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THE COLLAPSE OF A COMMUNIST GIANT: A STUDY OF PARTY UNITY IN THE
SOVIET UNION

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By Jillian S. Vice

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion
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Withdraw from Afghanistan quickly	Withdraw from Afghanistan gradually, maintain some Soviet presence, but do not send in more troops	Maintain some Soviet troops to protect the PDPA, even send in more troops if needed
Soviet Army	Mikhail Gorbachev– General Secretary of the CPSU (1985-91)	KGB
Marshal Sergei Sokolov	Andrey Gromyko–Chairman of the Supreme Soviet	Eduard Shevardnadze– Minister of International Relations
Marshal Sergei Akhromeev	Yegor Ligachev– Secretary of Ideology (1985-88), Secretary of Agriculture (1988-90)	Vadim Kryuchkov– KGB chairman

Table 2. Factions of Economic Reform Policy

Maintain centralized control over the economy	Allow limited free markets to co-exist with the planned economy (co-ops, etc.)	Full transition to market economy
Yegor Ligachev– Secretary of Ideology (1985-88), Secretary of Agriculture (1988-90)	Mikhail Gorbachev– General Secretary of the CPSU (1985-91)	Boris Yeltsin– First Secretary CPSU Moscow City Committee, CC Secretary for Construction
Gosplan (State Planning Committee)	Nikolai Ryzhkov– Chairman of Council of Ministers (1985-90)	Alexander Yakovlev– Head of CPSU Propaganda Department (1985-86); Full Politburo member, ideology department (1987-90)
KGB, Soviet Military		

Table 3. Factions of Nationalist Disintegration Containment Policy

Pursue a concessionist policy to maintain the Union	Employ coercive force in the Republics to maintain the Union
Mikhail Gorbachev– General Secretary of the CPSU (1985-91)	Soviet Army, KGB, Ministry of Internal Affairs
Alexander Yakovlev– Head of CPSU Propaganda Department (1985-86); Full Politburo member, Senior Secretary (1987-90)	Yegor Ligachev– Secretary of Ideology (1985-88), Secretary of Agriculture (1988-90)
Vadim Medvedev– Secretary for Ideology (1988-90)	Victor Chebrikov– KGB chairman (1982-88)
Bogomolov Commission	Dmitry Yazov– Marshal and Minister of Defense

Collapse of a Communist Giant—A Study of Party Unity in the Soviet Union

Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyze the breakdown of the unity of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) over policy disputes through three case studies: the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the cooperative movements, and the concessionist policy towards nationalist movements in the Baltic republics. Through a content analysis of primary sources including meeting minutes, diaries, newspaper sources and interviews, to ascertain the positions and opinions of party members and give insight into the party dialogue and atmosphere, revealing policy disagreements tied to contending values. This thesis finds that there was a breakdown in party unity during the Gorbachev era due to incompatibility of glasnost, perestroika and democracy with the traditional methods of coercion and highly centralized control of politics and the economy. As a result of this disunity, the CPSU was unable to maintain power, thus resulting in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, the world witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of the most unexpected and expeditious transformations that altered the international system. Even though the Communist Party (CPSU) withstood a number of crisis in its 70-year existence—including a Civil War, rapid industrialization, the Great Terror, and various leadership succession crisis—the breakdown of party unity due to the Afghan War, the evolution into a hybrid market economy under Gorbachev, and the rise of nationalist and independence

movements posed serious threats to the Soviet state's survival. As a result of the increasing fragmentation of party unity during Gorbachev's rule, the Soviet Union disintegrated.

The Russian Revolution followed Marxist-Leninist ideological lines as the working class revolted violently, overthrowing the tsarist elite to create a communist party-state. From its inception, Vladimir Lenin, the CPSU's first General Secretary, emphasized the primacy of party unity to the continuance of the Soviet state. In his "On Party Unity" speech on March 16, 1921, he urged Party members to maintain discipline and to resist factionalism to ensure the Party's and the state's survival:

In order to ensure strict discipline within the party and in all Soviet work, and to achieve maximum unity while eliminating all factionalism, the Congress gives the Central Committee full powers to apply all measures of party punishment up to and including expulsion from the party in cases of violation of discipline or of a revival or toleration of factionalism.¹

Since the party's inception, the party's unity remained strong due to the ferocity of leaders such as Josef Stalin who silenced voices of dissent and consolidated power. Since the Politburo was the supreme policy-making body of the Soviet Union, its membership typically included the Minister of Defense, the chairman of the KGB, and the other heads of important party organizations. Members of the Politburo were in theory elected by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, but in reality the Politburo acted independently, deciding its members for itself. Since Stalin's time in power, the general secretary of the Communist Party served as the chairman of the Politburo and was in effect the leader of the Party and the Soviet Union. Historically, the majority of power was centralized and concentrated in Moscow with little power allocated to the republics or localities, despite having some First Secretaries of the Republic

¹ Vladimir Lenin, "On Party Unity" (speech, Moscow, March 16, 1921), Soviet History Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/party-congress/10th/16.htm>

Parties serving as members of the Politburo. When Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the CPSU, he pursued his radical reform policy called perestroika and the restructuring of the party apparatus. He also encouraged debate within the Party and public critique of its past performance as part of his free speech policy, glasnost. Allowing open dissent within the Party created an opportunity for factionalism to arise, and due to policy disagreements surrounding the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, perestroika and how to respond to nationalist disintegration, this contrary atmosphere threatened party unity.

The decision to withdraw from Afghanistan created rival factions within the security apparatus and within the party. This decision also provoked ideological questions damaging the Soviet prestige as a leader of the socialist world. As the Soviet Union's economy further stagnated, Gorbachev sought cuts in military expenditures as a way to reinvest in industry, but the reduction in security investment sparked concern within the security apparatus. Divisions arose between the KGB and the Soviet army as the army found it too costly, economically and in human lives, to remain in Afghanistan, while the KGB wanted to prolong Soviet involvement to secure the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Soon the factionalism within the PDPA became a proxy-war battleground for the factions of the Soviet security apparatus.

The attempt to transition to a market economy incited polarization within the party as the ambiguity surrounding perestroika, the lack of cohesiveness with socialist ideology, and subsequent security concerns emanating from the economic reforms were met with conservative attitudinal and institutional barriers. Specifically, the creation of economic cooperatives, which was a private enterprise initiative, was a source of contention as it contradicted ideology and entrenched power relations, and it faced conservatives efforts to delay or stunt the reforms. As a

result, the economy worsened due to halfway reform measures resulting from party infighting, causing an increase in polarization within the party.

Restructuring and glasnost also fueled the rise of People's Fronts within the Soviet republics as nationalist groups were allowed to mobilize under the banner of glasnost. The nationalist movements called for the increased use of national symbols such as languages and flags, and eventually they even called for sovereignty. The demand for independence within the Baltic Republics sparked bitter in-party debate, and it threatened the influence and supremacy of the Soviet Union. The party divided over how to face the increasing nationalist demands with reformists advocating for increased concessions to the movements and the more conservative forces, such as the security apparatus, advocating for military or police intervention, which was the traditional method of maintaining control over the republics.

Previous research has glossed over the potential effects of party unity and instead maintained a linear, two-step approach to the collapse. This thesis seeks to create a more narrow approach through the addition of a critical step—fragmentation of party unity. Given the importance of party unity, rather than study the collapse in terms of some external factor leading to the fall of the USSR, this thesis argues that the external factors caused a loss in party unity which is why the Soviet system dissolved. Although during the last years of the Soviet Union, the state performed a more technocratic role and the Party's role was to generate ideas and policies for the state to carry out, the unity of the Party was still an integral factor for state survival. Following from this understanding, this thesis will examine fragmentation through three case studies: first, the decision to withdrawal from Afghanistan; second, the transition to a market economy; and third, nationalist disintegration and federalization of the Soviet Union.

These cases are significant as they incited factionalism within the party that threatened the party's essential unity. Overtime, as party members hotly contested how to deal with the Afghan war, economic reform, and rising nationalist movements, increasingly salient divisions developed within the Party that ultimately resulted in a failed coup and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Literature Review

Scholars have identified several causes for the collapse: poor leadership, the consequences of the Afghan war, economic stagnation, and widespread nationalist disintegration. In his work, *The Gorbachev Factor*, Archie Brown examined Gorbachev's role and influence in the Soviet Union's transition to a more democratic political system, and he considered the constraint the opposition forces could have imposed on Gorbachev's ability to implement reform. Brown concluded that Gorbachev played the role of a reformer, but the consequences of encouraging debate within the party resulted in the 'pluralism of opinion.'² With the potentially explosive political mixture threatening the party, Brown asserted:

These could only be controlled and the entire party kept together on the basis of Leninist discipline and an intransigent hostility towards factions and splits.³

George Breslauer also explored the role of the leadership in the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his publication, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, Breslauer examined Gorbachev's and Yeltisn's leadership strategies given the political, institutional and ideological constraints they faced. By 1989, as contradictions within perestroika became obvious, and as glasnost

² Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 311.

³ Brown, 312.

revealed the incompatibility of Leninism and liberalism, Gorbachev's legitimacy as a leader was threatened. As both reformist and conservative critics increased their challenge to Gorbachev over the restructuring, Gorbachev attempted to bridge the political spectrum. However, ultimately political polarization rose and his political base weakened. As his attempt as moderator failed to contain radical forces, Gorbachev engaged in a "pattern of pendular swings as a means of recouping authority."⁴ However, this tactic also failed as the party was too polarized, and it incited a conservative coup following Gorbachev's shift to realign with the reformists in the beginning of 1991.

Stephen Kotkin examined the role of the Soviet elite and economic decline in the collapse of the Soviet Union in his work *Armageddon Averted*. Kotkin argued that perestroika devastated the command economy, the party, and the faith in Soviet socialism. Notably, he stated "the blow to the party unhinged the Union, which the party alone had held together."⁵ His work revealed the consequences of socialism's inability to reform and the inability of institutions and the centrally-planned economy to adapt to market forces, resulting in widespread disillusionment and ultimate collapse. Anders Åslund accounted for the economic crises and the transformation into a market economy for the Soviet collapse.⁶ He discussed how the growth of economic cooperatives, which were economic incentives for the legalization of small businesses to allow for more of the black market to become taxable, and other somewhat free-market ventures resulted in less centralized control of trade and the economy at the individual level. This economic evolution and experimentation became a topic of debate among party members due to its departure from Marxist-Leninist institutions.

⁴ George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 106.

⁵ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

⁶ Anders Åslund, *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (Brookings Institution, 1995).

Ronald Suny and Mark Bessinger attributed the collapse of the Soviet Union to nationalist mobilization. They discussed how Gorbachev's policy of glasnost allowed for nationalist and independence groups within the Soviet republics to gain more momentum. With such an expansive territory encompassing a multitude of languages, cultures and religions, questions about national identity versus a collective international Soviet identity emerged and threatened the CPSU's legitimacy and unity. Ronald Grigor Suny discusses how the emergence of People's Fronts and the subsequent division between Russian-speaking and non-Russian speaking peoples in the republics fueled calls for sovereignty and independence, threatening the strength of the Union and the influence of the CPSU.⁷ Bessinger examined how as a result of liberalization and the threats non-Russian nationalist movements posed to Russian dominance, the Russian mobilization bolstered the inevitability of the collapse of the Soviet state as they, too, identified themselves as "victims of Soviet 'imperial' domination."⁸

Methodology

This thesis employs textual analysis of primary sources from the Soviet press along with diaries and memoirs from Soviet leaders during the period 1979-1991. The principal sources for this thesis are the minutes of Politburo meetings and CIA reports sourced from the *Wilson Archive* and the *National Security Archive*, as well as speeches and public statements from various party members as reported in the two main Soviet newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. These sources document the positions and opinions of party members and give insight into the

⁷ Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (California: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁸ Mark R. Bessinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 387.

party dialogue and atmosphere, revealing policy disagreements tied to contending values. The parameters of this study spanned the years 1979 to 1991 and reviewed the Soviet leadership during the later Brezhnev years through Gorbachev's years as General Secretary. Even though the Soviet press was more heavily censored during the earlier chronology of this study, the bulk of the research is concentrated during the Gorbachev's era during the time of *glasnost*, a rise of support and freedom for the intelligencia, and less censorship of the press. Additionally most of the analysis examines the late 1980s and early 1990s because it was during this time that the USSR pulled out of Afghanistan, the economy underwent liberal reforms, and nationalist disintegration rose. This thesis contends with the unspoken nature of censored journalism through an analysis of the journals of elite Party members, Party meeting notes, and interviews.

The following three chapters will look at a particular case for the collapse of the Soviet Union to analyze fragmentation and policy debates within the party. The first chapter examines the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and its effects on party unity. The second chapter analyzes the effects of economic reform policy, in particular the cooperative movement, on party unity. Finally, the third chapter explores policy in response to nationalist disintegration, specifically within the Baltic republics, and the effect on party unity. Through these case studies, this thesis seeks to accomplish an analysis of the breakdown of party unity in the Soviet Union.

Chapter I The Afghan War and Party Unity

Prior to the Afghan war, General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev pursued a policy of détente with Western powers. In efforts to reduce economic strain due to the arms race between the superpowers, the USSR and the US agreed to the Salt I and II treaties of 1972 and 1979, respectively. Despite these efforts, the decision to invade Afghanistan on December 27, 1979, ended the more peaceful relationship with the west and engulfed the Soviet Union in a long, fruitless war. As the war effort stagnated and the Soviet economy worsened under this military burden, Party members began to debate withdrawing troops and ending the war. With the ascension of Gorbachev to General Secretary in 1985, serious talks within the Politburo occurred about withdrawing from Afghanistan. In accordance with the Geneva agreements on facilitating peace in the region, the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan on February 16, 1989, after a decade without any progress towards Soviet goals.

Artemy Kalinovsky explored Party decision-making during the war and analyzed the structure and unity of the party from the decision to invade through the long process of withdrawal. Kalinovsky described how decision-making at the hands of a few elite members within the Politburo was a characteristic of policy making during the late Brezhnev era. This allowed the party elite to use “their seniority and closeness to the CPSU General Secretary... to sideline most critics” and form “a consensus among themselves.”⁹ The inner circle included Brezhnev and the Politburo’s Commission on Afghanistan, which was composed of the “troika,” or Foreign Minister A. Gromyko, Defense Minister D. Ustinov, and KGB Chairman Y. Andropov, as well as party conservative and head of the CPSU International Department B.

⁹Artemy Kalinovsky, “Decision-Making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan: From Intervention to Withdrawal,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11:4 (2009), 46-48.

Ponomarev.¹⁰ Brezhnev's speechwriter and advisor Aleksandrov-Agentov also had Brezhnev's ear.

Kalinovsky also detailed the division in party unity due to the internecine fighting between senior KGB and military officials. The division was present at the beginning of the invasion as Brezhnev and his inner circle followed the KGB's advice to invade, ignoring the suggestions and warnings of the Soviet military that would pay the price of the invasion. The rift grew worse near and during the withdrawal as policy-making on Afghanistan began to resemble that of its early years—controlled by a few key individuals who had influence over the General Secretary, limiting the input of military officials. While the party dynamics during withdrawal resembled the dynamics during the invasion, during the latter period, factionalism within the party was not controlled as in-party debate was encouraged during the Gorbachev era. Therefore, without the strict discipline that Lenin urged for the party, factionalism was able to rise relatively unchecked.

In 1980, Marshal Ogarkov, General Varennikov, and General Sergei Akhromeev concluded that there was no military solution to the war, and the CPSU Politburo generally agreed that there was not much to salvage in Afghanistan and that the economic and political costs outweighed unlikely gains.¹¹ However, Gorbachev's appointee and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Vladimir Kryuchkov, the head of the foreign intelligence branch of the KGB, "formed the 'Najibullah lobby' within the Politburo, arguing that Soviet policy had to be based on firm support for [KHAD chief Mohammad Najibullah]," using military force if necessary to secure his position of power.¹² Kalinovsky also described a sort of

¹⁰ Kalinovsky, 49.

¹¹ Kalinovsky, 56.

¹² Kalinovsky, 64.

proxy-factionalism within the CPSU as various groups supported different factions within the PDPA. The KGB supported the Parcham faction under Babrak Karmal they installed to power in 1979, and the military supported the Khalq faction and the Khalq-dominated Afghan state's army they helped to train.¹³ This factionalism in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and the proxy-factionalism of the Soviet leadership heightened the tensions within the Party, creating distinct camps on the Afghan withdrawal policy.

The Afghan war was damaging to the weak Soviet economy, USSR's authority as a socialist leader, and also to the confidence of the security apparatus. The Afghan war polarized the Party over security concerns, economic consequences and ideological issues, and soon forces within the Party apparatus began to have a proxy war with party members aligning with the either KGB or the Soviet military officials supporting opposing Afghani Parcham-Khalqi factions in the PDPA.

¹³ The nature of the Parcham-Khalq factionalism was rooted in differing views on the future of the PDPA and socialism. The Parcham faction advocated a gradual transition to socialism, while the Khalq faction desired a quick and violent government overthrow to impose a Soviet-style communist regime. (Arnold, Anthony. *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*. Rev. and enl. ed. Vol. 321. Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 1985.)

Analysis

Table 1. Factions of Afghan Withdrawal Policy

Withdraw from Afghanistan quickly	Withdraw from Afghanistan gradually, maintain some Soviet presence, but do not send in more troops	Maintain some Soviet troops to protect the PDPA, even send in more troops if needed
Soviet Army	Mikhail Gorbachev– General Secretary of the CPSU (1985-91)	KGB
Marshal Sergei Sokolov	Andrey Gromyko–Chairman of the Supreme Soviet (Removed from office in 1988)	Eduard Shevardnadze– Minister of International Relations (1985-90)
Marshal Sergei Akhromeev	Yegor Ligachev– Secretary of Ideology (1985-88), Secretary of Agriculture (1988-90)	Vadim Kryuchkov– KGB chairman (1989-90)

Intervention, Military Stalemate and the Illusion of Party Unity (1978-1985)

Several factors contributed to the inadvisable decision to invade Afghanistan and the difficulty with withdrawing Soviet troops. Firstly, the policymaking process towards Afghanistan was concentrated in a narrow circle of party elites in the Politburo, which formed the Commission on Afghanistan. Secondly, the usurpation of the Soviet-backed communist regime under President Nur Muhammed Taraki threatened the Soviet Union’s influence in the region, and Soviet influence was further threatened due to the mobilization of opposition groups with Pakistani and Western support. Thirdly, the competition among KGB advisors and military advisors in policymaking prolonged the war due to a lack of coordination. Key decisions the inner circle reached during the first few months of the war turned the intervention into a decade-long engagement. Another contributing factor for the invasion was that in discussing the

Afghan question, Brezhnev did not try to obtain a wide range of opinions, and instead he relied on the troika and other members of the inner circle. Even more, “Aleksandrov-Agentov in the late fall of 1979 pressured those who were against the intervention to abandon their position.”¹⁴ Therefore, through effectively silencing voices of dissent and those who could have circumvented the invasion, such as the military officials and intellectual advisors, the inner circle maintained party unity.

After the invasion, the troika collaborated to maintain Soviet troops in Afghanistan with Andropov arguing at a Politburo Meeting in January of 1980 that the CPSU should not withdraw troops because the new regime needed time to grow more secure to political and military challenges.¹⁵ The PDPA was inherently weak due to the Parcham-Khalq factionalism that threatened the party unity. Even though the Parcham faction held power in the PDPA as KGB-pick for General Secretary Babrak Karmal was Parcham, the Khalq faction constituted the majority of the Afghan military. In a report to the CC CPSU in January, 1980, the troika and Ponomarev asserted that the CPSU should aid the PDPA through “the consistent implementation in Party life and Party construction of the line about the unity of the Party.”¹⁶ At a Politburo meeting in February, 1980, Andropov discussed his conversations with the Afghan leadership in which he “stressed the necessity of establishing genuine party unity,” liquidating the rift between the factions, and developing the preparedness of the army in order to stabilize the country and

¹⁴ Kalinovsky, 64.

¹⁵ Central Committee of the CPSU, Politburo, Politburo speaking for the Meeting on 17 January, 1980 (17 January 1980); accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/rus/Afganistan.html>

¹⁶ "CPSU CC Politburo Decision, with Report by Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Ponomarev, 27 January 1980," January 28, 1980, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvenyi Arkhiv Noveistei Istorii (RGANI), f. 89, op. 34, d. 3. Accessed through the Wilson Center Archive; accessed on September 15, 2020. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111585>

ensure the PDPA's power.¹⁷ Defense Minister Ustinov stipulated that even though steps are being taken to stabilize Afghanistan, "we can not even think about a withdrawal of troops," and Brezhnev advocated for increasing Soviet forces in Afghanistan.¹⁸ In another report in the following April, the troika stated that "only when the situation in Afghanistan stabilizes, and the situation around the country improves, and only upon a request of the DRA leadership, may we consider the question of the eventual withdrawal of our troops from the DRA."¹⁹ As a result of the concentration of decision-making power among the troika, Ponomarev and Aleksandrov-Agentov, there was little division within the party as old methods of silencing dissenters were still in practice. However, as the war progressed and factionalism in the PDPA increased, it soon became clear that the invasion was at the detriment of the Soviet Union and the party began to look for a way out.

Even though the inner circle initially proceeded without much challenge, by June 1980 stronger opposition within the Party, the military, and the academic world surfaced. Chernyaev detailed how intellectual advisors to the CPSU were increasingly unhappy with the situation in Afghanistan and the consequences it wrought for the Soviet Union. Notably, Georgy Arbatov, a director of the Academy of Sciences institutes who served as a political advisor to Brezhnev and Andropov expressed the damage the invasion caused the U.S.-Soviet relations.²⁰ Academician

¹⁷ "CC CPSU Politburo transcript (excerpt), On Andropov's Conversations with Afghan leaders," February 07, 1980, Wilson Center Archive, f. 3, op. 120, d. 44, trans. by M. Doctoroff; accessed on September 16, 2019.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111587>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "CPSU CC Politburo Decision on Afghanistan, with report by Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Zagladin, 7 April 1980," April 10, 1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, f. 3, op. 82, d. 176, accessed through Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Svetlana Savranskaya; accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111590>

²⁰ "The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev: 1980," accessed through the National Security Archive, trans. by Svetlana Savranskaya; accessed on September 16, 2019. https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//rus/text_files/Chernyaev/1980.pdf

Oleg Bogomolov sent the CC CPSU and the KGB his evaluation of the invasion, stating that the potential advantages of interference “turned out to be insignificant compared to the damage which was inflicted on our interests,” including the destruction of detente, the expansion of anti-Soviet movements in countries bordering the Union, and the “burden of economic aid.”²¹ The members of the academic world were not the only group to criticize the intervention; the military also expressed worries. In a report from General Mayorov, General Maksimov, General Rodin and other military leaders to Ustinov, revealed reluctance to maintain military involvement as military efforts to defeat the counterrevolution and support the PDPA would be unproductive.²² They noted that PDPA was more attentive to “achieving narrow factional goals (removal of Khalqis)” in their resolution of problems and military concerns, negatively hampering the Party’s status.²³ Despite the military’s founded criticisms and evaluations, Ustinov was able to exploit his position as Defense Minister to prevent the military’s concerns from reaching the Politburo. As a result of the inner circle’s successful suppression of dissenters, at the CPSU Central Committee Plenum in June 1980, the plenum followed suit after the Politburo and voted in full approval of the situation in Afghanistan and the argument necessitating the continued presence of Soviet troops.²⁴

In a private interview in July, 1980, deputy head of the International Department Vadim Zagladin described diverging opinions and arguments between the Central Committee and the

²¹ "Some Ideas About Foreign Policy Results of the 1970s (Points)' of Academician O. Bogomolov of the Institute of the Economy of the World Socialist System sent to the CC CPSU and the KGB," January 20, 1980, Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Gary Goldberg; accessed September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111790>

²² "Report of Military Leaders to D. F. Ustinov," May 10, 1981, Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Gary Goldberg; accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113138>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Minutes of the Meeting of the CPSU CC Plenum on the situation in Afghanistan, 23 June 1980," June 23, 1980, RGANI, f. 89, op. 14, d. 40, accessed through Wilson Center Archive, accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111594>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the Afghan problem. While he revealed that the Central Committee wanted to concentrate on the “normalization of the Afghan internal situation” i.e. the organization of the PDPA, Gromyko and others believed that the CPSU needed to act in a way “to defend the interests of strategy,” as the consequences of intervention brought high political and economic consequences to the Soviet Union.²⁵

By the end of 1981, a *Pravda* correspondent to the CC CPSU reported war efforts had resulted in “no significant changes in the situation from the summer of the last year.”²⁶ Due to such costly stagnation, the inner circle was more favorable to diplomatic solutions. Although Ustinov was able to block pessimistic reports and positions from reaching the Politburo, as time went on, he grew aware of the pressing situation and became more sympathetic to concerns. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared, with Andropov’s and Ustinov’s support, a memorandum that the Politburo approved recommending proximity talks with Afghanistan and Pakistan to negotiate a ceasing of Pakistani support for the opposition Afghan forces, and the Soviet Union began working with the UN at the Geneva talks to reach a diplomatic solution. However, after Brezhnev’s death, his successor Andropov noted at a Politburo meeting “the negotiations with Pakistan in Geneva are moving slowly and with difficulty,” and he reminded the Politburo that they were “fighting against American imperialism” as the United States was supporting the

²⁵ "Memorandum of conversation between Vadim Zagladin of the CPSU CC and Gyula Horn, deputy head of the HSWP CC Foreign Department on debates inside the Soviet leadership on issues of international politics," July 16, 1980, National Archives of Hungary (MOL), accessed through Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Attila Kolontari and Zsafia Zelnik; accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112496>

²⁶ "Shchedrov's letter on the 'Situation in Afghanistan' to the CC CPSU, November 12, 1981." Trans.by Anna Melyakova. *National Security Archive*. 2006. Accessed on September 16, 2019. https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/rus/text_files/BrezhnevEpoch/1981.11.12%20Shchedrov%20Letter%20on%20Afghanistan.pdf

mujahideen opposition forces.²⁷ Under Andropov, who assumed the role of General Secretary in November 1982, no real progress towards solving the Afghan problem was negotiated nor drafted. There is very little documentation on policy-making towards Afghanistan under the succeeding Chernenko interregnum, from February 1984 to his death on March 10, 1985, as he was often ill and unable to attend Politburo meetings, and there were no other significant diplomatic initiatives. Documents and statements until 1982 revealed that Soviet party unity was intact under the leadership and control of the troika, even though there were rising anxieties surrounding the war. A KGB report on the situation in the PDPA compiled in January 1983 revealed how the persisting and increasing disagreements between the Parcham and Khalq factions had “taken over the armed forces and the government bureaucracy,” despite the Soviet Union’s efforts to stabilize the party.²⁸ Not only did the intra-party fights threaten the government’s stability, but the KGB evaluated that the Afghan army’s level of combat training would not be able to stop the counterrevolutionary forces and stabilize the country.²⁹ Even though the military felt strongly that military force would eventually be unproductive, the KGB wanted to maintain a military presence in efforts to normalize the situation as the PDPA would not survive on its own.

²⁷ "CPSU CC transcript of Politburo meeting (excerpt)," March 10, 1983, RGANI, f. 89 op. 42, d. 51, accessed through Wilson Center Archive, trans. by D. Rozas, accessed September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111597>

²⁸ "Excerpts from several reports about the situation in the PDPA compiled by the KGB," January 26, 1983, Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Gary Goldberg; accessed September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113129>

²⁹ Ibid.

Gorbachev's Decision to Scale Back the Soviet Presence and the Emergence of New Divisions within the Party (1985-1987)

Upon Chernenko's death, Gorbachev rose to fill the position of General Secretary, inheriting the puzzle of how to maintain Soviet prestige as a world power and as Communist leader in the world in the face of the Afghan war. During this time, Gromyko, new KGB chief Victor Chebrikov, and new Defense Minister Marshal Sokolov constituted the sitting Commission on Afghanistan. Gorbachev discussed the Afghan problem with military officials and other confidants, and the military commanders and detente-minded intellectuals expressed that there was no military solution to the war. At the Party Plenum in June 1985, Gorbachev replaced Gromyko and he nominated Shevardnadze to the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs.³⁰ Shevardnadze's nomination was a surprise and "indicative of the end of Gromyko's monopoly...over foreign policy."³¹ Gorbachev also liquidated excessive committees, including the one on Afghanistan, and he delegitimized Gromyko and other members who could hamper his ability to act "(almost absolutely) confidently and decisively."³² He also removed many of the Brezhnev era members of the Politburo and the CC Secretariat. By 1988, only Ukrainian First Secretary Vladimir Shcherbitskii and Gromyko remained in office as the last remnants of the Brezhnev period in the Politburo.³³ In addition to these dismissals, unlike the Brezhnev and Andropov periods, the early Gorbachev years allowed for more open discussion through his

³⁰ Central Committee of the CPSU, Politburo speaking for Questions of the Plenum of the CC CPSU (29 June 1985) National Security Archive; accessed September 16, 2019.

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB172/Doc11.pdf>

³¹ "The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev: 1980," accessed through the National Security Archive, trans. by Svetlana Savranskaya; accessed on September 16, 2019, 67.

https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB192/Chernyaev_Diary_translation_1985.pdf

³² Chernyaev, "The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1985," 35.

³³ William Maley, *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, 15.

policy of glasnost, in which debate within the party was encouraged, in contrast to the previously troika-dominated policies.

With new dynamics in place within the Politburo, Gorbachev began to pursue careful policy-making on the Afghan situation. In March of 1985, Gorbachev informed Babrak Karmal, the newly installed General Secretary of the PDPA, that it was his responsibility “to ensure the genuinely irreversible character of the revolutionary process in Afghanistan” as the “Soviet troops cannot stay in Afghanistan forever.”³⁴ In the midst of trying to implement economic reform through his policy of perestroika, Afghanistan was a “bleeding wound” to the Soviet economy.³⁵ Gromyko expressed that prolonged military engagement was a “to [America’s] advantage” due to these costs.³⁶ However the demilitarization and disarmament efforts to improve foreign relations with the west and to give the economy a fighting chance was met with resistance within the party. At a Politburo Session in June of 1985, Yegor Ligachev, the Secretary of Ideology, said that while the socialist world felt “the huge burden of military budgets, ... this does not mean that we should weaken the country’s defense preparedness.”³⁷ On October 17th, 1985, Gorbachev announced to the Politburo that he advised Karmal “to forget about socialism, share real power with the people who have real authority,” which included the

³⁴ Central Committee of the CPSU, M.S. Gorbachev, A.A. Gromyko and B. Karmal speaking for the Memorandum of Conversation 14 March, 1985 (14 March 1985).

³⁵ Minutes of Gorbachev’s Meeting with CC CPSU Secretaries, March 15, 1985. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEPP/NSAEPP172/index.htm>

³⁶“CPSU CC Politburo Meeting Minutes (excerpt),” November 13, 1986, RGANI, f. 89, op. 42, d. 16, accessed through Wilson Center Archive, trans. by D. Rozas; accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111599>

³⁷ Session of the Politburo of the CC CPSU 29 June 1985, “on the practical implementation of and practical support for the results of the visit of Cde. Gorbachev M.S. to the UN,” 7. National Security Archive; accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEPP/NSAEPP172/Doc11.pdf>

militant opposition groups and far right Islamist groups.³⁸ Even though the Politburo approved the decision to withdraw, there was no concrete plan in place.

During the period from 1985 to early 1988, Soviet leaders pursued a new strategy, and they launched a national reconciliation policy to increase support of various parties and tribes for the Afghan government. A newly formed Afghanistan commission consisted of International Department head Anatoly Dobrynin, Marshal Sokolov, Shevardnadze and KGB Chairman Viktor Chebrikov. In efforts to expedite the Soviet withdrawal and disentangle the Soviet Union within Kabul, discussions about removing Karmal and replacing him with KGB-selected candidate Mohammad Najibullah emerged in 1986. Due to the previous heavy Soviet involvement in Afghan political affairs through military support and the influence of Soviet advisors, when the Party was discussing withdrawing from Afghanistan they were faced with the problem that “many members of the PDPA leaders [were] without initiative, and [had] gotten used to waiting for recommendations from our advisors.”³⁹ Unlike Karmal, his successor took initiative and was willing to make independent decisions; however, “not a single member of the CC PDPA Politburo [supported] Najib.”⁴⁰ The Khalq-Parcham division worsened, and even though Karmal and Najibullah were both of the Parcham faction, the majority of the PDPA was Khalqi. Additionally, Najibullah served as the head of the KhAD, which essentially was an Afghan KGB force that gathered evidence “in an effort to eliminate active as well as potential opponents and ‘counterrevolutionaries’.”⁴¹ Despite apparent obstacles to his leadership, in November 1986, the

³⁸ Chernyaev, “The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1988,” 84.

³⁹“CPSU CC Politburo Meeting Minutes (excerpt),” November 13, 1986, RGANI, f. 89, op. 42, d. 16; accessed through Wilson Center Archive, trans. by D. Rozas; accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111599>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kakar, 153-154.

CPSU Politburo supported the KGB and Afghanistan commission selected candidate Najibullah's bid for power and encouraged Karmal to resign.

In 1987, serious talks about withdrawal were underway, and at a February Politburo meeting Gorbachev, Shevardnadze and Gromyko supported withdrawing troops from Afghanistan and supplying material aid as an alternative. Gorbachev noted in agreement with Gromyko that material aid would likely not produce successful results in Afghanistan either, deploying additional troops would signify "the collapse of our whole cause [perestroika]."⁴² However, he stipulated that the withdrawal should not be hasty as to appear that "we're running away."⁴³ By May 1987, General Varenikov reported to the Politburo that the efforts at national reconciliation were failing, but Kryuchkov maintained that it was "impossible to withdraw, flee, and throw everything away."⁴⁴ Marshal Akhromeev asserted in response that "a leading role for the PDPA will never happen," and to think contrary would "be an endless war."⁴⁵

Withdrawal and Polarization within the Party (1988-1989)

In 1988, Gorbachev brought in more like-minded reformers into the Politburo and pushed out conservatives, including Gromyko. Shevardnadze and Kryuchkov held control over Afghan affairs and policy-making. Marshal Akhromeev represented the military's viewpoint and, on occasion, advisors like Anatoly Chernyaev or Alexander Yakovlev could appeal directly to Gorbachev. Colonel K. Tsagolov wrote a letter to Minister of Defense Dmitry Yazov, which was

⁴² "Notes from Politburo Meeting, 26 February 1987 (Excerpt)," February 26, 1987, Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Gary Goldberg; accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117233>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Notes from Politburo Meeting, 21-22 May 1987 (Excerpt)," May 22, 1987, Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Gary Goldberg; accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117236>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the first open critique of the Afghan war from the military establishment. In his letter, Tsagolov condemned efforts of national reconciliation to increase support for the PDPA, noting that the “huge material resources and considerable casualties did not produce a positive end result,” but instead Soviet efforts in Afghanistan are wasted on supporting the PDPA, which he asserted was “the main issue in the DRA” as “it was an artificial combination of two independent political tendencies ‘Khalq’ and ‘Parcham’.”⁴⁶ Tsagalov described how the Afghan armed forces also felt a lack of confidence in its ability to defeat the counter-revolutionary forces as it suffered from increasing desertions, weak combat ability, and a lack of spurring ideology.⁴⁷ He suggested that instead of pursuing the doomed national reconciliation, the leadership should instead reject “the framework of the old thinking, old approaches,” and instead “help the progressive political forces of the country,” even at the death of the PDPA.⁴⁸ Tsagalov’s criticism and suggestions reflected the low morale the Soviet and Afghan military shared from the heavy losses and the desire for peace even at the expense of the PDPA. Even though the military favored a withdrawal regardless of if the PDPA was in crisis, the KGB did not want to allow the Pakistan and U.S. supported opposition forces to gain control of the DRA, knowing that the PDPA would not survive without direct Soviet involvement.

As the KGB-military rift worsened in the competition for influence on policy, they began to take sides with disputing factions of the PDPA with the KGB supporting the Parcham they installed to power in 1979 and the military supporting Khalq and the Khalq dominated DRA army they helped to train. This factionalism in the PDPA and the proxy-factionalism of the

⁴⁶ [from Alexander Lyakhovsky, *The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan*, Iskon, Moscow 1995, pp. 344-348], The National Security Archive, trans. by Svetlana Savranskaya; accessed on September 16, 2019. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/r20.pdf>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Soviet security apparatus created camps within the Party over Afghan policy. On the one hand, the Najibullah lobby and Gorbachev did not support a hasty withdrawal, and they wanted to secure Najibullah's position and Soviet interests. The other camp composed of the military and pro-withdrawal party members acknowledged that the national reconciliation efforts to gain support for the PDPA were not effective, and they hoped that the PDPA would form a coalition government with opposition movements. Georgii Kornienko, deputy director of the International Department, and Akhromeev pursued efforts to push Najibullah to make peace with leaders of opposition movements, but when Shevardnadze told Gorbachev they were not following party line, Gorbachev removed them from the Afghanistan commission as a result.⁴⁹ Their removal from Afghan affairs silenced the main voices for solutions to the Afghan problem that excluded Najibullah. Gorbachev spoke in support of this as he expressed "We must carry out the line of the Politburo and not adapt it to individuals in the General Staff or the working group."⁵⁰

Shevardnadze and the KGB were able to hold Gorbachev's ear, echoing the workings of the Brezhnev era, as their arguments reflected Gorbachev's concerns over saving face and preserving Soviet prestige. However, by 1989 as withdrawal was near completion, Gorbachev turned towards the policy-making advice of the military. During the withdrawal, Najibullah begged for the troops to stay as he knew his rule was threatened in the absence of the Soviet military. In January of 1989, Najibullah communicated with Shevardnadze over sending in a brigade of Soviet troops, a plan to which Shevardnadze agreed. Yakovlev called Chernyaev to tell him about Shevardnadze's proposal and what they should do. Chernyaev responded with "Is [Shevardnadze] crazy, or does he not understand that Najibullah is setting a trap so we can't

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

leave in order to cause us to clash with the Americans and the rest of the world?... [This operation] would take even more of our boys' lives."⁵¹ Chernyaev called Gorbachev and a Yakovlev-Cheryaev-Shevardnadze debate broke out in which Gorbachev sided with the former two. Gorbachev reasoned that the Soviets should not "create the impression of running away" from the third world, but that they should find a method to help without sending in more troops—"a slap in [Shevardnadze's] face."⁵² These incidents revealed the growing factionalism between KGB-aligned party members and Soviet military-aligned members over withdrawal policies denoting the USSR's continued role in Afghanistan. As the KGB and like-minded members urged continued Soviet support and presence in order to preserve the PDPA and the Soviet prestige as a socialist leader, the military and other members did not want to waste any more lives or money into Soviet Union's bleeding wound.

Another debate surrounding the Soviet withdrawal occurred in March after Najibullah asked for Soviet help again, this time in the form of bomb air-raids, otherwise the PDA government would collapse. Shevardnadze again supported Najibullah, and he enlisted the support of Kryuchkov, Secretary Lev Zaikov and General Yazov. Gorbachev held a Politburo meeting on March 11 to discuss the situation, in which Shevardnadze argued "we cannot act otherwise [than to conduct an air-raid], it would be a betrayal, we promised, we are forsaking our friends...what will the third world say..." and Kryuchkov supported his position.⁵³ Yakovlev countered by saying "from a military point of view it is a waste of time," and that Najibullah has an army and guard large enough for effective defense.⁵⁴ He furthered his argument in saying "it

⁵¹ Chernyaev, "The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1989," 5.

⁵² Chernyaev, "The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1989," 6.

⁵³ Chernyaev, 1989, 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

took us so much work to win international confidence ... are we going to flush it down the drain by this single action? And for what?! Our people are just beginning to slowly recover from Afghanistan.”⁵⁵ Belorussian First Secretary Nikolai Slyunkov, Secretary Victor Nikonov, Secretary Vadim Medvedev, Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Maslyukov and Gorbachev supported Yakovlev’s stance against the air-raids. After this incident, apart from offering financial support, the Soviet Union left Afghanistan to its own devices in accordance with the Geneva meetings, and signaled to the world the end of Soviet expansionism.

Conclusion

The Afghan war weakened party unity as it provoked ideological questions challenging the identity of the Soviet Union, and as it created and increased divisions within the party as factionalism within the PDPA was reflected in the CPSU. Withdrawal held the ramifications of signaling the end of Soviet expansionism, a moving away from the traditional party line in support of the international proletariat, and harming Soviet prestige as a leader of the Soviet world. At the inception of the war, party unity was relatively strong as policy-making was concentrated in the hands of a few key policy makers with close ties to the General Secretary and dissenters were silenced, pushing the remaining Politburo members to reach consensus in support of the policies. However, as the war progressed creating international and economic consequences, and after Gorbachev reorganized the dynamics of the party and introduced glasnost, weaknesses in party unity emerged. Even though Gorbachev encouraged debate, he retired most of the party members who served under Brezhnev, reduced his staff to one-third of

⁵⁵ Ibid.

its original number, and he dissolved a number of committees. As the withdrawal process neared, salient divisions emerged within the party. Shevardnaze held the position that complete Soviet withdrawal and the abandonment of Najibullah was a betrayal to the party line. Gorbachev and the KGB were wary of a withdrawal because it would allow for other powers, such as the United States, to gain influence in the region of economic interest to the USSR, and it would weaken Soviet prestige. The factionalism in the PDPA became a battleground for the disputing Soviet camps as the military and pro-withdrawal party members worked with Khalq and the Afghan to pursue other alternatives to Najibullah, opposing the KGB and Shevardnaze in support of Najibullah. Initially the pro-Najibullah camp had Gorbachev's ear as it consisted of the KGB and like-minded reformists; however, as the war went on, the casualties rose and more money was lost to this bleeding wound. The Soviet army had little gains, and with domestic Soviet opinion on the war soured, the war soon felt too costly to continue. Gorbachev's fears and the ideology of the Najibullah lobby were incompatible with the reality of the situation which the military viewed less favorably. Therefore, the Afghan war worsened the existing KGB-military rift, and it also created salient division among the Najibullah Lobby and its opposition within the CPSU.

In the Afghan situation, not only does the Soviet economy worsen, but the rise of the mujahideen and nationalist sentiments within Afghanistan emerged to challenge the revolutionary government in place. Despite the military budget cuts to spur the initiatives of perestroika, the economy was still unable to perform well due to the lasting consequences the military-industrial complex had on economic growth. Thus, the Afghan war not only damaged

party unity through weakening the USSR's international position, but it also contributed to future economic woes that furthered the dissolution in party unity.

Chapter II Economic Woes and Party Unity

Various leaders throughout Soviet history have sought to contend with the weak, slowing economy through enterprise measures to stimulate economic growth while maintaining centralized economic control. In October, 1921, Lenin described the New Economic Policy (NEP) he imagined for the Soviet Union. The NEP included privatization measures, and even though Lenin admitted these measures were capitalist in nature, he contended with capitalism urging “there must be collective discussion, but individual responsibility.”⁵⁶ Under Stalin, the Soviet Union abandoned the NEP in favor of rapid industrialization and collectivization, which resulted in great, however short-term, economic growth. As the economic boom under Stalin slowed down, Krushchev sought to devolve economic power concentrated in the center to a more local level and to increase local accountability through tying bonuses to enterprise profitability. When Brezhnev rose to power, under the leadership of his Second Secretary, Aleksei Kosygin, they sought to extend Krushchev’s initiatives and to implement a “socialist market” that encouraged production and efficiency through private enterprise, but his economic reforms ultimately failed because of the entrenched hierarchical nature of the Soviet system and the difficulty in devolving authority.⁵⁷

When Gorbachev inherited this failing economy struggling under a poorly-planned bureaucratic system, corruption, waste, and heavy investment in the defense industry at the expense of civilian and development sectors, he imagined a radical solution which was his economic policy, perestroika. Despite offering a dramatic restructuring of the Soviet economy,

⁵⁶ Vladimir Lenin, “The New Economic Policy and The Tasks of the Political Education Departments,” Translated by David Skvirsky and George Hanna, *Lenin’s Collected Works*, Progress Publishers (Moscow, 1965), vol 33, 60-79. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/oct/17.htm>

⁵⁷ Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: Expanded Edition* (University of California Press, 1991), 2.

essentially perestroika resembled the feeble, market-inspired effort to encourage enterprise as an economic stimulus that many of Gorbachev's predecessors had attempted. Stalin maintained Party unity through his totalitarian control, violently silencing voices of opposition to his economic policy. Due to division between Party members who wanted to maintain the same command-control economy versus Krushchev's economic reforms to incentivize productivity and consumer goods, Brezhnev staged a coup against Khrushchev in 1964, thus maintaining Party unity through a show of force. However, during the Gorbachev years, the same disagreements that were present during Krushchev's economic reforms emerged, and because they were encouraged under Gorbachev, they could not be overcome to the detriment of party unity.

In 1986, Gorbachev began perestroika with efforts to improve economic performance. His new vision for the economy was based upon market principles such as private enterprise to encourage competition and the investment in civilian and technology sectors to stimulate growth. Additionally, Gorbachev hoped that with restructuring the bureaucratic apparatus to streamline communication and to create distinct divisions he would be able to improve the state's efficiency and further facilitate improved economic performance. However, the cooperatives movement sparked debate over its cohesiveness with socialist ideology and pre-existing institutions, and it incited concerns over the future of the defense sector and the rise of nationalist movements in the face of economic chaos. Soon divisions in the party between conservatives, who supported the command-economy and traditional socialist economic principles, in opposition to market liberals, who supported reforms such as economic cooperatives, over the economic reforms. Conservatives including military members, the KGB and Party members who profited from the

entrenched power relation of the center resented and even feared the reforms, and they sought to slow or end its process. In opposition, reformists, including reform-minded individuals who Gorbachev installed after the party purge of Brezhnevian officials, urged a faster pace of implementing the reforms. The leadership's lack of complete and unified commitment to the reform process, the unwillingness of workers and officials to embrace private enterprise and increased economic accountability, and the ideologically contradictory reforms resulted in abysmal economic performance and growing anxieties surrounding the cooperative movement. These anxieties further cemented divisions in the party and a breakdown in party unity.

Analysis

Table 2. Factions of Economic Reform Policy

Maintain centralized control over the economy	Allow limited free markets to co-exist with the planned economy (co-ops, etc.)	Full transition to market economy
Yegor Ligachev– Secretary of Ideology (1985-88), Secretary of Agriculture (1988-90)	Mikhail Gorbachev– General Secretary of the CPSU (1985-91)	Boris Yeltsin– First Secretary CPSU Moscow City Committee, CC Secretary for Construction
Gosplan (State Planning Committee)	Nikolai Ryzhkov– Chairman of Council of Ministers (1985-90)	Alexander Yakovlev– Head of CPSU Propaganda Department (1985-86); Full Politburo member, ideology department (1987-90)
KGB, Soviet Military		

The Birth of Perestroika and The Emergence of Resistance (1985-1987)

After Gorbachev assumed the role of General Secretary, he began to call for widespread reform of the economy through introducing market mechanisms to increase the autonomy and responsibility of individuals at the production level and through restructuring the bureaucratic-economic apparatus. In a speech to the Central Committee, Gorbachev outlined his economic plan: “While strengthening centralized planning in the main areas, we propose to continue to expand the rights of enterprises, to introduce genuine economic accountability,” which can be achieved through “the proper delineation of the rights and duties of each level of management.”⁵⁸ With an understanding that radical economic reform would face resistance within the party, Gorbachev retired and replaced many Brezhnev-era members of the Central Committee, resulting in 41% of new full members to the Politburo and “an almost complete

⁵⁸ “Gorbachev Spurs Drive to Update Economy,” *Pravda*, April 12, 1985, 1-2.

turnover of department chiefs in place when Brezhnev died in 1982.”⁵⁹ At the 27th Party Congress on March 6, 1986, “the Congress strongly endorsed Gorbachev’s economic strategy,” and even the conservatives appeared to be on board, as conservative Ukrainian party boss Shcherbitskii indicated when he revised his hardline position against reform to support Gorbachev’s proposals.⁶⁰ Therefore, following the Congress, the new, more reform-minded leadership initially appeared capable of bringing reform to the failing Soviet economy.

In December of 1986, the first signs of resistance to perestroika came from reform-minded, yet reserved Yegor Ligachev, the Party secretary in charge of ideology. Gorbachev’s close advisor Anatoly Chernyaev detailed in his diary an argument that occurred when Ligachev spoke out against Gorbachev at the Politburo over perestroika and the destruction of social state norms. Chernyaev recorded that Ligachev argued the reforms of economic accountability and enterprise hurt those reliant upon the state such as the retired, poor, disabled and even students. Only Premier Ryzhkov supported Gorbachev, while RSFSR Premier Vitalii Vorotnikov, Control Committee chief Mikhail Solomentsev and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevarnadze were sympathetic to Ligachev’s position.⁶¹ This recorded instance revealed growing attitudinal resistance to the reform policies, and how Ligachev and other Politburo members perceived the Soviet population’s potential anxieties surrounding enterprise initiatives, even if these policies were meant to improve the profitability of state enterprises.

⁵⁹ "CIA Intelligence Assessment, 'The 27th CPSU Congress: Gorbachev's Unfinished Business'," April, 1986, accessed through CIA Archive; accessed September 16, 2019. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/19860401A.pdf> 5-7.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Anatoly Chernyaev, “The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1986.” Translated by Anna Melyakova. Edited by Svetlana Savranskaya. *National Security Archive*. 2006, 27.

In addition to attitudinal resistance, ideological debates surrounding the discrepancies between perestroika and traditional Party economy emerged. Secretary Aleksander Yakovlev, known as the Father of Perestroika, attempted to address the growing ideological strife surrounding perestroika in his presentation to the Politburo on September 28, 1987. He conceded that “perestroika has brought up the issue of democratization” and is seemingly contradictory to ideological values.⁶² Democratization also posed a threat to the entrenched power of party members and the perks they enjoyed with their membership, both of which greatly rattled the more conservative elements of the Party. Yakovlev noted that conservatism had hindered the path and implementation of perestroika and that it was incompatible “to live in a new way, and to work in the old way.”⁶³ Yakovlev urged the party to embrace the reforms because halfway measures would result in the failure of the economic reforms. However, the public was also skeptical towards the ideological contradictions present in perestroika. In particular, the “Pamyat” organization, which was a reactionary conservative movement to protect Russian heritage, distributed flyers crying “Stop Yakovlev!,” presenting Yakovlev “as the main threat to all the Russian sacred things.”⁶⁴ Chernyaev asserted that Pamyat had Ligachev’s and Vorotnikov’s direct support, and Yakovlev speculated that Chebrikov also played a role in the creation of the flyer.⁶⁵ These instances revealed growing attitudinal resistance to the reformist economic policy within the party, and it showed the beginning of polarization between reformists

⁶² Text of presentation at the CC CPSU Politburo Session September 28, 1987. National Security Archive; accessed on October 15, 2019. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB168/yakovlev04.pdf>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Anatoly Chernyaev, “The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1987.” National Security Archive, trans. by Anna Melyakova, accessed on September 18, 2019. 5. https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB250/Chernyaev_Diary_1987.pdf

⁶⁵ Ibid.

and conservatives over ideological concerns arising from personal enterprise with conservatives supporting the traditional command economy in opposition to market reforms.

However, the economic reforms not only faced ideological barriers that hindered full implementation, but also concerns from military and KGB officials who had strong reservations for economic reform. The security apparatus strongly favored the traditional command economic system because it required a strong center to maintain control over the economic practices and production throughout the Union. As part of the democratic initiative in perestroika, the military and KGB were no longer employed as forces of coercion to ensure that individuals and officials complied with the reform measures. Not only did the security apparatus dislike being on a shorter leash, but also it strongly opposed any whiff of capitalism, which they detected in the air surrounding economic reform. In a meeting on security concerns, the head of the KGB's Fifth Chief Directorate Abramov, discussed how 'self-initiative' and the rise of organizations and groups during the time of economic and social freedom are "directly affecting our [KGB] operations."⁶⁶ He stated that the KGB had a document from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow "to use these informal associations for infiltrating the party, state, and societal apparatus."⁶⁷ The security apparatus's position on the market reforms soured due to security concerns stemming from less centralized control of the economy at local levels, the potential encroachment of capitalism, and their loss of power due to increased reliance on market principles rather than coercion.

⁶⁶ "Stasi Note on Meeting Between Minister Mielke and Head of the KGB 5th Directorate Abramov," September 26, 1987, Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Bernd Schaefer; accessed on October 18, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115722>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Restructuring, The Law on Cooperatives, and Polarization within The Party (1988)

The year 1988 marked the beginning of increasingly radical economic reforms and drastic restructuring of the economic apparatus. The increased magnitude of reform created greater polarization within the party due to ideological, security-related, and institutional disagreements, creating clear conservative and reformist camps fighting for political influence of the economic future. On February 18, 1988, the CPSU Central Committee Plenum supported Gorbachev's speech calling for restructuring ideology to support the initiatives of perestroika and economic reform. Despite this win for perestroika, within the party “there [was] not even an idea of how to tune the economic mechanism to work on the new principles,” and in the meantime, the economy worsened with production falling and market supplies decreasing.⁶⁸ In response to this growing uncertainty felt within the public and the party, Gorbachev’s objective was to be more assertive and create a commodity-market mechanism and to have laws governing the economy rather than people.⁶⁹ In May, 1988, the state adopted the Law on Co-operatives, allowing private enterprise. Not only were cooperatives meant to stimulate economic growth at the individual level, but also encouraging individual enterprise “brought many phenomena of the shadow economy out into the open and legalized them, allowing the state to collect taxes on formerly underground income and profits.”⁷⁰ However, the encouragement of legalized private enterprise contradicted traditional party ideology, and even Gorbachev pondered at a Politburo meeting “how to combine democracy, glasnost with a strong, central power.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Anatoly Chernyaev, “The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1988.” Translated by Anna Melyakova. Edited by Svetlana Savranskaya. *National Security Archive*. 2006, 25.

https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB250/Chernyaev_Diary_1988.pdf

⁶⁹ Yaroshenko, “New Steps to Curb ‘Shadow Economy’ Urged,” *Pravda*, October 12, 1988, 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ “Anatoly Chernyaev, Notes from a Meeting of the Politburo,” June 20, 1988, Wilson Center Archive; accessed on October 18, 2019.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134767>

Soon officials and the public perceived “a mass of problems [arising] connected with the cooperatives,” such as price increases.⁷² By November, 1988, the media reported “blatant hostility toward members of cooperatives on the part of a portion of the public and, most important, of officials in positions of power is a complaint shared by almost everyone.”⁷³ At a December Politburo meeting, Ligachev stated that cooperatives were a deviation from the traditional party line and a threat to the command economy.⁷⁴ Local Soviet executive committees placed limitations on cooperatives to diminish their economic freedom through limiting the amounts of goods cooperatives could purchase. In a debate reported in *Izvestia*, party conservative Protsenko supported such limitations, while reform-minded Usov was opposed to these measures. Protsenko argued that cooperatives were purchasing a large portion of already scarce foodstuffs and resources and reselling them at higher prices. Usov countered that these restrictions showed “that the local authorities do not want to recognize the cooperatives as equal partners with the state sector.”⁷⁵ According to a CIA report, “ideological concerns and bureaucratic resistance have limited the scale of the program significantly.”⁷⁶ These incidents revealed widespread attitudinal barriers to the cooperative movement from party officials, to local officials, and within the general public.

In addition to introducing radical economic reform, Gorbachev proceeded with dramatic restructuring of the party apparatus to aid the reform process through greatly reducing the

⁷² "Meeting of the Politburo of the CC CPSU, 'On the Issue of Reorganization of the Party Apparatus'," September 08, 1988, Wilson Center Archive; accessed on October 18, 2019.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118945>

⁷³ A. Protsenko, “An Alliance of Business People,” *Izvestia*, November 4, 1988, 2.

⁷⁴ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," December 27, 1988, Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Vladislav Zubok; accessed on October 18, 2019.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112478>

⁷⁵ A. Protsenko, “Should Co-op Operators Be Allowed into the Store?” *Izvestia*, November 11, 1988, 4.

⁷⁶ "CIA Intelligence Assessment, 'Gorbachev's September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation'," December, 1988, Wilson Center Archive; accessed on October 18, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134820>

number of departments and weakening the Secretariat, which Ligachev previously headed. Chernyaev recorded that Gorbachev, who was now President as well as head of the Party, retired party conservatives Gromyko, Dobrynin, and Solomentsev.⁷⁷ He demoted Ligachev to head the agriculture division, and Chebrikov was now the head of the commission on legal issues.⁷⁸ In sum, “by shrinking the size of the Secretariat, Gorbachev has decreased the representation of several economic departments,” thereby further consolidating and centralizing the economic responsibility.⁷⁹ Despite the efforts at restructuring the apparatus to better implement economic reform, there was ambiguity of responsibilities within the new apparatus and vagueness about how the new apparatus was to implement perestroika. The cooperative movement and market reforms were inherently incompatible with a command economy because the law of supply and demand governing cooperatives did not serve as regulator of the central economy. Due to these fundamentally different principles on which these levels of the economy functioned, it was fruitless to try to find a middle ground for the economy to operate effectively. As a result, the party further polarized over economic policy with conservative forces in favor of a return to a stronger command economy in opposition to reformists desire for a more complete transition into a market economy.

Growing Unrest and the Failure of Perestroika (1989-1990)

By 1989, after little returns from the cooperative movement, skepticism spread and dissent developed within the party. Gorbachev felt frustrated towards the heel-dragging of party

⁷⁷ Chernyaev, “The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1988,” 47.

⁷⁸ “CIA Intelligence Assessment, ‘Gorbachev’s September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation,’” December, 1988, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Security Archive <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134820>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

conservatives who hindered the reforms, and in January of 1989, he announced that economic reform was far from complete due to the strong “inertia of old ways,” and the “ministries’ and central economic departments’ fear of losing control over the movement of material resources.”⁸⁰ In a speech, Gorbachev addressed the restive public in the face of continued food shortages and price increases acknowledging “restructuring has come down hard on some people’s personal interests,” including staffs of ministries and agencies where restructuring is underway.⁸¹ In the face of ideological strife and the question of the abandonment of socialist values, Gorbachev stated, “we have work to do on the philosophical and political principles of our society’s renewal.”⁸² In February, this similar dialogue continued, with Gorbachev stating “the current debate disturbs me... some people are already starting to show nostalgia for ‘the good old days.’”⁸³ In May, 1989 at a Speech to Congress, Gorbachev again chided members trying to hinder the economic reform process and even trying to sabotage the transition, revealing persistent, salient division within the party.⁸⁴ In the following September, Gorbachev discussed divisions between the reformists versus traditionally-minded conservatives, and how the former is too radical and wants too much change too fast while the latter is trying to stop perestroika from succeeding.⁸⁵ He addressed the “stormy process of transforming and breaking with outdated forms of social life and stereotypes from the past” impeding private property and the multiparty system through urging that “we must continue elaborating the concept of a new face of socialism.”⁸⁶

⁸⁰ “Blunt Reforms Updates Paint Mixed Picture,” *Pravda*, January 5, 1989, 2.

⁸¹ “Go Forward, Undaunted by the Difficulties,” *Pravda*, January 24, 1989, 1-2.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ “Gorbachev at Bay?—Defending His Policies,” *Pravda*, February 1, 1989, 1-4.

⁸⁴ “Gorbachev’s Policy Speech to the Congress,” *Pravda*, May 31, 1989, 1-3.

⁸⁵ “Gorbachev Hits Those Who Imperil Reform,” *Pravda*, September 1, 1989, 1.

⁸⁶ “Gorbachev at Bay?—Defending His Policies”.

Party conservatives such as Ligachev exploited these concerns on party ideology and economic reform “playing on fears of instability to weaken Gorbachev.”⁸⁷ According to a report from the CIA in April, 1989, large parts of the Central Committee, the party apparatus, the military and the KGB threatened economic reform.⁸⁸ Even though Gorbachev urged developing a new face of socialism, the party faced a crisis of legitimacy as the reforms appeared to be a rejection of communism, and “so far the regime [had] not developed an effective legitimizing myth to replace the one it [was] destroying.”⁸⁹ In response to the ideological issues and the contradiction between the economic reforms and socialism, Gorbachev again argued that “we more and more often run into the inertia of old thinking, into a desire to resort to old methods, to slow down the processes that are underway. This is where the contradiction arises!”⁹⁰ However, despite Gorbachev’s efforts to create a new version of socialism compatible with the economic reforms, a report from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow aptly reported that “Leninism in effect becomes what the current leaders want it to be” and “ideologically-based guarantees of social equity may have to give ground to market-based efficiencies.”⁹¹

The economic reform process had stagnated and the economic state of the Soviet Union only worsened in 1990. According to an article in the *New York Times* in March, economic experts stated that the reforms were “‘half-hearted,’ and entrepreneurs [had] still not been given

⁸⁷ "Central Intelligence Agency, 'Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution: An Intelligence Assessment'," April, 1989, Wilson Center Archive; accessed on October 18, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134869>

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "Cable from the US Embassy in Moscow to Secretary of State for General Scowcroft, 'The Soviet Union Over the Next Four Years'," February, 1989, Wilson Center Archive; accessed on October 18, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134826>

⁹⁰ "Gorbachev Answers Critics at Party Plenum," *Pravda*, April 4, 1989, 1-2.

⁹¹ "Cable from the US Embassy in Moscow to Secretary of State for General Scowcroft, 'The Soviet Union Over the Next Four Years'," February, 1989.

authority to run their enterprises efficiently.”⁹² Nikolai Tikhonov, the President of the Union of Cooperatives, said the Soviet economy was ‘falling apart.’ Gorbachev called a Politburo meeting in September in an effort to hasten the economic transition to a market economy, but again the stubbornness of the conservatives stunted his efforts. Eventually, perestroika was abandoned in the subsequent years, and the Communist Party no longer served as the leading force in the country. The attempted transition to a market economy in efforts to save the failing Soviet economy was met with staunch resistance from party conservatives such as Ligachev, members of the Secretariat, as well as members of the KGB and military that severely impaired the economic reform efforts resulting in halfway measures that were doomed to fail.

Conclusion

The dissonance surrounding the institutional barriers within the party apparatus and ideological contradictions between socialism and market initiatives such as the cooperatives movement fueled polarization within the party between reformists and party conservatives, resulting in a lack of consensus that led to economic failure and a loss of party power. At the beginning of Gorbachev’s administration, there was a general consensus that something must be done to improve the struggling economy. Following the largest purging of party members since before Khrushchev, Gorbachev appeared to have the power and support to implement radical economic reform. As time went on, polarization within the party emerged from the ambiguity surrounding perestroika, the departure from the traditional command economy, and subsequent security concerns. Conservatives viewed the cooperatives movement in direct contradiction to

⁹² Leonard Silk, “Soviet Crisis Worse, Economists Declare,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1990, 2.

socialist values of a command economy because they felt that private enterprise was in line with capitalist thought. Not only were there these conservative attitudinal and ideological barriers, but the cooperatives did not function well in the continued centralization of the economy. As a result of the institutional hurdles and the conservatives efforts to delay or stunt the reforms, the economy worsened and the polarization within the party widened. Therefore, the economic reforms and attempted transition to a market economy amidst worsening economic performance weakened party unity, leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

With the increased economic turmoil, nationalist groups were able to use this confusion and fear to fuel their movements. Additionally, disillusioned with perestroika's economic returns, various Soviet republics sought greater economic autonomy and began to push for independence or greater political autonomy. The rising nationalist disintegration amid struggling efforts of restructuring added to the Party's anxieties and concerns, intensifying polarization within the Party, and threatening the future of the Union.

Chapter III Nationalist Disintegration and Party Unity

Introduction

The potential volatility of ethnic nationalism to the Soviet system had been a present concern since the Russian Revolution, threatening Lenin's and the Bolshevik's ultimate goal of the voluntary merging of nations to create one large socialist state. Lenin and Stalin opposed federalism and the principles of extraterritorial and territorial national cultural autonomy, which respectively describe the representation of each nationality in parliament and the ethnic definition of autonomous territory.⁹³ However, after the revolution, in order to convince states desiring independence to join the Union, the Soviet state became ethnically defined political units and was theoretically federative in nature. Ronald Suny, noted that "both federalism and national-territorial autonomy were written into the first Soviet constitution" of 1918.⁹⁴ After the Russian Civil War (November 1917- October 1922), the Baltic States were some of the few states to remain independent after the war. During the 1930s, Lenin with support from Stalin encouraged the "nativization" policy, which supported native languages, created a national political elite and intelligentsia, and "formally [institutionalized] ethnicity in the state apparatus."

Stalin opposed this encouragement of ethnic culture and identity, and when he rose to power, his industrialization efforts greatly sidelined these cultural initiatives. The centralized command economy caused a decrease in republic autonomy and subordinated the ethnic interests to Russian language and culture. "Russian language study was compulsory in all schools" by the end of the 1930s, and only party officials or economic managers who were literate in Russian

⁹³ Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (California: Stanford University Press, 1993), 86.

⁹⁴ Suny, 87.

and Russian culture were chosen as cadres.⁹⁵ It soon became clear that Stalin and party leaders preserved the tsarist imperialists relationship between the center and the peripheries under the guise of a supranational ideology sanctioning Communist party rule. Despite enjoying decades of independence, during WWII, Stalin annexed the Baltic states in June of 1940 under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.⁹⁶ Not only were the Baltics states demographically securely national with over 75% of Latvians in Latvia and around 85% of Estonians and Lithuanians within their titulars at the time of annexation, but the memory of their independent rule would mobilize the Baltic peoples during Gorbachev's years. Through simultaneously eliminating the nationalities' political sovereignty while guaranteeing territorial identity, encouraging national language and culture, and promoting native cadres to power, the Soviet Union became a collection of national identities rather than the unified melting pot as Leninist thought desired. Stalin's forced Russification and imposed modernization policy greatly threatened nationalist identity under the pressures of assimilation, and this created a catalyst for the Soviet Union's destruction following the weakening of central power upon Stalin's death.

During the post-Stalin period, the center's control decreased, allowing regional and ethnic communist parties a greater degree of independence. During the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, the center permitted greater nationalists expressions, and this provided republican leaders the opportunity to grow in power even as the ultimate power still remained in Moscow. The republics soon fell under the rule of national "mafias," and by the 1970s, due to the longevity of the "mafias" tenure in power, local elites were able to consolidate power and

⁹⁵ Suny, 108.

⁹⁶ "Secret Supplementary Protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact, 1939," September, 1939, Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office, accessed through Wilson Center Archive; accessed on January 25, 2020. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110994>

placate “the local populations with moderate concessions to nationalist feelings and a high degree of economic permissiveness.”⁹⁷ As the Soviet economy stagnated, Brezhnev sought to dismantle the mafia network that hindered his economic plans, but the networks persisted and became a form of national resistance to central authority.

However, the pivotal moment in history that unleashed these nationalist movements was Gorbachev’s restructuring of the Party apparatus. Through encouraging democratic rule and glasnost, Gorbachev weakened the power of the republican Communist parties in the Baltics, and he delegitimized the Communist Party rule at the center.⁹⁸ These nationalist movements further damaged party unity, as party members could not agree upon a policy to preserve the Union, even as the sovereignty of the Communist party and the Soviet Union dissolved. Party conservatives in Moscow did not want the republics to gain independence, and they advocated for a show of force to curtail the demonstrations. The KGB and Soviet military also opposed these movements, and felt that if the Baltic republics became independent, they would reach out to the West, especially since they were politically oriented towards the West before their annexation. The reformists did not want the republics to separate from the Union, but they were against force because it would be the end of perestroika’s democratic initiative. As the Union began to fall apart due to the increasing demands of the popular movements in the Baltics, the sides grew increasingly divided on whether to address these movements with force or with concessions.

⁹⁷ Suny, 117-119.

⁹⁸ Suny, 128.

Analysis

Table 3. Factions of Nationalist Disintegration Containment Policy

Pursue a concessionist policy to maintain the Union	Employ coercive force in the Republics to maintain the Union
Mikhail Gorbachev– General Secretary of the CPSU (1985-91)	Soviet Army, KGB, Ministry of Internal Affairs
Alexander Yakovlev– Head of CPSU Propaganda Department (1985-86); Full Politburo member, Senior Secretary (1987-90)	Yegor Ligachev– Secretary of Ideology (1985-88), Secretary of Agriculture (1988-90)
Vadim Medvedev– Secretary for Ideology (1988-90)	Victor Chebrikov– KGB chairman (1982-88)
Bogomolov Commission	Dmitry Yazov– Marshal and Minister of Defense

Perestroika and the Rise of Nationalist Sentiments in the Baltics (1985-1988)

Even from the beginning of his stint as General Secretary, Gorbachev understood the significance of the Soviet Union’s ethnic and national diversity to the survival of the union. When Gorbachev began to replace and retire most of the Old Guard, he was thoughtful of his new appointees. At a June, 1985 Politburo session only months into his new leadership position, he appointed Eduard Shevardnadze, the first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party and an ethnic Georgian, to Minister of Foreign Affairs, not only because he shared reformists sentiments, but also as Gorbachev stated: “we have to have one more consideration in mind—that we have a multinational country, and it is important that it finds its reflection in the composition of the central party organs.”⁹⁹ In other words, Gorbachev understood the importance of having

⁹⁹ PB CC CPSU Session 29 June 1985, National Security Archive; accessed on January 25, 2020.. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB481/docs/Document%201.pdf>

people from the Soviet republics reflected in the membership of the Politburo to represent the sharing of central power with the republics. Similarly, as the Latvians had created a mass popular front by the fall of 1988, Gorbachev appointed Boris Pugo, the first secretary of the Latvian Communist Party, to serve as the chairman of the Party Control Committee in September, 1988. Pugo later became the Minister of Internal Affairs in December of 1990.

As perestroika developed not only as a restructuring of the economy but also the political apparatus, the rigidity of old structures gave way, allowing nationalistic rustlings in the republics in the form of People's Fronts to emerge in the Baltics. According to a CIA report in April, 1986, "the congress speeches reflected concern about nationalism and localism" with Secretary of Ideology Ligachev and Politburo member Victor Mishin having a "faint tone of Russian nationalism" in their remarks.¹⁰⁰ Conservatives were beginning to show concern over the possible consequences of perestroika and glasnost, fearing that the increased level of individual freedoms and democracy would erode the Party's influence and the Union's authority. At an August 1988 session of the Politburo, members "stressed the unacceptability of any attempts to use democracy and openness for antidemocratic goals to discredit our common internationalist achievements and to sow discord among nationalities."¹⁰¹ Conservatives and reformists alike were cautious of the potential threat democracy presented to the Soviet Union's center as the diffusion of power could allow groups to mobilize and challenge Moscow's authority. Ligachev and Chebrikov were the most vocal conservatives arguing that "glasnost and democratization have contributed significantly to the growing assertiveness of non-Russian ethnic groups," and

¹⁰⁰ "The 27th CPSU Congress: Gorbachev's Unfinished Business" An Intelligence Assessment 4-1-86. CIA Reading Room Archive; accessed on January 25, 2020.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp87t00787r000200230004-6>

¹⁰¹ "Communist Party," *Pravda*, August 14, 1988, 2.

they urged that the leadership curtail the growing unrest.¹⁰² Yakovlev argued in favor of allowing concessions to the movements, insisting that “the authoritarian policies of the past are principally responsible for the nationalist ferment.”¹⁰³

Pravda published a telling article in the following September that gave subsistence to party conservatives’ arguments against reform. According to the article discussing the Estonian People’s Front, the conditions of perestroika and glasnost “made it possible [for the People’s Front] to consolidate a large part of the population” for nationalist goals, confirming conservative fears.¹⁰⁴ The movement’s goal was “to restore state independence ... sovereignty of the republic. ... They do not believe that a super-centralized Union state can be turned into a union of sovereign states.”¹⁰⁵ Although the Party collectively was opposed to notions of independence, the conservatives desired a military solution to reinforce the authority of the Union. The reformists did not support independence, but they understood that encouraging individual accountability and free speech would incite extreme sentiments as a byproduct of reform. Instead of using force, the reformists endorsed a concessionist policy, hoping to settle the angst of nationalist movements through appeasement. According to a CIA Intelligence Assessment, the party was split on how to handle the growing unrest in the republics:

Before the September plenum, the leadership appeared to have reached a consensus on the need for a show of force to restore order in the Caucasus. At the same time, Politburo reformers seemed to give the green light to authorities in the Baltic states to allow extraordinarily large –and peaceful–demonstrations on behalf of greater regional autonomy, and to permit indigenous ‘popular fronts’ to organize actively.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² "CIA Intelligence Assessment, 'Gorbachev's September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation'," December, 1988, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Security Archive, 7. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134820>

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ "Estonian People's Front: What Does It Want?" *Pravda*, September 29, 1988, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ "CIA Intelligence Assessment, 'Gorbachev's September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation'," December, 1988.

This assessment revealed the disunity within the Party on how to handle these nationalist movements, resulting in inconsistent responses that further delegitimized the Communist Party's role as the central power.

In October, 1988, Gorbachev's reform-minded aid and political advisor Georgy Shakhnazarov, a member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, reflected shared concerns over calls for independence, as he urged that "we cannot renounce the role of a leader, the role that will always objectively belong to the Soviet Union as the most powerful socialist country."¹⁰⁷ Despite the desire to remain in a position of authority, Shakhnazarov advised in favor of reformists that Soviet leadership should not employ the military to diffuse future "crisis situations" as it would harm the initiatives of perestroika.¹⁰⁸

In November, the new Ideology chairman Medvedev, Socio-economic Policy Commission chairman Slyunkov and KGB chairman Chebrikov returned from the Baltics and described how they were assailed with "'Russians get out of here!' 'KGB, MIA, Soviet Army—to Moscow!' 'Do away with the dictatorship from Moscow!' 'full sovereignty!' etc."¹⁰⁹ Instead of using force to silence such blatant opposition, the leadership had even encouraged some of this activity "hoping to co-opt nationalist organizations that generally support Gorbachev's reform goals."¹¹⁰ Moscow even permitted the activities of the Baltic Popular Fronts, allowing them to fly "pre-Soviet flags of independence" and to advance programs promoting actual independence

¹⁰⁷ "Georgy Shakhnazarov's Preparatory Notes for Mikhail Gorbachev for the Meeting of the Politburo," October 06, 1988, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Published in G. Kh. Zhakhnazarov, Tsena prozreniia [The Price of Enlightenment]. Translated by Vladislav Zubok. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112474>

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Chernyaev, "The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1988," 59.

¹¹⁰ "CIA Intelligence Assessment, 'Gorbachev's September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation'," December, 1988.

from Moscow.¹¹¹ Even more, a CIA Intelligence Assessment in April, 1989 evaluated that the Baltic nationalist movements had usurped the local authorities in setting the political agenda, threatening Moscow's control of the Baltic region, excluding coercion.¹¹² At a December Politburo meeting, heeding the Baltic states' calls, Army General Yazov confirmed the removal of Soviet troops from several republics and he proposed withdrawing three more divisions in the following year.¹¹³ In response, Ligachev argued that even though the leadership was functioning on the perestroika agenda, "that does not mean that we should weaken the defense preparedness of the country."¹¹⁴ Although Gorbachev countered Ligachev and no one spoke in the latter's support, "the majority [of the Party members] 'purse their lips' and do not approve of [Gorbachev's] liberalism" and the concessions given to the republics.¹¹⁵ Even though the majority did not openly oppose the concessions, the increasing allowances for the Baltic republics further fueled the nationalist movements, intensifying the pressure within the Party to create policy to contain these movements.

Not only did nationalist movements incite debate over the reforms and possible methods to respond to these movements, but they also triggered a Russian nationalistic reaction from the Russian-speaking minorities within non-Russian republics. The article "Estonian People's Front: What Does It Want? Published in *Pravda* revealed such sentiments in a debate over the First

¹¹¹ "Central Intelligence Agency, 'Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution: An Intelligence Assessment'," April, 1989, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, FOIA request to CIA, National Security Archive, 17.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134869>

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU CC), (Excerpts)," December 27, 1988, RGANI, f. 89, op. 42, d. 24. Accessed through Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Vladislav Zubok; accessed on January 25, 2020.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112478>

¹¹⁴ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU CC), (Excerpts)," December 27, 1988.

¹¹⁵ Chernyaev, "The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev: 1988," 62.

Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party's Central Committee, who was an Estonian. Even though by this time, all first secretaries in the Union Republics were members of the titular nationalities, the article reported that "among the Russian speaking populations one can hear apprehensions that now their interest are being jeopardized, since the First Secretary is 'not one of ours.'"¹¹⁶ Therefore, the nationalist movements and People's Fronts provoked a Russian nationalist response, adding to the social and political turbidity surrounding perestroika.

At the conclusion of 1988, the CIA assessed that "strains in the leadership over national policy have been evident for some time."¹¹⁷ However, after Gorbachev restructured the apparatus, the Party leadership appeared "to have tilted the balance in favor of greater tolerance for national assertiveness," such as allowing the recognition of national languages and flying national flags, thus dismissing conservative concerns for the sake of the reform process.¹¹⁸

Gorbachev transferred Chebrikov from his position as head of the KGB to chair the party's legal commission, and he demoted Ligachev from "second secretary," traditionally and informally the General Secretary's second, to the head of agriculture. He also assigned Latvian party member Boris Pugo as the new head of the Party Control Committee to root out corruption that resisted from the Khrushchev and Brezhnev-era favoritism for republic mafias, a system that impeded perestroika's economic and political reforms.

Despite reorganizing the party apparatus, divisions within the party were becoming increasingly salient over endorsing a concessionist policy versus a coercive policy in response to the movements in the Baltics. Elements of the security apparatus, specifically the KGB and the

¹¹⁶ "Estonian People's Front: What Does It Want?" *Pravda*, September 29, 1988, 3.

¹¹⁷ "CIA Intelligence Assessment, 'Gorbachev's September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation'," December, 1988.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Soviet Army, felt the nationalist movements were a security threat to the Union, and therefore they advocated for the use of military or police forces to maintain control. Other less reform-minded party members such as Ligachev also supported the traditional use of force as they did not feel a concessionist policy would abate the movements, but they would instead weaken the center's control of the republics. On the other hand, reform-minded party members including Gorbachev, Yakovlev and Medvedev supported a concessionist policy as using force would signal the failure of glasnost and sociopolitical reform. As a result, factionalism intensified over Moscow's relationship with the Baltic republics and its future role.

The Party Debates the National Question (1989)

In 1989 the Party continued to debate the Soviet Union's role in relation to the Soviet republics and Moscow's policy to handle the nationalist movements. In a February memorandum to Yakovlev from the Bogomolov Commission, which advised the leadership on how to implement perestroika, the commission proposed various consequences for the Soviet Union due to failures of perestroika and growing unrest in the republics. With the poor economic performance and the ambiguity of restructuring, the commission predicted that the ruling republican parties would lose power and that new political forces, such as members of People's Fronts, would replace them. Therefore, the Communist party would lose influence in Eastern Europe as a central power, and even more, the socialist countries could fall "into the orbit of economic and political interest of the West."¹¹⁹ The commission warned that using force to stop the nationalist movements or to preserve the preexisting relationships will be an economic

¹¹⁹ "Memorandum to Alexander Yakovlev from the Bogomolov Commission (Marina Sylvanskaya)," February, 1989, Wilson Center Archive, trans. by Vladislav Zubok and Gary Goldberg; accessed on January 25, 2020. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112484>

burden, a reinforcement for the conservatives, and detrimental to the reform process—all exacerbating the crisis.¹²⁰ Not only would a forceful intervention greatly harm perestroika, but the commission argued that it would not put an end to nationalist disintegration and protests.

Reformists had argued that the success of perestroika would naturally abate the nationalist movements as the economy improved and restructuring provided greater democracy, but as it became clear perestroika would fail, the Party felt a sense of urgency. Gorbachev condemned both the conservative and reformist positions in a speech at the central committee in February. He admonished the position of the reformists, who hoped to hasten the restructuring process and even “skip some of its stages,” which radical actions would have increased ambiguity, and would have been too much of a shock for persisting “old way” institutions and attitudes.¹²¹ Such drastic change would have been destabilizing and possibly have given the People’s Fronts more influence as a political force. He also spoke against extremist movements and conservatives taking advantage of the public’s anxiety surrounding the movements to turn attitudes against restructuring and reform.¹²² However, despite his condemnations, the Soviet Union was still struggling to find a middle road to address the growing crisis.

A CIA report for April, 1989, noted that the leadership was growing more polarized over how to respond to these at-times violent developments in the Baltics, creating the danger of a “divisive split in the leadership.”¹²³ Not only were the heated protests from the Baltic People’s Fronts, but also the Russian minorities within the republics, “setting the stage for violent clashes

¹²⁰ "Memorandum to Alexander Yakovlev from the Bogomolov Commission (Marina Sylvanskaya)," February, 1989.

¹²¹ "Gorbachev at Bay?—Defending His Policies," *Pravda*, January 8, 1988, 4.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ "Central Intelligence Agency, 'Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution: An Intelligence Assessment'," April, 1989.

in the republics where the Russians are in danger of becoming second-rate citizens.”¹²⁴ With the concessions that Moscow had given to the People’s Fronts in accordance with glasnost and restructuring, the Soviet leadership was inadvertently fueling the tensions between the Russians and the native populations. These Russian nationalists sentiments also affected the attitude of party conservatives such as Ligachev and his supporters, the Soviet military, the Minister of Interior, and the KGB. The KGB feared that the leadership’s greater toleration of dissent would reduce the stability of the Soviet Union. Even though he previously sanctioned the withdrawal of troops from the Baltic region, General Yazov expressed military concerns over the rise of the nationalist movements and the leadership’s concessions to these movements. He reported a rise of anti-Army efforts in the Baltics and Transcaucasian republics where local leadership infringed upon the rights of servicemen and created unconstitutional laws to hinder USSR jurisdiction over youth military training and other Union functions.¹²⁵ Additionally, he argued that nationalistic sentiment “poisoned” potential draftees within the Republics against service, and therefore constituted a threat to the Soviet Military.¹²⁶

The Baltic People’s Fronts not only acted as nationalistic movements, but they became a rising opposition party calling for elections and pluralism, threatening socialist rule and Soviet influence. At a Politburo meeting in May, Medvedev reported that the outcome of the elections in the Baltics resulted in mostly the election of participants in the Popular Fronts, who “ran as a force opposing the CPSU,” supporting separatism and nationalism.¹²⁷ Gorbachev responded to

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ “A Nationalist Threat to Soviet Military,” *Pravda*, November 13, 1989, 3.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ “CPSU Politburo Discussion of the Memorandum of Six Politburo members on the Situation in the Baltic Republics,” May 11, 1989, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, f. 4, op. 1, accessed through Wilson Center Archive; accessed on January 25, 2020.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134879>

this news arguing in line with party reformists that the leadership should learn to work with the various People's Fronts to encourage them to remain in the Union rather than employing military force to maintain republic parties. Furthermore, in his speech to the Council of Europe in July, Gorbachev stated that it is "the sovereign right of each people to choose their social system at their own discretion."¹²⁸ Gorbachev understood that the Baltic republics now had a different relationship to the Soviet center than he had hoped. Instead of maintaining the pseudo-imperialist relationship of his predecessors or creating the Leninist super-state, the best scenario for Gorbachev was to federalize the Union. However, the failure of perestroika and concessions to maintain the Union coupled with the conservatives' desire to use force to preserve a Stalinist-style union heightened discourse within the Party over future policy towards the republics. Gorbachev noted at a July conference that the polarization of opinions within the Party were accelerating with the growth of left-radical sentiments calling for decisive, quick transformations.¹²⁹ In his concluding speech, Gorbachev urged conservative and leftist forces to join forces instead of divide. As a conservative voice at the conference, Ligachev argued that the exacerbated relations between nationalities and the uncertainty surrounding restructuring had created a situation "in which people fear for their safety... and for the country's future."¹³⁰ He also stressed that "a multiparty system would mean the breakup of the Soviet Federation," and argued for greater Party control.¹³¹ Premier Ryzhkov also agreed that they must work to elevate the prestige and role of the Party. RSFSR chairman Vorotnikov suggested enhancing the

¹²⁸ "Speech by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, "Europe as a Common Home", July 06, 1989, Wilson Center Archive' accessed on January 26, 2020.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134162>

¹²⁹ "Gorbachev Pushes Party Towards New Role," *Izvestia*, July 19, 1989, 1.

¹³⁰ "Leaders Debate Party's Changing Role," *Pravda*, July 21, 1989, 2.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

“sovereign rights of the Russian Federation” in the midst of nationalist movements to appease the growing unrest in the Russian republic and ethnic Russians in non-titular republics.¹³² These suggestions revealed the embedded Russophilia as part of Stalin’s legacy that remained in Party policy-making and conservative efforts to maintain Party power and Union sovereignty amid the growing anxiety surrounding restructuring and nationalist fervor.

When the Lithuanian Communist Party split from the CPSU and called for full independence in March of 1988, the Moscow leadership was faced with “heated debate.”¹³³ In a speech at the Plenary Session of the Central Committee, Gorbachev stated that both the reformists and the conservatives were attempting to frighten the public through prospecting “a general collapse,” but he discounted such fears asserting they were merely political strategy.¹³⁴ In another speech discussing Lithuania’s split, Gorbachev blamed the split on the republic Party leadership, which “deviated from the party line and went over to appeasement of and outside flirtation with nationalistic and separatist forces, to a splintering of the parties ranks.”¹³⁵ The irony in his reasons for admonishing the Lithuanian party were not lost on party conservatives, as they had repeatedly opposed giving concessions to the nationalist opposition movements.

The Dissolution of Party Unity and the Soviet Union (1990-1991)

Prior to Lithuanian Party split, there were relatively few calls for sovereignty in the preceding years as the Baltic republics received concessions from Moscow to use pre-Union national symbols and to organize nationalist demonstrations. However, 1990 featured a series of

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ “Gorbachev Sees Danger as Congress Nears,” *Pravda*, December 10, 1989, 1.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ “Central Committee Debates Lithuanian Split,” *Pravda*, December 26, 1989, 1.

declarations of independence and sovereignty, “beginning with Lithuania’s declaration of independence in March.”¹³⁶ By summer of 1990, the CPSU’s internationalist integrity was weak and people feared a similar split within the CPSU as in the Communist Parties of some republics.¹³⁷ Not only was political influence waning seriously, but also economic influence was under threat. At a Party Congress in July, 1990, Politburo members and candidate members reported their position on restructuring and the current situation of the Union. Ryzhkov described how various republics wanted to create individual closed markets, which would allow the creation of trade barriers between republics and increased economic ties with the West. He noted that with “increasing national self-awareness” republics had begun to adopt legislation contradicting the USSR’s Constitution, which “could undermine” the state system.¹³⁸ Yakovlev urged the “renewed party must move left.”¹³⁹ Notably, he stated “it is time to end the civil war that we seem unable to get out of,” revealing the tense division within the Party over the policies concerning the center’s relations with the republics.¹⁴⁰ Vorotnikov commented on fears of an inevitable split within the CPSU, disclosing that there were rumors to this effect circulating, even though he felt it was unlikely.¹⁴¹ Boris Yeltsin, the new chairman of the RSFSR (the Russian republic), fueled these fears, declaring “the country cannot be given orders any longer,” threatening the Russian republic would declare sovereignty.¹⁴² In his speech on the Politburo

¹³⁶ Suny, 144.

¹³⁷ P. Gutiontov, “Leftists, Rightists Hold Rallies in Moscow,” *Izvestia*, July 4, 1990, 3.

¹³⁸ “Party Congress Hears Politburo Members,” *Pravda*, July 7, 1990, 2.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ “Party Congress Hears Politburo Members—II,” *Pravda*, July 7, 1990, 3.

¹⁴² “Party Congress: Yeltsin, Others Give Views,” *Pravda*, July 7, 1990, 4.

members' reports at the July Congress, Gorbachev decided that the Party must abandon old institutions, democratize, and understand that the CPSU no longer held a monopoly on power.¹⁴³

Faced with the impending possibility that the Union would dissolve into merely a collection of sovereign republics, in a radical swing to the left, the Russian Supreme Soviet adopted economist Stanislav Shatalin's radical '500 Day' economic reform plan to hastily convert the economy into a market economy and give more economic autonomy to the republics.

¹⁴⁴ Shatalin was Gorbachev's economic advisor, and even though Gorbachev initially endorsed this plan, the Supreme Soviet of the CPSU approved a drastically more moderate plan, "basically gutting the 500-day program and smashing the alliance with Yeltsin and the democratic reformers."¹⁴⁵ In addition to his sudden conservative economic turn, Gorbachev also appointed conservatives to key positions in efforts to increase central authority, slowing the reform process he previously approved. Yakovlev was ousted from the party, conservative economist Vladimir Pavlov replaced Ryzhkov as prime minister, and Shevardnadze quit by the end of 1990, warning that a dictatorship was impending.¹⁴⁶ Gorbachev even turned to conservative 'forces of order,' including the military and KGB in efforts to gain more control of the crisis situation.¹⁴⁷ KGB chairman Kryuchkov stated in a speech that "democracy and glasnost [would] remain nothing but fine-sounding words if there is no law and order," suggesting increased reliance on force rather than politics in the future, threatening perestroika.¹⁴⁸ In an 'open letter' Shatalin

¹⁴³ "Gorbachev Reviews Congress's Work to Date," *Izvestia*, July 11, 1990, 2.

¹⁴⁴ "A Choice Has Been Made," *Sovetskaya Rossia*, September 18, 1990, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Suny, 145.

¹⁴⁶ "Fourth Congress of USSR People's Deputies," *Izvestia*, December 20, 1990, 4-11.

¹⁴⁷ Suny, 146.

¹⁴⁸ "Kryuchkov Talks Tough: Crackdown Coming?" *Pravda*, December 13, 1990, 3.

condemned Gorbachev's betrayal of "faithful comrades-in-arms from the beginning of perestroika" and his turn to "the 'black colonels.'"¹⁴⁹

Even though Gorbachev's shift to the right momentarily restrained the conservatives, who were outraged at Gorbachev's radical reformist attempt to preserve the Union, as the economic crisis and independence movements continued, Gorbachev shifted back to the left once more. In August, 1991, negotiations for the "Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States," which recognized the sovereignty of the republics, concluded and representatives prepared to sign on August 21.¹⁵⁰ However, faced with the reality of democratization and having to compete in a multi-party system in the future, conservatives launched a desperate attempt to regain power through a failed coup. Rather than gaining power, the coup destroyed the remaining central power, discredited the organs of the Soviet center—the Party, bureaucracy, army and police—and created a power vacuum that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

The rise of Baltic People's Fronts in response to freedoms accompanying glasnost and discontent with Moscow's unequal relationship with the republics exacerbated tensions in the steadily polarizing CPSU. The KGB and the Soviet Army feared the uncertainty and the destabilizing effects of restructuring that threatened Party power and Union authority, so they promoted use of force, stalled the reform process and clung to old institutions and methods of

¹⁴⁹ "Shatalin Faults Gorbachev on Swing to Right," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, January 22, 1991, 2.

¹⁵⁰ "New Union Treaty," *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report. U.S. Dept. of Commerce; National Technical Information Service, 1991. Accessed on January 27, 2020.

<http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1991-2/nine-plus-one-agreement/nine-plus-one-agreement-texts/new-union-treaty/>

power. The reformists such as Yakovlev and Gorbachev increasingly grew more radical, urging faster transitions, offering concessions to the nationalist movements, short of independence, and favoring economic and political methods of influence rather than force. Traditionally, Moscow employed the Soviet Army to control unrest in the republics, but such use of force would undermine Gorbachev's reform efforts and glasnost. As a result of not pursuing coercive force, reformists struggled to maintain a balance between promoting perestroika and glasnost while maintaining control over the increasingly restless republics.

When the Baltic Republics called for independence, it became clear that concessionist efforts had failed to maintain the Union, prompting Gorbachev to radically endorse conservative policies. Gorbachev's inconsistent allegiance to conservatives or leftists resulted in his increased political isolation and allowed Yeltsin and pro-nationalist forces in the Baltics to grow in power, further weakening the CPSU's authority. While reform-minded members of the CPSU were willing to democratize and participate in elections, the conservatives feared losing their hold on power. The polarization of the party manifested into the conservatives weakly attempted coup that ushered the fall of the Soviet Union.

Unlike previous leaderships, during Gorbachev's years of reform, Moscow rejected traditional methods of coercion to maintain control in favor of concessions and endorsed democracy. In efforts to promote reform, Gorbachev inadvertently exacerbated the opportunity for people's movements to organize and to gain power in the republics and threaten Moscow's sovereignty over the republics. The growing threat the nationalism movements presented to the Union, especially as the Baltic Republics called for independence, intensified factionalism within

the Party over how to respond to this challenge, ultimately resulting in a desperate and feeble conservative coup as the manifestation of the degree of disunity within the Party.

Thesis Conclusion

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union suffered increasing factionalism over policy debates surrounding the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the cooperative movement, and concessionist policy toward nationalist movements in the Baltics.

Soviet involvement in the Afghan war caused bitter disagreement within the security apparatus as the Soviet army advised strongly against intervention while Moscow endorsed the KGB's suggestion to invade. The internecine fighting intensified during the Soviet withdrawal as the Soviet army and aligned Party members advocated for a quick and complete withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan while the KGB and Shevardazde advocated for continued Soviet presence to support the weak PDPA. The factionalism within the CPSU reflected the infighting in the PDPA with the Soviet army camp supporting the Khalq faction that made up most of the Afghan army and the KGB camp supporting the Parcham faction that the KGB installed as the PDPA's leadership. As more money was sunk into the bleeding wound, more lives were lost, and the future security of the PDPA appeared bleak, Gorbachev supported the Soviet army's position for a complete withdrawal and to leave the fate of the PDPA with its leaders.

When Gorbachev introduced market reforms, such as the co-operative movement, he was met with resistance from the security apparatus and other conservative members who wanted to maintain their power and the traditional command-style economy. In contrast, reformists such as Gorbachev and Yakovlev supported increasingly radical market reforms and restructuring of the economy. As the market policies failed due to conservative efforts to hinder their implementation and the continued centralized control over the economy, it became clear that a halfway measure

would no longer work and the Party split into a pro-command economy faction and a pro-market economy faction.

The failings of perestroika undermined Moscow's authority, and the increased economic authority allocated to localities accompanied with glasnost fueled the rise of nationalist movements in the Soviet republics. The CPSU divided over how to respond to this growing threat to the Union with reform-minded members promoting a concessionist policy to appease these movements while the more conservative forces, including the security apparatus, urged the use of force to quell the nationalist calls. When the Baltic republics called for independence, it became clear that the concessionist policy had failed, so the Party reformists drafted the radical 500-day plan. However, Gorbachev swung in alliance with the conservatives in contrary efforts to bolster the center's control. Due to political backlash, Gorbachev aligned again with the reformists in favor of elections and a Union of States rather than republics, and conservatives who were fearful for their hold on power launched a failed coup, nailing the final coffin in the CPSU and the Soviet Union.

A commonality in all of these cases for the rise of factionalism within the Communist Party is not only increasingly salient divisions, but also the progressive isolation of the General Secretary. Gorbachev inconsistently supported reformists' positions on the co-operative movement policy and the concessionist policy and he similarly was varying in support for the KGB camp's desire to slow the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Additionally, Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika undermined the basic traditional function of the CPSU as he encouraged open, in-party debate and restructuring that weakened party members' control on the economy and their positions of power. This thesis reveals the fragile nature of the Soviet

party-state without having a strong leader to coerce consensus and to enforce centralized control, or, essentially, to forcefully maintain party unity.

Even though Gorbachev envisioned a prosperous Soviet Union thriving on a centrally-controlled market economy and serving as the leader of the socialist world under the banners of glasnost and perestroika, in reality, the entrenched power relations and traditional values within the party were diametrically opposed to reformists policies, lighting the kindling for factionalism within the Party and heralding the fall of the Communist giant.

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