

Cabinet of Ministers of the Ukrainian UkSSR 1991

Topic: The Future of Ukraine

Introduction

The area now known as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkSSR) has long been fraught with power struggles between the native people and various powers.. However, the current tension between the Soviet Empire and the UkSSR has roots in the last time Russia exhibited such dominance over Europe: The Russian Empire. The people of the Ukraine have fought back against Russian rule in various ways since then with varying degrees of success. The following guide will explore the crisis at hand as well as the greatest moments of tension between the Ukraine and Russia that have led to this current moment. This guide will outline the many ways that history serves as a foreground for the new and improved Ukrainian Independence movement and explore what a free Ukraine could look like.

Historical Background

The Russian Empire and the Annexation of Crimea

Crimea, a peninsula that is now a part of the UkSSR, has always been an attractive territory for various actors in the theater of Eastern Europe. During the time of the Ottoman Empire, Crimea was known as the Crimean Khanate and was populated mainly by Tartars. Russia, though, yearned to attain dominance of the area. In fact, control of Crimea was one of the issues that fueled the Russian-Turkish War (1768-1774).¹ The war was put on hold for a short time when the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca was signed, giving the Russian Empire control of key Crimean ports.² During this period, there were a number of peasant revolts, including the Pugachev Rebellion. Many Ukrainian Cossacks participated in this rebellion.

Despite the deep seated tension between the Russian Empire and the Ukrainian people, Empress Catherine II was determined to spread Russia's hegemony. In 1783, Crimea was formally annexed by the Russian Empire.³ This annexation caused even greater tension between the Russian Empire and Ukrainians, especially Ukrainian peasants. While the Russian Empire was exploiting Ukraine's people and natural resources, they were also discouraging the development of a uniquely "Ukrainian" culture. This was due to a wave of anti-Ukrainian sentiment that was spreading throughout Russia at the time.

¹ www.crimeahistory.org/the-first-annexation-of-crimea-1784/

² www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-catherine-great-invaded-crimea-and-put-rest-world-edge-180949969/

³ *ibid.*

The Ukrainian War of Independence (1917-1921)

Although there were minor peasant revolts before this time, the next flashpoint in the Russia-Ukraine relationship occurred in 1917. Most Ukrainians resented their forced participation in World War I; they did not stand to benefit from the conflict, yet their labor and lives were exploited for the Empire. The February War in Russia forced the Tsar out of the throne, and replaced him with a Soviet-friendly government, which led to a revolutionary wave spanning many of the countries in the Russian sphere of influence.

The Ukrainian Independence Movement was one of the first groups to take advantage of the new Russian weakness caused by the Revolution. The Ukrainian People's Republic, an autonomous entity closely linked with the Russian Provisional Government, was declared by moderate socialists in Kyiv during June 1917.⁴ At first, this partnership went well, but after the Bolshevik coup in November, the Central *Rada* refused to accept the new regime.⁵ Later that month, the Ukrainian National Republic was created, leading the Bolsheviks to retaliate by creating a rival Ukrainian government and army that would establish Ukraine as a Soviet Republic. With help from the Central Powers, the Ukrainians were able to maintain their independence for a brief moment.

This independence was threatened by a German-backed coup by "the Hetman of Ukraine," Gen. Pavlo Skoropadsky, that bred intense resentment in the peasants, socialists, and Ukrainian nationalists.⁶ The Ukrainian independence movement soon formed the Directory of the Ukrainian National Republic and removed Skoropadsky from power. Soon, the whole country devolved into factionalism and foreign aggression. The Poles, the Bolsheviks, and other Eastern European entities all began vying for Ukrainian land. These conflicts were exacerbated by internal religious and economic struggles. By the end of the war, Ukraine had been divided into four sections, leaving the lands east of the new Polish border to become Soviet Ukraine, dubbed the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, or UkSSR.

Holodomor

The aggressive industrialization and collectivization policies of the Soviet government had often disastrous, and sometimes even deadly, effects on the Soviet people, especially the peasantry. One of the most egregious of these policies were the agricultural quotas that led to the Holodomor famine of 1932-1933, during which millions of Ukrainians died. During this period there was a Soviet Famine as well, but no group suffered more than the Ukrainians. Many believe this is due to the rising tide of Ukrainian nationalism and resistance to collectivization. The UkSSR had a poor yield in their grain crops in 1932, partially due to collectivization

⁴ <https://www.wrath-bearingtree.com/2017/02/centennial-ukraines-independent-gambit/>

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/World-War-I-and-the-struggle-for-independence>

⁶ Ibid.

policies, although they still had enough to feed the populace.⁷ However, the Soviet Premier, Joseph Stalin, set impossibly high grain quotas for the UkSSR that were strictly enforced by a special brigade. This left rural Ukrainians to starve, despite the fact that the USSR was exporting over a million tons of grain—as well as being offered aid for the Ukrainians—during this time period. This famine was man made and is seen by many as a Russian attempt at ethnic cleansing.

Ukrainian Actions During WWII

During the early days of World War II, regions of the Ukraine that had been occupied by Polish and Romanian troops were incorporated into the UkSSR after the German invasion of Poland. This led to an increased “Sovietization” of life, as well as suppression of cultural and political activities.⁸ At the same time, the Western borderlands were placed under Nazi control, but by mid-1941, the Nazis launched their full invasion of the USSR. Most of the Ukraine was placed under the administrative unit known as Reichskommissariat Ukraine, although Crimea was directly occupied by the Nazis.⁹ Over 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews were murdered as part of the Holocaust, while many other Ukrainians left behind were forced into servitude and starvation by the Germans. During this time, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army was formed, rebelling against not just the Nazis, but also against Soviets.

The Germans began their retreat in 1943, and the Soviets took over Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, shortly after. This led to violent clashes between the Red Army and the Ukrainians. As the war drew to a close, the Ukrainian-Polish border was redrawn to reflect the ethnic and political differences between the two nations. Around this same time, the Ukraine became one of the charter members of the United Nations and even served on the United Nations Security Council during 1948-1949. These political developments granted Ukraine a certain degree of autonomy, while still remaining part of the USSR. However, despite these small victories, the country was left ravaged by the war, with millions dead and even more left homeless.

The UkSSR in the Post-War Period

The Last Years of Stalin

The conflicts between the UkSSR and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, or RSFSR, did not end when the war did. Although economic reconstruction began immediately under the heavy hand of the Soviets, Stalin’s Fourth Five Year Plan focused on industry, which hurt consumers. The Communist secret police were soon back at work, targeting Nazi collaborators, prominent Ukrainian nationalists, and citizens who were thought to be disloyal to the Kremlin. Thousands of these individuals were sent to concentration camps in Siberia and

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-famine-of-1932-33>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CR%5CE%5CReichskommissariatUkraine.htm>

other places deep in the RSFSR.¹⁰ The conflict between the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Soviet troops continued even into the 1950s, with support from the rural poor.

The Rule of Khrushchev

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, having served as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the CP(B)U, was more trusting of the Ukrainians than his predecessor. Khrushchev appointed many Ukrainians to high positions of power in the party and transferred the Crimean Peninsula back to the UkSSR from the RSFSR. Ukrainians began to support the Communist Party in larger number as Khrushchev continued his process of de-Stalinization, including a reduction in the role that Moscow played in UkSSR economic affairs via decentralization.¹¹ However, in the second half of Khrushchev's power, he reignited the process of Russification by curtailing use of the Ukrainian language in schools. Groups of dissenters began to form, expressing their Ukrainian Nationalism in subversive ways, although some were arrested by the secret police.

The UkSSR during Politburo, Brezhnev and Shcherbytsky

The new Politburo led the USSR in a new direction, slowing down efforts to decentralize while dealing with non-Russians more compassionately. Ukrainian national pride was allowed to be more prominently displayed in the media. At the same time that dissent groups continued to grow in the Ukraine, party membership began to climb. By the 1970s, the permissiveness that allowed dissident groups and Ukrainian nationalist content to thrive began to wane with a change in the head of the KGB. Brezhnev continued the process of Russification through his support of suppression of the Ukrainian language, as well as the concept of the "unshakable union" of the USSR. Shcherbytsky, patron of Brezhnev, focused on re-centralization, economic growth, intense Russification and containment of dissent. This included arresting and institutionalizing political activists under false pretenses.¹² Around this time, underground Ukrainian rebel groups operated quietly, leading to a rise in Anti-Soviet pamphlets. One of the most influential of these groups was the Ukrainian Public Group to Promote the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords on Human Rights, more commonly known as the Ukrainian Helsinki Group. This group, a partner of the Moscow Helsinki Group, aimed to monitor human rights in the UkSSR and to prevent Soviet violations of the Helsinki accords. The Ukrainian Helsinki group also served as an advocate for Ukrainian freedom on the world stage, much to the chagrin of the Soviets.¹³ As a result, the majority of the group was either imprisoned or exiled by 1982.

¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/Soviet-Ukraine-in-the-postwar-period>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CU%5CK%5CUkrainianHelsinkiGroup.htm>

Current Situation

The Fight for Independence

The loosely connected Ukrainian Independence movement had been bubbling under the surface for many years, waxing and waning under different Soviet regimes until it came to a head under Premier Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* ("openness"). This new policy led to a steady uptick in the amount of Ukrainian Nationalist sentiment. The Ukrainian press started to cautiously express negative sentiments about the Communist Party and Soviet technological developments, especially in light of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the spring of 1986.¹⁴ The horror of Chernobyl was one of the moments that forced many passionate Party members, including the elites, to reexamine the political system.

During the late 1980s, Ukraine saw a new crop of Ukrainian nationalist leaders arrive to prominence as dissidents, such as members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, returned from exile and concentration camps.¹⁵ The former political prisoners and exiles urged the dissident movement to an end while ushering in the new national liberation movement. Under the leadership of Lev Lukianenko, the Helsinki group returned as the Ukrainian Helsinki Association, a group that aimed for Ukrainian autonomy and democratic reform.¹⁶ By the next year, the Association had organized large demonstrations against repressive laws and measures. Many other less influential groups organized similar demonstrations, as well as demonstrations specifically for Ukrainian independence as nationalism began to fully take hold of the Ukrainian people.

The year of 1989 was pivotal for the Ukrainian independence movement. During this year, the Ukrainian Helsinki Association grew increasingly involved in elections and began to mobilize on a larger scale than ever before. In February, the National Writers' Union of Ukraine proposed the policies for the independence movement, including the promotion of democracy and support for human and national rights.¹⁷ These ideas were used by the Helsinki Association, as well as other revolutionary groups, to organize the People's Movement of Ukraine for Reconstruction. This group was classified as a civil-political movement, as there were no parties allowed other than the Communist Party. In September, the first Constituent Congress of the People's Movement of Ukraine for Reconstruction met, and Ivan Druch was elected to lead the movement.

¹⁴ <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CH%5CI%5CHistoryofUkraine.htm>

¹⁵ <http://museum.khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1127288239>

¹⁶ <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CU%5CK%5CUkrainianHelsinkiGroup.htm>

¹⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/Parliamentary-democracy>



*Human Chain, 1990 Stretching from Lviv to Kyiv*¹⁸

The movement planned a number of symbolic events and protests, the most influential of which was the Human Chain of 1990. This event was a line of volunteers holding hands, stretching almost 550 kilometers from Lviv to Kyiv. The cities chosen were significant, as the two cities had been the capitals of the two halves of the Ukraine that had united with the intent of declaring independence in the Act Zluky or Unification Act. The Department of Internal Affairs estimated that 450,000 people participated in this symbolic event, indicating a high level of support for the People's Movement of Ukraine for Reconstruction, otherwise known as Rukh among the Ukrainian populace. This year also marked the development of parliamentary democracy in the Ukraine, allowing competitors to the Communist party for the first time since the Soviet domination of the territory. Although these moves were a step in the right direction, the Ukrainian people want more and want to be completely independent of Soviet Russian control.

The Ukrainian Independence movement would like to see a lot of changes if they are able to secure a free Ukraine. For example, many are advocating for a Ukrainian national bank, citizenship and unique currency. Other plans include protection of the environment, promotion of human rights and refusal of nuclear weaponry. Some movement members are even arguing for state neutrality. Above all else, the Ukrainian Independence Movement is hoping to gain full

¹⁸ <http://euromaidanpress.com/2018/01/22/117425/>

sovereignty of the territory, without interference from Soviet Russia. As the Soviet state declines, this independent outcome looks increasingly likely. No matter what the Ukrainians choose to do next, the eyes of the world are upon them.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What should the Ukrainian independence movement do to achieve full autonomy from the Soviet Union?
- 2) How will Ukraine recover from the abuses of the Soviet years?
- 3) What should a free Ukraine look like? How should the government be run?

Ukraine as Nuclear State

A tragedy occurred in the Ukrainian town of Chernobyl on April 26th, 1986. During a routine test, part of the power station was destroyed after a power surge, leading to a fire that poured very large amounts of radioactive substances into the surrounding area. This amount of radiation led to the deaths of hundreds of Ukrainians, either directly or indirectly, due to the increased rates of radiation sickness and cancer among the populace.¹⁹ The IAEA and the World Health organization have also noticed increased rates of mental illness, alcoholism and some unexplained physical symptoms among the people affected by the disaster. With this tragic event so fresh in the minds of the Ukrainian people, it is no wonder that the independence movement has vowed not to continue the pursuit of nuclear weapons.²⁰



Nuclear Reactor Four, four days post-accident in Chernobyl, Ukraine

¹⁹ <https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/chernobyl-bg.html>

²⁰ <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/ukraine/index.html>

Many involved in the Ukrainian Independence movement would like to prevent a potentially sovereign Ukraine from using, making, or acquiring more nuclear weapons. It is believed that they are angling for a spot in the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear weapon state. Such a position would bolster the legitimacy of an independent Ukraine.²¹ This is not to say that all Ukrainians are supportive of efforts to curtail the nuclear weapons arsenal. In fact, many politicians feel as though the weapons will make a strong deterrent for any future Russian aggression.

The Ukrainian arsenal as it stands now is rather extensive. In fact, it is the third largest in the world after the U.S. and the USSR.²² There are about 180 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launchers, loaded with over 1,000 warheads on Ukrainian territory. Many of these ICBM launchers can deliver multiple nuclear weapons. On top of this weaponry, the Ukraine also has bombers loaded with missiles and gravity bombs. In total, it is believed that there are about 5,000 strategic and tactical nuclear weapons in the Ukrainian arsenal.

The Ukraine has always been one of the most important territories in the sphere of Russia's influence. Due in part to its location—and in later years, because of its possession of nuclear weapons—Russia has seen the retention of Ukrainian sovereignty as a matter of high importance. As the USSR stands on the brink of dissolution, and Ukraine is poised to achieve independence, the world is wondering what the Ukrainians will choose to do with its arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What should Ukraine do with its nuclear arsenal upon achieving independence?
 - a) Should they keep the weapons? Give them away? If so, to whom?
- 2) How will Ukraine promote safe nuclear practices both domestically and internationally in light of the Chernobyl tragedy?

²¹ <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Ukraine-Nuclear-Weapons>

²² Ibid.

Cabinet of Ministers of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) 1991

Topic: The Future of the Soviet Union

Introduction

Since Khrushchev's time as Premier, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) has been one of the most important economic and political actors in the greater Union. But in the last two years, there has been unprecedented change in Ukraine's political organization, autonomy and vision for the future. Total secession from the Union is on the table, and even if the Union prevails, centralized control by Moscow is a thing of the past. Ukraine is no longer willing to keep accepting false promises as a policy platform. The Ukrainian Cabinet has to consider the economic, security and political implications of the changing landscape within the USSR. The following guide examines the state of the Union. It explains the concerns the Cabinet should take into account as it decides whether or not it will exist in a world with or without the Soviet Union.

Historical Background

The Reform Era

By the 1980s, the Communist system stagnated. The citizens of one of the two poles of global politics had a quality of life that ranked about 50th worldwide in 1986.¹ Gorbachev's rise to power and his radical reforms disguised as disgruntled moderate action were, therefore, an attempt to save the system from total collapse.

Gorbachev started his reform policies in the context of a visionary mission to conserve the Soviet system as it was, rather than begin to introduce capitalist or western-minded reforms. He attempted to tighten industrial and societal discipline, accelerating production (or uskoreniye), preventing absenteeism and reducing alcohol consumption. These policies quickly began producing the opposite effect. For example, restricting vodka production caused massive sugar shortages, as many Soviets began to make moonshine. Following these impacts, Gorbachev transitioned into focusing almost solely on an increase in productivity and investing publicly into scientific progress and technology throughout many of the Republics. In specific industries, like agriculture, he attempted to create centralized state-managed corporations, such as Gosagroprom, to boost efficiency and invigorate economic growth. This too quickly failed as a policy instrument.

These attempts to bounce off of or intensify existing policies led Gorbachev to create his diametric policies of glasnost and perestroika. Glasnost seeks to fill in the gap between the

¹ search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=8906051023&site=ehost-live

Soviet vision and the reality of how the Union functions in two parts: create a functional, critical assessment of the Soviet economy, and promote public debate about reform to accustom the Soviet public to quickly enact changes in their lives. By the late 1980s, Gorbachev began the process of perestroika to actually enact changes based on policy conclusions made thanks to glasnost.

Perestroika has mainly led to the reconstruction of Soviet markets and an increased friendliness towards private enterprise, prioritizing profitability and optimized economic performance. In regards to free market-esque entrepreneurship, Gorbachev espouses the policy of *sustiazel'nost'*, loosely translated as “adversarial relations,” to encourage accountable business practices through the new January 1988 Law on the State Enterprise. This law established self-financing rules, reduced or eliminated subsidies, and introduced economic levers and stimuli by letting the market regulate businesses despite reinforcing central planning from Moscow. The state has also considered relinquishing its control on direct trade with foreign partners.

Industry-specific reforms predominantly pertain to agriculture. State-planned farms were inefficient, insensitive, and unproductive for decades, yet small plots that farmers worked for themselves generally reported very high productivity. Gorbachev proposed a leasing system in July 1988 that would allow peasant farmers to work their own land, increasing worker commitment and farming quality.

Economy in Crisis

These policies are arguably too new for economists to be able to accurately analyze their impacts. But, severe economic stagnation continues and is potentially turning into a rapid decline. Soviet national income has decreased by nearly 12 percent since January 1991. This percentage likely reflects about 5 percent of hidden inflation, and the decrease appears to be accelerating. The biggest factor behind this plummet are rampant shortages. Many Soviet citizens ask why they should work for money if they cannot buy anything; inflation in the past year amounts to 91 percent.²

Trade with foreign partners is a convenient microcosm of the greater crisis. Soviet exports dropped by 23 percent in the last 6 months, and vital oil export were disproportionately affected, decreasing by 50 percent. At this rate, Soviet oil exports could stop by the end of 1992.³ Additionally, western countries aren't willing to finance Soviet initiatives due to such economic turmoil.

² <https://www.newsweek.com/big-bang-moscow-203524>

³ Ibid.

Increases in Regional Power

Although Gorbachev did not have the same pro-Ukrainian attitudes as Khrushchev, his policies of perestroika and glasnost eventually had the same impact of liberalization in a state that had been traumatically Russified throughout its participation in the Soviet Union. That, combined with the difficulty of controlling information with the influx of cheap electronic devices that were impossible to regulate, meant that 1989 was a particular democratic turning point for the Ukrainian government. Notably, the Soviet government had the first semi-free elections in its history, and the first-ever mass civil society group appeared in Ukraine: Rukh, or the Popular Movement for Perestroika, which parallels Poland's Solidarity and Czechoslovakia's Civic Forum in its mission. Their membership was around 300,000 in late 1989 and doubled by the end of the 1990.⁴ The legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church also made the Ukrainian SSR stronger relative to the Russian SSR. In March, the Democratic Party of Ukraine won more than 25 percent of parliamentary seats. In June, the Ukrainian parliament released a declaration similar to those of the Baltic republics that gave Ukrainian laws precedence over those of the Union, called for the creation of a Ukrainian army, and declared that Ukraine would undergo denuclearization and become a non-nuclear state. This effectively made Ukraine a sovereign country without outright declaring secession.

Current Situation

Political Protest and Perspectives

This past January, approximately one million Ukrainians created a human chain that stretched about three hundred miles from Kiev to Lvov in a show for independence from the Union. In early October, nearly half a million Ukrainians marched on the building of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet in Kiev, demanding resignation.⁵ Around the same time, a hundred thousand Belorussians marched on Minsk, protesting price hikes and demanding Gorbachev's resignation. Last January, Soviet forces put down protests in Lithuania, killing 13 people.⁶ Soviet unity is at some form of an end, and the Union is being broken apart by nationalistic forces. No matter what, the bureaucratic structure and operational ties between the republics are already changing and will evolve further.

Legislation recently passed by the Supreme Soviets of Russia, Ukraine and the majority of the republics seems to be pushing the Union towards a process that models western post-war integration in the majority of this century. First, the republics will reject unitary organization. Additionally, there will be widespread acceptance of the differences in political, cultural and

⁴ https://search.proquest.com/docview/1301123976?accountid=11243&rfr_id=info%3Axi%2Fsid%3Aprimo

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.newsweek.com/anyone-listening-202096>

economic development of each republic. And finally, each republic will be granted the right to protect and preserve its national identity. Whether or not these models can actually succeed will most likely depend on the cooperation and implementation by individual Soviets and whether or not leadership in Moscow allows some degree of self-determination.

Economic Implications

The emphasis on productivity, innovation and the reduction in unnecessary bureaucracy may result in about 13 to 19 million job redundancies.⁷ Where the Soviet Union intends to put these near 20 million workers is a question of great importance considering the already extant social strife and political protest within individual republics.

If the Soviet Union remains as an autonomous group of republics, economic ties would have to be maintained by mutual cooperation. Perhaps it is possible to envision the creation of a common market on the condition that all the republics become politically sovereign.⁸

Discussion Questions

- Will Ukraine be able to find a future as a respected member of the Western European community within a Soviet bloc?
- How can political demands be satisfied for both democratic and communist ends of the spectrum?
- What should be done about displaced workers?
- What is the future of centralized or state-owned corporations?

⁷ <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bsu&AN=4550174&site=ehost-live>

⁸ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42763827>