Ukrainian War for Independence (1918-1922)

- The **Russian Revolution** of February 1917 initially brought into power a Provisional Government, which introduced freedom of speech and assembly and lifted the tsarist restrictions on minorities.

  o National life in Ukraine quickened with the revival of a Ukrainian press and the formation of numerous cultural and professional associations, as well as political parties. In March, on the initiative of these new organizations, the **Central Rada** ("Council") was formed in Kiev as a Ukrainian representative body.

    ▪ The stated goal of the Central Rada was territorial autonomy for Ukraine and the transformation of Russia into a democratic, federative republic.

    ▪ Although the Provisional Government recognized Ukraine's right to autonomy and the Central Rada as a legitimate representative body, there were unresolved disputes over its territorial jurisdiction and political prerogatives. Locally, especially in the Russified cities of eastern Ukraine, the Central Rada also had to compete with the increasingly radical **Soviets** (*an elected local, district, or national council in the Soviet Union*) of workers' and soldiers' deputies, whose support in the Ukrainian population, however, was quite limited.

- Ukrainian-Russian relations deteriorated rapidly following the **Bolshevik coup (Leninist Ideology)** in Petrograd[1] on November 7, 1917. The Ukrainian Rada refused to accept the new regime's authority over Ukraine and on November 20 proclaimed the creation of the Ukrainian National Republic, though still in federation with the new democratic Russia that was expected to emerge from the impending Constituent Assembly.

  o The Bolsheviks, in turn, at the first All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, held in Kharkiv in December, declared Ukraine to be a Soviet republic and formed a rival government.
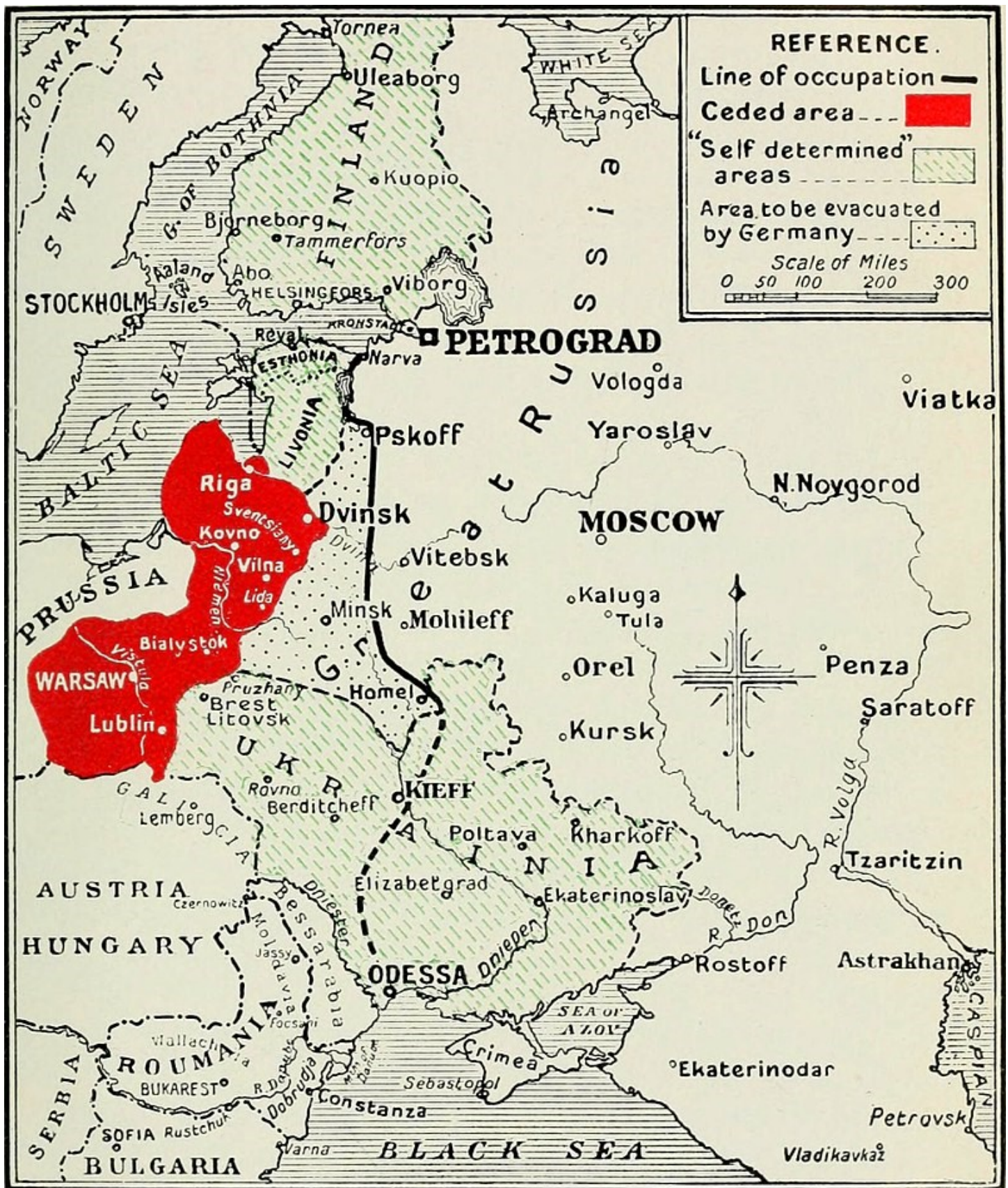
---

[1] Present-day St. Petersburg

The borders shown are the pre-2014 borders of Ukraine.

- o The Bolsheviks launched an offensive in the **Left Bank** and advanced on Kiev. The Central Rada, already engaged in peace negotiations with the Central Powers, from whom it hoped for military assistance, proclaimed the total independence of Ukraine on January 22, 1918. On the same day, the Central Rada passed a law establishing national autonomy for Ukraine's Jewish, Russian, and Polish minorities. Almost immediately, however, the government had to evacuate to the **Right Bank**, as Soviet troops occupied Kiev.

- On February 9, 1918, Ukraine and the Central Powers signed the **Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** which included a guarantee of Ukrainian Independence from Russian control.

  - o A German-Austrian offensive dislodged the Bolsheviks from Kiev in early March, and the Rada government returned to the capital. In April the Red Army retreated from Ukraine.

Map showing territory lost by Russia according to the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Created in 2019, updated in 2022 (During the Russian invasion of Ukraine)

- The socialist policies of the Ukrainian government, especially land nationalization, conflicted with the interest of the German High Command to maximize the production of foodstuffs for its own war effort. On April 29, 1918, the Central Rada government was overthrown in a German-supported coup by Gen. Pavlo Skoropadsky.

  - A descendant of an 18th-century Cossack hetman, Skoropadsky assumed the title *Hetman of Ukraine* (which he intended to become hereditary), abrogated all laws passed by the Rada, and established a conservative regime that relied on the support of landowners and the largely Russian urban middle class.

  - The capitulation of Germany and Austria in November removed the main prop of Skoropadsky's regime. In a bid for the support of the Allied Powers, Skoropadsky announced his intention to join a future non-Bolshevik Russia in a new federation which triggered an uprising. On December 14 the *Hetman of Ukraine* abdicated, and Ukraine descended into civil war between the Left and Right Banks of the country.

    - Polish forces were drawn in to support Ukrainian forces on the Right Bank as they fought Soviet Forces on the Left.

- As authority broke down in Ukraine, random violence increased. A ferocious wave of pogroms[2] against the Jewish population left tens of thousands of dead. Most of the pogroms occurred in 1919, perpetrated by virtually all regular and irregular forces fighting in Ukraine as well as civilians from both the peasant and landowning classes.

  - Polish forces sued for peace with the Bolsheviks in 1921, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) was proclaimed the same year. Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Ukrainian SSR shortly after, adopting the Leninist governing structure used in Russia.

---

[2] Pogrom is a Russian word meaning "to wreak havoc, to demolish violently."

Created in 2019, updated in 2022 (During the Russian invasion of Ukraine)