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CARL GERSHMAN **Remarks to the Ukrainian American Bar Association**

November 15, 2014 Washington, D.C.

There are two important post-communist anniversaries this week. The first is on Monday, November 17 - the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, on which occasion a bust of Vaclav Havel will be unveiled in the U.S. Capitol. The second, just as important but probably less noticed, is the first anniversary of the Maidan Uprising in Ukraine, which occurs next Friday, November 21. It's hard to believe that so much has happened in less than one year: the EuroMaidan uprising, the sustained protests in sub-freezing temperatures against the corruption of the Yanukovich government, the repression, the martyrs, the fall of Yanukovich, then the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea, and now Russia's continuing aggression in eastern Ukraine. These have been world transforming events, and they're continuing to this day, with consequences that go far beyond Ukraine.

A new Ukraine has emerged from all of this turmoil and struggle. It's a more unified country than ever before, with a much stronger sense of national identity. I was speaking over dinner with Professor Volodymyr Vassylenko, who said that Putin is trying to destroy Ukraine's national identity. But in an ironic way, it is because of Ukraine's struggle, and therefore also because of Putin and Yanukovich, that Ukraine has become a new country, a unitary state where language and other divisions are no longer as difficult as they once were; a country that wants to become a modern, European state with democracy and the rule of law.

I was in Ukraine last May for a solidarity conference of intellectuals organized by Professor Timothy Snyder and Leon Wieseltier of *The New Republic*. There was a session bringing together religious leaders from all different faiths – Greek and Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Muslims, and Jews. There was also a panel of seven Jewish leaders. Everyone there was speaking as a Ukrainian. This could never have happened before, and it's happened because of the Maidan and the Russian aggression against the uprising and against Ukraine itself.

The Maidan uprising was a profoundly democratic event, with the protesters embracing a concept of democratic citizenship involving individual responsibility to uphold democratic values and to serve the larger community. Ukraine took another step towards democracy on October 26 when it held parliamentary elections. NED's Nadia Diuk, who is with us tonight, was there as an election observer. She reported afterwards that one of the most significant things that happened in the elections was that civil-society activists, journalists and other leaders from the Maidan entered politics for the first time. The decision by these activists and journalists to run for parliament was not an easy one because politics and politicians have such a bad reputation in Ukraine - for good reason since it's considered a dirty business. But they knew that they could not defend the revolution and achieve the reforms contained in the Reanimation Reforms Package initiative if they did not make the jump from civic activism to politics. They simply had done as much as they could do as civic activists and had to take responsibility for governance. This is something that the protesters in Egypt's Tahrir Square could not do, which is why in the end Egypt's revolution fared so badly.

And so activists like the journalist Mustafa Nayyem, whose Facebook post launched the Maidan protests, made the difficult decision to move from protest to politics. And I think Ukraine will benefit as a result. I'm happy to announce that on December 9

three of the Maidan activists who were elected to the new parliament will be honored at a dinner in Washington of the National Democratic Institute, one of NED's four core institute which is chaired by Madeleine Albright and has been very active in Ukraine. The three are Serhiy Leshchenko, the investigative journalist who took a leave from his Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow at NED to return to Kyiv when the Maidan protests erupted last November; Hanna Hopko, an ecology advocate and journalist; and Oleksandr Solontay, a political analyst and civic educator.

The entry of such people into politics is extremely important since there is now an urgent need to implement real reforms. Anders Aslund, a leading specialist on postcommunist economic transition, has described the current economic situation in Ukraine as "desperate, though not hopeless." He has written that the economy is on the verge of a meltdown, with the GDP plummeting by 8 percent this year – 10 percent according to *The Economist* - and the budget deficit rising to 12 percent of GDP. The value of the hryvnia has fallen by half and is likely to fall much more. Inflation for this year will reach 24 percent, and of course the war in the east has caused billions of dollars in damage.

In a policy brief published by the Peterson Institute for International Economics, Aslund offers "An Economic Strategy to Save Ukraine." Among its key points are that the reformist forces that won the parliamentary elections need to agree as soon as possible on the formation of a highly competent coalition government, which then will launch the kind of radical reforms contained in the Reanimation Package. These include cleaning up the government from the top down, including the purge of corrupt officials from the old regime, especially in the judiciary and police; abolishing the legal immunity of parliamentarians so that they can be held accountable; closing or merging superfluous or even harmful state agencies, and laying off excess staff while raising salaries and qualifications; cutting public expenditures by one-tenth of GDP in the next year; and reducing energy subsidies by unifying energy prices - meaning putting an end to the trading of gas between low state-controlled prices and high market prices - which Aslund calls "the main mechanism of corruption" in Ukraine.

In addition to implementing radical reforms, Ukraine will need much more financial support than it has received to date from the IMF and other international financial institutions – not in the form of credits, which Ukraine won't be able to repay as the economy is collapsing – but as aid to rebuild its economy. What's needed, according to Aslund, is a new Marshall Plan to save Ukraine, just as the United States saved Europe after World War Two. And it can work, because Ukraine is now ready to do what has to be done to control corruption and become a modern state.

The challenge confronting Ukraine is more difficult than the one faced by post-war Europe because it needs to rebuild economically while the war is still going on – in this case, the war caused by Russia's continuing aggression in Ukraine's east. Ukraine is now fighting a war of survival against a very brutal, dangerous, and powerful enemy. NATO Commanding General Philip Breedlove said on Wednesday that Russian forces have again crossed the border into south east Ukraine with tanks, artillery and troops. He charged that Putin is ignoring last September's Minsk peace accords calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the region, but as *The Economist* reports in the current issue, Putin claims he doesn't have to do so since Russia has no troops in Ukraine in the first place. Of course he's lying, but the West, Breedlove aside, is not calling him on it. *The Economist* notes that Putin's standard operating procedure is to escalate the conflict and then agree to go no further in exchange for concessions, and he has been getting away with it. It quotes Kirill Rogov, a Russian political analyst at the Gaidar Institute in Moscow, as saying that "Putin likes to open talks by putting a knife on the table first." Yet somehow we continue to think that Putin is a potential partner in securing a more peaceful world order.

But of course he's not a partner. The German government has called the latest Russian move "incomprehensible," but it's perfectly comprehensible if one just observes Russian behavior. And the new foreign policy chief of the European Union, Federica Mogherini of Italy, has said that we can't let the peace process break down because it will be so difficult to start it again. But what peace process is she speaking about? *The Wall Street Journal* said yesterday that "Putin has never stood down" – not in Chechnya in 1999 when he used the Chechen war to take power; not in Georgia in 2008; and not in 2012, when he whipped up anti-Americanism and domestic repression to crush anti-government street protests. He will stand down only if and when he is forced to stand down.

No, he's not a partner in peace or in negotiations, and he has demonstrated a seething anti-Americanism. Here's how *The Washington Post* characterized his recent speech in Valdai. They called it "a poisonous mix of lies, conspiracy theories, thinly veiled threats of further aggression and, above all, seething resentment toward the United States."

Now he's gone even further with his endorsement of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. What can this mean? Tim Snyder's answer is that Putin is following Stalin: "In his own way, Putin is now attempting much the same thing. Just as Stalin sought to turn the most radical of European forces, Adolf Hitler, against Europe itself, so Putin is allying with his grab bag of anti-European populists, fascists, and separatists. His allies on the far right are precisely the political forces that wish to bring an end to the current European order: the European Union."

What are we to do? More important, really the first question, is what are we dealing with here? If Putin's Russia is not a partner, then what is it? And if it is an adversary, or an opponent, or even an enemy – which is certainly how Putin views it – how does this affect us?

I suggest that Putin seeks a different kind of world order than the one that followed the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, which he said was "the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th Century." That's why he "drove a tank over the

world order” as *The Economist* put it last March after the invasion and annexation of Crimea: He thinks the current world order represents a grave injustice to Russia. He is seeking to reverse the verdict of 1989, which he considers to be an unjust and humiliating defeat for Russia.

The Russian analyst Lilia Shevtsova, who delivered the NED’s annual Lipset Lecture on Democracy last month at the Canadian Embassy, has said that the world is in the midst of an authoritarian surge. She adds that “Today’s Russia is an advance combat unit of the new global authoritarianism, with China...waiting in the wings to seize its own opportunities.” She warns that if the West chooses to respond with appeasement, “this will give a green light to the Authoritarian Internationale, signaling that the West is weak and can be trampled underfoot.” As *The Wall Street Journal* said yesterday, it will certainly open the way for Putin to threaten and attack other countries aside from Ukraine – Moldova, the Baltic states, Poland, and Kazakhstan.

Should this matter to the United States? Are our own interests involved, leaving aside those of Ukraine and our allies? Why should we care? I raised this question at a forum we organized the day following Lilia Shevtsova’s lecture. A member of the panel, Leon Aron of the American Enterprise Institute, responded that Russia is a country with 1,700 nuclear missiles and is now in the grip of a leader with a messianic, revanchist ideology and historic grievances against the United States. Shouldn’t that matter to us? If Putin wants to destroy NATO and the EU, shouldn’t we care? Have we no sense of what our national interest is and what we must do to defend it?

We are entering a new moment in our politics. After last week’s election, we can expect a much tougher tone in the debate in Congress over foreign policy, and more pressure for a stronger response than we’ve seen so far to Putin’s aggression. There will certainly be an effort to expand sanctions to sharpen the economic crisis that is growing in Russia. The ruble has fallen by 22 percent so far this year, a rate of decline second only to Argentina. The drop in oil prices, the outflow of capital that could exceed \$100 billion this year, the inflation in food prices caused by Putin’s retaliatory embargo on agricultural imports from the West – all of this will contribute to Russia’s severe economic difficulties and present new opportunities to increase pressure on Russia by tightening sanctions.

But what is most urgent, as Senators Carl Levin and Jim Inhofe wrote in *The Washington Post* last month, is the need to give Ukraine the weapons it needs to defend itself. They don’t want U.S. boots on the ground, but blankets and food rations are hardly enough, as President Poroshenko told the Congress in September. What they need is what was provided for in the bill adopted with bipartisan and unanimous support in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: anti-tank weapons to defend against Russian-provided armored personnel carriers; ammunition; vehicles and secure communications equipment; and intelligence support and training.

Key leaders in the U.S. and Europe have said that they oppose weapons for Ukraine because they fear that an armed Ukraine might think that there is a military solution to the conflict. Unfortunately, as *The Washington Post* has repeatedly pointed out, Mr. Putin does not agree that there is no military solution. He has used military escalation to achieve his *victory* in the form of a dissected Ukraine and a frozen conflict that will destabilize Ukraine for the foreseeable future and deny it membership in the European Union and NATO. Military aid to Ukraine may not by itself bring the conflict to an end, but no political solution will be possible in the absence of a military balance that convinces Putin that his aggression will meet with stiff resistance and will not be able to succeed.

If he does fail, the consequences for Putin could be severe. Clearly he hopes that the invasion and annexation of Crimea and the attack on eastern Ukraine will help him gain support in Russia and resist pressures for change. He’s not the first Russian leader to think that way. In 1904, the czarist interior minister Vyacheslav Plehve said, “What this country needs is a short victorious war to stem the tide of revolution.” He had in mind Russia’s war against Japan. But what happened? Plehve was assassinated, Russia lost the war, and the defeat precipitated the revolution of 1905, which brought about Russia’s first parliament and the reforms of Pyotr Stolypin. According to both the Russian analyst Vladimir Kara Murza and the Georgian writer Ghia Nodia, this was not the only case of a Russian military defeat or setback leading to political change. They note that Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War of 1853-1856 demonstrated the backwardness of its autocratic system and led to the abolition of serfdom and other liberal reforms, including the establishment of local self-government and trial by jury. Russia’s devastating setbacks in World War I contributed to the collapse of the czarist system and the Russia Revolution of 1917, which began as a democratic revolution before the Bolshevik coup. And the failed Soviet invasion of Afghanistan precipitated the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Putin may yet regret the day he decided to send troops into Ukraine.

But many people think who argue that the fall of Putin would itself present a great danger because he will likely be replaced by someone even worse. They say that Russia, with its autocratic history and authoritarian culture, is not capable of establishing a real democracy. But is that true?

I asked that question to my friend Vladimir Kara Murza, who now works in Moscow for Mikhail Khodorkovsky’s Open Russia, which seeks a democratic opening and a European future for Russia. Kara Murza responded by saying that anti-democratic forces have always done badly in Russian elections whenever they were free and competitive. The first-ever election was in 1906, when the Constitutional Democratic Party, which had campaigned for liberal reforms and a British-style parliamentary system, won a plurality of seats in the State Duma, while the far-right monarchists failed to get even a single candidate elected. In 1917, in the election for the Constituent Assembly held after the Bolshevik coup, the Bolsheviks lost to the pro-democracy Socialist Revolutionary Party by 40 to 24 percent, which is why the Bolsheviks then dispersed the “bourgeois” Assembly by force. The next time the Russians had a chance to vote, according to Kara Murza, was in 1991 when Boris Yeltsin, backed by the opposition Democratic

Russia movement, overwhelmingly defeated the Communist candidate, former Soviet Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov, by 57 to 17 percent. Even in the 1993 parliamentary elections, when ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky won a plurality, the centrist and liberal parties out-poll the combined total received by Zhirinovsky and the Communists by 40 to 35 percent. And in 1996, even though Yeltsin was an unpopular incumbent and in poor health, he was able to defeat the Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov by 54 to 40 percent in the second-round presidential runoff.

I am by no means saying that democracy is inevitable in Russia, only that it is possible, and that one should not resign oneself to Putin's continued rule on the grounds that the only possible alternative to him would be worse. I believe that Putin does not feel secure in his power, and that the greatest threat to autocracy in Russia is a successful and a democratic Ukraine. This is what Putin fears most, because the mentality of Russian imperialism that Putin represents will wither if Russia cannot control Ukraine. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, as Zbigniew Brzezinski has said, and it can become a more normal country, even a democracy, where the central concern is not the power of Great Russia but the welfare of the people.

Putin also fears a democratic Ukraine because it will be a powerful model for Russia itself. He knows that a neighboring Ukraine, with millions of Russian-speaking people freely expressing themselves, will be a magnetic symbol of democratic freedoms for people inside Russia.

So the strategic goal for people who want to see a more peaceful and democratic world is a Russia that, like Ukraine, wants to be democratic and a part of Europe. I don't know if that will happen. But I do know that a successful and democratic Ukraine is a precondition for it to happen. Therefore, Ukraine's struggle for democracy, independence, and territorial integrity has global significance. It's a struggle that will have consequences for the whole world. And I believe that the U.S. has a profound national interest in its success. So we must stand with Ukraine, not just because it deserves our support, but to defend our values and our national security.

In conclusion, I want to refer back to the October 26 election and to the thought that Ukraine is a new country. As I mentioned, Nadia Diuk was there as an observer, in Dnipropetrovsk, which used to be a center for Soviet missile production. She wrote afterwards that she saw signs of a different country and a new patriotism all about her, in political graffiti and in walls and fences painted yellow and blue. She said that on her return plane trip to Kyiv from Dnipropetrovsk, the steward made the usual announcements before landing, saying that the passengers should make sure to take all of your personal belongings." And then he ended with the phrase that was as unusual as it was expressive of the new spirit of the country, and it's how I want to end tonight: "Slava Ukraini!" – Glory to Ukraine. Thank you very much.

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