

# Can Moscow hold Ukraine? Independence demands grow

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On Oct. 1, a "hot autumn" began in Ukraine as hundreds of thousands took to the streets of the capital of Kiev and other Ukrainian cities to demand that the July 16 sovereignty declaration by Ukraine's parliament be implemented. Several million others, 500,000 in Kiev alone, answered a general strike call by the Ukrainian national movement, Rukh. The massive day of action was timed with the opening of the Ukraine parliament's autumn session, and marked the start of a series of mass pro-sovereignty and pro-independence protests that Ukraine will witness in increasing intensity this autumn.

No other national crisis is causing Moscow so much anxiety as what is occurring in Ukraine. The Russian Empire can lose the Baltic, lose Transcaucasia, lose Muslim Central Asia, and still remain intact as a global superpower. The same cannot be said should Ukraine, with 52 million people and over one-quarter of all Soviet industrial and agricultural output, achieve independence.

Holding on to Ukraine, however loose the form of attachment, has become perhaps the most acute internal problem on the Kremlin's crisis-packed agenda. For in Ukraine, an anti-Bolshevik "Peaceful Revolution," very much akin to the process witnessed last year in Central and Eastern Europe, has reached, in the space of less than two years, the critical pre-independence threshold phase.

The historic inauguration of the pre-independence period occurred on July 16 when the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, or parliament, adopted a stunning declaration of sovereignty by a nearly unanimous vote of 355-4. It proclaimed the republic's goal of achieving total independence in the preamble: "Ukraine is striving to become in the future an independent national state."

The declaration of sovereignty, while short of an outright declaration of independence, went far beyond the declaration of sovereignty adopted June 12 by the Russian Federation parliament. Ukraine's declaration echoed the Russian one, in part, in announcing that "the laws of Ukraine in future have precedence over Union laws," that "all resources, industry, and agriculture are the property of the Ukrainian republic," and that Ukraine will conduct its own foreign, foreign economic, and domestic economic policies.

The Ukrainian parliament proclaimed the "supremacy, independence, and individuality of the republic's power on its territory, and its independence and equality in external relations." It declared the "right to have its own armed forces, interior security troops and state security [i.e., a Ukrainian state security to replace the hated Soviet KGB] bodies," and stipulated that "Ukrainian citizens cannot be conscripted to serve outside the republic without the permission of the Ukrainian parliament." These passages were a call for the withdrawal of Soviet KGB and Interior Ministry forces from Ukrainian soil, and the limitation of Ukrainians serving in the Soviet Army to a strictly voluntary basis.

The Ukrainian parliament, like its counterparts in the three Baltic republics, avoided frontal confrontation with Moscow on the highly sensitive question of existing Soviet military forces based on the republic's territory. It left untouched, for wise tactical political reasons, the question of the Soviet Army, Navy, and Air Force units based on Ukrainian territory.

The statements on economic policy were also landmarks. The parliament resolved that Ukraine would create its own national bank, not merely to issue a Ukrainian national currency, but as a credit-extending institution to promote Ukrainian economic development. In principle, this measure is akin to the dirigist economic policies of America's first Treasury Secretary, Alexander Hamilton, in his creation of the National Bank of the United States which became, in the first decades of that nation, the credit-extending motor for productive investment which transformed America into a world industrial and agricultural giant. Ukraine will also create its own foreign economic bank to co-finance trade deals with Germany and Western Europe, and to secure foreign investment and capital goods imports.

## The 'Great Retreat' reaches Ukraine

The July 16 declaration of sovereignty reflected two profound inputs: The new maturity of the Peaceful Revolution for national independence, and a strategic shift in Soviet policy towards Ukraine, forced upon Moscow by the uncontrollable spread of the anti-Bolshevik revolutionary process in the republic.

These inputs were evident in the striking fact that the vote for Ukrainian national sovereignty was all but unanimous. The parliaments of the Baltic republics which have voted for independence contain a ratio of two-thirds or more non-Communist Party, pro-independence deputies, whereas in Ukraine the exact opposite ratio exists. The more than 200 deputies from the detested Communist Party voted *en bloc* on July 16 along with Rukh and its allies to grant Ukraine a status of sovereignty which, at least on paper, falls just short of total independence. Why?

That vote was unmistakable proof that the Moscow strategy of the "Great Retreat" witnessed earlier in Eastern Europe, of bending to and adapting to revolutionary change rather than risking losing a head-on confrontation against such change and thus precipitating an even greater acceleration of the dissolutionary processes ripping through the empire, had been extended to the Slavic core of the Russian Empire.

Moscow had no choice but to change course in Ukraine. Had Ukraine's Communist deputies not reversed their traditional stance of implacable opposition to sovereignty, they would have ensured the electrifying growth of a mass, uncontrollable, Ukrainian movement demanding immediate independence. A political explosion with unpredictable consequences would have been generated. Gorbachov would have found his worst nightmare, which he had postulated in his speech in Donetsk on Feb. 25, 1989, come true: "You can only imagine what would happen if there were disorders in Ukraine. . . . Fifty-one million people live here. The whole fabric of the Soviet Union would be amiss, and perestroika would fail."

### **An unforgettable year**

The first turning point in Ukraine's revolutionary process occurred in the immediate aftermath of the coming to power of Solidarnosc in Poland, Ukraine's great neighbor to the west, in late August 1989. The defeat of Bolshevism in Poland was the spark for two singular events in September 1989—the founding of Rukh, the Ukrainian national movement, and the creation in the aftermath of the July 1989 coal miners' strikes, which had been spearheaded by the Ukrainian coal miners of the Donetsk region, of the first independent proto-trade unions.

From then on, the Peaceful Revolution in Ukraine accelerated with dazzling speed, with Moscow continually and hastily changing its policies to adapt to the Ukrainian revolution.

Rukh was under no illusion that independence was immediately attainable, either by Moscow miraculously granting it or through sufficient support from the entire population. The strategy for ensuring ultimate victory in the independence struggle was clearly expounded at the Rukh founding congress in a speech by Anatoli Lukyanenko, a Rukh leader and uncompromising fighter for Ukrainian independence. He stressed Ukraine's independence as "the goal," adding that

the forces to ensure this goal "must first be organized and built up." He emphasized that independence could only be reached through carefully planned and coordinated joint strategy and actions with Poland, the Baltic republics, Belorussia, and the Transcaucasus: "We cannot go too far, too fast, on any one front, in any one republic. . . . We must avoid rash actions, provocations, and being misled by inter-ethnic conflicts, because that would lead to crushing defeats."

For the autumn of 1989, Rukh did not campaign for independence as such, but concentrated on building up its organization, already very strong in western Ukraine, in all parts of Ukraine. The campaign issues were demolition of the power of the Communist Party, the full and immediate legalization of both outlawed Ukrainian churches, and the end of Russification. To cut short any Moscow attempts at sabotaging Rukh's growth by exploiting inter-ethnic rivalries, Rukh from the outset vehemently adopted a strong profile as a multi-national Ukrainian movement, to create a free Ukraine for all nationalities living on the territory of Ukraine. This stance by Rukh was decisive in contributing to the success of the Ukrainian national rebirth, as Ukraine is indeed a multi-national state, with Ukrainians comprising slightly less than two-thirds of the population. It is a tribute to this highly principled, anti-chauvinist stand of Rukh that Moscow has been unable to foment any "national" backlash against the Ukrainian Peaceful Revolution.

One example of how Rukh has countered KGB divide-and-conquer schemes has been its relentless campaign against anti-Semitism, showing how organized anti-Semitism has been an operation fomented, supported, and steered by the Soviet state and KGB. At Rukh's founding congress, a powerful resolution against anti-Semitism was passed unanimously and then circulated throughout Ukraine.

Rukh's initial caution is understandable if the reader remembers that back in September 1989, except for Poland, where Solidarnosc had just come to power, Ukraine was isolated everywhere along its borders. Stalinist regimes still ruled in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, and the process of democratic revolution had not yet surfaced in Ukraine's huge Russian neighbor.

Rukh's strategy was never based on mere local considerations. Its first mass campaign, launched right after its founding Congress, to legalize the Ukrainian Catholic Church, was timed to coincide with the upcoming Synod of the Ukrainian Catholic Bishops in Rome, and the knowledge that Gorbachov was scheduled to meet Pope John Paul II before the end of the year.

Rukh, meanwhile, concentrated all its energies on building a mass movement that would force the authorities to register Rukh as a legal political movement so that it could field candidates for the March parliamentary elections. During the last three months of 1989, this meticulous organizing work went on day and night. To build and strike only from a

position of strength, was the Rukh maxim. That position of strength was reached by mid-January and Rukh delivered a devastating blow to Ukraine's Communist authorities.

On Jan. 21, 1990, Rukh made its demonstration of strength with a human chain of more than 1 million Ukrainians, stretching 500 kilometers from the western Ukrainian city of Lvov (Lviv) to the Ukrainian capital of Kiev. Mass rallies were held in Lvov, Kiev, and 30 other Ukrainian cities and towns with heavy worker representation, especially from the miners. With this human chain demonstration, Moscow could no longer ignore, let alone crush Rukh. Moscow had no choice but to legalize Rukh, as it had earlier granted full legal status to the Baltic popular fronts. On Feb. 9, Rukh was officially registered as a legal political movement and ran candidates in the March 11 parliamentary elections.

The late registry ensured Rukh the ability to enter the new Ukrainian parliament with a significant bloc of deputies, but also ensured that Rukh would not have the time to extend its campaign to all regions and thus actually acquire a parliamentary majority.

On March 11, the Ukrainian parliamentary elections were held. Rukh and Rukh-supported candidates, organized into the electoral alliance "Democratic Bloc," won in this first round 110 of 440 seats contested. In many of the big cities Rukh won overwhelming majorities, smashing the opposing candidates of the Communist Party apparatus. In Kiev, Rukh won in 16 of 22 election districts; Rukh swept all election districts in the western Ukrainian cities of Lvov, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk (the city councils of these three cities and dozens of other towns in western Ukraine have come under solid Rukh control), and scored impressive victories in ethnically mixed Ukrainian and Russian eastern industrial centers such as Donetsk and Sumy.

### **Rukh's platform**

The Rukh candidates won on a platform which delineated the following basic principles, designed to create the political preconditions for achieving Ukrainian independence:

- "Genuine" political and economic sovereignty for Ukraine.
- A multi-party system, and the abolition of Article 6 of the U.S.S.R. Constitution which had certified the leading role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
- The creation of an economic system in Ukraine based on a variety of forms of ownership, with equal rights for all forms of enterprise.
- A cultural renaissance and freedom for the Ukrainian language and culture and the cultures of all other national groups living in the republic, including Russians, who comprise some 23% of the republic's population, and Jews.
- Freedom of religion, including the immediate legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.
- The preparation of a new constitution for the Ukrainian

republic that would guarantee human sovereign and political rights based on internationally accepted human rights laws.

The simultaneity of the March 11 elections and Lithuania's declaration of independence ignited the next major leap in the Ukrainian Peaceful Revolution. Ukraine was to become in the weeks of March and April the center internationally of mass rallies and marches in support of Lithuania. These marches and rallies proved to be a crucial psychological turning point for the majority of Ukrainians. Previous mass rallies had either been against something Moscow or its stooges in Kiev were doing, or for demands and measures that fell short of independence. Now, Ukrainians were marching for the independence; or total exit from the Soviet Union, of a Soviet republic. Support for Lithuanian independence meant, as every Ukrainian knew, support for their own republic's independence.

The largest series of mass rallies to aid Lithuania were held April 1 in defiance of a ban by Soviet authorities. The demonstrations, called by Rukh and held in at least nine major Ukrainian cities, involved over 300,000 people and were thus the largest non-Baltic mass rallies in support of Lithuania ever held anywhere in the world. In the capital of Kiev, 30-50,000 demonstrated in a sea of blue and yellow Ukrainian national flags; in the western Ukraine metropolis of Lvov, over 100,000 took part, while in the western Ukrainian cities of Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil, the figure was 50,000 each.

Rukh's program, circulating throughout the Ukraine, already was calling for a post-independence economic confederation between Lithuania, Belorussia, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

These demonstrations, which established Ukraine as the main center of support inside the Soviet Union for beleaguered Lithuania, were themselves one of many barometers of how rapidly the internal crisis in the Soviet Union has grown since this year began. They also showed how extensive the coordination has been between the national freedom movements of the Baltic republics and Ukraine.

The open question remains whether Ukraine can now use its new position of greatly enhanced freedom gained by the Peaceful Revolution, as a springboard to total independence.

The leaders of Rukh are under no illusion that independence will be reached overnight. The problem lies not only with Moscow, since Moscow would never voluntarily surrender Ukraine. The Anglo-American sellout of Lithuania, the commitment of President Bush and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to appease Moscow at the expense of the Captive Nations, has been duly noted. Ukrainians know that they can count on no help from the West. On this basis, strategies are being worked out to best coordinate the struggle of the newly independent nations of Eastern Europe and the Captive Nations inside the U.S.S.R. to win what all Ukrainians see as a long, bitter struggle before true independence is achieved.