

The Polish and Ukrainian Lobby and U.S. Policy toward the Soviet Union and Russia

Maciej Olchawa

The dissertation entitled “The Polish and Ukrainian Lobby and U.S. Policy toward the Soviet Union and Russia” presents the Polish and Ukrainian ethnic groups in the United States and the manner in which they exerted, or failed to exert, their influence on U.S. foreign policy.

This dissertation poses the following research question: Under what conditions did the Polish and Ukrainian ethnic lobbies influence U.S. foreign policy prior to, during, and after the Cold War? According to the hypothesis of this comparative case study, these groups were able to do so when the U.S. government believed that it was in the country’s national interest to pursue policies perceived by the Soviet Union/Russia as antagonistic and when the lobbies were well-organized, consistently pursued symbolic measures that may have seemed marginal but served to constantly remind policymakers of the lobbies’ goals so that their cause would not be forgotten, built coalitions with other ethnic groups, and were able to seize opportunities associated with changes in the international arena. The findings of the presented dissertation suggest that one more very important element needs to be incorporated into the aforementioned list of factors that allowed the lobbies to influence U.S. foreign policy: charismatic leaders with access to decision-makers. It was these leaders that often tipped the scale for an ethnic interest group to succeed.

Whereas the literature on ethnic lobbies does not exclude the importance of leadership, little or no attention is given to the unique role of the charismatic leader that is able to gain access to decision-makers and is recognized by them as one who represents the ethnic interest group. This dissertation argues that at moments of far-reaching changes in the international arena, the charisma, drive, and personality of some leaders is the solidifying element that brings the other assets together.

The three main chapters of this dissertation present a comparative case study focusing on Ukrainian and Polish lobbying efforts in the United States. Instead of adhering to a strict chronological order, three distinct time periods are presented during which the Polish and Ukrainian ethnic groups in the U.S. lobbied on behalf of their ancestral homelands within a given international context: lobbying for stateless nations that took place before and during World War I; lobbying for occupied and captive nations, which covers the period of World War II and the Cold War; and lobbying for sovereign nations in the 1990’s – starting in the period of the demise of the Soviet bloc and the USSR until the symbolic end of the “Yalta order” when Poland joined NATO. These three specific periods provide an outstanding account of how the Polish and Ukrainian lobbies changed and evolved under various conditions.

During World War II, the United States government did not believe that it was in the country’s national interest to pursue policies perceived by the Soviet Union as antagonistic. At the conclusion of the war, an estimated ten million people in Europe found themselves outside of their homelands; thousands of Poles and Ukrainians remained in Germany as displaced persons. The new émigrés, often Polish and Ukrainian displaced persons, brought to the United States a deep distrust for the communists in their homelands and a hatred for the Soviet Union. They were often veterans of the war and had fought against the Germans, Soviets, or both. Many were veterans of conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians themselves. But once in the U.S. they

focused on a common enemy and cooperated in activities to undermine Moscow's control over Central and Eastern Europe. Ethnic lobbies exponentially increase their chance of success when they build coalitions that work toward a common goal or against a common enemy. Despite deeply-rooted antagonisms, the international context and the covert operations of the U.S. government also fostered the respect and trust that began developing between Polish and Ukrainian émigrés in the United States.

Taken individually, many efforts of the Polish and Ukrainian lobbies during the Cold War may seem largely symbolic. But the Soviet Union didn't disintegrate because of one factor or event; this was the result of a combination of interconnecting elements. Taken together and over time, efforts that may appear symbolic or marginal made more than a marginal difference. The independence movements in Central and Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union signaled a tectonic shift in the international arena. It gave Polish and Ukrainian ethnic lobbies an opportunity to have a greater voice on foreign policy because with the end of the Cold War the U.S. was redefining its role in the world and adjusting to the status of the only remaining superpower. The collapse of the U.S.S.R offered a policy vacuum that would prove very auspicious for Polonia and less fortunate for Ukrainian Americans.

Whereas the Ukrainian lobby had little room to impact the conditions of Ukraine's nuclear disarmament, the Polish Americans' involvement in NATO enlargement is one of the most successful and effective ethnic interest group efforts in American history. It was the culmination of over a hundred years of Polonia's determination to help its ancestral homeland. Using pressure from their constituents, the ethnic lobbies were part of the discussion on American strategies toward the Soviet Union and Russia and were able to convince the U.S. government that their recommendations were congruent with American national interest.