

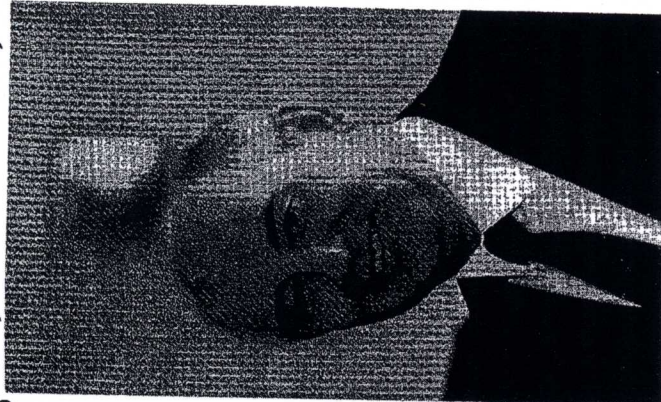
REBIRTH: A POLITICAL HISTORY OF EUROPE SINCE WW II

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McADAMS

The Soviet Union

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The leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev as the head of the Communist party of the Soviet Union supports the theory that individuals do have the power to change the course of history. Although many Western observers were initially skeptical of his policies of perestroika and glasnost, Gorbachev began a full-scale assault on the inefficiency and inhumanity of many aspects of the Soviet system. He also unintentionally set in motion a train of events that led to the complete disintegration of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and, soon thereafter, of the Soviet Union itself. (Photo courtesy of the German Information Center.)

Afghanistan. Such groups would provide the nuclei of new political parties once these were permitted just a few years later.

The policy of promoting *glasnost* received an early test in April 1986, when an explosion at the Chernobyl atomic energy plant resulted in the world's worst nuclear-reactor disaster. The fallout spread across Europe from Scandinavia to Great Britain and as far south as Italy, causing widespread contamination of agriculture and livestock. The Europeans immediately became aware of the fallout, but Moscow remained silent for several days. It seemed as though the traditional Soviet policy of secrecy was still intact. The Soviets finally gave wide publicity to the disaster, although critics have claimed that its full extent was not made clear for some years. After that crisis, and in part because of its undeniable significance, the Soviet media became increasingly bold in reporting such phenomena. Major accidents, public demonstrations against the government, and critical opinions that previously would have been squelched received free play in the media. Long-suppressed books and articles were published, while many provocative films now came off the censor's shelf. Indeed, within a matter of one or two years, Soviet television and print media had become almost as open as their Western counterparts (and a bit more lively). Virtually no subject was taboo, from crime, sex, and drug addiction to the personality of Gorbachev himself.

Gorbachev's original intentions for *perestroika*, the broader program of "restructuring" or "reformation" that *glasnost* was meant to support, are considerably more difficult to divine. *Perestroika*'s early emphasis was on Andropov-like measures to make the existing system function better, but not to transform it radically. One view is that Gorbachev quickly learned from the ineffectiveness of these first steps, such as the antialcohol campaign that served only to create enormous queues at vodka stores and encourage the illicit production of home brew (and consequent shortages of sugar) while lost liquor revenues caused an immediate budget deficit. Another interpretation is that Gorbachev turned to more radical political change only when he understood that the majority of Communist party officials opposed any meaningful reform as a challenge to their privileged lives; his seizing upon *glasnost* in the aftermath of Chernobyl, a disaster symbolizing all that was wrong with the old system, supports this view. A third interpretation holds that Gorbachev's goals for *perestroika* were quite bold from the outset—certainly far more ambitious than suggested by the tentative steps of 1985–1986—but that the ideas gleaned from his extensive contacts with liberal intellectuals could not

Glasnost and Perestroika

Glasnost, which means "openness" or "publicity," is probably the simpler to understand of the two famous terms. It refers to the easing, and soon near-total abandonment, of state censorship over the media, scholarship, literature, film, and other realms of cultural-social life. Gorbachev's goal—and *glasnost* clearly began to serve more as a specific purpose than as a matter of principle—was to give his reforms a strong impulse and engage all of Soviet society in them by promoting open discussion of past and present problems. Initially there were clear limits to the permissible—Stalin could be criticized, but Lenin was still sacrosanct—but a whole range of long-suppressed views were discussed in the press, literature, films, and plays. In Moscow, Leningrad (now known again by its prerevolutionary name, St. Petersburg), and other major cities, there soon emerged a large number of *neformaly*, or unofficial clubs and associations, concerned with everything from the environment to the war in

be implemented until he had strengthened his hold on power. Finally, there is the view that Gorbachev embraced more radical domestic and foreign policy change only when forced to do so by a looming economic collapse that was exacerbated by the burden of the arms race. This interpretation, if accurate, would be a vindication of U.S. President Reagan's military buildup as well as the NATO policy of new INF deployments, both in the early to mid-1980s.

In fact, each of these factors probably played a part in the radicalization of Gorbachev's *perestroika* as well as his embrace of an increasingly less Marxist-Leninist vision of international relations. After nearly three years in office, Gorbachev boldly laid out this new vision for the West with the fall 1987 publication of his *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. On the very first page, Gorbachev asserted that

Perestroika is an urgent necessity arising from the profound processes of development of our socialist society. This society is ripe for change. It has long been yearning for it. Any delay in beginning *perestroika* could have led to an exacerbated internal situation in the near future, which, to put it bluntly, would have been fraught with serious social, economic and political crises. (p. 3)

He then went on to list in some detail the reasons the Soviet rate of growth had declined to almost zero in the 1980s. He criticized the failings of the Soviet system as harshly as had some of the USSR's most hostile Western critics. At the same time, he predicted that the success of *perestroika* would demonstrate that a reformed socialism was the best system after all.

Looking abroad, Gorbachev stressed the complexity of the contemporary world:

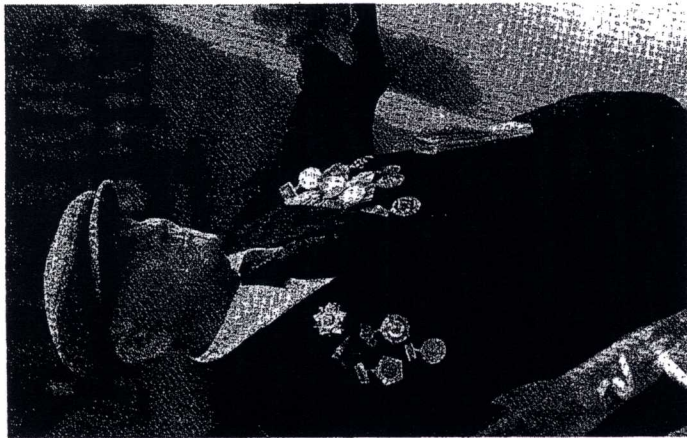
It is diverse, variegated, dynamic and permeated with opposing trends and acute contradictions. It is a world of fundamental social shifts, of an all-embracing scientific and technological revolution, of worsening global problems—problems concerning ecology, natural resources, etc.—and of radical changes in information technology. It is a world in which unheard-of possibilities for development and progress lie side by side with abject poverty, backwardness, and medievalism. It is a world in which there are vast "fields and tension." (p. 121)

Unlike his predecessors, however, Gorbachev did not claim that the USSR had solutions to all of these problems but insisted instead that they called for international cooperation: "We say with full responsibility, casting away false considerations of 'prestige,' that all of us in the present-day world are coming to depend more and more on one another and are becoming increasingly necessary to one another" (p. 123). In particular, he emphasized that all of the states in the modern world needed to find new, safer means of carrying on the competition among them: "Nuclear war cannot be a means of achieving political, economic, ideological or any other goals" (p. 126).

By this time, Gorbachev had already offered a number of significant initiatives in arms talks, observed an eighteen-month, self-imposed moratorium on nuclear tests, and was soon to make the final concessions toward the December 1987 INF Treaty (see Chapter 5 for details). He had also taken the first steps toward the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan—publicly referring to the war as a "bleeding wound"—and privately told the East European Communist party leaders that the Brezhnev doctrine was over and henceforth they would sink or swim on their own. Thus, although some analysts might argue that the Cold War did not end until the East European revolutions of 1989, the processes that led to its end had been set in motion several years earlier.

To anyone attempting to divine Gorbachev's early intentions and the extent to which he guided events, or was simply swept up in them, it is noteworthy that these critical foreign-policy steps were taken *before* the economic situation had descended from difficult to desperate and *before* domestic political and social changes had acquired a momentum of their own. Yet it was precisely in domestic reforms, particularly the economy, that *perestroika* would ultimately succeed or fail in creating a more dynamic, liberal, but still socialist order. It was also the economy that, in contrast to the comparatively simple task of changing foreign-policy course, presented the most difficult challenges.

Economic reform was so difficult in part because the nomenklatura interests vested in the old order were so numerous and powerful. Any move to streamline, to curb the bureaucracy, to reward incentive and punish failure, or to reduce the role of the plan and replace it with that of the market ran into opposition immediately. Further, owing to the vast size of the economy and of the administration that oversaw it, the opportunities to obstruct or sabotage attempted changes were great. Finally, the supercentralized nature of the economy meant that changes introduced



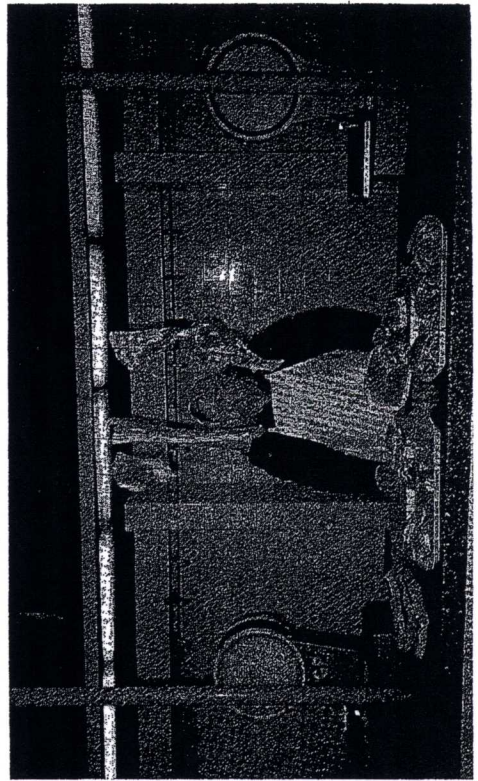
Regardless of their nationalities, many of the Soviet peoples were united by the common experience of having suffered through the bloodbath of World War II. Decades after the war's end, one still encountered elderly people (like the old man in this photo) who had special occasions wore the medals they had earned in the struggle against Nazi Germany. In the late 1980s these medals still commanded enough respect to permit their wearers a privileged place in the long lines for scarce commodities (such as those displayed in this butcher shop). For average Soviet citizens much of the appeal of communism lay in the government's ability to provide them with basic necessities. The regime's growing recognition that it could no longer guarantee such provision was one of the underlying reasons for the initiation of Gorbachev's campaign for perestroika. (Left photo courtesy of Paul Christensen; bottom photo courtesy of Richard Brody.)

in one sector would inevitably disrupt production or supply in others. In other words, the system was so rigid, with shortages and bottlenecks already so widespread, that it contained little of the slack that would have permitted partial, "experimental" reforms in one or another sector.

Given the entrenched opposition as well as Gorbachev's own indecision, partial reforms (or "half measures," as they were later derided) were all that Gorbachev attempted for several years. Admittedly they went well beyond his first Andropov-style efforts toward discipline and "acceleration" of the existing order. Yet for the reasons previously noted, nearly all of them did more harm than good. For example, a 1987 law granting factories greater decisionmaking autonomy had little effect when directors were still obliged to operate in an environment wherein their resources, wages, and prices were still determined by central plan. A 1988 law expanding the rights of cooperative (or semiprivate) enterprises similarly confronted restaurant, small manufacturing, and other new businesses with the dilemma of where to purchase supplies and equipment when these necessities were not included in what remained an overwhelmingly state-run economy. Almost inevitably, these businesses turned to unofficial or black-market sources, an arrangement that only exacerbated shortages in other areas while attracting the criminal interests that would soon grow to a problem of massive proportions. Similar problems plagued nearly all of Gorbachev's economic initiatives—from efforts at land reform that left fledgling private farmers without the necessary equipment, credit, and legal protection to the liberalization of foreign trade that permitted import-export activities to be dominated by well-connected insiders and bribe-taking officials.

Obstacles to reform clearly included what might be termed cultural factors as well. Official corruption had grown rampant during Brezhnev's time, and many functionaries were quick to exploit the vast new opportunities that Gorbachev's efforts toward economic liberalization afforded them. Likewise, many longtime black marketeers welcomed the chance to launder their illicit fortunes while buying or bribing their way to new status as "legitimate" entrepreneurs. Also important was that millions of ordinary workers had grown accustomed to state guarantees of employment and social services. Even if their wages were low and these services were poor, they were not prepared to seek their fortunes in the new private sector if that meant longer hours and greater risk.

This ingrained reluctance was a particular problem in the agricultural sector, and a crippling one for *perestroika* because success in encouraging private farming would have alleviated one of Soviet consumers' most



desperate problems and thus brought Gorbachev broad social support. Agriculture was, after all, the critical first stage in the successful Chinese reforms. The failure of *perestroika* to encourage a large new class of private farmers highlights the continuing legacy of Stalin's terror and the deadening impact of seventy years under the Communist system, in contrast to just over thirty years of such experience in China. But even if the USSR's long-suffering farmers and workers were understandably more timid than their Chinese (or Polish) counterparts, the larger problems were structural. The Soviet bureaucracy was more corrupt and less responsive to central directives, for example, and Gorbachev lacked the authority to bend it to his wishes. Deng Xiaoping, Gorbachev's Chinese counterpart, was a revolutionary veteran and onetime comrade of Mao's. Gorbachev, by contrast, was still a green youth in the eyes of many senior Soviet officials, a member of the postwar, post-Stalin generation whose experience was limited essentially to one sector (agriculture) in one region (southern Russia). Given this background, it is not surprising that many functionaries at all levels felt secure in simply ignoring his exhortations for change.

Thus by 1987, with his reforms stalled and the economy worsening, Gorbachev and his closest allies—Central Committee secretary Alexander Yakovlev and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze—knew that *perestroika* had reached a crossroads. They could play it safe, scaling back their ambitions and settling for a modestly more efficient, less corrupt, and less militarized model of Brezhnev's USSR. Or they could gamble by enlisting broader but less predictable social forces in the cause of reform. *Glasnost* had already demonstrated that many intellectuals, and millions of ordinary citizens, were yearning for just such change. Gorbachev chose the calculated risk of unleashing Soviet society to advance his stalled "revolution from above" with support from below. In practice, this meant taking the unprecedented path of democratization, transforming the Soviet political system from a single-party dictatorship to one with a major component of genuine pluralism. Privately, Gorbachev had broached this idea as early as 1986. In party councils, he floated it in 1987. Publicly, such proposals came to broader attention only with the convocation of an extraordinary party conference (as distinct from the regular party congresses) in July 1988.

This gathering, more noted at the time for the radical-reformist appeal of Gorbachev's onetime ally Boris Yeltsin, also approved the creation of new parliamentary structures to replace the old rubber-stamp legislature. The lower house, to be called the Congress of People's Deputies, would

be composed of 2,250 members, most of whom would be selected in multicandidate, secret-ballot elections. The smaller upper house, the Supreme Soviet, would be drawn from the Congress. It would be the standing legislature responsible for debating budgets, approving ministers, and electing a USSR president. The Congress would meet less frequently in sessions devoted to broader political debates. Gorbachev meant to harness popular desires for change to motivate the Communist party, but the results of the March 1989 balloting suggested that something much larger had been set in motion. A significant minority of radical reformers were elected, including Yeltsin and Sakharov, despite nominations that were frequently manipulated by party conservatives. And some party notables were rejected by voters even in districts where they ran unopposed.

When the new Congress convened in May, more surprises were in store. Gorbachev's election as president had been expected, but the outcry for Yeltsin's inclusion in the Supreme Soviet had not. Also unforeseen were the far-ranging and highly critical debates that, televised in their entirety, absolutely galvanized the country. Their subjects included everything from the abuses of the KGB to denunciations of Communist party corruption. Speaker after speaker held forth as if releasing ideas and anger that had been bottled up for years. For millions of viewers, such public proclamations of things that earlier could only have been safely uttered in the private company of trusted friends was a critical turning point. Thus, in popular attitudes and beliefs as well as the structures of governance, Gorbachev's democratization of Soviet society came to be rightly hailed as one of his greatest accomplishments.

Crisis and the Collapse of the USSR

The advent of political pluralism had a darker side as well. Gorbachev hoped that gradual democratization could be harnessed to prod the still-dominant Communist party into action, to transform it into a broadly reformist organization that would lead *perestroika* by its own example. Instead, a majority of its functionaries proved unwilling or unable to change. This was already in evidence at the Congress, where many sided with the forces of conservatism in the heated debates that erupted over a wide range of domestic and foreign-policy issues.

One such issue concerned nationalities policy and the ethnic strife already well under way. The first major eruption had occurred as early as 1986, when widespread rioting swept Alma-Ata (now known as Al-

maty), then the capital of Kazakhstan, over the replacement of the republican party boss Dinmukhamed Kunaev by a Russian. Gorbachev's intentions had been good—to replace a corrupt Brezhnev-era functionary with a younger and more progressive official—but his insensitivity to the ethnic slight his decision entailed reflected a lack of understanding of the feelings of non-Russians that would repeatedly bring his nationalities policy (or lack thereof) to grief. By 1987 nascent national movements had emerged in several other republics, most notably the Baltics. And by 1988 open fighting had broken out between the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. As soon as *glasnost* permitted, Armenian groups had seized upon their new political liberties to demand the transfer of this Azerbaijani-controlled enclave to their jurisdiction. The Armenian majority in Nagorno-Karabakh voted for such a change, believing that it was entirely in the spirit of Gorbachev's call for democratization. Gorbachev himself initially vacillated, first encouraging such hopes before siding with the Azerites, who were understandably reluctant to cede a large portion of their territory. Gorbachev was rightly concerned about the precedent that any change in borders would set for the many other interrepublic territorial disputes within the USSR. But his vacillation, and the subsequent inability (or unwillingness) of Soviet policy and military forces to protect Armenians from the violent reprisals of angry Azerites, ultimately served to fuel the desire of these and other non-Russian nationalities to leave the Union altogether.

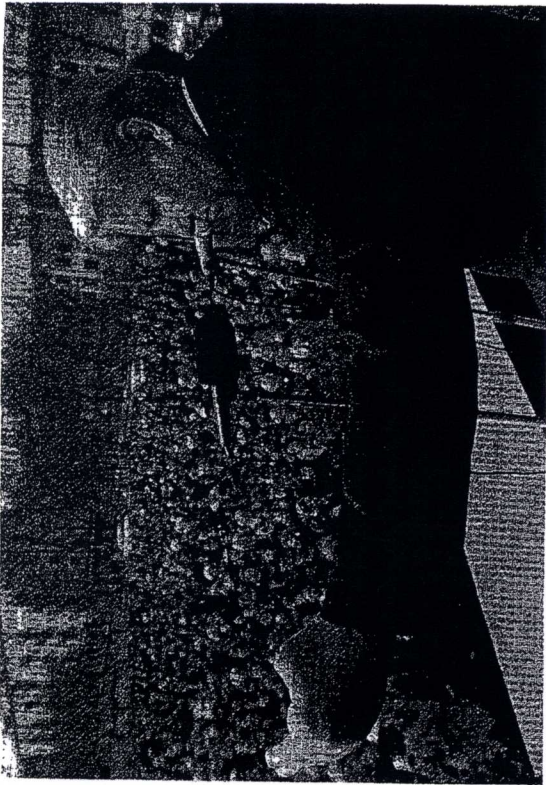
By 1989, when the first Congress of People's Deputies was held, not just national assertion but full-fledged separatism had grown widespread. A powerful movement for independence had emerged in the republic of Georgia where, on the eve of the Congress, troops had violently slain some two dozen peaceful demonstrators. Though the action had been taken without Gorbachev's consent, those guilty were not punished, and Gorbachev inexplicably permitted the military's version of events, which essentially blamed the victims, to dominate the Congress debate. His posture nearly prompted the resignation of Gorbachev's liberal Georgian-born Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze; it also infuriated the Georgian deputies, who now identified less with Gorbachev's efforts to revive the Union than with the Baltic peoples' desire to leave it.

This episode again revealed the problems and contradictions of Gorbachev's approach to the non-Russian republics. National movements initially supportive of *perestroika* grew quickly disenchanted at its economic failures as well as Gorbachev's rejection of their demand for

meaningful economic autonomy. These developments galvanized the supporters of outright secession, particularly in Lithuania where the Sajudis national movement was strong. The separatists in turn took advantage of their newfound political liberties to strengthen their cause. The paradoxical impact of *glasnost* was evident when Gorbachev's principled decision to tell the truth about the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, under which Stalin had bargained with Hitler to annex the then-independent Baltic states, served only to strengthen the advocates of secession. Denouncing the pact's illegality, separatists in Latvia and Estonia too now argued that, under international law, they were in fact still independent states under an illegal Soviet occupation.

As separatism grew, and national movements emerged even in such once-quietest regions as Ukraine and Belarus, Gorbachev futilely sought a middle ground between the radicals arguing that the republics should be permitted to secede and the reactionaries demanding a more violent crackdown. The latter grew especially concerned about the fate of the "inner" Soviet empire as the "outer" empire was rapidly crumbling, for 1989 was also the year of Eastern Europe's revolutions in which the similarly paradoxical impact of *perestroika* was on display. Gorbachev, as noted, had early on told the leaders of the bloc countries that henceforth their relations with Moscow would be on a new footing, that the Brezhnev doctrine was dead and they should undertake their own reforms in order to garner popular support for socialism. The latter point bears emphasis, for what Gorbachev then envisioned for Eastern Europe was a revived socialist commonwealth, not the reintroduction of capitalism. It should also be noted that the USSR's growing economic woes and need for Western aid further constrained Gorbachev's options in 1989. Yet it was precisely Gorbachev's call for a peaceful *perestroika*, and principled rejection of the use of force in foreign policy, that emboldened the peoples of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia to take matters into their own hands. Gorbachev also encouraged the Polish Communist party's 1988 compromise with the Solidarity opposition and supported the East German Communist party's 1989 retreat from violent measures, steps that quickly sealed the fate of these regimes. When the revolutionary events of that autumn ensued, Gorbachev firmly overruled those in the Soviet leadership who advocated saving the bloc at all costs. Those costs admittedly would have been high, but many party elites were willing to pay them. Gorbachev was not.

Thus by 1990 *perestroika* had entered a new and more difficult phase as the Soviet political scene grew increasingly polarized. Many ordinary cit-



Former Moscow party boss Boris Yeltsin was originally one of Gorbachev's allies. They parted ways over a bitter dispute about the pace of reform. Yeltsin was later elected president of the Russian republic and led the opposition to the August 1991 coup. Although he was reelected in 1996, his economic failures soured many, and his health became a source of growing concern. (Photo from Reuters/Bettmann.)

izens who had initially welcomed *perestroika* wondered where it was leading when it seemed only a corrupt few were enjoying Western consumer goods and an opulent lifestyle while their lives became only more difficult. A Russian nationalist backlash grew, reflected in (but not limited to) the anti-Semitic *Pamyat* (Memory) society. Even such a staunch anti-Communist as Nobel Prize-winning author Alexander Solzhenitsyn warned against the corrupting influence of a "debauched and decadent" Western mass culture that was "alien" to Russia.¹ Against this backdrop, Gorbachev's conservative opposition grew bolder, openly criticizing his policies across the entire spectrum of issues (and openly resisting or undermining his efforts). Meanwhile, on his left, liberals voiced increasingly radical opinions in calling for more decisive reformist measures. Many of the latter—a large segment of the intelligentsia in particular—shifted their allegiance to Yeltsin as this Communist gadfly continued his remarkable political ascent by winning the presidency of the Russian re-

public in 1990. Public opinion was torn, but there was hope for a reconciliation and pooling of efforts between these two political giants (and, sadly, bitter personal enemies) for the good of the entire country.

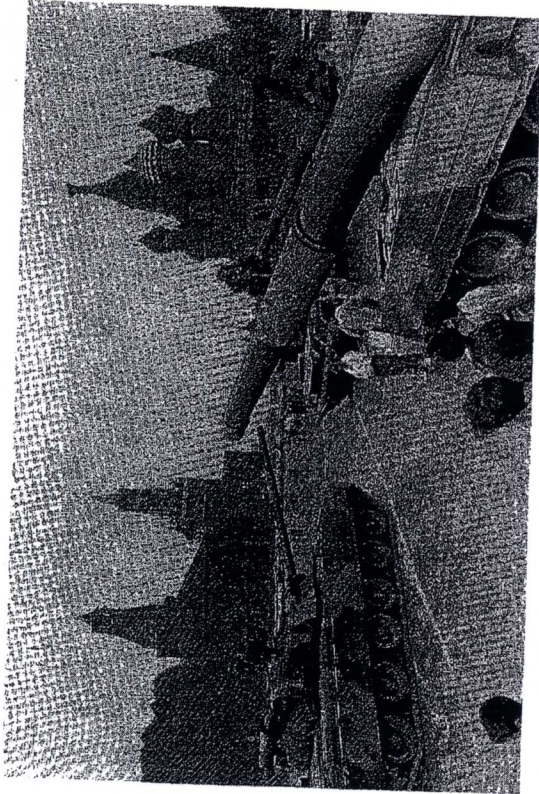
Such a step seemed at hand in summer 1990 when a group of Western-oriented economists drafted a plan for more rapid and decisive steps toward a free-market economy. This effort, the so-called 500 Days plan, raised considerable hopes. Gorbachev's more timid steps, in tandem with the chaos caused by interrepublican strife, energy and transport workers' strikes, and continued bureaucratic opposition, had by then brought shortages to near-desperate levels. To widespread relief, Gorbachev initially endorsed the plan, and his economic advisers joined with Yeltsin's to work out its implementation. But by the fall, chastened by warnings that it would cause much unemployment and thus provoke broad social unrest, Gorbachev withdrew his support. This decision, which many came to see as a fateful lost "final chance" for *perestroika*, prompted broad despair among liberal Soviet intellectuals and vicious criticism of Gorbachev. Yeltsin's hand was strengthened, at least within Russia, and he announced his intentions to proceed with a version of the plan for Russia alone. Such a move, in tandem with Russia's own proclamation of sovereignty, could only further complicate Unionwide economic and political woes.

With the Left's abandonment of him, Gorbachev turned to a disturbing and dangerous collaboration with the Right. Late 1990 and early 1991 saw him move to restrict press liberties, increase his personal presidential powers, and appoint reactionary, antireform officials to key positions in his cabinet and elsewhere in the government. The latter were now emboldened, darkly warning of Western conspiracies and acting to reassert Soviet-style economic and political controls. Gorbachev was quiescent until January 1991 when the hard-liners orchestrated a bloody crackdown in Lithuania and Latvia in an apparent effort to justify nationwide imposition of a state of emergency. The "looming dictatorship," of which Shevardnadze had warned in announcing his resignation a month earlier, now seemed imminent. Stung by an outpouring of Western criticism, Gorbachev quickly reversed his passive-conservative course of the preceding six months and returned to his reformist vigor of old. Good relations with the West were reaffirmed (it should be noted that throughout his conservative "deviation," Gorbachev cooperated with the U.S.-led coalition in the Persian Gulf War precipitated by the old Soviet ally Sadaam Hussein), and Gorbachev finally tackled the issue he had been avoiding for over two years—the forging of a new Union treaty.

Essentially a plan for a new division of central and republican powers in a less centralized, more federal structure, Gorbachev's effort was also meant to address national grievances by replacing the original union "agreement" that had been imposed on the republics by force with a truly voluntary, democratic agreement. Moreover, Gorbachev hoped that the Union treaty would alleviate economic woes by granting the republics more autonomy and ending the interrepublic economic warfare of tax squabbles, resource disputes, and outright blockades. So vital in both legal and economic terms, the Union treaty's successful negotiation over the spring and summer of 1991 was also encouraging for the reconciliation it seemingly brought between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. Only with the cooperation of the Union center and Russia, its most important republic, was any solution to the crisis possible. By August 1991 this seemed at hand.

At that moment, however, the USSR's fate was probably sealed by a dramatic but short-lived coup of reactionary forces. On August 19, Soviet citizens awoke to find that the lively media to which they had become accustomed was largely muzzled. In their place, state-run television and radio, together with a few "loyal" Communist party-run newspapers, announced that ill health had necessitated the transfer of Gorbachev's presidential authority to his vice-president, Gennady Yanayev, and other members of a self-appointed "Committee on the State of Emergency." In Moscow, residents who ventured out were further shocked by the spectacle of tanks and troops deployed near the Kremlin and at other key positions in the capital. The real power behind the putsch, as displayed at a disastrous press conference, was not the fumbling Yanayev but KGB Director Vladimir Kryuchkov, Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov, and other representatives of powerful military-industrial interests. Their immediate goal was less to implement vague "anticrisis measures" than to forestall the imminent signing of the Union treaty.

The hero of the hour, especially for his courageous rallying of resistance around the "White House" (the Russian parliament building) and demand for Gorbachev's release from house arrest, was Yeltsin. Credit too goes to the ineptitude of the putschists themselves, who somehow could not arrange Yeltsin's early arrest, staunch the proliferation of opposition media and holding of opposition rallies, or even see to the loyalty of their own troops (some of whom defected to the anticoup side). The putschists, products as well as defenders of the old order, seemed to believe that they had only to give the appropriate orders, with an accompanying show of force, and the masses would comply. Many did, but



Few people were prepared for the events of August 19, 1991, when tanks and troops appeared in Red Square just outside of the Kremlin, signaling an attempted coup against Gorbachev's reform government. Gorbachev was placed under house arrest in the Crimea, while in Moscow Soviet citizens braced themselves for the imposition of a new dictatorship. Less than three days later, though, it became clear that the coup plotters did not have the full backing of the military. The tanks were withdrawn, and Gorbachev returned to the capital, hoping somehow to restore order in his troubled country. (Photo from Reuters/Bettmann.)

that enough did not is testimony to the success of *perestroika* in radically altering attitudes toward authority in only a few short years. Credit also goes to Gorbachev for rejecting the putschists' demand that he sanction their coup. They believed that, when presented with a fait accompli, he would join their efforts. When he did not, and their putsch began to unravel, they lacked any other fallback plan as well as the determination to implement one.

The euphoria that greeted the coup's collapse was sadly short-lived. Yeltsin seemed determined to parlay this triumph into increasing his, and Russia's, power at the expense of Gorbachev and the Union. For his part, Gorbachev unwisely continued to defend the Communist party even when it was apparent that most of its senior officials had supported the coup. They now covered (and hastily destroyed documents) as their offices were ransacked, accounts frozen, and statues of their Bolshevik predecessors toppled. Popular passions ran high, and Gorbachev, despite his



The failure of the August 1991 coup unleashed Soviet disdain for the symbols of the Communist past. The offices of the secret police (the KGB) in Moscow and elsewhere were stormed and defaced; prominent Communist party newspapers like Pravda were temporarily banned; and statues of major revolutionary personalities (such as this one of Lenin), representing decades of Communist oppression and dictatorship, were toppled. (Photo from Reuters/Bettmann.)

personal bravery in resisting the coup, was simultaneously held responsible inasmuch as it was his handpicked ministers who had launched it.

Notwithstanding the recriminations that flew and the power struggle that deepened in Moscow, the USSR's fate was probably decided in the republics. In a number of them, the coup intensified fears of the center and generated redoubled efforts to achieve distance from it. In others, it fanned local rivalries that only further complicated the situation. In Georgia, for example, the apparent willingness of nationalist President Zviad Gamsakhurdia to comply with the putschists' demands sparked a power struggle that eventually toppled this once overwhelmingly popular leader. In Ukraine, nationalists pushed even harder for independence, and ominously, there and elsewhere, increasing numbers of republican Communist party officials abandoned Gorbachev and joined forces with the separatists.

In this fast-deteriorating situation, Gorbachev launched a frantic effort to revive the Union treaty. But with his authority rapidly crumbling,

only through broad additional concessions was he able to persuade a majority of—but not all—republican leaders to continue the effort. Nevertheless, it appeared increasingly unlikely that most republican parliaments would ever ratify the treaty, and when a popular referendum in Ukraine showed a strong majority voting for outright independence, the effort collapsed. On December 8, in a sort of putsch of their own, Yeltsin and the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus—Leonid Kravchuk and Stanislav Shushkevich—issued a declaration that the USSR would cease to exist with their formation of a new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). A week later, the five Central Asian states, led by Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, declared their intention to join too. Gorbachev denounced the move as unconstitutional and warned of its dire consequences if it were consummated. Yet as each of the union republics asserted full and effective sovereignty, the momentum of dissolution seemed unstoppable. With his state withering as rapidly as his authority, Gorbachev bowed to the inevitable. On December 25, 1991, he resigned as president of the USSR.

Different Roads from Socialism

Economic and Political Turmoil

Perhaps the most decisive difference in the paths of the former Soviet states lies in their economies. This is not to argue a Marxist-materialist view of development, for a whole host of social, historical, and even geopolitical factors have influenced economic progress since 1991. These range from the quality of leadership to the presence (or absence) of civil peace at the time of the USSR's collapse. Whatever the reasons, those post-Soviet states that have been able to move most rapidly and resolutely toward a market economy have also had the greatest success in building democracy, maintaining social stability, and forging national unity.

On one side of this broad spectrum lie the Baltic states, where everything from a Western cultural inheritance to generous foreign investment has facilitated rapid progress toward the goal of rejoining Europe. On the other side are the states of Central Asia, where communism has largely yielded to autocratic politics and a semifeudal socioeconomic order. The other successor states, most notably Russia, lie somewhere between these extremes. Because of its still-great potential and still-formidable power, Russia's future is also vital to those other successor states—