighting in the Donbas, in exchange for expanded autonomous rights under a more federalist system in order to preserve what is left of its territorial integrity. Ukraine currently does not have the military might to remove the pro-Russian forces in the Donbas. And we can expect Russia to never cede Crimea. Since the US is not willing to go to war over Ukraine, and Russia knows that it may go to war if it invades the territory of a NATO member state, the current frontlines are likely to hold. Given the recently forged alliance between the US and Russia on a Syrian military campaign against ISIS, it is entirely possible, if not probable, that as Russia focuses its military attention toward the Middle East, that it will not choose to sustain (or be able to sustain) the forces in the Donbas and find a negotiated settlement. Ultimately, however, it is Russia who seemingly is in the best position to determine the outcome of what will happen to Ukraine.

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