

US Diplomatic Recognition Will Set Precedent
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The Christian Science Monitor (1908-Current file); Dec 3, 1991;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers Christian Science Monitor (1908 - 1998)
pg. 1

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By Linda Feldmann

Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

— WASHINGTON —

THE Bush administration has embarked on a delicately balanced strategy in its relations with the Ukraine, which voted overwhelmingly Sunday for independence from the crumbling Soviet Union.

United States policymakers, including President Bush, have stated that formal US diplomatic recognition of the Ukraine is in the offing, and that it will take place "sooner rather than later."

But in an apparent effort to nudge the Ukraine toward poli-

cies the US finds acceptable, US officials are in alternate breaths dampening expectations of immediate recognition.

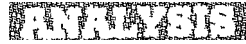
"Independence doesn't just remove all the obstacles," said Robert Strauss, US ambassador to the Soviet Union, in an interview Sunday with CBS-TV's "Face the Nation." "It just creates a lot of issues that must be dealt with."

The issues the US will address with the Ukraine include adherence to conventional and nuclear weapons treaties, treatment of ethnic minorities, and the Soviet foreign debt. The US will likely send an envoy to the Ukraine soon, Ambassador Strauss said.

The shift of US emphasis from supporting Soviet President Mik-

hail Gorbachev's rapidly evaporating "center" toward enhanced relations with the breakaway republics — made clear last week in a private meeting between Bush and Ukrainian-American leaders — came as a surprise.

Until a couple of weeks ago,



senior US officials played down the possibility that the US would recognize Ukrainian independence, in deference to President Gorbachev's efforts to preserve some form of Soviet Union. Early in August, in a speech in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, Bush alienated pro-independence

forces in the Ukraine by warning against "suicidal nationalism."

But since mid-August, when a failed hard-line coup mortally wounded Soviet unity, the US has come to the realization that the political breakup of the Soviet Union is inevitable and that any measures that can help prevent a violent dissolution are necessary.

"My sense is it [the new US policy] was finally a facing of the obvious," says Bob McConnell, an activist in Ukrainian-American affairs who attended last Wednesday's meeting with Bush.

Mr. McConnell says that although Bush did raise the areas where the US needs assurances — such as the Strategic Arms Reduc-

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tion Treaty and the recently ratified treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe – the president “saw no reason to believe these would be stumbling blocks.”

How the US handles the issue of Ukrainian independence is of particular importance, because it will set a precedent for its handling of other breakaway republics in the Soviet Union, Yugo-

slavia, and Czechoslovakia.

Not only will the US face demands of recognition from many of the 12 remaining Soviet republics, but it may find those republics, including the Russian Federation, breaking down along ethnic lines, with minority enclaves seeking diplomatic ties.

The restoration of full diplomatic relations last August with the three Baltic nations was an easier call for the White House,

since the US had never recognized the annexation of the Baltics in 1940. But the US has always recognized the Ukraine (or at least the eastern portion) as part of the Soviet Union. (Western Ukraine was annexed in 1940, like the Baltics, as part of the secret Hitler-Stalin pact.)

Ironically, the US was far more reserved on the reestablishment of full ties with the Baltics than it is in discussing full relations with the Ukraine, even though the latter carries graver implications for the future of the Soviet Union.

The Baltics accounted for only 9 million of the Soviet Union's 280 million people, little in the way of natural resources, and no nuclear warheads; the Ukraine has 52 million people, is a key agricultural center, and home to nuclear weaponry. After Russia, the Ukraine is the most important Soviet republic. Without it, the old Soviet Union no longer exists.