

THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION

1985-1991

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"The eighth leader [of the Soviet Union] is called Michael [i.e. Michael Gorbachev, the eighth Soviet leader since Lenin]. He will be young and good-looking. He will change the situation. However, then there will come great poverty..."
Holy Hermitess Helena of the Caucasus (1955).

"The communists have been hurled at the Church like a crazy dog. Their Soviet emblem - the hammer and sickle - corresponds to their mission. With the hammer they beat people over the head, and with the sickle they mow down the churches. But then the Masons will remove the communists and take control of Russia."
Hierconfessor Igumen Theodore of Belorussia (+1975).

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INTRODUCTION

The Fall of the Soviet Union represents, after the Russian Revolution itself, perhaps the most important and instructive period of revolutionary change in the twentieth century. The critical years of the Russian revolution constituted the six years of Lenin's reign from October 1917 to January 1924. Similarly, the critical years of the Soviet collapse constituted the six years of Gorbachev's rule from March 1985 to December 1991. It is the belief of the present writer that on one's relative evaluation of these two six-year periods of revolutionary change - the reign of Lenin and the reign of Gorbachev - hangs a correct understanding, not only of Russian history but of world history, in the modern period.

The present Russian president, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, famously called the fall of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century". My belief is quite the opposite: the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century was Lenin's revolution. Gorbachev's revolution, which is the subject of this book, was neither a tragedy - for what it destroyed was indeed an evil empire - nor a real counter-revolution in that it did not restore the blessed order of the Orthodox Autocracy; nor was the fall of the Soviet Union the aim of Gorbachev's "reconstruction". Nevertheless, it was sufficiently radical to "turn the world upside down", and is therefore worthy of close study and analysis.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, and of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us! Amen.

August 5/18, 2020.

*Forefeast of the Transfiguration of Christ.
Holy Martyr-King Oswald of Northumbria.
137 Woking Road, Guildford. GU1 1QX.*

1. THE COMING OF GORBACHEV

“The problem of Communism,” writes Lucian Boia, “was that in the natural order of things, it could not function. It was conceived and put into practice in defiance of elementary human and social laws. How could a system function without property, without competition and without sufficient individual motivation? Perhaps only by creating a ‘new man’, as was indeed the intention. Communism was kept alive by artificial means (tolerating a variable sector of private property and free commerce), and its survival was due to a great extent to the inflow of Western credit and assistance. The real miracle was not the collapse of Communism but the fact that it was able to go on so long!”¹

Jean-Francois Revel wrote in 1985: “The Soviet Union... is undoubtedly sick, very sick. It will die, that’s certain,... because it is in and of itself a society of and for death. But the prime question of our time is which of the two events will take place first: the destruction of democracy by communism or communism’s death of its own sickness?...”²

Indeed, a superficial view of the situation would have confirmed Revel’s judgement that the West would collapse before the Soviet Union. As John Darwin writes, “In the mid-1980s the scope of Soviet ambition seemed greater than ever. From a forward base at Camranh Bay in southern Vietnam, the Soviet navy could make its presence felt across the main sea lanes running through South East Asia and in the Indian Ocean, a ‘British lake’ until the 1950s. By laying down huge new aircraft carriers like the *Leonid Brezhnev*, Moscow now aimed to rival the Americans’ capacity to intervene around the globe. But then in less than half a decade this vast imperial structure – the ruling power across Northern Eurasia, the tenacious rival in Southern Asia, Africa and the Middle East – simply fell to pieces. By 1991 it was an empire in ruins. There was no ‘silver age’ or phase of decline: just a calamitous fall...”³

This epochal change was made possible by the one institution in the state that understood what was happening - the KGB, which backed the one man in the Politburo who was willing and able to change things - Gorbachev.

As Norman Stone writes, the KGB, unlike almost everybody else, “knew how far things had gone wrong, and, with a view to shaking up the old men, saw that a degree of public criticism and respect for law would be helpful, quite apart from the good impression to be made abroad. The Party and the KGB had had a host-parasite relationship... Now the parasite was given responsibility.”

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¹ Boia, *Romania*, London: Redaktion, 2006, pp. 111-112.

² Revel, *How Democracies Perish*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985, p. 85.

³ Darwin. *After Tamerlane. The Rise & Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000*, London: Penguin, 2007, p. 477.

⁴ Stone, *The Atlantic and its Enemies*, London: Penguin, 2010, p. 541

For what? For averting looming catastrophe. For, as Vladimir Bukovsky and Pavel Stroylov write: "By the beginning of the 1980s, the Soviet leadership had finally woken up to the fact that their system had entered a period of profound structural crisis. On the one hand, their economic model, unproductive and wasteful by definition, like all socialist models, had brought them to the brink of bankruptcy. On the other, their very 'success' in exporting that model to other countries was becoming an unbearable burden to carry on their shoulders. With their troops bogged down in Afghanistan, and with the Polish crisis looming large on their doorstep, the 'cost of Empire' had become virtually unsustainable. Simply put, they had suddenly realised that their economic base was too small for their global ambitions. Added to that a new round of the arms race forced on them by Ronald Reagan, falling oil prices and a growing discontent at home, and one could understand their sudden urge for reforms. A final blow came with Reagan's obsession with the 'Star Wars' project. The Americans might have been bluffing, but the Soviets had to follow suit regardless, trying to compete in the very sphere where they were most behind the West - high-tech."⁵

Yuri Andropov, Brezhnev's successor as general secretary, had been Soviet ambassador to Hungary in 1956, and then head of the KGB for many years. This made him a disciplinarian *par excellence*, who introduced an anti-corruption campaign and feared that more freedom would bring down the whole system (which it did). At the same time, he knew that liberalizing reforms had to be permitted, especially in economics; otherwise, the whole system would still collapse. After the death of the hard-line Kremlin ideologist, Mikhail Suslov, in 1982, he felt that a window of opportunity for change had come; but poor health prevented him from undertaking such change himself. In any case, he was himself a persecutor of dissidents and could probably never have broken the crust of Stalinism within himself, let alone in the country as a whole. His hope for the future was his friend Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, with whom he had had long discussions while on holiday in the North Caucasus.⁶

Who was Gorbachev? "Gorbachev's ideas," writes Figes, "were shaped by the Khrushchev thaw, the defining intellectual influence on the revolution's third and final generational phase. Born in 1921, Gorbachev came from a younger generation than the Party leaders who preceded him - Khrushchev (born in 1894), Brezhnev (1906), Andropov (1914) and Chernenko (1911) all having been born before 1917. Unlike them, he had not made his career in Stalin's time. He was the first leader to have played no part in Stalin's crimes. In fact his family - peasants from the Stavropol region in southern Russia - had been victims of Stalin's war against the peasantry during the 1930s. His paternal grandfather was sent into exile in Siberia for failing to fulfill the sowing plan of 1933 - a year of famine when three of his six sons and half the population of his village died

⁵ Bukovsky and Stroylov, *EUSSR: The Soviet Roots of European Integration*, Worcester Park: Sovereignty Publications, 2004, p. 4.

⁶ William Taubman, *Gorbachev. His Life and Times*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1988, 2017, pp. 138-144.

of starvation. His maternal grandfather, who was the kolkhoz chairman, was arrested as a 'Trotskyist' in 1937. Gorbachev concealed this 'spoilt biography' until 1990. He made his way through life and rose through the Party despite the origins of his background as the grandson of an 'enemy of the people'. That experience was no doubt at the root of his commitment to overcome the legacies of Stalinism."⁷

Gorbachev was a clever, hardworking man who did not drink or chase women or take bribes, and who, moreover, had learned from his own peasant background and from his time as party leader in Stavropol province, that the communist system was not delivering and badly needed reform. His intellectual sympathies, cemented by several visits to Western Europe, were with the liberal Eurocommunists. Nevertheless, Figes aptly calls him "the last Bolshevik", for he remained a convinced Leninist (apparently without ever fully understanding Lenin) until the end of his rule. Stone also aptly calls him, borrowing a phrase of Lenin's to describe capitalists who unwittingly help the communist cause, "the last useful idiot"⁸. But he was an idiot for the opposite reason, being more useful to the capitalists than the communists in that his reforms unwittingly destroyed the system he was trying to support.

As Norman Lowe writes, "Andropov had encouraged and promoted reform-minded people - Mikhail Gorbachev, Yegor Ligachev and Nikolai Ryzhkov were all appointed as Central Committee Secretaries. When Andropov realized that he probably had only a short time to live, he tried to make sure that Gorbachev would succeed him. He sent written instructions to this effect to the Central Committee, but Chernenko's supporters intercepted them and Andropov died before he could take any further action. The Politburo chose Konstantin Chernenko as next Secretary-General, although he was 72 years old and already terminally ill with emphysema and hepatitis. He had had an undistinguished career in the party and owed his rise to the fact that he had been a personal assistant to Brezhnev. It seems incredible that the Politburo should have chosen such a man, who was intellectually limited, and so weak that he could hardly speak coherently, to be leader of their state. One suggested explanation is that the majority wanted somebody who would abandon the anti-corruption campaign and leave them in peace and quiet. Chernenko was just the man: he had no ideas of changing anything or even much awareness that things needed to change. As Dmitri Volkogonov puts it: 'Chernenko was not capable of leading the country or the Party into the future. His rise to power symbolized the deepening of the crisis in society, the total lack of positive ideas in the Party, and the inevitability of the convulsions to come.' After only 13 months in office, much of the time too ill to attend Politburo meetings, he died in March 1985."⁹

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⁷ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia, 1891-1991*, London: Pelican, 2014, pp. 382-383.

⁸ Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 536.

⁹ Lowe, *Mastering Twentieth-century Russian History*, Houndmill: Palgrave, 2002, p. 396.

Gorbachev was finally elected unopposed to the post of Secretary General of the Soviet Union (he was even supported by the last of the Stalinist dinosaurs, Andrei Gromyko) in March, 1985. His first year in office was essentially a continuation of Andropov's policies, including his anti-corruption campaign. But he quickly perceived that much more was required. For, as he admitted to the Twenty-Seventh Communist Party Congress in 1986, "the targets for economic development set in the Communist Party programme, and even the lower targets of the 9th and 10th 5-year plans have not been attained. Neither have we managed to carry out the social programme charted for this period. A lag has ensued in the material base of science and education, health protection, culture and everyday services."¹⁰

This lag was important because, as Plokhy writes, "the communists ruled the country not only by means of terror and coercion but also with the promise of a brighter future. That future was called the attainment of communism, which in the popular mind meant an abundance of food and consumer goods. Khrushchev had promised the advent of that paradise in the early 1980s. With no communism in sight and the economy in decline, faith in the coming paradise and its prophets hit bottom. In promising a communist future, the authorities had contrasted the achievements of the socialist economy with those of its capitalist counterpart in the West, claiming that Soviet socialism was destined to outperform capitalism in the interest of the toiling masses. That promise was never fulfilled. If the contrast was still plausible in the 1950s and 1960s – the Soviet gross national product (GDP) more than tripled between 1950 and 1965 – by the 1970s the Soviet economy was no longer competitive. In 1970, it was about 60 percent as large as the US economy; after that, it declined steadily, and by 1989 it was less than half the size of the American economy."¹¹

Especially striking was the sharp fall in grain production in the years 1980-84 by comparison with the rapid rise in Chinese production.¹² Also important was the sharp drop in the price of oil – oil was the Soviet Union's main foreign currency earner, and also a major means of blackmailing its satellite states in Eastern Europe, to whom the Soviets supplied the oil at prices far below world prices. Only in the defence sector was the Soviet economy performing reasonably well – as well it should, considering the vast sums poured into it, at the expense of the living standards of ordinary people. And yet even there the backwardness of the Soviets in such field as computer technology threatened to make it fall ever further behind the Americans, whose "Star Wars" technology threatened to make the Soviet missile threat redundant.

Yuval Noah Harari argues that it was the Soviets' backwardness in technology that was the main cause in their country's collapse: "Socialism,

¹⁰ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, London: William Collins, 1988, p. 632.

¹¹ Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom. A History of Russian Nationalism from Ivan the Great to Vladimir Putin*, London: Allen Lane, 2017, p. 300.

¹² Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 636.

which was very up to date a hundred years ago, failed to keep up with new technology. Leonid Brezhnev and Fidel Castro held on to ideas that Marx and Lenin formulated in the age of steam, and did not understand the power of computers and biotechnology. This partly explains why Khrushchev's 1956 ["we will bury you!"] never materialised, and why it was the liberal capitalist who eventually buried the Marxists. If Marx came back to life today, he would probably urge his few remaining disciples to devote less time to reading *Das Kapital* and more time to studying the Internet and the human genome."¹³

The technological gap was indeed growing larger. As David Reynolds writes, "Back in the 1970s the United States seemed to be floundering. Industrial growth had stagnated, inflation was out of control and the heavy industries on which the post-war boom had been based, like cars and textiles, were no longer competitive against Asian competition. Parts of urban America seemed like a rustbelt. In the 1980s, however, new service industries, spearheaded by IT and boosted by deregulation, seemed to signal a 'post-industrial' society. Meanwhile, however, the Soviet Union remained a 'heavy metal' society - locked in the smokestack industries of yesteryear. Behind the Iron Curtain deregulation and the IT revolution were inconceivable. The Soviets had found it hard enough to keep up with mainframe computers; their anaemic consumer economy offered no stimulus to PC development; and the cell-phone explosion was totally impossible in a closed society. Information is power and, under communism, both were tightly controlled.

"In computers and electronics the Soviet Union lagged behind European clients like Czechoslovakia and East Germany, yet even then their pirated products did not compare with authentic Western versions that were now flooding into eastern Europe. 'With these computers comes not only technology but also ideology,' lamented one Czech computer designer. 'Children might soon begin to believe that Western technology represents the peak and our technology is obsolete and bad.' In ten years' time, he warned, 'it will be too late to change our children. By then they will want to change us.'

"So the PC and information revolution posed a double challenge to the Soviet bloc - both economic and ideological. Moscow's Five-Year-Plan of 1985 envisaged 1.3 million PCs in Soviet schoolrooms by 1995, but the Americans already had 3 million in 1985 and in any case the main Soviet PC, the Agat, was an inferior version of the crude and now antiquated Apple II.

"Gorbachev was keenly aware of these problems...

"Becoming part of the American-led information age was a major reason why Gorbachev was so anxious to forge a new relationship with the United States. Otherwise the USSR would be consigned to obsolescence. By the 1980s,

¹³ Harari, *Homo Deus*, London: Vintage, 2017, p. 319.

in fact, the whole Soviet bloc was in 'a race between computers and collapse'."¹⁴

Dominic Lieven has compared Gorbachev's task in modernizing the Soviet economy to Alexander II's in modernizing Imperial Russia. But the risks for Gorbachev, he points out, were much greater than for Alexander II. "By 1986-7 it seemed clear that the socialist command economy, even when purged of Brezhnevite sloth by Andropov's reforms, could not hope to compete with capitalism in the era of the spaceship and the computer. But, as the 1990s have shown, even in countries where the transition from socialism to the market is inherently easier than in the Soviet Union the process is bound to be lengthy, risky and very painful. Moreover, the nationalities problem was also much more serious than in the monarchy's last years. The bulk of the non-Russian population were no longer peasants and nomads, largely immune to nationalist appeals. Large middle classes existed in all the republics. Under Soviet law these republics were states in embryo, possessing even the constitutional right to secede. A Soviet regime which stressed its allegiance to the rule of law and began to breathe democratic life into representative institutions which previously had been merely a façade faced enormous risks.

"Difficult 'objective circumstances' were therefore one reason why, unlike under Alexander II, Gorbachev's attempt to introduce controlled modernization from above went swiftly off the rails and led to the collapse both of Communism and of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the 'human factor' cannot be ignored. The disintegration of the economy was, to a very great extent, due to a string of disastrous blunders made by the Gorbachev leadership itself, whose grasp of the principles underlying economic reform was very weak. By 1989 the economy was being integrated and disciplined by the old methods of command, not by a market. Complete financial irresponsibility reigned. Moreover, until it was far too late the leadership vastly underestimated the threat of minority nationalism and had no policy with which it might realistically be combated. Even in March 1990 a decision to accept the Balts as a special case and to offer generous levels of autonomy to other republics might well have held the core of the Soviet Union together but blindness continued to prevail. Economic collapse, which devastated Moscow's prestige and appeal, coupled with republican nationalism killed the Soviet Union but the process was far from inevitable..."¹⁵

The process was far from inevitable, for Gorbachev could have chosen the Chinese way of economic liberalization and decollectivization before and instead of political liberalization. But Gorbachev consciously rejected the Chinese way. The result was the fall of the Soviet Union...

¹⁴ Reynolds, *America. Empire of Liberty*, London: Penguin, 2010, pp. 525, 526. The importance of the new information technology was impressed upon him also by foreign visitors, such as Reagan's Secretary of State George Schultz. Gorbachev was receptive to, and grateful for, Schulz's lessons.

¹⁵ Lieven, *Nicholas II*, London: Pimlico, 1993, p. 358.

2. CHERNOBYL

The first year and more of Gorbachev's rule was simply a continuation of the Brezhnevian-Andropovian era of stagnation. His new slogan was "acceleration" – only it wasn't new (Khrushchev had coined it), and the only thing that accelerated was the decline of the country. Gorbachev worked very hard to get things moving, but his methods were the old, discredited ones of more bureaucracy, more personnel changes and more centralization – and these, as usual, did not work.

And then came Chernobyl. The disaster at Chernobyl was so huge, so undeniable (although at the beginning it was denied), so damaging to the prestige of Soviet science and technology (of which the nuclear industry was the jewel in the crown) that it, more than any other single event, must be considered to have precipitated the fall of the Soviet Union; the physical explosion prefigured the political implosion of the whole empire...

On April 26, 1986 at 1.23 a.m., "one of the four huge graphic reactors at the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl (Ukraine) exploded, releasing into the atmosphere 120 million curies of radioactive materiel – more than one hundred times the radiation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki *combined*. The plume of atomic fallout was carried north-west into Western Europe and Scandinavia, reaching as far as Wales and Sweden and exposing an estimated five million people to its effects. In addition to the 30 emergency workers killed on the spot, some 30,000 people have since died from complications caused by exposure to radiation from Chernobyl, including more than 2,000 cases of thyroid cancer among residents in the immediate vicinity.

"Chernobyl was not the Soviet Union's first environmental disaster. At Cheliabinsk-40, a secret research site near Ekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains, a nuclear waste tank exploded in 1957, severely polluting an area 8 km wide and 100 km long. 76 million cubic metres of radioactive waste poured into the Urals river system, contaminating it for decades. 10,000 people were eventually evacuated and 23 villages bulldozed. The reactor at Cheliabinsk was from the first generation of Soviet atomic constructions and had been built by slave labor in 1948-51.

"Other man-made environmental calamities on a comparable scale included the pollution of Lake Baikal; the destruction of the Aral Sea; the dumping in the Arctic Ocean and the Barents Sea of hundreds of thousands of tons of defunct atomic naval vessels and their radioactive contents; and the contamination by sulphur dioxide from nickel production of an area the size of Italy around Norilsk in Siberia. These and other ecological disasters were all the direct result of indifference, bad management and the Soviet 'slash and burn' approach to natural resources. They were born of a culture of secrecy. The Cheliabinsk-40 explosion was not officially acknowledged for many decades, even though it occurred within a few kilometres of a large city – the same city where, in 1979, several hundred people died of anthrax leaked from a biological weapons plant in the town centre.

"The problems with the USSR's nuclear reactors were well known to insiders:

two separate KGB reports dated 1982 and 1984 warned of 'shoddy' equipment (supplied from Yugoslavia) and serious deficiencies in Chernobyl's reactors 3 and 4 (it was the latter that exploded in 1986). But just as this information had been kept secret (and no action taken) so the Party leadership's first, instinctive response to the explosion on April 26th was to keep quiet about it – there were, after all, fourteen Chernobyl-type plants in operation by then all across the country. Moscow's first acknowledgement that anything untoward had happened came fully four days after the event, and then in a two-sentence official communiqué.¹⁶

“But Chernobyl could not be kept secret: international anxiety and the Soviets' own inability to contain the damage forced Gorbachev first to make a public statement two weeks later, acknowledging some but not all of what had taken place, and then to call upon foreign aid and expertise. And just as his fellow citizens were then made publicly aware for the first time of the scale of official incompetence and indifference to life and health, so Gorbachev was forced to acknowledge the extent of his country's problems. The bungling, the mendacity and the cynicism of the men responsible both for the disaster and the attempt to cover it up could not be dismissed as a regrettable perversion of Soviet values: they *were* Soviet values, as the Soviet leader began to appreciate.”¹⁷

The state's bungling of the Chernobyl catastrophe demonstrated in nutshell all that was wrong with the Soviet Union from a political point of view. As Alexander Lee writes, commenting on the testimonies collected in Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer* (1997), “the disaster illustrated all that was wrong with the decaying Soviet system. It was not just that the reactor had been built by corrupt contractors, or poorly maintained by incompetent apparatchiks. It was that they had been lied to. No one had told them about radiation or its effects, even after the explosion. They had blundered blindly into a terrifying world of cancer and death. In their agony, they railed and fulminated at all that the USSR had been. But when they looked at what the Soviet Union had been replaced with, they saw even greater suffering. Now that socialism had gone, they were abandoned. No one wanted to be near them, let alone waste money treating their illnesses. It was no surprise that, when they narrated their experiences, they gave the impression that they would have preferred the rotten certainties of the Soviet system than this hopeless, inhuman freedom...”¹⁸

The worship of science in the Soviet Union had always been excessive – although this was a sin it shared with its rival, the United States. Thus the space race was more than simple technological rivalry; it was a race to see which system was superior because more “scientific” ...

¹⁶ The present writer was a member of a group of Surrey University students in Russia at the time. The first they heard of the disaster was not from the Soviet authorities, but from parents phoning up from England. The authorities at first denied the news. (V.M.)

¹⁷ Judt, *Postwar*, London: Pimlico, 2007, pp. 596-603.

¹⁸ Lee, “Portrait of the Author as a Historian, No. 12: Svetlana Alexievich”, *History Today*, June, 2017, p. 88.

However, on May 7, 1984, the Day of the Physicist, it became not just scientific, but idolatrous, even *satanic*. For on that day a satanic ball was staged by nuclear physicists that was captured in a 1988 documentary film called *Zvezda Polyn'* (the star of Chernobyl).¹⁹ The film-maker clearly saw a link between the ball and the terrible catastrophe that had taken place at Chernobyl only two years earlier...

“The star of Chernobyl” is a clear reference to Revelation: “Then the third angel sounded. And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch. And it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood {*Apsinthos* in Greek, *Chernobyl* in Ukrainian, denoting a bitter herb found in the region}. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water because it was made bitter” (8.10-11)

Many Christians at the time saw the explosion at Chernobyl as the direct fulfillment of this prophecy. The Moscow Patriarchate of course denied it. Be that as it may, the explosion without a question had apocalyptic consequences in the form of the fall of the collective Antichrist of the Soviet Union.

For it was the disaster at Chernobyl that really compelled Gorbachev from seeing the *need* for *glasnost'* (openness) and *perestroika* (reconstruction) into actually *carrying it out*.

*

Before Chernobyl, Gorbachev's attempts to introduce a limited kind of market economy had turned out to be unsuccessful. For, as Tony Judt writes, “The reforming instinct was to compromise: to experiment with the creation – from above – of a few favored enterprises freed from bureaucratic encumbrances and assured a reliable supply of raw materials and skilled labor. These, it was reasoned, would serve as successful and even profitable models for other, similar, enterprises: the goal was controlled modernization and progressive adaptation to pricing and production in response to demand. But such an approach was foredoomed by its operating premise – that the authorities could create efficient businesses by administrative fiat.

“By pumping scarce resources into a few model farms, mills, factories or services the Party was indeed able to forge temporarily viable and even notionally profitable units – but only with heavy subsidies and by starving less-favored operations elsewhere. The result was even more distortion and frustration. Meanwhile farm managers and local directors, uncertain of the way the wind was blowing, hedged their bets against the return of planned norms and stockpiled anything they could lay their hands on lest centralized controls tighten up again.

“To Gorbachev's conservative critics this was an old story. Every Soviet reform program since 1921 began the same way and ran out of steam for the same reasons,

¹⁹ <https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-3TYAU3i221c/WHuWLLamaJI>.

starting with Lenin's New Economic Policy.²⁰ Serious economic reforms implied the relaxation or abandonment of controls. Not only did this initially exacerbate the problems it was designed to solve, it meant just what it said: a loss of control. But Communism depended on control – indeed Communism *was* control: control of the economy, control of information, control of movement and opinion and people. Everything else was dialectics, and dialectics – as a veteran Communist explained to the young Jorge Semprún in Buchenwald – 'is the art and technique of always landing on your feet'.

"It soon became obvious to Gorbachev that to land on his feet as he wrestled with the Soviet economy he must accept that the Soviet economic conundrum could not be addressed in isolation. It was but a symptom of a larger problem. The Soviet Union was run by men who had a vested interest in the political and institutional levers of a command economy: its endemic minor absurdities and quotidian corruption were the very source of their authority and power. In order for the Party to reform the economy it would first have to reform itself.

"This, too, was hardly a new idea – the periodic purges under Lenin and his successors had typically proclaimed similar objectives. But times had changed. The Soviet Union, however repressive and backward, was no longer a murderous totalitarian tyranny. Thanks to Khrushchev's monumental housing projects most Soviet families now lived in their own apartments. Ugly and inefficient, these low-rent flats nonetheless afforded ordinary people a degree of privacy and security unknown to other generations: they were no longer so exposed to informers or likely to be betrayed to the authorities by their neighbors or their in-laws. The age of terror was over for most people and, for Gorbachev's generation at least, a return to the time of mass arrests and party purges was unthinkable.

"In order to break the stranglehold of the Party *apparatus* and drive forward his plans for economic restructuring, then, the General Secretary resorted instead to '*glasnost*' – 'openness': official encouragement for public discussion of a carefully restricted range of topics. By making people more aware of impending changes and heightening public expectation, Gorbachev would forge a lever with which he and his supporters might pry loose official opposition to his plans..."²¹

In his own words, the catastrophe "shed light on many of the sicknesses of our system as a whole. Everything that had built up over the years converged in this drama: the concealing or hushing up of accidents and other bad news, irresponsibility and carelessness, slipshod work, wholesale drunkenness..."

As William Tauber writes, "That even the untouchable nuclear realm turned out to be rotten suggested that the whole system was, too. For the flaws revealed at Chernobyl and afterward were characteristic of the system as a whole: rampant incompetence, cover-ups at all levels, and self-destructive secrecy at the top.

²⁰ However, NEP did not so much fail as was not allowed to succeed by Stalin. Until Stalin cut it short, it was doing well – because its principles were capitalist, not communist. (V.M.)

²¹ Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 596-603.

'Chernobyl really opened my eyes,' Gorbachev recalled. 'In a sense, he continued, his life could be 'divided into two parts: before Chernobyl and after it.'"²²

²² Tauber, op. cit., p. 241.

3. GLASNOST' AND PERESTROIKA

Armed with a new insight into the radical inadequacies of the Soviet system, and inspired with a new courage to face the opposition from hardliners he knew must inevitably come, Gorbachev embarked on his flagship policy of perestroika.

“It was not until the January 1987 Plenum of the Central Committee that Gorbachev announced the launching of his perestroika campaign, describing it as a ‘revolution’ in its radical restructuring of the command economy and the political system. Gorbachev invoked the Bolshevik tradition to legitimize his bold initiative, closing his speech with the lofty words: ‘We want even the sceptics to say: Yes, the Bolsheviks can do anything. Yes, the truth is on their side. Yes, socialism is a system that serves man, his social and economic interests and his spiritual elevation.’ This was the voluntarist spirit of another October 1917.

“Economically, perestroika... rested on the hopeful assumption that market mechanisms could be added to the structures of the planned economy to stimulate production and satisfy consumer needs. State controls on wages and prices were loosened by a 1987 Law on State Enterprises. Cooperatives were legalized in 1988, resulting in a NEP-like sprouting up of cafés, restaurants and small shops or kiosks, selling mostly vodka (now re-legalized), cigarettes and pornographic videos imported from abroad. But these measures failed to ease the shortages of food and more important household goods. Inflation grew, exacerbated by the lifting controls on wages and prices. Only the dismantling of the planned economy could have solved the crisis. But ideologically that was impossible until 1989, when Gorbachev began to break free from the Soviet mould of thinking, and even then it was too radical for him to legislate until August 1990, when the 500-Day Plan for the transition to a market-based economy was at last introduced by the Supreme Soviet. But by then it was too late to halt the economic crash...”²³

Gorbachev had much greater success with his other flagship policy of glasnost. This began in the arts. And among the arts, first of all in the cinema.

This was logical for a Leninist, as Gorbachev always claimed to be. For, as Taubman writes, “Lenin had viewed film, with its vivid mass appeal, as a prime means of propaganda. ‘For us,’ he reportedly told People’s Commissar of Culture Lunacharsky, ‘cinema is the most important of all the arts.’ Like writers, artists, and composers, filmmakers had been herded into a ‘union’, the better to tame them with a mixture of perks and threats. The union’s leaders were only nominally ‘elected’. In fact, the party apparatus prepared a slate of candidates (one candidate for each office) who were ‘unanimously’ approved at periodic union congresses. In the spring of 1986, however, filmmakers revolted. Instead of accepting the slate, the union’s nominating committee

²³ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 392-393.

expanded it, voted down the party-appointed nominees, and put forward their own. Asked later whether this upheaval wasn't stage-managed from above by liberals around Gorbachev, film and theatre critic Maya Turovskaya said the rebels were as 'flabbergasted' as the former leaders themselves. 'We hadn't agreed to advance on what we do, we hadn't prepared. It happened quietly, spontaneously, drastically.'

"Decades of discontent by filmmakers whose films had been cut or shelved exploded at the union congress between May 13 and 15. 'Critical speech after speech, very sincere, very harsh, very strident,' recalled film director Elem Klimov, who was elected the union's leader after the officially approved candidate was voted down and twelve others were rejected for the union board.

"What followed after the congress was even more striking. Klimov made it a priority to release 'arrested films', although 'none of us knew how many had been shelved.' The union formed a conflicts committee, which started reviewing and 'rehabilitating' banned films. It eventually released more than a hundred of them. *Repentance* had been completed in 1984 by the Georgian master Tengiz Abuladze, with the help of Sheverdnadze, then Georgian party boss, but hadn't been released. The film is a powerful allegory in which Varlam, the mayor of a small Georgian town, is a composite of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin [not to mention Beria]: a man with a small moustache, a black shirt, and thick dark hair. Varlam dies and is buried with honor at the beginning of the film, but his corpse keeps reappearing until it, too, is 'arrested'. In flashbacks, the film describes how Varlam imprisoned and destroyed countless victims. *Repentance* is complicated and difficult to follow, but, at a time when it was still unclear whether Stalin could be criticized, the film was a revelation. Realizing that, Klimov took the issue directly to Yakovlev [Gorbachev's liberal ally in the propaganda department]. Yakovlev, despite his commitment to radical reform, hesitated, asking Klimov, 'What will comrades in other socialist countries say? The release of this film will change our social system.' Gorbachev, to whom Yakovlev took the film, recognized it was a 'bombshell'; he promised Sheverdnadze, who also lobbied him for the film, that it would eventually get a 'green light'. Some in the Politburo wanted to decide whether the film should be released, but Gorbachev insisted on letting the filmmakers' union decide, an unprecedented move. First, there were showings in Georgia, then selected ones in Moscow, finally, general release, but the reaction was spectacular. Soviet viewers immediately took it as a sign that truly radical change was indeed underway..."²⁴

The release of *Repentance* was an event of the greatest importance, and it was followed by the publishing of many fictional and non-fictional works exposing the crimes of the Stalinist period.

²⁴ Taubman, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-248.

As the truth came out, many people did repent and threw away their party cards, and for a moment it looked as if a real resurrection of the Russian people might take place in time for the millennial anniversary of the Baptism of Russia in 1988.

For this priceless fruit of *glasnost'*, due credit must be given to Gorbachev, who, as Taubman's biography showed, had been a secret anti-Stalinist from his youth. True, repentance for the sins of Communism did not go far enough; and it may well be argued that this failure of repentance was the real cause why reconstruction failed in the longer term. For Gorbachev's aims were political rather than spiritual; his aim was the reconstruction of political structures and economies rather than human souls – but it was healing for the soul that Russians really needed.

But, as was only to be expected, the reaction of the impenitent was also gathering pace. Moreover, Gorbachev himself was limited in his understanding of the forces and counter-forces he had unleashed. Even at the political level, he did not understand that the root of Russia's problems lay, not in Stalin, but in Lenin, and that the democratization and tolerance of other opinions that he had hoped to instill had been destroyed, first of all, by his own hero, Lenin. Not understanding Lenin, he was quite incapable of going still deeper into the roots of the catastrophe that is, the rejection of Orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Autocracy that Lenin spearheaded in 1917. So while he destroyed the Soviet Union (unwittingly and unwillingly), he failed to destroy Sovietism...

Nevertheless, *glasnost* was certainly proving one thing: that Sovietism was a tissue of lies and half-truths, as a result of which "popular belief drifted away from the government – much of it transferring to the media outlets which revealed revealed these truths. The most daring newspapers and magazines had fantastic circulations. The weekly subscription to *Argumenty i Fakty* (Arguments and Facts) – which ceased to be a propaganda organ and became a source of once-secret facts and critical opinions on Soviet life – grew from a million to 44 million copies between 1986 and 1990. Every Friday night tens of millions of younger viewers watched the programme *Vzglyad* (View), which pushed subversively on the foundations of taste, let alone of Soviet censorship, in its TV mix of current affairs, interviews and investigations into history (it was eventually banned in January 1991).

"Glasnost politicized society. Independent public bodies formed. By March 1989, there were 60,000 'informal' groups and clubs in the Soviet Union. They held meetings and joined demonstration in the streets, many of them calling for political reforms, civil rights, national independence for Soviet republics and regions, or an end to the Communist monopoly of power. The major cities were returning to the revolutionary atmosphere of 1917..."²⁵

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²⁵ Figes, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

The question of the Communist monopoly of power, enshrined in Article 6 of the 1977 Constitution, was the key to the further development of perestroika. For after the (successful) introduction of glasnost' and the (unsuccessful) attempt to introduce elements of a market economy, the next step in Gorbachev's revolution was the democratisation of the political structure itself. The question of Article 6 had been raised by the dissident Andrei Sakharov on his liberation from exile in Gorky (Nizhni Novgorod) in December, 1986. At that time, Gorbachev had rejected the idea. But things began to change, in his mind as well as in the country as a whole, in the following year, as political prisoners began to be released in large numbers and as censorship was relaxed. Thus, as Tony Judt writes, "1987 saw the long-delayed publication of Vassily Grossman's *Life and Fate* (twenty-six years after M.S. Suslov, the Party's ideological commissar, had predicted that it could not be released for 'two or three centuries'). The police were instructed to cease jamming foreign radio broadcasts. And the Secretary General of the CPSU chose the occasion of his televised speech to the Party Central Committee in January 1987 to make the case for a more inclusive democracy, over the heads of the Party conservatives and directly to the nation at large.

"By 1987 more than nine out of ten Soviet households possessed a television, and Gorbachev's tactic was initially a striking success: by creating a *de facto* public speech for semi-open debate about the country's woes, and breaking the governing caste's monopoly of information, he was forcing the Party to follow suit – and making it safe for hitherto silent reformers within the system to speak out and give him their backing. In the course of 1987-88 the General Secretary was, almost despite himself, forging a national constituency for change.

"Informal organizations sprang up: notably 'Club Perestroika', formed in Moscow's Mathematical Institute in 1987, which in turn gave birth to 'Memorial', whose members devoted themselves to 'keeping alive the memory of the victims' of the Stalinist past. Initially taken aback at their own very existence – the Soviet Union, after all, was still a one-party dictatorship – they soon flourished and multiplied. By 1988 Gorbachev's support came increasingly from outside the Party, from the country's newly emerging public opinion.

"What had happened was that the logic of Gorbachev's reformist goal, and his decision, in practice, to appeal to the nation against his conservative critics within the apparatus, had transformed the dynamic of *perestroika*. Having begun as a reformer within the ruling Party, its General Secretary was now increasingly working against it, or at least trying to circumvent the Party's opposition to change. In October 1987 Gorbachev spoke publicly of Stalinist crimes for the first time and warned that if the Party did not champion reform it would lose its leading role in society.

"In the [Nineteenth] Party conference of June 1988 he reiterated his commitment to reform and to the relaxation of censorship, and called for the preparation of open (i.e. contested) elections to a Congress of People's Deputies

for the following year. In October 1988 he demoted some of his leading opponents – notably Yegor Ligachev, a longstanding critics – and had himself elected President of the Supreme Soviet (i.e. head of state), displacing Andrei Gromyko, last of the dinosaurs. Within the Party he still faced strong rearguard opposition; but in the country at large his popularity was at its peak, which was why he was able to press forward – and indeed had little option but to do so.

“The elections of May/June 1989 were the first more or less free vote in the Soviet Union since 1918. They were not multi-party elections – that would not happen until 1993, by which time the Soviet Union itself was long gone – and the outcome was largely pre-determined by restricting many seats to Party candidates and forbidding internal Party competition for them; but the Congress they elected included many independent and critical voices. Its proceedings were broadcast to an audience of some 100 million spectators, and demands by Sakharov and others for further change – notably the dethroning of the increasingly discredited Party from its privileged position – could not be swept aside, even by an initially reluctant Gorbachev. The Communists’ monopoly of power was slipping away, and with Gorbachev’s encouragement the Congress [spurred on by an inter-regional group of Party and non-Party democrats] would duly vote the following February to remove from the Soviet constitution the key clause – Article Six – assigning the Communist Party a ‘leading role’...

“It is one of the curiosities of Communist reformers that they always set out with the quixotic goal of reforming some aspects of their system while keeping others unaffected – introducing market-oriented incentives while maintaining central planning controls, or allowing greater freedom of expression while retaining the Party’s monopoly of truth. But partial reform or reform of one sector in isolation from others was inherently contradictory. ‘Managed pluralism’ or a ‘socialist market’ was doomed from the start. As for the idea that the ‘leading role’ of the Communist Party could be sustained while the Party itself shed merely the pathological excrescences of seven decades of absolute power, this suggests a certain political naiveté on Gorbachev’s part. In an authoritarian [despotic] system power is indivisible – relinquish it in part and you must eventually lose it all...”²⁶

Having started his reforms to save the one-party state,” writes Figes, Gorbachev “was now dismantling it. ‘In place of the Stalinist model of socialism,’ he said in a televised address on 2 July, ‘we are coming to a citizens’ society of free people. The political system is being transformed radically, genuine democracy with free elections, the existence of many parties and human rights is becoming established and real people’s power is being revived. Russia was returning to the February Revolution of 1917...”²⁷

²⁶ Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 596-603.

²⁷ Figes, *op. cit.*, pp. 397-398.

But not, unfortunately, to the Russian Orthodox Autocracy of pre-February 1917. And therefore there was no guarantee, or even promise, that the Soviet Union's new-found democracy would not eventually culminate in another despotism on the pattern of October 1917 in Russia (or March 1933 in Germany)...

4. THE LIBERATION OF EASTERN EUROPE

Paradoxically, the liberation of Eastern Europe, and the beginning of nationalist conflicts within the USSR itself, coincided almost exactly with the peak of Gorbachev's international success. On December 7, 1988, with the INF treaty on intermediate-range missiles already under his belt, Gorbachev delivered a speech to the United Nations in which, as Tauber writes, "all the ideas Gorbachev had been gathering, pondering, nurturing, and positioning to replace Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy poured forth in their fullest statement yet. In the new, interdependent world of global mass communications (pace George Schulz), a 'closed' society was impossible. In this world, neither force nor threat of force should be used, "freedom of choice" should have "no exceptions", ideology had no place in international relations, and no one had a monopoly on truth. Then came those dramatic improvements. The Soviet Union would unilaterally reduce its armed forces by 500,000 soldiers; 50,000 of these, along with six tank divisions including 5,000 tanks, assault troops, and all their weapons and combat equipment, would be withdrawn from Eastern Europe. In all, Soviet armed forces in the USSR's European region and on the territory of its East European allies would be reduced by 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery systems, and 800 combat aircraft, cuts that amounted (by U.S. calculations) to 10 percent of Soviet armed forces, and a much higher proportion of the forces in Eastern Europe, about which Western strategists had worried for so long.

"No wonder, as [American ambassador] Matlock recalled, the applause was 'more prolonged than any of the assembled delegates could remember.' [Gorbachev's close aide] Chernyaev recalled 'an eruption of ovations', and that 'they could not let M.S. go for a long time. He even had to take a bow, as if he were on stage.'"²⁸

Nor was it just an act. In the following fateful year of 1989, when national revolutions broke out throughout Eastern Europe and in many parts of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev, in accordance with his promise, never sent in the troops in convincing force – that is, as in 1968 under Brezhnev. Indeed, in July 1989 the "Brezhnev Doctrine" was formally renounced at a Warsaw Pact summit in Bucharest. This was in the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing in June, which confirmed Gorbachev in his conviction that the empire could not be defended under the barrel of a gun. The Cold War – but also the Soviet empire's hold over its satellites – was effectively finished.

For this series of happy events, Gorbachev's new policies deserved, and received, much credit – at any rate, abroad. It had very major unintended consequences – but they, too, were by no means all bad. For God's Providence rules over all the plans and promises of men...

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²⁸ Tauber, *op. cit.*, p. 422.

“The course of Soviet domestic upheaval from 1985 to 1989,” writes Judt, “was facilitated by a major shift in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev and his new Foreign Minister Edvard Shevardnadze. From the outset Gorbachev made clear his determination to unburden the USSR at the very least of its more onerous military encumbrances. Within a month of coming to power he had halted Soviet missile deployments and gone on to offer unconditional negotiations on nuclear forces, starting with a proposal that both superpowers halve their strategic arsenals. By May 1986, after a surprisingly successful ‘summit’ meeting with Reagan in Geneva (the first of an unprecedented five such encounters), Gorbachev agreed to allow US ‘forward-based systems’ to be excluded from strategic arms talks, if that would help get these under way.

“There followed a second, Reykjavik summit in October 1986 where Reagan and Gorbachev, while failing to reach agreement on nuclear disarmament, nonetheless laid the basis for future success. The two leaders agreed that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,” and they acted as if they meant it. By late 1987 Shevardnadze and US Secretary of State George Schultz had drafted an Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, signed and ratified the following year. This Treaty, by endorsing Ronald Reagan’s earlier ‘zero option’ proposal, constituted Soviet acceptance that a nuclear war in Europe was un-winnable – and served as the prologue to an even more important treaty, signed in 1990, strictly limiting the presence and operation of *conventional* forces on the European continent.

“Seen from Washington, Gorbachev’s concessions on arms naturally appeared as a victory for Reagan – and thus, in the zero-sum calculus of Cold War strategists, a defeat for Moscow. But for Gorbachev, whose priorities were domestic, securing a more stable international environment was a victory in itself. It bought him time and support for his reforms at home. The true significance of this sequence of meetings and accords lay in the Soviet recognition that military confrontation abroad was not only expensive but also dysfunctional: as Gorbachev expressed it in October 1986 in the course of a visit to France, ‘ideology’ was not an appropriate basis for foreign policy.

“These views reflected the advice he was beginning to get from a new generation of Soviet foreign affairs experts, notably his colleague Aleksandr Yakovlev, to whom it had become clear that the USSR could exercise more control over its foreign relations by well-calculated concessions than by fruitless confrontation. In contrast to the intractable problems he faced at home, foreign policy was an arena in which Gorbachev exercised direct control and could thus hope to effect immediate improvements. Moreover the strictly Great-Power dimension of Soviet foreign policy relations should not be exaggerated: Gorbachev placed at least as much importance on his relations with western Europe as on his dealings with the US...

“Indeed, in important respects Gorbachev thought of himself above all as a *European* statesman with European priorities. His focus upon ending the arms race and the stockpiling of nuclear weapons was closely tied to a new approach to the

Soviet Union's role as a distinctively *European* power. 'Armaments,' he declared in 1987, 'should be reduced to a level necessary for strictly defensive purposes. It is time for the two military alliances to amend their strategic concepts to gear them more to the aims of defense. Every apartment in the 'European home' has the right to protect itself against burglars, but it must do so without destroying its neighbors' property.'

"In a similar spirit and for the same reasons, the Soviet leader understood from the outset the urgent need to extract the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, the 'bleeding wound' as he described it to a Party Congress in February 1986. Five months later he announced the withdrawal of some 6,000 Soviet troops, a redeployment completed in November of the same year. In May 1988, following an accord reached at Geneva with Afghanistan and Pakistan and guaranteed by both great powers, Soviet troops began to leave Afghanistan and Pakistan: the last remaining soldiers of the Red Army departed on February 15th 1989.

"Far from addressing the Soviet nationalities question, the Afghan adventure had, as was by now all too clear, exacerbated it. If the USSR faced an intractable set of national minorities, this was in part a problem of its own making: it was Lenin and his successors, after all, who had invented the various subject 'nations' to whom they duly assigned regions and republics. In an echo of imperial practices elsewhere, Moscow had encouraged the emergence - in places where nationality and nationhood were unheard of fifty years earlier - of institutions and intelligentsias grouped around a national urban center of 'capital'. Communist Party First Secretaries in the Caucasus, or the central Asian republics, were typically chosen from the dominant local ethnic group. To secure their fiefdom these men were understandably drawn to identify with their 'own' people, particularly once fissures began to appear in the central apparatus. The Party was starting to fracture under the centrifugal pull of anxious local administrators protecting their own interests.

"Gorbachev seems not to have fully understood this process. 'Comrades,' he informed the Party in 1987, 'we can truly say that for our country the nationalities issue has been resolved.' Perhaps he did not altogether believe his own claims; but he certainly thought that some loosening of central control and addressing of long-standing grievances would suffice (in 1989 the Crimean Tatars, for example, were finally allowed to return home after many decades of Asian exile). In a continental empire of over one hundred ethnic groups from the Baltic to the Sea of Okhotsk, most of whom had long-standing grievances that *glasnost*' now encouraged them to air, this was to prove a serious miscalculation..."²⁹

However, in Eastern Europe Gorbachev was to be more successful...

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"Poland," writes J.M. Roberts, "led eastern Europe to freedom. The importance of events there had quickly been perceived in other communist countries, whose

²⁹ Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 596-603.

leaders were much alarmed. In varying degrees, too, all eastern Europe was exposed to the new factor of a steadily increasing flow of information about non-communist countries, above all, through television (which was especially marked in the GDR). More freedom of movement, more access to foreign books and newspapers had imperceptibly advanced the process of criticism there as in Poland. In spite of some ludicrous attempts to go on controlling information (Romania still required that typewriters be registered with the state authorities), a change in consciousness was under way...³⁰

Although the fall of Communism had begun in Poland in 1981, as we have seen, the process had stymied in a kind of stalemate for eight years. But then it gradually dawned on both sides in the stand-off that the process of *perestroika* in the USSR was irreversible, especially after Gorbachev's speech on December 7, 1988 at the United Nations. For, as Judt writes, "after announcing unilateral cuts in Soviet conventional forces in Europe, Gorbachev went on to advise his audience that 'Freedom of choice is a universal principle. There should be no exceptions.' This was more than just a renunciation of the 'Brezhnev Doctrine', an acknowledgement that Moscow would not use force to impose its version of 'Socialism' upon fraternal states. What Gorbachev was conceding – and was immediately understood to have conceded – was that the citizens of the satellite states were now at liberty to go their own way, Socialist or not. Eastern Europe was about to re-enter history..."³¹

Garry Kasparov, the former world chess champion, has speculated that in letting Eastern Europe go its own way Gorbachev was motivated by self-interest and the desire to save his own skin: "It would have been foolish for Gorbachev to take risky military action in Hungary or Czechoslovakia when he had to worry about stability in the USSR. When your own house is on fire you don't send the firefighters to your neighbour's house."³²

However, contrary to that thesis, it should be pointed out that already in 1987 Gorbachev had written: "The time is ripe for abandoning views on foreign policy which are influenced by an imperial standpoint... It is possible to suppress, compel, bribe, break or blast, but only for a certain period."³³ Moreover, the date of his speech at the United Nations – December, 1988 – preceded the beginning of real disturbances in any part of Europe by nearly a year. The Berlin Wall did not fall for another year, and the first blood was not shed in Eastern Europe until the Romanian dictator's fall in December, 1989. So we may concede to Gorbachev some genuine democratic idealism in this matter – although it still remains likely that his aim was always the *reform* of Communism, not its final demise.

The first to move were the Hungarians. "The threat of the Romanian leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, to raze several thousand villages in Transylvania prompted

³⁰ Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon, 1992, p. 906.

³¹ Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 604.

³² Kasparov, *Winter is Coming*, London: Atlantic, 2015, p. 26.

³³ Mazower, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

them to take a super-Gorbachevian reformist line: in January 1989 they permitted alternative political parties, and in May Imre Nagy was reburied with honours. The Communists sought to recreate the 1944-1947 alliance with the Social Democrats, as Nagy had proposed in 1956. Soviet diplomats, hesitantly at first, let it be known that the Brezhnev doctrine would not be enforced. Gennadii Gerasimov, foreign ministry spokesman, spoke jocularly of its being replaced by a 'Sinatra doctrine': 'Do it your way'.³⁴

The Poles were next. At the beginning of 1989 the government legalized Solidarity and other political parties. Then, in April, writes Olga Chetverikova, "Lech Walesa and the representatives of the Polish government finally signed an Agreement on political and economic reforms, and in May the Polish Catholic church received a status that has no analogy in other East European countries: they returned to it the property that had been confiscated in the 1950s and allowed it to create its own educational institutions. In June of the same year the representatives of 'Solidarity' were victorious at the parliamentary elections, and its candidate, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, was elected as prime minister."³⁵

"Soon," writes J.M. Roberts, "the new parliament denounced the German-Soviet agreement of August 1939, condemned the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, and set up investigations into political murders committed since 1981.

"In August Walesa announced that Solidarity would support a coalition government; the communist diehards were told by Mr. Gorbachev that this would be justifiable (and some Soviet military units had already left the country). In September a coalition dominated by Solidarity and led by the first non-communist Prime Minister since 1945 took office as the government of Poland. Western economic aid was soon promised. By Christmas 1989 the Polish People's Republic had passed from history and, once again, the historic Republic of Poland had risen from its grave."³⁶

The Polish political counter-revolution was completed in 1990, when Lech Walesa became president of the country. "Characteristically wishing to be delivered from all signs of the socialist system, even on the symbolic level, he received his privileges, not from the lawful president Jaruzelski, but from the president of Poland in exile, Richard Kacharowski."³⁷

The communist states now began to fall like dominoes...

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³⁴ Hosking, *Russia and the Russians*, London: Penguin, 2012, p. 574.

³⁵ Chetverikova, *Izmena v Vatikane ili Zagovor Pap protiv Khristianstva* (Betrayal in the Vatican, or the Conspiracy of the Popes against Christianity), Moscow, 2011, p. 91.

³⁶ Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon, 1992, p. 906.

³⁷ Chetverikova, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

The Tiananmen massacre, which took place on June 3-4, 1989, had been a victory for the Communist Party (and Friedmanite economics); but it was to be the last before the end of the millennium. Moreover, it helped the anti-Communist revolutionaries of Central and Eastern Europe by teaching them some valuable lessons. First, it showed that Communism could not be overcome by violence alone. Hence the remarkable eschewal of violence – with the partial exception of Romania – in the East European revolutions that developed with such extraordinary speed in the later part of 1989. A second lesson learned by the East Europeans – again with the partial exception of the Romanians – was that victory was not assured until the Communist Party itself, together with its security apparatus, had been at least partially “turned”, either through the removal of the threat of external invasion from Moscow (this was a particular threat to Poland and East Germany), or through shame at earlier betrayals of the nation (Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968). A third lesson was that the enslaved peoples of Communism were more likely to rise up against their enslavers if they had a flourishing example of a non-Communist state on their doorstep, to which they could be united. For the anti-Communists of Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 that alluring neighbouring state was the European Union...

But the remarkable thing about this process was how cautiously, not to say reluctantly, the EU took part in it. The ugly truth was that the EU had become so accustomed to appeasing Communist Eastern Europe through decades of *Ostpolitik* and détente, and so ready to turn its eyes away from the terrible reality of Communism for the sake of its own material comfort and security, that when it came to assisting in the process of finally destroying Communism and the Iron Curtain that separated East and West, they were unprepared and unwilling. The real movers here were the captive peoples themselves, assisted by the heads of the superpowers, Gorbachev, Reagan and Bush – and Germany’s Helmut Kohl, who was determined to seize the opportunity to reunite his country. Thatcher and Mitterrand feared the re-emergence of a newly powerful Germany at the centre of Europe. But they, too, eventually joined the consensus – albeit slowly and reluctantly...

In the summer of 1989, writes Simon Jenkins, “the bicentennial of the French Revolution, Moscow lost its grip on the handle of Soviet power. In August, history descended into irony [or rather: farce] when a member of the European Parliament, Otto von Habsburg, pretender to the Austro-Hungarian throne, co-sponsored a ‘pan-European picnic’ on the Austria-Hungary border. Hundreds of East Germans trekked to it and, in a gesture of friendship, officials temporarily opened the border gates. Six hundred ‘picknikers’ stampeded across before they closed – and did not return. Pandemonium ensued as thousands rushed to the spot. On 11 September the Hungarian government announced they could no longer control the border. It opened, and some 50,000 East Germans crossed to the west.

“The Iron Curtain was breached, and the East German leader, Erich Honecker, resigned. In October the Hungarian government declared a new republic and free elections. A month later, on 9 November 1989, [the

anniversary of the fall of the Kaiser's monarchy in 1918,] East Germany announced that east-west movement through the Berlin Wall would be eased. As crowds rushed the gates, soldiers abandoned all attempts to stop them. Ecstatic masses climbed the wall and lined its fortifications. Pictures of this photogenic symbol of ideological collapse flashed round the globe."³⁸

The irony of it was that, as Roberts writes, this took place "on the eve of the carefully-planned and much-vaunted celebration of forty years' 'success' as a socialist country, and during a visit by Mr. Gorbachev (who, to the dismay of the German communists, appeared to urge the east Germans to seize their chance), riot police had to battle with anti-government demonstrators on the streets of east Berlin. The government and party threw out their leader, but this was not enough. November opened with huge demonstrations in many cities against a regime whose corruption was becoming evident; on 9 November came the greatest symbolic act of all, the breaching of the Berlin Wall. The East German Politburo caved in and the demolition of the rest of the Wall followed."³⁹

"It is rare," writes Daniel Johnson, "for liberty and tyranny to confront one another without bloodshed. One such event, in which I happened to take part, was the fall of the Berlin Wall... The trigger for the opening of the Wall was the East German Communist Party spokesman Günther Schabowski's press conference. Eight minutes before it was due to end, he unexpectedly announced new travel rules that would allow people to cross the border between East and West. The room was electrified: this was sensational news, though just how sensational we could not know. Someone (it is still unclear who) shouted out the question: 'When do [the new travel rules] come into force?' This elicited the reply: 'Immediately, without delay.' The careful choreography of the East German plan, which required a controlled opening of the border, was thereby cast to the winds. Several of the key players, including Schabowski himself, are now dead. So we may never know everything about what was happening backstage before and during the drama of those eight minutes.

"My role was to ask the last question – the only one that actually mentioned the Wall: 'What will happen to the Berlin Wall now?' It reduced Schabowski to silence for a second or two, followed by a rambling, incoherent response, as if he had simultaneously grasped what he had done and was at stake: the end of the Berlin Wall, the Cold War and the division of Europe by the Iron Curtain. He had no answer to my question, because of the obvious absurdity of keeping a wall through the German capital if people could pass through it. The phrase 'a moment of truth' is often misused, but in this case it is the *mot juste*. Schabowski was lost for words because the truth had just dawned on him – and on the multitudes watching on live television. He abruptly brought the press conferred to an end, leaving many journalists confused about what had

³⁸ Jenkins, *A Short History of Europe*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2018, pp. 284-285.

³⁹ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 908.

actually been announced. For my part, I was in no doubt that the Wall was opening and ran back to my hotel to report it to the disbelieving foreign desk of the *Daily Telegraph*. TV new reports soon reinforced this interpretation, but it took a couple of hours before people started gathering at the check-points and demanding to be let through. Even then, the opening was not inevitable – but there were no orders and the officer in charge was not prepared to open fire on his own compatriots.”⁴⁰

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A few days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Czechs began what came to be known as the “Velvet Revolution”. “The first big anti-communist demonstration was held in Prague on 17 November 1989. At first it seemed as though the communists would hold on, and some people were injured when police went into action to disperse the crowds. The Civil Rights movement, Charter 77, led by the famous playwright, Vaclav Havel, organized further opposition rallies. [By November 25 there were 800.000 protestors on the streets of Prague]. Two days later, after Alexander Dubček, the hero of the 1988 Prague Spring, had made an emotional speech - his first public appearance since his removal by Soviet troops over 20 years earlier - a national strike was declared. [It was joined by three-quarters of the population.] The communists decided it was time to go, and on 29 December Havel was elected President [by a unanimous vote of the Federal Assembly]...

“Changes also took place in Bulgaria, although here they were not so clear cut. In December 1989 the progressive communists in the Bulgarian Politburo voted Todor Zhivkov, who had been leader since 1954, out of office. Free elections were held in June 1990 which were won by the communists, now calling themselves the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Change was a little longer coming in Albania but eventually the communist leaderships bowed to the inevitable and allowed free elections; the first non-communist president was elected in 1992...”⁴¹

“More than anywhere else, events in the GDR showed that even in the most advanced communist countries there had been a massive alienation of popular feeling from the regime.⁴² 1989 had brought it to a head. All over eastern Europe it was suddenly clear that communist governments had no legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects, who either rose against them or turned their backs and let them fall down. The institutional expression of this alienation was everywhere: a demand for free elections, with opposition parties freely campaigning. The Poles had followed their own partially-free elections in

⁴⁰ Johnson, “The Righteous and the Right: Thoughts on the Survival of Western Civilisation”, *Standpoint*, May, 2018, p. 47.

⁴¹ Lowe, *Mastering Twentieth-Century Russian History*, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002, pp. 416-417; Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, p. 400.

⁴² The alienation had begun long before. Even before the building of the Berlin Wall in the early 1960s, two million East Germans had fled to the West (Andrew Marr, *A History of the World*, London: Pan, 2012, p. 522). (V.M.)

which some seats were still reserved to supporters of the existing regime, with the preparation of a new constitution; in 1990, Lech Walesa became President. A few months earlier, Hungary had elected a parliament from which emerged a non-communist government. Soviet soldiers began to withdraw from the country. In June 1990 Czechoslovakian elections produced a free government and it was soon agreed that the country was to be evacuated of Soviet forces by May 1991. In none of these countries did the former communist politicians get more than 16 per cent of the vote. Free elections in Bulgaria were less decisive: there, the contest was won by the communist party members turned reformers and calling themselves socialists.”⁴³

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The liberation of Romania requires somewhat longer treatment as being the largest Orthodox nation outside the Soviet Union, and also because there events took a somewhat different turn...

Romania suffered perhaps more than any other Balkan country from fascism in the pre-war and war period, and from communism in the post-war period. But at the same time – and perhaps in consequence of these sufferings – it gave birth to easily the largest True Orthodox Church in the region, led by the extraordinary figure of Metropolitan Glykerie, which remains to this day the most flourishing True Orthodox Church in the world.

The early 1980s, writes Mark Mazower, were “a period of austerity harsh even by Romanian standards: consumption was being squeezed to pay off foreign debts, and daily life was ravaged by the insanely destructive programme of ‘systematization’ through which the regime demolished thousands of villages, scores of towns and eventually a large part of Bucharest itself...”⁴⁴ To a greater degree than in any other country of Eastern Europe (including Russia), power in Romania was concentrated in the hands of a single man, Nicolae Ceaușescu. Supported by the very powerful secret police, the Securitate, he turned Romania “virtually into a personal fiefdom. Even the most senior echelons of the *nomenklatura* were sidelined, as all decisions were taken, without prior discussion, by the Conducator and his powerful, sinister wife, Elena. Party officials were treated much like their Ottoman predecessors, moved from posting to posting, to prevent their building power bases which might threaten their master. After their daughter, Zoia, a mathematics student, tried to flee her parents, an angry Ceaușescu closed down the Bucharest Mathematical Institute, provoking a massive brain drain of some two hundred of the country’s leading mathematicians.”⁴⁵

“Romania also exemplified another way in which communist elites tried to regain some popularity – through the cultivation of national aspirations.

⁴³ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 908.

⁴⁴ Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe’s Twentieth Century*, London: Penguin, 1998, p. 375

⁴⁵ Mazower, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

Ceaușescu pushed the use of nationalism further than any other leader, and achieved an apparent detachment from Moscow which brought rich rewards from the West. But national communism became part of a common strategy for clinging on to power. Older gods from the nationalist pantheon were introduced into the Marxist-Leninist liturgy. Marshal Pilsudski started to appear on Polish postage stamps; Luther and Frederick the Great were commemorated in East Germany. Compliant professors produced works like the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences' fourteen-volume history of the country, or the infamous nationalist memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. Archaeology, history and ethnography all helpfully uncovered socialism's deep roots in the nation...

"But national communism also involved a tense and more antagonistic relationship towards the surviving remnants of the region's ethnic minorities: anti-Semitism, for instance, surfaced briefly in Poland in 1968, despite the almost total disappearance of what had once been the largest Jewish community in Europe. Tito's legacy was abandoned in Yugoslavia as Milošević used the issue of Kosovo to play to reawakening Serb nationalism. In Bulgaria, decades of a centralizing assimilationist policy towards the minorities culminated in the 1984-5 drive to rename the Turkish population, or rather, to 'restore' their original Bulgarian names. When Romania similarly sanctioned the official persecution of its Hungarian minority, it enflamed a grievance with Hungary which... would play an important part in the events of 1989."⁴⁶

For "On 16 December 1989, the Hungarian minority in Timișoara held a public protest in response to an attempt by the government to evict Hungarian Reformed church Pastor László Tőkés. In July of that year, in an interview with Hungarian television, Tőkés had criticised the regime's systematization policy and complained that Romanians did not even know their human rights. As Tőkés described it later, the interview, which had been seen in the border areas and was then spread all over Romania, had 'a shock effect upon the Romanians, the *Securitate* as well, on the people of Romania. [...] [I]t had an unexpected effect upon the public atmosphere in Romania.'

"The government then alleged that Tőkés was inciting ethnic hatred. At the behest of the government, his bishop removed him from his post, thereby depriving him of the right to use the apartment to which he was entitled as a pastor, and assigned him to be a pastor in the countryside. For some time his parishioners gathered around his home to protect him from harassment and eviction. Many passersby spontaneously joined in. As it became clear that the crowd would not disperse, the mayor, Petre Moț, made remarks suggesting that he had overturned the decision to evict Tőkés. Meanwhile, the crowd had grown impatient and, when Moț declined to confirm his statement against the planned eviction in writing, the crowd started to chant anti-communist slogans. Subsequently, police and *Securitate* forces showed up at the scene. By 19:30 the protest had spread and the original cause became largely irrelevant.

⁴⁶ Mazower, op. cit., pp. 377-378.

Some of the protesters attempted to burn down the building that housed the district committee of the PCR. The *Securitate* responded with tear gas and water jets, while police beat up rioters and arrested many of them. Around 21:00 the rioters withdrew. They regrouped eventually around the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral and started a protest march around the city, but again they were confronted by the security forces.

“Riots and protests resumed the following day, 17 December. The rioters broke into the district committee building and threw party documents, propaganda brochures, Ceaușescu's writings, and other symbols of Communist power out of windows.

“The military was sent in to control the riots, because the situation was too large for the *Securitate* and conventional police to handle. The presence of the army in the streets was an ominous one: It meant that they had received their orders from the highest level of the command chain, presumably from Ceaușescu himself. The army failed to establish order and chaos ensued, including gunfire, fights, casualties, and burned cars. Transportor Amfibiu Blindat (TAB) armoured personnel carriers and tanks were called in.^[31]

“After 20:00, from Piața Libertății (Liberty Square) to the Opera, there was wild shooting, including the area of Decebal bridge, Calea Lipovei (Lipovei Avenue) and Calea Girocului (Girocului Avenue). Tanks, trucks and TABs blocked the accesses into the city while helicopters hovered overhead. After midnight the protests calmed down. Colonel-General Ion Coman, local Party secretary Ilie Matei, and Colonel-General Ștefan Gușă (Chief of the Romanian General Staff) inspected the city. Some areas looked like the aftermath of a war: destruction, rubble and blood

“On the morning of 18 December the centre was being guarded by soldiers and *Securitate* agents in plainclothes. Mayor Moț ordered a party gathering to take place at the university, with the purpose of condemning the "vandalism" of the previous days. He also declared martial law, prohibiting people from going about in groups of larger than two.¹

“Defying the curfew, a group of 30 young men headed for the Orthodox cathedral, where they stopped and waved a Romanian flag from which they had removed the Romanian Communist coat of arms leaving a distinctive hole, in a manner similar to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Expecting that they would be fired upon, they started to sing "Deșteaptă-te, române!" ("*Awaken thee, Romanian!*"), an earlier patriotic song that had been banned since 1947. They were, indeed, fired upon; some died and others were seriously injured, while the lucky ones were able to escape.

“On 19 December, local Party functionary Radu Bălan and Colonel-General Ștefan Gușă visited workers in the city's factories, but failed to get them to resume work. On 20 December, massive columns of workers entered the city. About 100,000 protesters occupied Piața Operei (Opera Square – today Piața

Victoriei, Victory Square) and chanted anti-government slogans: "*Noi suntem poporul!*" ("We are the people!"), "*Armata e cu noi!*" ("The army is on our side!"), "*Nu vă fie frică, Ceaușescu pică!*" ("Have no fear, Ceaușescu is falling!")⁴⁷

"Meanwhile, Emil Bobu (Secretary to the Central Committee) and Prime Minister Constantin Dăscălescu were sent by Elena Ceaușescu (Nicolae being at that time in Iran) to resolve the situation. They met with a delegation of the protesters and agreed to free the majority of the arrested protesters. However, they refused to comply with the protesters' main demand (resignation of Ceaușescu) and the situation remained essentially unchanged.⁴⁸

"The next day, trains loaded with workers from factories in Oltenia arrived in Timișoara. The regime was attempting to use them to repress the mass protests, but after a brief encounter they ended up joining the protests. One worker explained, "Yesterday our factory boss and a party official rounded us up in the yard, handed us wooden clubs and told us that Hungarians and 'hooligans' were devastating Timișoara and that it is our duty to go there and help crush the riots. But I realised that wasn't the truth."⁴⁹

"On 18 December, Ceaușescu had departed for a visit to Iran, leaving the duty of crushing the Timișoara revolt to his subordinates and his wife. Upon his return on the evening of 20 December, the situation became even more tense, and he gave a televised speech from the TV studio inside the Central Committee Building (CC Building) in which he spoke about the events at Timișoara in terms of an 'interference of foreign forces in Romania's internal affairs' and an 'external aggression on Romania's sovereignty.'⁵⁰

"The country, which had no information about the Timișoara events from the national media, heard about the Timișoara revolt from Western radio stations like Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, and by word of mouth. A mass meeting was staged for the next day, 21 December, which, according to the official media, was presented as a "spontaneous movement of support for Ceaușescu," emulating the 1968 meeting in which Ceaușescu had spoken against the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces."⁵¹

Yuval Noah Harari continues the story: "On 21 December 1989, Ceaușescu organised a mass demonstration of support in the centre of Bucharest. Over the previous months the Soviet Union had withdrawn its support from the eastern European communist regimes, the Berlin Wall had fallen, and revolutions had swept Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Ceaușescu, who had ruled Romania since 1965, believed he could withstand the tsunami, even though riots against his rule had erupted in the Romanian city of Timișoara on 17 December. As one of his counter-measures, Ceaușescu arranged a massive rally in Bucharest to prove to Romanians and the rest of the world that the majority of the populace still loved him – or at least feared him. The creaking party apparatus mobilised 80,000 people to fill the city's central

⁴⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanian_Revolution.

square, and citizens throughout Romania were instructed to stop all their activities and tune in on their radios and televisions.

“To the cheering of the seemingly enthusiastic crowd, Ceaușescu mounted the balcony overlooking the square, as he had done scores of times in previous decades. Flanked by his wife Elena, leading party officials and a bevy of bodyguards, Ceaușescu began delivering one of his trademark dreary speeches. For eight minutes he praised the glories of Romanian socialism, looking very pleased with himself as the crowd clapped mechanically. And then something went wrong. You can see it for yourself on You-Tube. Just search for ‘Ceaușescu’s last speech’, and watch history in action.

“The You-Tube clip shows Ceaușescu starting another long sentence, saying, ‘I want to thank the initiators and organisers of this great event in Bucharest, considering it as a---’, and then he falls silent, his eyes open wide, and he freezes in disbelief. He never finished the sentence. Somebody in the audience booed. People still argue today who was the first person who dared to boo. And then another person booed, and another, and another, and within a few seconds the masses began whistling, shouting abuse and calling out: ‘Ti-mi-șoa-ra! Ti-mi-șoa-ra!’

“All this happened live on Romanian television, as three-quarters of the population sat glued to the screens, their hearts throbbing wildly. The notorious secret police – the Securitate – immediately ordered the broadcast to be stopped, but the television crews disobeyed. The cameraman pointed the camera towards the sky so that viewers couldn’t see the panic among the party leaders on the balcony, but the soundman kept recording, and the technicians continued the transmission. The whole of Romania heard the crowd booing, while Ceaușescu yelled, ‘Hello! Hello! Hello!’ as if the problem was with the microphone. His wife Elena began scolding the audience: ‘Be quiet! Be quiet!’ until Ceaușescu turned and yelled at her – still live on television – ‘You be quiet!’ Ceaușescu then appeared to the excited crowds in the square, imploring them, ‘Comrades! Comrades! Be quiet, comrades!’

“But the comrades were unwilling to be quiet. Communist Romania crumbled when 80,000 people in the Bucharest central square realised they were much stronger than the old man in the fur hat on the balcony...”⁴⁸

Harari goes on to describe how “moderate communists” Iliescu took the place of the dictator. And indeed, as Vali Crețu argues, it was not a real revolution, but the replacement of one generation of communists with another, younger one: “This was not a small act of defiance at all, nor was it a spontaneous riot organised by ‘the people’. It wasn’t an anti-Communist revolution, but a coup d’etat planned in its smallest details by Ceaușescu’s younger associates. Among others, Communist Party members like Ion Iliescu, Adrian Năstase, Petre Roman (son of Ernő Neuländer, the Jew who founded

⁴⁸ Harari, *Homo Deus*, London: Vintage, 2017, pp. 155-158.

the Securitate - the Romanian equivalent of the KGB) etc. rebelled against Ceaușescu, organised the coup, overthrew his regime and assumed power. It was just younger Communists against older Communists, with no respect for the Romanian State or the Romanian people. Many Romanians died in vain thinking they were fighting some liberation war. This power struggle became clear when the Romanians actually tried to oppose Iliescu's new Communist regime and were crushed during the Mineriade, when Iliescu called the miners to come to Bucharest and create havoc in Piața Universității, where Romania's intellectual elite had gathered (back then we still had one). That was our last real cry for freedom and identity and we failed it. The Old Style Orthodox Church remains our only hope and our only contribution to true faith..."⁴⁹

Nevertheless, as Anca Stati writes, there was an attempt to repent of the sins of communism immediately after the so-called revolution. Students and many young people went on the streets and occupied the University Square in Bucharest, demanding a strong condemnation of communism and of all the communists. They wanted all communists to be banned from public office. They claimed that the revolution had been confiscated by neo-communists and they were right! They were saying prayers and singing Christian songs. The official Church did not support them at all. Nor did the government. They used the mass media to denigrate people participating to the event. In order to disperse them, President Iliescu, a former communist, called for the mineworkers of Jiu Valley to "re-establish order and discipline". Most of the participants in the movement were beaten and arrested. God knows what happened to many of them..."⁵⁰

"By June 1990," writes Roberts, "a government some believed still to be heavily influenced by former communists had turned on some of its former supporters, now critics, and crushed student protest with the aid of vigilante squads of miners at some cost in [1100] lives and in disapproval abroad."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Crețu, *Facebook*, September 8, 2017.

⁵⁰ Stati, personal communication, November 14, 2014.

⁵¹ Roberts, *op. cit.*

5. ORTHODOXY AND PERESTROIKA

Gorbachev hoped, as Bernard Simms writes, “that a more conciliatory attitude towards dissidents would reduce the terrible international battering the Soviet Union had received over human rights since the mid-1970s... Greater freedom of expression, Gorbachev believed, would mobilize the intelligentsia and reduce incompetence and corruption. Dissidents were released, police repression was greatly eased, civil rights groups emerged, there was a revival of the [official] Russian Orthodox Church and a vibrant public sphere moved from the underground into the open...”⁵²

True Russian Orthodoxy was indeed preparing to move from the underground into the open. The pseudo-Orthodoxy of the Moscow Patriarchate had been in the open for several decades. However, the question that all believing Orthodox Christians – that is, all those Orthodox Christians who hated atheism and Sovietism – were asking in 1988, as the Soviet system began to disintegrate, was: could the official Orthodox Church in Russia be converted from being a pawn of Communist power to a fully autonomous religious institution subject only to God? And this in turn depended on a third question: could the Russian people as a whole convert from the Communist world-view to that of genuine Orthodox Christianity?

Of course, as we have seen, Gorbachev’s aim in his reforms, at least until 1989, was simply to modernize the existing system, not make a transition to real democracy, let alone Orthodoxy and Orthodox autocracy. Communism would borrow from the West, but only in order to overthrow the West (to “bury” it, as Khrushchev had put it). In his book *The Perestroika Deception*, the former KGB agent and defector to the West Anatoly Golitsyn outlined a plan that the KGB had conceived for deceiving the West about its basic intentions. Several later defectors, planted by the KGB, tried to persuade the West that this plan was fictitious. But the development of events in the perestroika years, 1985-91, showed that almost all his predictions had been accurate...⁵³

This explains why, as late as early 1989, the American administration under its new president, George Bush, were more cautious than the West European leaders Thatcher, Mitterand and Kohl in committing themselves to supporting Gorbachev wholeheartedly. They had reason to doubt. After all, in November, 1987 Gorbachev said to the Politburo: “*Perestroika* is no retreat from communism but rather a step toward the final realization of Marxist-Leninist utopia: a continuation of Lenin’s ideas. Those who expect us to give up communism will be disappointed. In October, 1917 we parted from the Old World, rejecting it once and for all. We are moving toward a new world, the world of communism. We shall never turn off that road. *Perestroika* is a continuation of the October revolution...”

⁵² Simms, *Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy*, London: Allen Lane, 2013, pp. 479-480.

⁵³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkw8nwHG2GM>

“Comrades, do not be concerned about all you hear about *glasnost*’ and democracy. These are primarily for outward consumption. There will be no serious internal change in the USSR other than for cosmetic purposes. Our purpose is to disarm America and let them fall asleep. We want to accomplish three things: (1) the Americans to withdraw conventional forces from Europe, (2) the Americans to withdraw nuclear forces from Europe, and (3) the Americans to stop proceeding with SDI [the Star Wars Defence System].”⁵⁴

Nevertheless, there was a difference between Gorbachev and the KGB. Gorbachev *genuinely believed* in perestroika, not just as a stratagem to outwit the Americans, but in and for itself; and he was not afraid (at any rate from 1988) of taking it to its logical conclusion – that is, removing article 6 from the Soviet Constitution and allowing multi-party democracy. It was at this point, however, that the KGB came to believe that *they* had been deceived, which led to KGB chief Kriuchkov taking part in the 1991 *putsch*.

The evolution in the viewpoint of the KGB (in the opposite direction of Gorbachev’s evolution) is described by William Tauber. Gorbachev had made Kriuchkov KGB chief in 1988 and trusted him “because Andropov had done so, and also because, as he told aides on several occasions, Kriuchkov’s position in the KGB had been in foreign intelligence and therefore he was not associated with domestic oppression. Kriuchkov and [Gorbachev’s main ally and chief ideologist, Alexander] Yakovlev had been together on March 11, 1985, when they learned Gorbachev was to be the new leader. Kriuchkov ‘breathed a sign of relief’, Yakovlev recounted; ‘we congratulated each other and drank a toast to the new *Gensek*.’ Yakovlev later chastened himself for mistaking Kriuchkov’s careerist ambitions for sincere political ambitions. Kriuchkov later lamented, ‘The KGB’s biggest mistake in its whole history was to misunderstand Gorbachev.’”⁵⁵

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Now one of the chief litmus tests of true loyalty to the communist cause was hostility to religion. Multi-party democracy might be forgiven as long as the levers of real power remained in the hands of communists – which they did until 1991. But religion was another matter... Both the KGB and the early Gorbachev agreed on that: Leninism and religion were incompatible. “The opium of the people” had to be dispersed by the fresh, invigorating air of atheist Communism, even if the violent repressive measures of the Stalinist (and Leninist and Khushchevian and Brezhnevian and Andropovian) eras was no longer acceptable.

And so, at the beginning of *perestroika* there was no sign of the religious liberalization that was to come. In fact, in November, 1986, Gorbachev told

⁵⁴ Gorbachev, in Dr. Olga Ackerly, “High Treason in ROCOR: The Rapprochement with Moscow”, http://stnicholasandles.com/High_Treason.htm, pp. 13, 14.

⁵⁵ Tauber, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

party officials in Tashkent that religious faith and party membership were incompatible (this was probably aimed at Muslim communists): "There must be no let-up in the war against religion because as long as religion exists Communism cannot prevail. We must intensify the obliteration of all religions wherever they are being practised or taught."

But what, then, was to be done about the millenium of the Baptism of Rus', which was to take place in 1988? After all, the Soviets had an official Orthodox Church, and such an anniversary could not be ignored. In 1987 Yakovlev said concerning it: "To God what is God's, to the Church what is the Church's, but to us, the Marxists, belongs the fullness of truth. And on the basis of these positions any attempts to represent Christianity as the 'mother' of Russian culture must be decisively rejected. And if the Russian Middle Ages merit the attention of historians, such cannot be said of the 1000-year date of Orthodoxy."⁵⁶

Two years later, however, Gorbachev declared at a meeting of Warsaw Pact member states that "there does not exist any kind of universal socialist model, (and) no one possesses a monopoly of truth"⁵⁷ This was in direct contradiction to what Yakovlev had said in 1987. Between the two statements stood - the 1000-year-old anniversary of Russian Orthodoxy.

1988 did indeed prove to be a turning-point. In this year Gorbachev saw off the challenge of his hard-line opponent, Yegor Ligachev. And it was precisely at this time that Gorbachev's decision to pass from what Sir Geoffrey Hosking called "Mark 1" to "Mark 2" *perestroika*, from tinkering with the system to removing one of its main planks, dictated a change in policy towards the Church, too.⁵⁸ For the success of *perestroika* required sincere believers in the new order recruited from the Church, not just party hacks; the atheists decided that they needed God on their side...

In March, 1988 Constantine Mikhailovich Kharchev, the head of the Council for Religious Affairs, told representatives of the higher party school in Moscow: "We attained our greatest success in controlling religion and suppressing its initiative amidst the priests and bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church. At first this gave us joy, but now it threatens to bring unforeseen consequences in its train... Now a priest often has no connection with his parish, but he is born somewhere else, and is often even of a different nationality. He comes once a week to the parish in a car, serves the liturgy... and wants to know nothing more. Many even like this, after all they are not responsible for anything: neither for their flock, nor for the money, nor for the repair of the church. The official in giving him his licence warns him: take your 350 roubles, and don't poke your nose into anything..."

⁵⁶ Yakovlev, *Vestnik Akademii Nauk SSSR* (Herald of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR), 1987, № 6, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Mazower, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

⁵⁸ Hosking, *The Awakening of the Soviet Union*, London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1991, p. 120.

“We, the party, have fallen into a trap of our own anti-ecclesiastical politics of bans and limitations, we have cut the pope off from the believers, but the believers have not begun as a result to trust the local organs more, while the party and the state is increasingly losing control over the believers. And in addition, as a consequence, we witness the appearance of unspiritual believers, that is, those who carry out the ritual side [of Church life] and are indifferent to everything. And the main thing – are indifferent to communism... It is easier for the party to make a sincere believer into a believer also in communism. The task before us is: the education of a new type of priest; the selection and placing of a priest is the party’s business.”

“For 70 years,” he said, “we have struggled with the Church. In particular, we have been concerned that the most amoral and corrupt people should be appointed to the most significant posts. And now, look, we want these people to arrange a spiritual regeneration for us...”⁵⁹

It was indeed an acute paradox. And it was not only party officials who had to perform somersaults. Church leaders, too, had to prove that St. Vladimir’s deliverance of Russia from the curse of paganism in 988 was somehow compatible with Russia’s worshipping of the golden calf in 1988...

The critical point came in April, 1988, when Gorbachev met church leaders and worked out a new Church-State concordat reminiscent of the Stalin-Sergei compact of 1943. This concordat, combined with the underlying growth in religious feeling that had now been going on for several years, and the recovery of courage made easier by *glasnost’* and the release of most of the religious and political prisoners, made the millennial celebrations in June a truly pivotal event.

The fruits were soon evident for all to see. Religious and political prisoners were freed; permission was given for the reopening of hundreds of churches (1,830 in the first nine months of 1990); and religious societies and cooperatives of almost all denominations sprang up all over the country. Programmes on Orthodox art and architecture, and sermons by bearded clergy in cassocks, became commonplace on television; very wide publicity given to the millennial celebrations in the media; and commentators from right across the political spectrum began to praise the contribution of the Orthodox Church to Russian history and culture.

There was openness, too, on the terrible cost to the Russian Church of Leninism and Stalinism.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Kharchev, *Russkaia Mysl’* (Russian Thought), May 20, 1988, № 3725. See also Bishop Valentine of Suzdal, “Put’ nechestivyykh pogibnet” (The Way of the Impious Will Perish), *Suzdal’skij Palomnik* (Suzdal Pilgrim), №№ 18-20, 1994, pp. 96-97.

⁶⁰ D.I. Mendeleev calculated that there were 125 million innocent victims of the communist yoke (in I.F. Okhotin, “Velichie i blagodenstvie Rossii v Tsarstvovanie Imperatora Nikolaia II podtverzhdennoe v tsifrakh i faktakh” (The Greatness and Prosperity of Russia in the Reign of Emperor Nicholas II Confirmed in Figures and Facts), *Imperskij Vestnik*, October, 1989, p. 12.)

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There were, however, negative aspects to this process. The True Orthodox Church remained outlawed; resistance to the opening of churches by local officials continued in the provinces; and religious activists objected to the adulterous mixing of religion and nationalism, and religion and humanist culture.⁶¹ Moreover, the suspicion continued to exist that the party's new-found respect for religion was simply a tactical ploy, a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter*.

Such scepticism had some basis in reality. After all, no leading communist had announced his conversion to Christianity. Moreover, in April, 1988, the month in which Gorbachev met the patriarch, an unsigned article in *Kommunist* hinted that the real aim of Gorbachev's rapprochement with the Church was to communize the Church rather than Christianize the party (it failed to mention that the Church hierarchs were already KGB agents!). And yet, if that was the party's aim, it backfired. For unlike the concordat of 1943, which did indeed have the effect of communising the official Church, the concordat of 1988 seems to have helped to free Orthodox Christians from bondage to Communist ideology and coercion. For if the Church hierarchs continued to pay lip-service to "Leninist norms", this was emphatically not the case with many priests and laity, of whom Fr. Gleb Yakunin (liberated from the camps in 1987) was probably the most influential and best known.

This was most strikingly evident in March, 1990, when the elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies returned 300 clerics of various faiths as deputies at various levels. These included 190 Russian Orthodox, while the Communist Party candidates in the major cities were routed. In April, the Christian Democratic Movement, led by RSFSR deputies Fr. Gleb Yakunin, Fr. Vyacheslav Polosin and philosopher Victor Aksyuchits, held its founding congress.

Then, on May 19, the birthday of Tsar Nicholas II, the Orthodox Monarchist Order met in Moscow, and called for the restoration of Grand-Duke Vladimir Kirillovich Romanov to the throne of all the Russias. From that time, Orthodox monarchism became a factor in Russian politics that has increased in importance right up to the present day. Thus a restoration of the Tsardom (more likely: constitutional pseudo-Tsardom) under one of the "Kirillovichi" is avidly discussed in Putin's Russia.⁶²

Now Grand-Duke Vladimir was a member of ROCOR, so his recognition by the monarchists inside Russia would have meant an enormous increase in prestige for ROCOR at the expense of the patriarchate. However, the Grand-

⁶¹ Gleb Anishchenko, "Vrata ada" (The Gates of Hell), *Posev* (Sowing), № 3 (1395), May-June, 1990, p. 135.

⁶² On the claims of the "Kirillovichi", see Mikhail Nazarov, *Kto Naslednik Rossijskogo Prestola?* (Who is the Heir of the Russian Throne?), Moscow, 1996.

Duke spared the patriarchate this embarrassment by apostasizing to it. And then, in November, 1991, he died...⁶³

Contrary to the hopes and expectations of many, the MP remained devoted to the Soviet ideology to the last minute. And yet even it began to show signs of change under the influence of *glasnost'*. The first sign was at the church council in June, 1988, when the 1961 statute making priests subordinate to their parish councils was repealed. Then came the canonization of Patriarch Tikhon in October, 1989. And then, on April 3, 1990 the Synod issued a declaration in which it (i) declared its neutrality with regard to different political systems and ideologies, (ii) admitted the existence of persecutions and pressures on the Church in the past, and (iii) tacitly admitted the justice of some of the criticism directed against it by the dissidents.⁶⁴

Finally, in May, Metropolitan Vladimir of Rostov, the head of a commission formed to gather material on priests and believers who had been persecuted, said that "up to now, the details of glorified by an impenitent "Soviet church", did not allow the Fall of the Soviet Union to be the springboard for the restoration of the Russian Orthodox Autocracy. the repression of the Russian Orthodox Church have been ignored or falsified by official, state and even numerous Church figures in order to meet the accepted ideological stereotypes."⁶⁵

The climax to this process was reached in June, when the polls revealed that the Church had now passed the Party, the Army and the KGB in popularity.⁶⁶

People wondered: could this be the beginning of the end of sergianism? Was this the moment when the MP, freed at last from the yoke of communism, and under no obligation to pursue the communist-imposed policy of ecumenism, would finally repent of its past and return to the True Church?...

Alas, it was not to be...

⁶³ Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles, "Velikij Knyaz' Vladimir Kirillovich i ego poseschenie SSSR" (Great Prince Vladimir Kirillovich and his Visit to the USSR), *Pravoslavnij Vestnik* (Orthodox Herald), №№ 60-61, January-February, 1993.

There are sharp differences of opinion on whether Grand Duke Vladimir Kirillovich was the true heir to the Russian throne. For the argument in favour, see Archpriest Lev Lebedev, "Kogo i chego nam nuzhno berech'sa?" (Who and what must we care for?), *Dal'nevostochnij Monarkhicheskij Vestnik* (Far-Eastern Monarchist Gazette), № 18, 2006, pp. 1-3. And for the argument against, see Mikhail Nazarov, *Kto Naslednik Rossijskogo Prestola?* (Who is the Heir of the Russian Throne?), Moscow, 1996.

⁶⁴ *Moskovskij Tserkovnij Vestnik* (Moscow Ecclesiastical Herald), № 9 (27), April, 1990, pp. 1, 3.

⁶⁵ Oxana Antic, "The Russian Orthodox Church moves towards coming to terms with its past", *Report on the USSR*, March 8, 1991.

⁶⁶ *Moscow News*, June 3-10, 10-17, 1990.

6. THE REUNIFICATION OF GERMANY

The “loss” of Eastern Europe inevitably drew harsh criticism of Gorbachev from his hardline opponents. In his defence, he could argue that, with the exception of Romania, no government had been overturned, no state boundaries had been changed, and there was nothing to prevent the Soviet Union and its former East European satellites continuing to form a single socialist or social democratic commonwealth of nations sharing a single defence structure (the Warsaw Pact) parallel to Western Europe and NATO but no longer in deadly and expensive competition with them. However, such a vision rested on a crucial assumption: that East Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), remained *a viable state independent of West Germany*.

However, this assumption proved to be false. For several weeks after the fall of the wall, while the possibility of the reunification of Germany was in everybody’s mind, no political leader declared himself in favour of it. This was not surprising in the case of Gorbachev – Soviet foreign policy since Stalin had consistently ruled out the possibility of a union between the two Germanies. It was perhaps less surprising in the case of Thatcher and Mitterand, who both feared the emergence of a still more powerful Germany at the heart of Europe. As for the Americans, most of Bush’s advisers were against, while he himself was non-committal.

Then came the bombshell. On November 28, without even informing his foreign minister, Hans Dietrich Genscher, the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl “presented a ten-point plan for reunification. Its most important points were that Bonn would consider developing ‘confederative structures between both states in Germany, with the aim of creating a federation, that is, a federal order, in Germany’, and that, in the meantime, it would expand desperately needed economic aid to the GDR, but only ‘if a fundamental transformation in the political and economic system of the GDR is definitively accepted and irreversibly set in motion.’”⁶⁷

The West German Chancellor, writes Judt, had been “initially as hesitant as everyone else... But after listening to East German crowds (and assuring himself of the support of Washington) Kohl calculated that unified Germany was now not merely possible but perhaps urgent. It was clear that the only way to staunch the flow west (2,000 people a day at one point) was to bring West Germany east. In order to keep East Germans from leaving their country, the West German leader set about abolishing it.”⁶⁸

Gorbachev was shocked and angry. “Kohl’s ten points were nothing less than ‘ultimatums’, Gorbachev warned Genscher, to be ‘imposed on an independent and sovereign German state.’ Less than three weeks earlier, he

⁶⁷ Tauber, *op. cit.*, p. 492.

⁶⁸ Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 638.

and Kohl had a 'constructive, positive' phone conversation in which they 'reached agreement on several fundamental issues.' But now Kohl 'probably already thinks his music is playing - a march - and that he is already marching with it.' He was 'treating the citizens of the GDR, in essence, like his own subjects.' ('Even Hitler did not allow himself anything like that,' Sheverdnadze interjected. Kohl was preparing a funeral for the European process.' The 'confederation' he proposed 'implies a common defense system, a common foreign policy. Where will the FRG be, in NATO or the Warsaw Pact? Or will it become neutral? And what would NATO mean without the FRG? What will happen next, in general? Have you thought this all through? What will become of our existing agreements?')

"The shock of Kohl's bold move explains Gorbachev's emotional reaction... He interpreted the move, Chernyaev recalled, 'as a breach of [Kohl's] promise not to push events forward or to try to extract one-sided political advantage' and 'a violation of their agreement to consult each other on every new move.' Nor did Kohl's Western allies appreciate his unilaterally placing German unification squarely atop Europe's agenda. Hence his 'icy' reception (Kohl's description) at a December 8 European Community summit where the 'interrogation' he received reminded him of a 'tribunal'. But since West Germany had made clear its wishes, its allies (even Thatcher) could go only so far to oppose the. Kohl's ten points 'have turned everything upside down', Mitterand complained to Gorbachev in Kiev on December 6. Mitterand still wanted to make sure 'the all-European process develops more rapidly than the German question, but neither he nor Gorbachev had a plan for doing so.'"⁶⁹

What did Mitterand mean? How could German reunification hinder the all-European process? Thatcher feared "that German unification might destabilize Mikhail Gorbachev, possibly even leading to the fall (by analogy with Nikita Khrushchev's disgrace following his Cuban humiliation)."⁷⁰ That was a real, rational fear, but it was not Mitterand's. His fear was that German reunification would make the further integration of the European Union impossible because Germany would now become too powerful for French diplomacy to control. (He may also have been influenced by French Masonry here - the European project was very close to the heart of the Grand Orient of Paris. His brother Jacques was the leader of French Masonry, and he himself was buried in a coffin with "666" engraved on it.)

He needn't have feared. For the sake of reunification, Kohl was prepared to make a deal with the French that would satisfy them. Essentially Mitterand demanded the introduction of the euro as the common currency of the European Union, and the kind of increase in integration and centralization in the Community that became law in the Treaty of Maastricht two years later. Kohl accepted these conditions. He was in any case a firm adherent of the

⁶⁹ Tauber, *op. cit.*, pp. 493-494.

⁷⁰ Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 640.

European project, and the Bundesbank assured him that that they could control the Euro...

In fact, "the French were banking on Gorbachev to veto German unity - as Mitterand explained to his advisers on November 28th 1989, 'I don't want to do anything to stop it, the Soviets will do it for me. They will never allow this greater Germany opposite them.'" ⁷¹ But Gorbachev did allow it. Partly because he realized that the will for unity was very strong in both East and West Germany, so to oppose it, just as to oppose the anti-communist wave in Eastern Europe as a whole, would have been futile. Partly also Gorbachev may have calculated that it was no use his attempting to conciliate hard-line critics of perestroika any longer; many of them, he hoped, would be removed in the upcoming elections to the Congress of People's Deputies, so: "in for a penny, in for a pound!"

But the vital factor influencing Gorbachev's decision may have been his conversations with President Bush at their summit in Malta on December 2-3, which created a friendship that was less marred by suspicions than his relationship with Reagan had been, and which gave him the international support he needed to go the extra mile in both domestic and international affairs. Not that the two leaders discussed Eastern Europe much. But they did exchange "important confessions and compliments. Bush admitted that he was 'shocked' by how fast things were changing, and he offered high praise for Gorbachev's 'personal reaction and the reaction of the Soviet Union' to these changes. 'You are catalyzing changes in Europe in a constructive way.' 'Look at how nervous we are,' Gorbachev admitted at one point. 'What form of action should we take? Collective action?' 'I hope you noticed,' said Bush, 'that the United States has not engaged in condescending statements aimed at damaging the Soviet Union.' Some in the United States accused him of being 'too cautious', and it was true. 'I am a cautious man, but I am not a coward, and my administration will seek to avoid doing anything that would damage your position in the world.'

"'You cannot expect us not to approve of German reunification.' Bush continued. But he admitted that 'some Western allies who pay lip-service to reunification' are actually 'quite upset by the prospect,' and he assured Gorbachev, 'We are trying to act with a certain reserve.' 'We will not take any rash steps; we will not try to accelerate the outcome of the debate on reunification.' If Kohl's declarations sounded more radical, that was because when Germans speak of reunification, they do so 'with tears in their eyes'." ⁷²

This subtle conversation, in which the vital question - was Gorbachev to use military force against the Germans? - was not even raised explicitly, nevertheless finally resolved the question of German reunification, thereby bringing a real end to the Cold War.

⁷¹ Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 640.

⁷² Tauber, *op. cit.*, pp. 497-498.

For that war had begun with Stalin's cold-hearted decision to divide Germany for the sake of consolidating his ill-gotten communist empire. The wishes of the vast majority of the German people, in both East and West, had had nothing to do with it. Moreover, the supposed military threat of the Germans was a fantasy: no people in history has been more thoroughly subdued and crushed than the Germans in 1945, and to this day the Germans have shown a distinct – indeed, excessive – distaste for the idea of rebuilding their military strength. Stalin's successors continued his struggle to divide and destroy the German people, not only by military occupation and the building of the wall, but also by making every fourth citizen of the GDR a spy in relation to his neighbour. The division of Germany had therefore become a dogma of Soviet Communism just as much as state control of the commanding heights of the economy or one-party rule. Gorbachev had invoked *glasnost'* and *perestroika* for his liberal reforms that chipped away at the latter dogmas, but they were quite insufficient to justify the jettisoning of the dogma of Germany's eternal division. At the same time, he knew that vetoing reunification – or, a more likely necessity in view of East German popular sentiment, sending in the 400,000 Soviet troops stationed in Germany to prevent it – would have marked the immediate end of *perestroika*, the return of hardline communism with a vengeance, a reintensification of the Cold War – and probably his own political demise.

It was at this point that President Bush played a critical role. Bush was not restricted by the narrow-minded ambitions of Europeans like Mitterand, Bush was primarily concerned with the success of *perestroika* and understood the difficulty of Gorbachev's dilemma. He wanted Gorbachev not to hinder German reunification, hinting that there were powerful emotional forces ("tears in German eyes") that made its implementation almost impossible to prevent in the longer term. But he carefully refrained from putting any pressure on him, knowing that the hardliners in Russia would claim that he was America's poodle.

Events in Germany itself now took centre stage. "Hans Modrow, the new East German Prime Minister, visited Moscow on 30 January 1990 and told Gorbachev that the majority of East Germans no longer wanted a separate state; it was going to be impossible to preserve the republic. Gorbachev seemed to take this news calmly, and in February he told Kohl that it was up to the Germans to decide things for themselves. In the run-up to the East German elections in March 1990, Kohl staged an election tour in support of the Alliance for Germany, the main opposition party to the communists."⁷³

The Alliance, writes Judt, "won 48 percent of the vote: the Social Democrats, handicapped by their well-advertised ambivalence on the subject, won just 22 percent. The former Communists – now the Party of Democratic Socialism – secured a respectable 16 percent showing..."

⁷³ Lowe, *Mastering Twentieth-Century Russian History*, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002, p. 425.

“The first act of the new majority in the GDR Volkskammer, represented by a CDU-SPD-Liberal coalition led by Lothar de Maizière, was to commit their country to German unity. On May 18th 1990 a ‘monetary, economic and social union’ was signed between the two Germanies, and on July 1st its crucial clause – the extension of the Deutschmark to East Germany – came into force. East Germans could now exchange their virtually useless East German marks – up to the equivalent of DM 40,000 – at a hugely advantageous rate of 1:1. Wages and salaries in the GDR would henceforth be paid in Deutschmarks at parity – a dramatically effective device for keeping East Germans where they were, but with grim long-term consequences for East German jobs and the West German budget.

“On August 23rd, by pre-agreement with Bonn, the Volkskammer voted to accede to the Federal Republic. A week later a Treaty of Unification was signed, by which the GDR was absorbed into the FRG – as approved by its voters in the March elections and permitted under Article 23 of the 1949 Basic Law. On October 3rd the Treaty entered into force: the GDR ‘acceded’ to the Federal Republic and ceased to exist.”⁷⁴

As Roberts writes, “The change was momentous, but no serious alarm was openly expressed, even in Moscow, and Mr. Gorbachev’s acquiescence was his second great service to the German nation. Yet alarm there must have been in the USSR. The new Germany would be the greatest European power to the west. Russian power was now in eclipse as it had not been since 1918. The reward for Mr. Gorbachev was a treaty with the new Germany promising economic help with Soviet modernization. It might also be said, by way of reassurance to those who remembered 1941-45, that the new German state was not just an older Germany revived. Germany was now shorn of the old east German lands (had, indeed, formally renounced them) and was not dominated by Prussia as both Bismarck’s *Reich* and the Weimar republic had been. More reassuring still (and of importance to west Europeans who felt misgivings), the Federal Republic was a federal and constitutional state seemingly assured of economic success, with nearly forty years’ experience of democratic politics to build on, and embedded in the structures of the EC and NATO. She was given the benefit of the doubt by west Europeans with long memories, at least for the time being.

“At the end of 1990, the condition of what had once seemed the almost monolithic east European bloc already defied generalization or brief description. As former communist countries (Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary) applied to join the EC, or got ready to do so (Bulgaria), some observers speculated about a potentially wider degree of European unity than before. More cautious judgements were made by those who noted the virulent emergence of new – or re-emergence of old – national and communicable divisions to plague the new East. Above all, over the whole area there gathered

⁷⁴ Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 638-640.

the storm-clouds of economic failure and the turbulence they might bring. Liberation might have come, but it had come to peoples and societies of very different levels of sophistication and development, and with very different historical origins. Prediction was clearly unwise..."⁷⁵

'By the end of 1990,' writes Lowe, "the USSR had not only lost control over the states of eastern Europe, it had also failed to retain much influence in the area. This, according to Archie Brown, was 'a giant failure of Soviet foreign policy over more than forty years', but not a failure on the part of Gorbachev, although the Soviet military leaders and communist hardliners interpreted it as such, and talked of the 'loss' of eastern Europe. But, asks Brown, 'who eventually lost?' He goes on to argue that the only people who actually lost were 'those forces with an interest in confrontation - ideological, political and military - and who wished to preserve authoritarian regimes.' But everybody else gained: the West gained because it was no longer faced by a hostile Warsaw Pact; the countries of eastern Europe gained because they were now independent; and Russia also gained because it was saved from massive military expenditure and was no longer responsible, and held accountable, for everything which happened in eastern Europe. Gorbachev also deserves enormous credit for refusing to use force to preserve the communist regimes of eastern Europe, even though he must have known that their collapse would make it all the more difficult for him to preserve his own regime in the USSR."⁷⁶

One of the Soviets who blamed rather than applauded Gorbachev was a young KGB agent stationed at that time in Leipzig, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, who, as he burned sensitive files, witnessed the anger of the East German crowds, and never forgot the fear and the humiliation...

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But problems resulted from the reunification of Germany. The most important concerned the future role of NATO, of which the united Germany must now be a part...

Or must it?

There was much heated discussion of this question in the early months of 1990; it was finally resolved at a US-Russian summit in Washington at the end of May. Once again, the subtle but firm diplomacy of Bush played a critical role.

Tauber describes the critical interchange: "Gorbachev tried one last time to raise alternatives to German NATO membership: new security structures in Europe, transforming both military blocs into political organizations, letting united Germany 'stand on two pillars' with 'some sort of associated membership not only in the West but also in the East.' Predictably, Bush

⁷⁵ Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 908-909.

⁷⁶ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

disagreed, but as delicately as possible: 'If I am not right, then I ask you to point out where I am mistaken.' If he were mistaken, if 'the new generation of Germans' were to decide that they didn't want to be in NATO, then 'we will pull out of Germany.'

"Gorbachev affirmed that the American military presence in Europe was 'necessary' - a declaration that would have merited Kremlin defenestration at any point during the previous four decades. For the time being at least, he added awkwardly but stunningly. 'One probably could not do without NATO.' But he still preferred double membership for Germany in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Gorbachev hoped he and Bush could agree because 'if the Soviet people get an impression that we are disregarded in the German question, then all the positive processes in Europe... would be in serious danger.'

"Baker repeated the nine 'assurances' he had presented in Moscow. But Gorbachev wanted more - the kind of Grand Coalition that had united the United States and the USSR during World War II. 'Are we more stupid than Roosevelt and Stalin?' he asked. More point/counterpoint followed before the dam suddenly broke in the following interchange:

"Bush: 'If Germany does not want to stay in NATO, it has the right to choose a different path.'

"Gorbachev: 'Then let us make a public statement on the results of our negotiations [where we will say that] the U.S. president agreed that sovereign Germany would decide on its own which military political status it would choose - membership in NATO, neutrality or something else.'

"Bush: 'It is the right of any sovereign country to choose alliances. If the government [of Germany] would not want to stay in NATO, or even tell our troops to get out, we would accept that choice.'

"Gorbachev: 'That's how we will formulate it then: the United States and the Soviet Union agree that united Germany... would decide on its own which alliance she would be a member of.'

"BINGO! According to Bush, 'the room suddenly became quiet.' Akhromeyev [Gorbachev's military advisor] and Falin [his advisor on Germany] 'looked at each other and squirmed in their seats.' After Gorbachev confirmed his concession, 'Akhromeyev's eyes flashed angrily as he gestured to Falin.' They exchange 'loud stage whispers' as Gorbachev spoke: 'It was an incredible scene,' Bush continued 'the likes of which none of us had ever seen before - virtually open rebellion against a Soviet leader.' Sheverdnadze 'tugged at Gorbachev's sleeve and whispered to him.' Falin 'launched into a lengthy filibuster,' while Sheverdnadze 'kept gesticulating and whispering heatedly to Gorbachev.' In response to all this, Gorbachev tried to back off and saddle Sheverdnadze with pursuing the issue with Baker, only to have Sheverdnadze insist that issues of this importance must be discussed by the two presidents.

'Another incredible moment,' according to Bush, even though Sheverdnadze then gave in. Bush couldn't figure out 'why Gorbachev did what he did'. All he knew was that it was an amazing performance.' Scowcroft too, 'couldn't believe what I was seeing, let alone figure out what to make of it.' Another Bush aide, Robert Koellik, recalled the scene as 'one of the most extraordinary' he had ever witnessed.

"Why did Gorbachev concede? Many years later, James Baker and Condoleza Rice still couldn't answer that question. 'Had he been insistent,' Scowcroft later speculated, 'perhaps' he could have kept united Germany 'neutral'. But that alternative, like all others Gorbachev had proposed, now seemed at a dead end. Moreover, as his unconvincing advocacy of those alternatives indicated and he later admitted, he himself had come to share the main Western arguments - that united Germany must not be left 'in a situation analogous to the one it occupied in 1918'; that united Germany in the Warsaw Pact was 'impossible'; that German NATO membership would not in fact threaten Soviet security; that, 'most important', Germany itself, as represented by both West and East German governments, 'wanted to join NATO,' As Gorbachev put it in an interview: if Germany was to be 'sovereign, its people should decide for themselves. As someone devoted to democracy, how could I object? To have done so would have been unworthy.'"⁷⁷

True. And yet these are essentially rationalizations of what the eyewitnesses were right to think was extremely surprising, even miraculous: that the head of the world communist movement, a Leninist even well into his period of office, should have been converted to the point of view of western democracy, not through coercion or undue pressure (all the pressure was in the opposite direction, from his own side, including his own most liberal supporter). This was one of those turning points in history when "historical necessity" counted for nothing, when only the individual will counted. And that will was not even a human will, but that of God, as when He turned the cruel Pharaoh's heart to agree to his opponent Moses' command: "Let my people go free".

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This still left the major issue of the purpose of NATO in this new world in which everything had been turned upside down...

NATO's aim since its inception in 1949 was famously described as "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down". By the end of 1991 the first aim had been triumphantly achieved, and American troops remained in Europe in continued fulfillment of the second aim. As for the Germans, although since reunification they were more powerful than before, they were still "out" in the sense that they had no intention of violating the terms of their accession to NATO in 1955 - that is, the commitment not to use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons - and remained the most pacifist of nations.

⁷⁷ Tauber, *op. cit.*, pp. 552-553.

However, now that the Soviet Union was no more, and the Russian bear was, it would seem, no longer a military threat to the West, it was unclear why NATO should continue to exist at all. As time passed, and NATO continued in being, some speculated that NATO's *raison d'être* was no longer defensive, but aggressive – to absorb Eastern Europe into the western world. And this speculation was reinforced by the rapid expansion of NATO – Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia joined in 1999, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 2004 – and by its operations outside Western Europe in the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

In 1990, according to Vladimir Putin (speaking at a security conference in 2007), during negotiations over German reunification between Gorbachev, US Secretary of State James Baker and other Western leaders, the West promised that after reunification NATO would not expand eastwards from Germany into Central and Eastern Europe. The West denied this, saying that the only commitment made was that no new NATO forces or structures would be stationed in the former East Germany after reunification – a commitment that was fulfilled. Gorbachev himself has confirmed the western version of events, adding that the question of NATO expansion further east from Germany was never discussed – at that time.⁷⁸

The possibility that really troubled the Russians was the incorporation of *Ukraine* into NATO, not only because of its crucial political and economic importance to the Union but also because of its nuclear weapons (which was what really troubled the Americans as well). As Serhii Plokhyy and M.E. Sarotte write: “On independence, Ukraine immediately became a direct threat to the West: it was ‘born nuclear’. The new state had inherited approximately 1,900 nuclear warheads and 2,500 tactical nuclear weapons. To be sure, Ukraine had physical rather than operational control over the nuclear arms on its territory, since the power to launch them was still in Moscow. But that did not matter much in the long run, given its extensive uranium deposits, impressive technological skills, and production capacities, particularly of missiles; every single Soviet ballistic missile delivered in Cuba in 1962, for example, had been made in Ukraine.

“Ukraine instantaneously became the world’s third-biggest nuclear power, with an arsenal larger than those of China, France, and the United Kingdom. (Two other countries – Belarus and Kazakhstan – also inherited nuclear weapons, but not nearly as many.) Ukrainian strategic weapons could destroy American cities. Determining who, exactly, would have both launch command and day-to-day control over the weapons became an immediate priority of the Bush administration.

⁷⁸ Steven Pifer, “Did NATO Promise Not to Enlarge? Gorbachev Says ‘No,’” Brookings Institution, November 6, 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2014/11/06/did-nato-promise-not-to-enlarge-gorbachev-says-no/>.

“U.S. Secretary of State James Baker provided a stark assessment of the significance of these developments to Bush. Baker told Bush, ‘Strategically, there is no other foreign issue more deserving of your attention or rime’ than the future of the Soviet nuclear arsenal in the wake of the country’s breakup. A Yugoslav-type situation with 30,000 nuclear weapons presents and incredible danger to the American people – and they know it and will hold us accountable if we don’t respond.’

“Baker thought that there was no value, and much risk, for the United States in nuclear rivalries among former Soviet states. Only one nuclear power could be allowed to emerge out of the Soviet Union: Russia. In part, this preference was due to the fact that Washington had a long history of dealing with Moscow on issues of arms control. Better stick with the devil you know, Baker believed, than deal with a whole new set of nuclear powers. As a result, Washington’s and Moscow’s interests suddenly became identical: both wanted all the nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union destroyed or relocate to Russia. The Bush administration and its successor worked hard in cooperation with Yeltsin to make that happen, using a series of inducements and diplomatic arm-twisting.

“Scarred by the horrors of the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe – which irradiated sizable areas of Belarus, Ukraine and other European countries – the Ukrainians initially seemed inclined to go along with U.S. and Russian plans for Ukraine’s denuclearization. But the ongoing imperial contest with Russia, particularly over the status of Crimea, led to rethinking in Kyiv. In May 1992, Moscow and Kyiv clashed over the fate of the Soviet Union’s Black Sea Fleet, which was based in Sevastopol. A dispute over the division of the fleet and control of the port would drag on for the next five years. As tensions flared, the Ukrainian parliament began making new demands in exchange for giving up the formerly Soviet missiles: financial compensation, formal recognition of Ukraine’s borders, and security guarantees.

“At an international summit held in Budapest in December 1994, more than 50 leaders were scheduled to create the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe out of a pre-existing conference of the same name. British, Russian, and U.S. leaders used the occasion to offer Kyiv the so-called Budapest Memorandum in an effort to assuage Ukrainian concerns. The memorandum’s goal was to get denuclearization back on track and to finalize the removal of nuclear weapons from Ukraine. In exchange for parting with all its weapons, Ukraine would get assurances of territorial integrity – not guarantees, a meaningful difference, but one that seemed not to matter so much in the heady, hopeful post-Cold War world.

“Washington had by then also spearheaded the establishment of a NATO-related security organization called the Partnership for Peace. This partnership was open to post-Soviet states – meaning that it offered a security berth to Ukraine, thus providing it with a further inducement to give up its nukes.

“Ukraine decided to sign the memorandum, despite not getting firmer guarantees. Kyiv did so because it had a weak hand; the country was on the verge of economic collapse. But with the United States and Russia allied against it on this issue, Ukraine faced the prospect of international isolation if it did not sign. Signing the agreement seemed to be a way to escape isolation and get badly needed financial assistance.

“The Budapest Memorandum initially seemed to represent a significant moment of shared triumph and unity between Washington and Moscow. As U.S. President Bill Clinton advised Yeltsin, they were jointly engaged in a worthy cause: ‘We have the first chance ever since the rise of the nation state to have the entire continent of Europe live in peace.’ Clinton rightly emphasized that Ukraine was the ‘linchpin’ of that effort.

“But recently declassified documents show that the triumph was incomplete – something that Ukraine recognized at the time but could do little about. As a Ukrainian diplomat confessed to his U.S. counterparts just before signing the Budapest Memorandum, his country had ‘no illusions that the Russians would live up to the agreements they signed.’ Kyiv knew that the old imperial center would not let Ukraine escape so easily. Instead, the government of Ukraine was simply hoping ‘to get agreements that will make it possible for [Kyiv] to appeal for assistance.. when the Russians violate’ them.

“And in a sign that there was worse to come, Yeltsin blindsided Clinton at the same conference with an attack on U.S. plans to enlarge NATO, saying that Clinton was forcing the world from a Cold War into a ‘cold peace.’ Newly available documents reveal that this broadside triggered a showdown in Washington just before Christmas 1994. U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry insisted on an audience with the president to warn him that a wounded Moscow would lash out in response to NATO expansion and derail strategic arms control talks...

“But Perry’s efforts were to no avail. As the removal of nuclear weapons from Ukraine resumed after the signing of the Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine became much less of a priority for Washington. Meanwhile, opponents of the Partnership for Peace, who wanted to expand NATO proper as soon as possible to a few select states rather than build another, looser security alliance from the Atlantic to the Pacific, gained new momentum thanks to the midterm election victory of the Republican Party, which was in favour of NATO enlargement, in November, 1994. Despite Perry’s efforts, Clinton made clear to his secretary of defense that the United States would now proceed with NATO enlargement into central and eastern Europe...”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Plochy and Sarotte, “The Shoals of Ukraine”, *Foreign Affairs*, November 22, 2019, pp. 84-88.

7. THE SOVIET NATIONALITIES

Perestroika and *Glasnost'*, promising as they did a completely new USSR, could not fail to bring into the open suppressed nationalist sentiments. Eventually these, stimulated by the liberation of Eastern Europe, led to the break-up and destruction of the USSR. The major steps in this process were: the *de facto* independence of the Baltic republics in August, 1989, then that of the Russian Republic (RSFSR) in 1990, and finally that of Ukraine in 1991.

By renouncing the use of force to preserve the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev, as we have seen, made possible the liberation of those countries from Communism. This was partly the product of democratic idealism, but not entirely. It was partly also the product of miscalculation. He wanted to slow the process by a Law of Secession, thinking that nations not threatened by violence would voluntarily want to stay in the Soviet Union.

They did not. This failure to understand would cost Gorbachev dearly...

Landsbergis, future president of Lithuania, explained the situation as follows: "We are an occupied country. To pretend we are grateful for a little democracy, to go through some sort of referendum to prove our commitment to independence, to talk with Mr Gorbachev as anything other than a foreign leader, is to live a lie... We have never considered ourselves a genuine part of the Soviet Union. That is something Gorbachev does not quite understand. We wish his *perestroika* well, but the time has come for us to go our own way."⁸⁰

In December 1988, writes Norman Lowe, "there were the first disturbing signs that Gorbachev did not understand the strength of nationalist feelings or the delicacy of the relationship between Moscow and some of the republics. He decided to get rid of the 74-year old Dimukhamad Kunayev, who had been leader of Kazakhstan since 1954, who had a reputation for spectacular corruption and ran his republic with the help of his numerous family and friends, like a mafia boss. An article in *Izvestiya* claimed that among his other considerable assets, he had control of 247 hotels, 414 guest flats, 84 cottages, 22 hunting lodges and 350 hospital beds. Certainly Kunayev deserved to go, but Gorbachev made the mistake of replacing him with a Russian, Gennady Kolbin, who had just distinguished himself by cleaning up the corruption in Georgia, and who, it was hoped, would repeat the exercise in Kazakhstan. This was insensitive to say the least, Kazakh nationalist feelings were outraged that a Russian should be foisted on them as their next leader. There was a huge protest demonstration in front of communist party headquarters in Alma Ata, the capital, although it was not entirely spontaneous – Kunayev's family and friends had a hand in its organization. Moscow decided that the Kazakhs needed a sharp lesson: troops were brought in to disperse the demonstrators, who seemed to be mostly students. Some were killed, hundreds injured and thousands were arrested. Gorbachev was shocked by the reaction and by its bloodshed, but did not back down, at least not immediately; it was only in

⁸⁰ Landsbergis, in Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

1989 that he replaced Kolbin with a native Kazakh.

“The problem for Gorbachev was that as *glasnost* and *perestroika* came on full stream, with freedom of expression and democratization, further tensions were inevitable. The various nationalities began to demand greater local control and self-determination. Nor was it just as simple case of non-Russians resisting control from Moscow; in each of the republics there were conflicts between minorities and the dominant nationality group. In Georgia, for example, there were two minority groups – the Abkhaz who were Muslims, and the Ossetins – who each had small autonomous regions of their own within Georgia. There were constant clashes between the Abkhaz and the Ossetins on the one hand, who protested that the Georgians were trying to interfere excessively in their regions, and the Georgians on the other hand, who complained that the non-Georgians were expecting too much. The most disturbing development was the emergence of a Russian national movement under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin which aimed to use the Russian republic as an alternative power base from which to challenge the hard-line communists and Gorbachev as well. So although Gorbachev had no intention of causing the break-up of the USSR, it seems that this outcome was almost inevitable if he continued with the democratizing element of *perestroika*. However, Gorbachev believed that it ought to be possible to work out a middle way between the existing Soviet system and a total breakdown, in which every national group, not just the fifteen republics, became completely independent. He hoped, by persuasion and negotiation, to arrive at a system which still preserved a high level of integration and co-operation.

“The first major nationalist test for Gorbachev was a conflict between the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan over possession of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The population of this area was 80 per cent Armenian but it had been placed under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan by Stalin in 1923. Armenian resentment had smouldered on and off since then. They had many grievances: they were Christians, whereas the Azeris were mainly Shiite Muslims; they felt that their culture was suppressed and that they were exploited economically by the Azeri authorities in Baku. The new atmosphere in the USSR encouraged the Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh to request a transfer to the jurisdiction of Armenia (February 1988). Demonstrations were held in Yerevan, the Armenian capital, in support of this demand, and clashes developed between Azeris and Armenians in other parts of Azerbaijan. The worst violence occurred in the city of Sumgatt on the Caspian Sea near Baku: 26 Armenians and 6 Azeris were killed. Moscow’s official line was that the request could not be granted, since it would encourage scores of similar demands and clashes; however, Gorbachev did promise a just solution. In June 1988 the Armenian Supreme Court voted to incorporate Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia, but this was rejected by the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan. As disorders continued, the Supreme Soviet decided to place Nagorno-Karabakh under direct rule from Moscow (January 1989). This did nothing to solve the problem: ominous border clashes occurred, and the two republics were on the brink of civil war.

“In April 1988 a new crisis suddenly erupted in Georgia, where there was a rapidly growing nationalist movement. Its aims were to press for autonomy from

the USSR, but at the same time to deny the Abkhaz people their independence from Georgia. Huge demonstrations were organized, stretching over several days, in the capital, Tbilisi, and although they were almost entirely peaceful, the local communist party leaders decided to use troops to disperse the crowds. Twenty of the demonstrators were killed, including several policemen who tried to protect women in the crowd from assault by the troops, and hundreds were injured: but the violence was counter-productive: public opinion in Georgia was outraged and quickly turned against the Georgian Communist Party. There was a rush of support for the nationalists and for complete independence from the USSR. In November the Georgian Supreme Soviet declared sovereignty and decided that the Soviet occupation of Georgia in 1921 violated the treaty signed in 1920 between Georgia and Russia. There was great controversy about who should be held responsible for the Tbilisi tragedy, and for a time there was a tendency to blame Gorbachev. But in fact there is plenty of evidence that he did his best to prevent violence. He stated categorically that the situation must be resolved by political means and through dialogue. A commission of enquiry later put the blame on the local party leadership, and on the general in charge of the troops, who was moved elsewhere...⁸¹

The next domino to fall was the Baltic States... Significantly, freedom for the Baltic States followed after they gained a recognition from Moscow that the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 had been illegal... In 1987, writes Mazower, "powerful environmental protest movements gave way in the Baltic states to large unofficial demonstrations commemorating the anniversary of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which had effectively sealed the fate of the inter-war independent republics. Further anniversaries also gathered large crowds, plunging the authorities into disarray and paving the way for the more intense struggle of the following year. At the end of 1988 Estonia proclaimed its sovereignty as an autonomous republic – the first to do so in the USSR – and declared the primacy of republic over federal law. 'National' emblems of the pre-war republics were increasingly visible in demonstrations organized by massively popular pro-autonomy groups which wrested unofficial recognition from the local authorities.

"What weakened the latter and made them hesitate to crack down on the demonstrators were the signs from the Kremlin that it was opposed to a hard line. By early 1989 the popular fronts had scored a resounding success, trouncing the Party in elections to the new USSR Congress of People's Deputies, and they started moving cautiously from demands for 'autonomy' to full independence."⁸²

"In the course of 1989," writes Serhii Plokhy, "after declaring the sovereign status of their republics, the Balts (Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians) went into the streets to protest Moscow's planned changes to the Soviet constitution. These changes would have allowed the center to override republican legislation with all-Union laws and unilaterally decide the issue of secession from the Union. In an

⁸¹ Lowe, *op. cit.*, pp. 424-426.

⁸² Mazower, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

overwhelming rejection of Soviet sovereignty over their republics, the activists of the Baltic national movements, called national fronts, organized a Baltic Way in August 1989 – a human chain linking their capitals, Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius. The demonstration was organized on the fiftieth anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact...

“With the support of local communist party committees, which had everything to lose from the Baltic revolt, Moscow struck back, mobilizing ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in support of the Union. Feeling threatened by the revival of local languages and cultures, the Russian-speaking population of the region generally supported the International Front in Latvia and the International Movement in Estonia, Moscow-backed political organizations whose task it was to counteract the popular fronts created by the titular nationalists.

“Estonia and Latvia were more vulnerable to pressure from the center than Lithuania. Latvia, with a population of 2.6 million, was in the most precarious position: Latvians constituted only 52 per cent of the population, followed by Russians with 36 percent, Ukrainians with 4.5 percent, and Belarussians with 3.5 percent. In Estonia, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians made up 35 percent of the population. Most of the Russian and East Slavic inhabitants of the Baltic republics were recent migrants working in industrial enterprises established and run by Moscow after World War II. If the popular fronts were pushing for the sovereignty and eventual independence of the Baltic republics, the international fronts were pushing back.

“In Russia, the first wave of political mobilization came with semi-free elections to the Soviet super-parliament in the spring of 1989 and continued through the elections of the Russian parliament in 1990. Like the dissident movement of the previous decade, this one had two main ideological poles – liberalism and nationalism. The proponents of the latter were conservative in their economic and social agenda, stressing the wrongs done to the Russians by the communist regime, while at the same time demonstrating loyalty to communism and solidarity with movements of the International Front type in the Baltics.

“The merger of communism and nationalism in Russia received its institutional embodiment in the creation of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation – a process long opposed and disrupted by Gorbachev, who feared that a separate Russian party would spell the end of Soviet communist unity, and thus of the Union as such. Maintaining the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as a de facto Russian party had been a consistent policy since the times of Lenin, who wanted a union of republics but was quite content with Russian dominance over the party. But the Russian communists now demanded a party of their own so as to be on a par with the communists of Ukraine, Belarus, and other republics. They finally got their way in the summer of 1990. The Russian conservatives were now on a collision course with the Union.

“Another aspect of Russian mobilization came into existence not in opposition to the non-Russians but in alliance with them. The leaders of the Russian liberal

intelligentsia shared their vision of democratic transformation of their societies with the leaders of the popular fronts and national movements in the Baltics, Ukraine, and some other Soviet republics. In the summer of 1989, they joined forces in the Interregional Group of Deputies at the first semi-democratically elected Soviet super-parliament, the Congress of People's Deputies. The Interregional Group found support in Moscow, Leningrad, and other large industrial cities of Russia and the Soviet Union. The democratically minded deputies all rebelled against the Communist Party's monopoly of power, but their ability to define a positive political agenda was limited, with members from the non-Russian republics putting their ethno-national demands first. Gorbachev and the center, for their part, found support among conservative deputies from the non-Russian republics, especially those of Central Asia.

"Democratic Russia, a coalition of liberal deputies of the Interregional Group, contested the Russian parliamentary elections of March 1990 and won 190 seats, or roughly one-fifth of the total. This made the Russian liberals switch the focus of their activities from the all-Union to the Russian parliament. In May 1989, they were able to elect their leader, the fifty-eight-year-old Boris Yeltsin, a former Moscow party boss who had parted ways with Gorbachev over the pace of democratic reforms, to the all-important post of chairman. A party official by background, a maverick by nature, and an autocrat by inclination, Yeltsin embraced the program of the democratic transformation of society. The Russian reformers then decided to press ahead with democratic and market reforms by using their power in the Russian parliament. In June 1990, with two-thirds of the deputies in favor, a resolution was adopted on the sovereignty of the Russian Federation, officially still titled the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

"The idea appealed to liberals and conservatives alike. Yeltsin told the deputies: 'For Russia today, the center is both a cruel exploiter and a miserly benefactor, as well as a favourite with no concern for the future. We must put an end to the injustice of these relations.' Yeltsin gave voice to the emerging liberal Russian nationalism movement. The object of its loyalty was not the idea of a 'small' ethnically based Russian nation, or of the big Russian nation of imperial times, but a nation to be formed out of the inhabitants of the Russian Federation. Although the Russian Federation was overwhelmingly Russian (82 percent) in ethnic composition, it included numerous autonomous republics and regions that had not become Union republics for a variety of demographic, geographic, or historical reasons. With the sole exception of the former East Prussia, now constituted as the Kaliningrad region of Russia, the Russian Federation was territorially continuous from Leningrad (soon to be renamed St. Petersburg) on the Baltic to Vladivostok on the Pacific. It was a good candidate to form a nation, but in 1990 there were numerous odds against that proposition.

"In June 1991, Yeltsin won the race for the newly created office of president of the Russian Federation in competition with candidates supported by his onetime protector and then nemesis, the president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. Unlike Gorbachev, who had been installed in office in the spring of 1990 by the Soviet parliament, Yeltsin was elected by the voters of Russia. As he took office,

Yeltsin pledged his loyalty to the citizens of the Russian Federation, promising to defend the interests of the republic and its peoples.

“Yeltsin and his liberal supporters regarded the Russian Federation as an engine for the political and economic reform of the entire Union. But the nationalists who voted for Yeltsin saw Russian institutions as an instrument for enhancing Russian identity, providing support for Russian culture, and cutting financial support for the Union republics, which they claimed were bleeding the Russian economy white. But no one advocated the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the summer of 1991, by creating an alliance with leaders of other republics, Yeltsin forced the embattled Gorbachev to agree to a reform of the Union that would benefit Russia and other well-to-do republics. The new Union treaty negotiated by Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan in July 1991 gave the preponderance of economic and political power to the republican leaders, first and foremost to the leader of Russia.

“The deal was supposed to become the law of the land on August 20, 1991...”⁸³

⁸³ Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom. A History of Russian Nationalism from Ivan the Great to Vladimir Putin*, London: Allen Lane, 2017, pp. 307-310.

8. THE GULF WAR

“August 1988”, writes David Reynolds, “finally saw a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war. The conflict that Iraq had begun in September 1980 had turned into the longest conventional war of the twentieth century. The dead and wounded exceeded 1 million; the cost ran to \$1.2 billion. Although the fighting ended, no peace was agreed and, less than two years later, on 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded and occupied its neighbour to the southeast, the emirate of Kuwait.

“Faced with vast war debts and growing internal discontent, Saddam reckoned that invading Kuwait was the best way to increase his regional power, enhance his oil revenues and shore up domestic support. Personalities aside, Iraq – hacked by the British in 1921 out of the ruins of the Ottoman empire – was virtually landlocked, having only fifteen miles of coastline through which its exports (mostly oil) could flow into the Gulf. Territorial disputes with neighbouring Iran and Kuwait were features of its national history.

“So Iraqi war-making in 1990 was the act of a fragile state as well as a megalomaniac leader, but it was only possible because the West had built up Saddam as a major power. From 1983, as the war against Iran went decisively against him, the US and Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, came to his aid to prevent victory for the Islamic revolutionaries in Teheran. In 1983-4 Baghdad’s trade with Washington was three times the value of its trade with Moscow, officially its main patron. Saddam was receiving top-quality US intelligence as well as credits to build an oil pipeline to Jordan. Britain and other NATO states helped further to expand Saddam’s arsenal – often using a spurious distinction between military and non-military equipment to sell machine weaponry. The lack of Western condemnation of Saddam’s brutal methods of war in Iran (including the use of chemical weapons) encouraged him to expect similar indifference when he attacked Kuwait.

“The outcry that greeted Saddam’s attack – from Bush in Washington to Hosni Mubarak in Cairo – was partly anger at having been deceived and surprised, but there was far more at stake than amour-propre. Although Kuwait was an autocratic monarchy, it was also a small country brutally overwhelmed by a big neighbour. Within hours Iraq had been unanimously condemned by the fifteen-member UN Security Council; even Marxist Cuba supported the United States...

“By effectively promising to liberate Kuwait, the president was going against the firm advice of the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Colin Powell – the first black American to hold that post. Bush had been goaded by the media but he was also expressing gut instinct, and what stuck in his gut was Hitler.

“‘Half a century ago, the world had the chance to stop a ruthless aggressor and missed it,’ he told a conference of war veterans later in August. ‘I pledge to you: We will not make that mistake again.’ As reports of Saddam’s atrocities

in Kuwait kept coming in, the president's anger mounted. 'We're dealing with Hitler revisited, a totalitarianism and a brutality that is naked and unprecedented in modern times. And that must not stand. We cannot talk about compromise when you have that kind of behaviour going on this very minute. Embassies being starved, people being shot, women being raped – it is brutal. And I will continue to remind the rest of the world that this must not stand.'

"By occupying Kuwait, Saddam had doubled his control over world oil reserves to 20 per cent; if he also invaded Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, then the proportion would rise to over half. It is not clear that he planned to do so but, having been wrong-footed over Kuwait, US policy makers lurched from complacency to alarm. Within days the Saudis had acceded to American pressure and asked for US troops to help defend their kingdom. So began Operation Desert Shield.

"General Powell and Secretary of State James Baker still hoped that international sanctions might be enough to persuade Saddam to pull out of Kuwait, but Bush and Brent Scowcroft, his national security adviser, were gearing up for war. On 30 October, Powell gave a White House briefing on his recent trip to the Middle East, using a series of flip-charts to illustrate US plans. He reported that the first phase of the mission was virtually accomplished. 'We'll soon be in a position to defend Saudi Arabia.' Then Powell flipped on to explain how America could 'go on the offensive to kick the Iraqis out of Kuwait'...

"The die was cast, but Bush was still careful to proceed by consent. On 29 November the US secured a resolution in the UN Security Council authorizing member states to 'use all necessary means to uphold and implement' previous resolutions about Kuwait and to 'restore international peace and security in the area' if Iraq was not out of the country by 15 January 1991. This gave Bush the legitimacy he needed for war.

"The following day the president praised what he called the 'historic UN resolution'....

"... With the undeclared war in Vietnam in mind, Bush was at pains to obtain congressional approval, though the vote was close in the Senate. The White House offered various justification for the impending war – from stopping Hitlerite aggression to securing Western oil, from safe-guarding American jobs to denying Saddam a nuclear arsenal – but increasingly another slogan too precedence. As Bush told Americans on the day the war began in January 1991, 'We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order – a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations. When we are successful – and we will be – we have a real chance at this new world order, an order in which

a credible United Nations can use its peacekeeping role to fulfill the promise and vision of the U.N.'s founders."⁸⁴

The Americans were supported on the battlefield not only by the ever-faithful British, but also by the usually-but-not-this-time-obstructive French. And "among the Arab states, not merely Egypt and Saudi Arabia - long-standing American allies - were supportive but also inveterate foes such as Syria.

"So, when the defensive Operation Desert Shield became the offensive Desert Storm in mid-January 1991, it was a war waged by a unique international alliance. The mood in America, however, remained somber. Playing on these fears, Saddam promised 'a second Vietnam and the mother of all battles'.

"On 17 January the coalition began intensive bombing against Iraq's air defence and command systems, and then against similar targets in occupied Kuwait. Ground operations started five weeks later. The Allied commander, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, controlled 540,000 US troops and 250,000 from the Allies, of whom the Saudis comprised the largest contingent. Schwarzkopf planned a classic encirclement. Feint attacks north against Kuwait City would suck in the enemy, while the bulk of the US armoured and mechanized units plus a British and a French division, would sweep hundreds of kilometres west and then east to cut off the Iraqi forces.

"Execution was almost perfect. The ground war began on 24 February and lasted only 100 hours before Bush called a halt to avoid what seemed on TV to be a massacre. Later estimates range from 35,000 to 80,000 Iraqi dead. The coalition lost 240 killed in action, of whom 148 were Americans...

"For Bush, victory vindicated his new rhetoric. 'Until now, the world we've known has been a world divided - a world of barbed wire and concrete block, conflict, and cold war. Now, we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order.'

"Diplomatically, however, the impact of the war was less definitive. Bush deliberately stopped fighting when Kuwait was liberated; he did not invade Iraq or seek to topple Saddam, though he hoped and assumed that after such a disaster there would be a coup in Iraq. In the aftermath, as Saddam recovered, there was much criticism of US restraint, but Bush remained unrepentant. Defending his actions seven years later he argued that, in order to seek out and eliminate Saddam, 'we would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq. The coalition would instantly have collapsed.' Furthermore, he went on, 'we had been self-consciously trying to set a pattern for handling aggression in the post-Cold War world. mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression that we hoped to establish.

⁸⁴ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, pp. 532-533, 534, 535.

Had we gone the invasion route, the United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land.' Going in and occupying Iraq, thus unilaterally exceeding the United Nations..."⁸⁵

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The UN's founders had included the Soviet Union as well as the United States, and Bush's success in this venture was largely owing to the fact that the Soviet Union under Gorbachev and Shevardnadze did not apply the usual Soviet veto on western-led undertakings. This was the more surprising in that the USSR had been Saddam's main supporter. So, as Gary Kasparov points out, "the joint US-USSR statement condemning his invasion was another signal that the Cold War was fading..."⁸⁶

"Gorbachev was on his Black Sea summer holiday on August 2 [1990] when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Chernyaev got the word in a nighttime phone call from Sheverdnadze, who got it in turn from James Baker, who was his guest in Siberia...

"For Soviet intelligence agencies the news was too bad to be true. Iraq was Moscow's closest ally in the Persian Gulf, the two tied together with an official Peace and Friendship Treaty; it had brought billions in Soviet weapons, including advanced fighter planes, helicopters, SCUD missiles, tanks, and artillery, and still owed Moscow \$13 billion; it had KGB advisers for its secret police, Soviet military advisers for its armed forces, and Soviet technicians servicing its military-industrial complex. Some nine thousand Soviet citizens and their families lived and worked in Iraq, susceptible to becoming hostages if Moscow joined with Washington against Saddam Hussein.

"For all these reasons, the question of how Moscow should respond to the invasion was fraught... To Chernyaev's surprise, Gorbachev 'stated unequivocally that this was an aggression and couldn't be justified.' But Sheverdnadze and Chernyaev were almost alone in supporting him.

"While Baker was in Mongolia, Ross and Zoellick, with Tarasenko's assistance, drafted a joint U.S.-Soviet joint statement condemning Iraq's invasion which Baker (stopping in Moscow on his way back to Washington) and Sheverdnadze could proclaim together. But Defense Minister Yazov and KGB chief Krichkov vigorously objected, as did old Middle East hands at the Foreign Ministry who were loath to abandon Iraq. The head of the ministry's Middle East desk grabbed Tarasenko, rammed him against a wall and demanded to know what he would do if an Iraqi mob reacted to the proposed U.S.-Soviet statement by assaulting Soviet children living there.

⁸⁵ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, pp. 536, 537.

⁸⁶ Kasparov, *Winter is Coming*, London: Atlantic, 2014, p. 33.

“Gorbachev approved the joint statement, and during the autumn he stuck to his denunciation of the invasion. But whereas Shevardnadze, in agreement with Baker, was prepared to step up the pressure on Saddam and even threaten to use force against him, Gorbachev, according to Chernyaev, ‘was repelled by the mass use of modern weapons and deeply concerned to keep casualties to a minimum.’ In this, he was strongly influenced by Yevgeny Primakov, veteran Middle East specialist, long-time Saddam Hussein acquaintance, and now close Gorbachev adviser, who kept telling him it might be possible to negotiate Saddam out of Kuwait. Things got so bad between Shevardnadze and Primakov that when Gorbachev dispatched Primakov to Washington with a ‘peace plan’ for Iraq, Shevardnadze took it as a sign of Gorbachev’s mistrust and moved to undermine the messenger, whom he also suspected of plotting to replace him as foreign minister. Shevardnadze had his own aides inform Baker’s that he was against Primakov’s plan. ‘Shit all over it,’ was Zoellik’s interpretation of what Shevardnadze wanted Washington to do.

“Gorbachev was trying to have it both ways in Iraq, as he was in the USSR – to redirect history without using force. But on November 29 he finally went along with a United Nations resolution authorizing member states to use ‘all necessary means’, including force, if Iraq refused by January 15, 1991, to cease and desist. ‘Aggression must not be encouraged,’ he wrote later, ‘an aggressor, no matter who, must not be allowed to emerge the victor.’ Looking back, he declared that the Iraqi invasion constituted a ‘watershed’ in world politics. ‘the first time the superpowers acted together in a regional crisis’.

“In that sense it was a test for both Gorbachev and Bush, and particularly for each in the eyes of the other. For Bush the question was whether Gorbachev would match his highfalutin’ talk of a new world with concrete action. Gorbachev would find out whether Bush was finally ready to accept the Soviet Union as a full partner, or whether, despite all his praise, he was still primarily interested in exploiting Soviet weakness.

“Both seemed to pass these tests. Gorbachev did so by backing the UN resolution. Bush reversed the decades-old American policy of trying to bar the Soviet Union from the Middle East by welcoming it into the region – not just by recruiting Gorbachev as a partner against Iraq (thereby buttressing the anti-Saddam coalition Bush was organizing) but by agreeing to cosponsor an international conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When the two men met on November 19 in Paris (where they were attending a CSCE summit), Bush begged his friend ‘Michael’ (as he now called him) for assistance in the Gulf: ‘I need your help’. To which Gorbachev replied, ‘Let me say it rests on just the two of us.’ When the two leaders and their aides gathered for an informal dinner that evening, Bush recalled, they ‘joked and told stories’ with Gorbachev and his usually dour defense minister Yazov ‘roaring with laughter’. According to Bush, Gorbachev agreed with him that ‘it had been the best meeting we ever had, even better than Camp David.’”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Tauber, *op. cit.*, pp. 566-568.

9. PERESTROIKA HITS THE BUFFERS

After the Washington summit of May-June 1990, writes Tauber, “the Soviet position on the German question which Gorbachev had seemed to settle in Washington, hardened. At a Two-plus-Four meeting of foreign ministers in East Berlin on June 21, Sheverdnadze proposed that soon after unification the four former occupying powers retain their rights and that Germany in effect remain divided between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. German Foreign Minister Genscher passed a note to Baker calling the proposal ‘window dressing’, but Baker feared Gorbachev had been overruled in the Kremlin. One of Baker’s aides, Dennis Ross, challenged Sheverdnadze’s assistant, Tarasenko, after the meeting, ‘This is a total reversal. You guys just screwed us. What the hell is going on?’

“What was happening was what Gorbachev had predicted in Washington – that there would be hell to pay at home for what he conceded in the White House. Tarasenko told Ross that Sheverdnadze’s new stance was a Politburo position that had been ‘overtaken by events’, but could not be disowned until after the Twenty-Eighth Party Congress in early July, later adding that his boss had been forced to ‘go through the motions’ with the ‘military, hard-line document’. Deputy Foreign Minister Yuly Kvitsinsky, who feared that Sheverdnadze was losing ‘one trump card after another’, had prepared the tough proposals to slow the runaway train. Sheverdnadze in Berlin was as ‘beleaguered’ as Baker had ever seen him, as if overwhelmed by the domestic political struggle.”⁸⁸

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That struggle was indeed hotting up as Gorbachev prepared initiatives in both the political and spheres that definitely went beyond the bounds of Soviet communism even at its most liberal.

Gorbachev had been able to achieve so much so far largely because he was General Secretary of the Communist Party, an immensely powerful position, the seat of the Communist despotism since Stalin’s time. At no point did he ever have anything like a majority for his liberal policies in the Politburo (his liberal allies like Yakovlev and Chernyaev all occupied more junior positions). And yet he was able to push through glasnost’ and perestroika because the habit of obedience to the General Secretary was so deeply engrained among communists. However, as the country collapsed politically and economically, a challenge to his power within the party was bound to emerge eventually. Before that, however, there would be a challenge to the party itself.

For, as Norman Lowe writes, “it was inevitable that sooner or later a major challenge would be mounted to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. At the second session of the Congress of People’s Deputies which began on 12

⁸⁸ Tauber, *op. cit.*, p. 561.

December 1989, Sakharov tried to call for the abolition of Article 6 of the constitution. This was the occasion on which Gorbachev switched off Sakharov's microphone and refused to allow the proposal to be discussed. According to Archie Brown, Gorbachev had accepted, in private, at least since the summer of 1988, that Article 6 would have to go and that the party would have to give up its leading role and take its place within a multi-party system. 'But he wanted to do this at a time of his own choosing when executive power could be transferred from the Communist Party to elected state organs... He wanted to choose the right time... The problem was, however, that when the time was as yet scarcely ripe for the Communist Party establishment - in early 1990 - it was already overripe for a society which had seen Communist Parties removed not only from their constitutionally decreed 'leading role' but from actual power in Eastern Europe in the course of 1989. Nevertheless, Gorbachev pushed ahead with his plans. He prepared a new set of proposals to carry the transfer of power from party to state a further important step: two of the main points were the introduction of a presidential system, and the amendment of Article 6 so that the party abandoned its leading role, accepted a multi-party system and adopted humane, democratic socialism. In February 1990 the proposals were put to a Central Committee plenum. Predictably there was a stormy debate: the conservatives did all they could to wreck the amendments of Article 6; both conservatives and radicals objected to the new role of president, which, they said, would carry too much power. Vladimir Brovnikov, the Soviet ambassador to Poland, put the conservative case forcibly. 'The general secretary and his closest colleagues are trying to shove the Party onto the sidelines of political life, to turn it from a ruling party into a discussion club, or at least into a pawn in a parliamentary game. To let this happen would be a catastrophe for the country... our leaders are trying to cross out the Party as the leading force in society and to transfer the functions of the Politburo to the President.' However, Gorbachev got his way: the Plenum and the Congress eventually approved the proposals, and in March Gorbachev was elected President of the Soviet Union for a term of five years. Two new bodies came into existence to help the President to function: a Federation Council which consisted of the parliamentary leaders of all 15 republics, and a Presidential Council which consisted of senior ministers and any other advisors whom the President cared to choose. He could, he hoped, now function increasingly independent of the party.

"Gorbachev was soon disappointed once again. The presidency did not give him the power he had hoped for, partly because he had decided to opt for an election by the Congress of People's Deputies [the great majority of whom were communists] instead of by the whole population. His caution was understandable - there must have been considerable doubt as to whether he could have won an election across the entire Soviet Union, given that his popularity was dwindling rapidly, while Boris Yeltsin's was increasing. This meant that Gorbachev's presidency, unlike the Presidency of the United States, somehow lacked legitimacy. Further problems were caused for the new President by the results of the republican and regional elections held in February and March 1990. In the three Baltic republics the elections were won

by pro-independence candidates, many of whom were communists; on 11 March Lithuania formally declared itself independent of the USSR, the first of the republics to do so. In elections for the parliament of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR or simply Russia), the official party candidates did badly; worst of all for Gorbachev, on 29 May Yeltsin completed his dramatic comeback when he was elected Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet. Yeltsin now became the focus of attention for all the radical reformers. Although he had no power in the other 14 republics outside the RSFSR, in the political centres of Moscow and Leningrad, where it really mattered, Yeltsin now had an enormous advantage over Gorbachev; he was, in effect, the President of a democratically elected parliament which would become more powerful than the communist party. There were now two presidents, two parliaments and two governments in one country, and even in one capital city – Moscow. On 8 June 1990 the Russian republic announced its sovereignty, which meant, as far as anybody could be certain, that Russian laws took precedence over Soviet ones. Yeltsin’s parliament and government would be able to prevent Gorbachev’s policies being implemented in Russia, or alternatively, it could implement them in a more radical way than Gorbachev intended. Yeltsin was formally elected president of the Russian Federation on 12 June 1991.”⁸⁹

By the summer of 1990, Gorbachev was also preparing a radical change from the socialist command economy to a market economy. This was only partly out of the realization that the half-measures he called “economic reform” were only making the situation worse. It was also because he desperately needed massive loans to prop up an economy that was now failing to provide even the most basic foodstuffs and other materials – like soap, razor blades, tampons, etc. But even his friend President Bush was refusing to give him the loans he needed until he made more radical economic reforms.⁹⁰ A transition to the market economy would also have the major political advantage of bringing Yeltsin onto his side. (Indeed, Yeltsin might introduce such reforms into the RSFSR in any case.) However, that would precipitate the all-out war against the hardliners that Gorbachev had avoided so skillfully for so long.

Norman Lowe writes: “Gorbachev was attracted by the radical ideas of Grigory Yavlinsky, a young economist working for Yeltsin and the Russian government. He saw this as a chance to improve relations with Yeltsin; in August 1990 he persuaded Yeltsin to support the idea of a joint Soviet-Russian team of radical economists to draw up a plan for rapid marketization. The group produced what became known as the ‘500 Days Programme’, an extremely impressive (at least on paper) 240-pge document composed mainly by Stanislav Shatalin with help from Yavlinsky. It was a crash programme involving large-scale privatization, devolution of power to the republics and

⁸⁹ Lowe, *op. cit.*, pp. 420-422.

⁹⁰ Bush, who was himself under pressure from Congress, was also demanding that he pass a law allowing Soviet citizens to emigrate and renounce his economic blockade against rebellious Lithuania. (V.M.)

the setting-up of market institutions. There was no mention of socialism, and there was no way that any country with such an economic system could still be considered communist. Gorbachev signaled his approval of the documents publicly. And yet, as Archie Brown points out, 'they spelled the end of state socialism and were utterly inconsistent with the idea that Gorbachev was still a Communist in any meaningful sense of the term, even though he was still General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union!' There was pandemonium when the details of the programme became known. [Prime Minister] Ryzhkov and his supporters felt that it was unworkable, and he threatened to resign and take the entire government with him if Gorbachev tried to adopt it. The economic ministries and most of the party apparatus were opposed to it, and so were the KGB and the army which would both have their funding substantially reduced if the programme was carried out. One of the main points made by the critics was that since the republics would be in control of their own economies, that would deprive the central union authorities of most of their revenue-collecting powers; this would threaten the survival of the Soviet Union or indeed any other kind of union. Ryzhkov argued that it would cause mass unemployment and the closure of thousands of factories.⁹¹ Gorbachev himself began to have second thoughts, and invited another economist to prepare a compromise document combining the best aspects of the 500 Days Programme and Ryzhkov's more cautious plan. It was this compromise - known as 'Basic Guidelines' - which in October 1990 was accepted by the Supreme Soviet. However, it was an unsatisfactory crossbreed sort of plan, described by Yeltsin as like 'trying to mate a hedgehog with a snake'. What it meant in effect was that the conservatives had destroyed any possibility of a swift changeover to a market economy. Should Gorbachev have gambled and pressed ahead with the programme? The majority of economists now seem to think that, leaving aside the fierce opposition, the plan was unrealistic and the targets impossible; one economist said that it was the equivalent of Stalin's attempt to complete a Five-Year Plan in three years, and that if it had been implemented, the results would probably have been worse than today.

"Gorbachev's retreat over the 500 Days Programme offended Yeltsin and the radical reformers and ruined the prospect of any further co-operation. Over the next few months - from October 1990 to March 1991 - he took a distinct move towards the right. He was obviously worried by the strength of the right-wing opposition and saw this move as a kind of tactical retreat, or, as he said later, 'an attempt to steer a middle course'. On 7 November 1990, during the usual celebrations to mark the Bolshevik revolution, a man tried to assassinate Gorbachev with a shot-gun. Fortunately, the guards were alert and he was unharmed. But he was deeply shocked by the incident, and it may have helped to convince him that law and order needed to be tightened up. On 18 November his move to the right became unmistakable; he abolished the Presidential Council, the body which included his most radical advisers like

⁹¹ Ryzhkov's fears may have led to the major heart-attack he suffered in the autumn, leading to this retirement. (V.M.)

his close colleague Yakovlev; he gave himself as President greatly increased powers; and a new Security Council was set up, with seats for the KGB, army and police. Although Gorbachev repeated that he was still in favour of reform, it looked as though he was more interested in strengthening the traditional pillars of the communist state – the KGB, the *nomenklatura* and the threat of force. Yeltsin and the radicals were horrified. On 24 November the first draft appeared of a new Union Treaty, but it was unacceptable by the republics which felt that it was deliberately vague: it mentioned ‘joint control’ of policy, but the republics felt that in practice the centre would continue to dominate.

“Gorbachev’s problem was that as his relations with the republics and the radicals deteriorated, he found himself pushed more closely towards the conservatives. Having already sidelined Yakovlev, early in December he sacked his liberal Minister of the Interior, Vadim Bakatin, and replaced him with Boris Pugo, a hard-liner and former head of the KGB in Latvia. One of Pugin’s first actions was to confer with the defence minister, Dmitri Yazov, and the head of the KGB, Vladimir Kryuchkov, both hard-liners. It was arranged that the army would set up military patrols on the streets of major cities. Gennady Yanayev was appointed Vice-President: he was another conservative, dedicated to preserving the Union, and he was a man Gorbachev mistakenly felt he could trust. When Ryzhkov suffered a serious heart-attack in December, he too was replaced by the more conservative Valentin Pavlov. The hard-liners were becoming more vociferous in the Congress of People’s Deputies; in October 1990 they formed a group called *Soyuz* (Union) which, by the end of the year, numbered about 600 deputies. They were not all communist party members; what united them was the belief that the Soviet Union was worth preserving, that people should be proud of its industrial and cultural achievements, and especially proud of the fact that the USSR had defeated Nazi Germany. They saw Gorbachev as a wrecker who was out to destroy the greatest state in the world. During the session of the Congress which met in December 1990, *Soyuz* speakers called for strong measures to restore order and maintain the unity of the USSR. Gorbachev replied that he would use all his new presidential powers and if necessary would declare a state of emergency in any republic which tried to break away illegally.

“This was the final straw for Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze [who was from one of the breakaway republics, Georgia], the last liberal member of the government. On 20 December, in a dramatic and emotional speech to the Congress, he announced his resignation. For months he had been subjected to criticism from the army and the armaments industry, but since October, when the move to the right began, Gorbachev had ceased to support him, and he felt isolated. The army blamed him as the man who had ‘lost’ eastern Europe and allowed German reunification, although they knew perfectly well that these had been Gorbachev’s decision. Now his message to the Congress was that the reforming zeal of the liberals and radicals had been betrayed – by some of the reformers themselves: ‘Comrade democrats, you have run away,’ he told them: ‘Reformers have taken cover. A dictatorship is coming. I am being completely responsible in stating this. No one knows what kind of dictatorship it will be

or who will come or what the regime will be like. I want to make the following statement: I am resigning... Let this be my contribution, if you like, against the onset of dictatorship.' Shevardnadze's speech caused a sensation; he had not discussed it beforehand with Gorbachev, who was hurt and embarrassed, but most importantly it gave notice, both to the people of the USSR and the rest of the world, of the strong possibility that the conservative backlash would reverse all the changes of the previous few years. Shevardnadze had no concrete evidence of an impending coup at this point, but he sensed, correctly, that sooner or later the conservatives would try to remove Gorbachev.

"Events in the Baltic republics soon suggested that there might be something in Shevardnadze's warning. On 7 January 1991 Soviet paratroops entered all three republics with the excuse that they were searching for deserters. The situation in the republics had become more complicated, since the Russian inhabitants had organized themselves into pro-Moscow, anti-independence parties, opposed to the democratically elected governments of the republics. In Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, supporters of the pro-Russian party (*Edinstvo*) stormed the parliament building and called on the Lithuanian government to resign. President Landsbergis issued an appeal to all Lithuanians to rally to the support of the republic; a Lithuanian counter-demonstration responded by chasing the Russians out of the parliament. Russian officials on the spot exaggerated the situation, telling Gorbachev that Lithuania was on the verge of civil war, and calling for the imposition of presidential rule. Gorbachev accused the Lithuanian government of trying to 'restore the bourgeois order' and demanded that they reinstate the Soviet constitution. Without waiting for a response from the Lithuanian government, Soviet tanks and troops went into action in Vilnius, occupying key buildings and seizing the radio and television stations and the television tower, which was surrounded by some 5000 demonstrators; 14 people were killed and 165 injured, some seriously. However, the attack did not take place; the presence of many foreign journalists and the television cameras which had recorded the bloodshed for all the world to see, no doubt made the military think twice before repeating the operation. However, a week later in Riga (Latvia) Soviet troops attacked the Latvian Ministry of Internal Affairs building, killing four people; but again they stopped short of trying to seize parliament. "⁹²

⁹² Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 429-432.

10. THE AUGUST COUP

Yeltsin supported the Lithuanian rebels. So now the battle-lines were more clearly drawn. On the one side was Gorbachev with his hard-line appointees in the most important government posts, who were fighting to keep the Union intact. They were mainly communists, but not exclusively so. On the other side were Yeltsin, who had renounced his membership of the Communist Party, and the liberals, whose seat of power was now the Russian, not the Soviet administration. The central issue was now the relationship between the centre and the republics, and the need to achieve some kind of consensus on a union treaty.

On 17 March, 1991 “a referendum was held throughout the USSR on the question: ‘Do you consider necessary the preservation of the USSR as a renewed federation of equal sovereign [*not* Soviet] republics, in which the rights and freedoms of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?’ Although six republics (the three Baltic states, together with Armenia, Georgia and Moldavia) refused to take part, their share of the population was relatively small, and in fact, over 80 per cent of the Soviet adult population voted. 76.4 per cent were in favour of the Union. The Russian republic added another question to its referendum: ‘Are you in favour of an elected president for Russia?’ Seventy per cent voted ‘yes’. Now both Gorbachev and Yeltsin could claim that they had mandates – Gorbachev to reconstitute the USSR as a free association of sovereign republics, and Yeltsin to hold elections for the president of the Russian republic.’⁹³

By the middle of 1991 Yeltsin was President of *Russia*, as opposed to the Soviet Union, and as his power and popularity increased by virtue of his pro-Russian and anti-Soviet stance, so did Gorbachev’s decline. Gorbachev might have buttressed his position by sending in the troops in a more determined manner against the rebellious republics. But he, unlike Milošević in Yugoslavia, was not prepared to use force to preserve the old Union, which was interpreted by the conservatives as a desire to break up the Union – which was in fact far from true... Paradoxically, the American President George Bush, who arrived in Moscow at the end of July, 1991, still favoured Gorbachev the communist, in spite of his manifestly declining power, over Yeltsin the anti-communist: first, because he had just signed the START treaty with the Soviets, and feared that a breakup of the Union could destroy the gains of that treaty and lead to nuclear proliferation; and secondly, because the break-up of the Union could lead to bloody civil war... Garry Kasparov records meeting several American foreign policy experts in this period. Even at this late stage, they believed in the stability of Gorbachev’s regime, and laughed at Kasparov’s prediction that it would fall in 1991.⁹⁴

⁹³ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

⁹⁴ Kasparov, *Winter is Coming*, London: Atlantic, 2014, chapter 1.

After the referendum Gorbachev tacked back towards the centre ground. For in spite of his attempts at compromise during the previous six months (October to March), “the conservatives were not happy with him: how could they be when he was clearly bent on breaking up their multi-national state? He was becoming more impatient with their stubbornness and resistance to reform, and it was obvious to him that the majority of ordinary people were in favour of Yeltsin and reform. Gradually, from March onwards, he began to move away from the hard-liners and turn back to the advisers with whom he felt most comfortable – especially Yakovlev, Shakhnazarov, Chernyaev and Primakov. A meeting was arranged between Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and the leaders of the other eight republics which had taken part in the referendum; it was held in a dacha at Novo-Ogarevo in April 1991, and was the first of a series aimed at producing a constitution for a new federation. The final version was arrived at in August, but it was clear long before then that in the new union, the republics would have sovereign power and the centre would be reduced to dependency on the goodwill of the republics for its revenue. The new union would still be known as the USSR, but now the letters stood for ‘Union of Soviet Sovereign States’. Gorbachev came under severe attack in the Congress and at one point he even handed in his resignation. However, the radicals persuaded him to stay on and the conservatives at this point lacked the nerve to give him the final push. On 11 July the Congress approved the general principle of the new union. What have you done, boys?” a member of the Politburo was reported to have asked the Novo-Ogarevo team. ‘You have thrown away power, and with it the Union.’”⁹⁵

This harsh judgement was based on the fact, as Figes writes, that “in these negotiations Yeltsin (in a strong position after his election as the Russian President) and Leonid Kravchuk (angling to become the Ukrainian President by reinventing himself as a nationalist) managed to extract from the Soviet President a large number of powers for the republics which had previously belonged to the Kremlin.

“In August, eight of the nine republics had approved the draft treaty – the one exception being the Ukrainians, who had voted for the union on the basis of the 1990 Declaration of State Sovereignty. The draft treaty would have converted the USSR into a federation of independent states, not unlike the European Union, with a single president, foreign policy and military force. The treaty would have renamed it the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics (with ‘sovereign’ replacing ‘socialist’). On 4 August, Gorbachev left Moscow for a holiday in Foros in the Crimea, intending to return to the capital to sign the new union treaty on 20 August.

“Although the treaty was meant to save the Union, the hardliners feared it would encourage its breakup. They decided it was time to act. On 18 August, a delegation of conspirators flew to Foros to demand the declaration of a state of emergency and when Gorbachev refused their ultimatum, placed him under

⁹⁵ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 432-433.

house arrest. In Moscow a self-appointed State Committee of the State of Emergency (which included Yanaev and Pugo in addition to Valentin Pavlov, the Soviet Prime Minister, Vladimir Kriuchkov, the head of the KGB, and Dmitry Yazov, the Defence Minister) declared itself in power. A tired-looking Yanaev, his hands all-an-alcoholic-trembling, announced uncertainly to the world's press that he was taking over as the President.

“The putschists were too hesitant to have any real chance of success. Perhaps even they had lost the will to take the necessary measures to defend the system at its very end. They failed to arrest Yeltsin, who made his way to the White House, the seat of the Russian parliament (the Supreme Soviet), where he organized the defence of democracy against the coup. They failed to give decisive orders to the tank divisions they had brought into Moscow to put down resistance to the coup. The senior army commanders were divided in their loyalties in any case. The Tamanskaya Division, stationed outside the White House, declared its allegiance to Yeltsin who climbed on top of one of the tanks to address the crowd. Without a bloody struggle there was no way the putschists could succeed in an attack on the White House. But they did not have the stomach for a fight...”⁹⁶

“Next day more troops and tanks were brought into the city; in one incident three young protestors were run over by a tank and killed. By this time the White House was full of deputies and sympathizers who had come in to lend support to Yeltsin and democracy. The cellist Mstislav Rostropovich was there [he flew in from London], standing guard with an assault rifle outside Yeltsin's office; so was the poet Yevgeni Yevtushenko; Shevardnadze and Yakovlev arrived to offer encouragement. The atmosphere was tense, and it was by no means certain that they would emerge alive. Orders were actually given to storm the White House, but one by one the commanders found excuses to delay action. In the end the members of the state committee lost their nerve; by midday on August 21 they had decided to terminate their coup attempt and Yazov called off the military action. One of the commanders later said that it would have been a simple matter to take the White House; the barricades were flimsy and the tanks could have made short work of them. But he admitted that although it could all have been over in 15 minutes, the casualties would have been heavy. ‘It was all up to me,’ he said. ‘Thank God I couldn't bring myself to do it. It would have been a bloodbath. I refused.’ The coup was over, and the main leaders were eventually arrested, except Pugo, who committed suicide [after shooting his wife]. Yeltsin was the hero of the hour, and Gorbachev and his family... were able to return to Moscow.”

Although some have argued that Gorbachev was playing a double game, Archie Brown rightly points out: “It is unthinkable that for the sake of some illusory political gain Gorbachev would have subjected his wife to the

⁹⁶ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, London: Pelican, 2014, pp. 401-403.

uncertainty, stress and suffering which she endured between 18 and 21 August 1991, after which her health was never to be as strong again.”⁹⁷

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“Formally speaking,” writes Judt, “Gorbachev resumed his power; but in reality everything had changed for ever. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was terminally discredited – it was not until August 21st that Party spokesmen publicly condemned their colleagues’ coup, by which time the plotters were already in prison and Yeltsin had taken advantage of the Party’s fatal hesitations to ban it from operating within the Russian federation. Gorbachev, who seemed dazed and uncertain when seen in public, was understandably slow to grasp the import of these developments. Rather than praise Yeltsin, the Russian parliament or the Russian people for their success, he spoke to the cameras about *perestroika* and the indispensable role the Party would continue to have in renewing itself, promoting reforms, etc.

“This approach still played well in the West, where it was widely assumed (and hoped) that after the abortive coup things would carry on much as before. But in the Soviet Union itself Gorbachev’s anachronistic reiterations of failed goals, and his apparent ingratitude to his rescuers, were a revelation. Here was a man who had been overtaken by History and didn’t know it. For many Russians the events of August had been a true revolution, a genuinely popular uprising not *for* the reformers and their Party but *against* them: the CPSU, as the demonstrators shouted at Gorbachev on his belated arrival at the Russian Parliament, was ‘a criminal enterprise’ whose own government ministers had tried to overthrow the constitution. By the time a chastened Gorbachev had got the point, suspended the CPSU and (on August 24th) resigned as its General Secretary, it was too late. Communism was now irrelevant, and so too was Mikhail Gorbachev.

“Of course, the former General Secretary was still President of the Soviet Union. But the relevance of the Union itself was now in question. The failed putsch had been the last and greatest impulse to secession. Between August 24th and September 21st Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Tajikistan and Armenia followed the Baltic republics and declared themselves independent of the Soviet Union – most of them making the announcement in the confused and uncertain days that followed Gorbachev’s return. Following Kravchuk’s lead in Ukraine, regional First Secretaries like Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan, Askar Akaev in Kyrgyzstan, Gaidar Aliev in Azerbaijan, Stanislav Shushkevich in Belarus and others cannily distanced themselves from their long-standing Party affiliation and re-situated themselves at the head of their new states, taking care to nationalize as quickly as possible all the local Party’s assets.

⁹⁷ Brown, in Lowe, *op. cit.*, pp. 435, 436.

“Gorbachev and the Supreme Soviet in Moscow could do little more than acknowledge reality, recognize the new states and lamely proposed yet another ‘new’ constitution that would embrace the independent republics in some sort of confederal arrangement. Meanwhile, a few hundred yards away, Boris Yeltsin and the Russian parliament were establishing an independent Russia. By November Yeltsin had taken under Russian control virtually all financial and economic activity on Russian territory. The Soviet Union was now a shell state, emptied of power and resources.”⁹⁸

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Let us look more closely at the fateful day, August 22nd, on which Gorbachev confronted the Russian Duma. First, he was forced to confirm Yeltsin’s decree on Russian economic sovereignty, whereby, writes Plokhy, “as of January 1, 1992, all enterprises on Russian territory would be transferred to the jurisdiction and operational control of the Russian Federation. The Russian president also decreed measures to create a Russian customs service, form Russian gold reserves, and subject the exploitation of natural resources to licensing and taxation by Russian authorities. It was a ploy designed to make Gorbachev approve a decree that he would not otherwise have countenanced, as it undermined the economic foundations of the Union...

“That was not all,” writes Serhii Plokhy. “A separate decree signed by Yeltsin on August 22, the day on which Gorbachev resumed his functions as president of the USSR, banned the publication of *Pravda* and other newspapers that had supported the coup. Yeltsin clearly overstepped his jurisdiction by firing the general director of the all-Union information agency TASS and establishing Russian government control over Communist Party media outlets on Russian territory. These measures went far beyond the rights ascribed to the Russian Federation by the draft union treaty [agreed between Gorbachev and Yeltsin earlier that month] that had been derailed by the coup. They left no doubt that as far as Russia was concerned, the treaty was dead. But Yeltsin was not content with taking more sovereign rights for Russia. Having saved Gorbachev from the plotters, he was subjecting the Soviet president to a new captivity. Gorbachev’s aide Vadim Medvedev referred to Yeltsin’s actions in the first days after the coup as a counter-coup...”⁹⁹

Whether we call it a counter-coup or not is irrelevant. Leaving aside all constitutional niceties, which were now irrelevant and outdated, the fundamental and joyous fact was: the Soviet Union had ceased to exist *de facto*, if not yet *de jure*. The *coup de grâce* came on August 22, as crowds tore down the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky outside the KGB’s headquarters, and desperate communist officials tried to shred compromising papers (the machine was jammed by a hairpin!).

⁹⁸ Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 656-657.

⁹⁹ Plokhy, *The Last Empire. The Final Days of the Soviet Union*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2015, p. 137.

In the Russian parliament deputies were bombarding Gorbachev “with questions about his own complicity in the coup and demanded that the Communist Party, his real power base, be declared a criminal organization. Gorbachev went on the defensive. ‘This is just another way of carrying on a crusade or religious war at the present time,’ he told the deputies. ‘Socialism, as I understand it, is a type of conviction which people have and we are not the only ones who have it but it exists in other countries, not only today but at other times.’

“Then came a question about the ownership of all-Union property on the territory of the Russian Federation and the decree on Russia’s economic sovereignty signed by Yeltsin. ‘You today said that you would sign a decree confirming all my decrees signed during that period,’ said Yeltsin, referring to the measures he had signed during the coup.

“Gorbachev knew he was in trouble. ‘I do not think you have tried to put me in a trap by bringing me here,’ he responded. Gorbachev went on to say that he would sign a decree confirming all Yeltsin’s decrees of the coup period except the one dealing with all-Union property. ‘I will issue such a decree after signing the [union] treaty,’ he said to Yeltsin. This was not merely a delaying tactic. Gorbachev was trying to keep Yeltsin on the hook: signature on the union treaty first, property second.

“The Russian president did not like what he heard. His ruse of backdating the decree had failed, but he had a trump card in hand and knew how to use it against Gorbachev. ‘And now, on a lighter note,’ declared Yeltsin in front of the cameras, ‘shall we now sign a decree suspending the activities of the Russian Communist Party?’ Yeltsin used the pronoun ‘we’ to refer to himself. Gorbachev was stunned. All party organizations in Russia were suddenly on the chopping block. Without them, his already dwindling powers would be reduced to almost nothing. After realizing what was going on, he asked his ‘ally’, ‘What are you doing?... I... haven’t we... I haven’t read this.’

“The Russian president took his time signing the decree temporarily banning Communist Party activity on Russian territory. When Gorbachev told him he could not ban the party, Yeltsin responded that he was only suspending its activities. Welcoming the decree with applause and chants of approval, the Russian deputies went on with their interrogation of the trapped Soviet president. Gorbachev found it hard to recover from Yeltsin’s blow. ‘At that encounter,’ he remembered later, ‘Yeltsin was gloating with sadistic pleasure.’...”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Plokhy, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-44.

11. THE RUSSIAN CHURCH AND THE PUTSCH

As a result of “glasnost” and “perestroika” a huge pent-up demand for Christian services was released. Religious faith in Russia never grew more intensively than in the past three decades, said Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk in 2019.

“The epoch which we call ‘the second Baptism of Russia’ begun in our Church in 1988. The mass baptism of our population started in Russia in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s,” Metropolitan Hilarion said while relating the history of Orthodoxy in Russia to the Italian guests.

“Today we have 35,000 churches. That means that we have opened 29,000 churches over twenty-eight years, opening more than 1,000 churches per year or three per day... Earlier we had three theological seminaries or academies, and today there are over fifty,” the metropolitan stressed.

In Metropolitan Hilarion’s view, Russian history has “never witnessed such growth in religious faith as we have seen in the past twenty-eight years.”

“More than that, I know no other precedent of this kind anywhere throughout the history of mankind. We are aware that the epoch of St. Constantine the Great in the fourth century was a time when churches were built everywhere and mass baptisms took place. But there are no statistics for that period, while we do have statistics for the epoch we live in,” he added.

Noting that today many say that modern society lives in the post-Christian era, the representative of the Russian Orthodox Church said that it is not felt in Russia.

“With our own eyes we have seen the power of Christianity which enables us to open three churches per day today. We have witnessed how Christianity transforms human lives, to what extent Christ and His teaching are still important nowadays,” Metropolitan Hilarion said in conclusion.”¹⁰¹

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But to what extent was this a revival of *True* Christianity?

The failed coup of August, 1991, which really brought an end to the Soviet Union, took place during the Orthodox Feast of the Transfiguration, when Christ demonstrated the power of His Divinity before His three chosen disciples, Moses and Elijah. This was to remind all those with eyes to see that the fall of the Soviet Union – so unexpected by all except a very few, who

¹⁰¹ *Russian Faith*, “Russia Built 3 Churches Per Day, 1000 Per Year For 28 Years - A World Record”, September 13, 2019, https://russian-faith.com/church-politics/russia-built-3-churches-day-1000-year-28-years-world-record-n980?fbclid=IwAR0o5HbR0zOsFUilVKR1aTIWpSFYNQcc0P-eHlGi2OPp50Wf4RL7QqsW_Ws.

included none of the leading politicians – was the work of God, not man. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses” (Psalm 19.7), and for most of its existence the Soviet Union trusted in tanks and nuclear weapons. But in the end, for all its material power, it was brought down by the right Hand of the Most High...

The failed coup and successful counter-coup took place during the Orthodox Feast of the Transfiguration, when Christ demonstrated the power of His Divinity before his three chosen disciples, Moses and Elijah. This was to remind all those with eyes to see that the fall of the Soviet Union – so unexpected by all except a very few, who included none of the leading politicians – was the work of God, not man. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses “ (Psalm 19.7), and for most of its existence the Soviet Union trusted in tanks and nuclear weapons. But in the end, for all its material power, it was brought down by the right Hand of the Most High...

However, while the Soviet Union and the Communist Party appeared to have been destroyed, there was one part of the Communist apparatus that survived the coup and even extended its influence – the Sovietized Moscow Patriarchate. The survival of this “second administration” of the Red Beast boded ill for the future. It reminds us that while the fall of the Soviet Union was an all-important political event, it was not a *religious* event; and that without true faith and repentance for the sins of the Soviet past, mediated through the True Church, even the outwardly successful counter-revolution remained a house built on sand. As for the house of the MP, for all its external splendour, it remained that rickety house with a false Stalinist foundation, of which the Prophet-King David said: “Except the Lord build the house, in vain do they labour that build it” (Psalm 126.1).

This is clearly seen in the actions of the leader of the MP at that time, Patriarch Alexis (Ridiger) – Agent “Drozdov”, as he was known in the KGB... In June, 1990, the Hierarchical Council of the MP elected Metropolitan Alexis as the new patriarch. This was the man whom the Furov report of 1970 had called the most pro-Soviet of all the bishops, a KGB agent since 1958 who had been prepared to spy to the KGB even on his own patriarch, and who, when he was Metropolitan of Tallinn, said: “In the Soviet Union, citizens are never arrested for their religious or ideological convictions”.¹⁰²

On being elected, Alexis immediately, on July 4/17, 1990, the day of the martyrdom of Tsar Nicholas II, announced that he was praying for the preservation of the communist party!

Being a clever man, “Patriarch” Alexis quickly recovered from that gaffe, his sense of which way the wind was blowing; and there was no further overt support of the communists. True, he did attach his signature, in December, 1990, to a letter by 53 well-known political, academic and literary figures who urged Gorbachev to take urgent measures to deal with the state of crisis in the country,

¹⁰² *Keston News Service*, № 94, March 21, 1980 p. 1.

speaking of "... the destructive dictatorship of people who are shameless in their striving to take ownership of territory, resources, the intellectual wealth and labour forces of the country whose name is the USSR".¹⁰³ But the patriarch quickly disavowed his signature; and a few weeks later, after the deaths in Vilnius by Soviet troops, he declared that the killings were "a great political mistake – in church language a sin". Then, in May, he publicly disagreed with a prominent member of the hardline *Soiuz* bloc, who had said that the resources of the army and the clergy should be drawn on extensively to save the people and the homeland. In Alexis' view, these words could be perceived as a statement of preparedness to use the Church for political purposes. The patriarch recalled his words of the previous autumn: the Church and the Faith should not be used as a truncheon.¹⁰⁴ By June, the patriarch had completed his remarkable transformation from dyed-in-the-wool communist to enthusiastic democrat, saying to Yeltsin: "May God help you win the election".

Still more striking was his apparent rejection of Sergianism, the doctrine justifying the submission of the Church to militant atheism preached by the first Soviet patriarch, Sergei Stragorodsky. Thus in an interview granted to *Izvestia* on June 6 he said: "This year has freed us from the state's supervision. Now we have the moral right to say that the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergei has disappeared into the past and no longer guides us... The metropolitan cooperated with criminal usurpers. This was his tragedy.... Today we can say that falsehood is interspersed in his Declaration, which stated as its goal 'placing the Church in a proper relationship with the Soviet government'. But this relationship – and in the Declaration it is clearly defined as being the submission of the Church to the interests of governmental politics – is exactly that which is incorrect from the point of view of the Church... Of the people, then, to whom these compromises, silence, forced passivity or expressions of loyalty that were permitted by the Church leadership in those days, have caused pain – of these people, not only before God, but also before them, I ask forgiveness, understanding and prayers."¹⁰⁵

And yet, in an interview given to *Komsomolskaia Pravda* only two months earlier, he had said: "The most important thing for the Church is to preserve itself for the people, so that they should be able to have access to the Chalice of Christ, to the Chalice of Communion... There is a rule when a Christian has to take on himself a sin in order to avoid a greater sin... There are situations in which a person, a Christian must sacrifice his personal purity, his personal perfection, so as to defend something greater... Thus in relation to Metropolitan Sergei and his successors in the leadership of the Church under Soviet power, they had to tell lies, they had to say that everything was normal with us. And yet the Church was being persecuted. Declarations of political loyalty were

¹⁰³ *Keston News Service*, № 369, February 21, 1991, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Letter in *Literaturnaia Rossia* (Literary Russia), June 14, 1991; Oxana Antic, "Patriarch Aleksii II: A Political Portrait", *Report on the USSR*, vol. 3, № 45, November 8, 1991, p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ "Patriarch Alexis II: I take on myself responsibility for all that happened", *Izvestia*, № 137, June 10, 1991; Bishop Gregory Grabbe, "Dogmatizatsia Sergianstva" (The Dogmatization of Sergianism), *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), № 17 (1446), September 1/14, 1991, p. 5.

being made. The fullness of Christian life, charity, almsgiving, the Reigning icon of the Mother of God were also renounced. Compromises were made." In other words, Sergianism, though sinful, was justified. It may have "disappeared into the past", but if similar circumstances arise again, the "sacrifice" of personal purity can and should be made again!...¹⁰⁶

In September, 1991, the patriarch said: "A church that has millions of faithful cannot go into the catacombs. The hierarchy of the church has taken the sin on their souls: the sin of silence and of lying for the good of the people in order that they not be completely removed from real life. In the government of the diocese and as head of the negotiations for the patriarchate of Moscow, I also had to cede one point in order to defend another. I ask pardon of God, I ask pardon, understanding and prayers of all those whom I harmed through the concessions, the silence, the forced passivity or the expressions of loyalty that the hierarchy may have manifested during that period."¹⁰⁷

This is closer to self-justification than repentance (and was in any case contradicted by later statements). It is similar to the statement of Metropolitan Nicholas (Corneanu) of Banat of the Romanian Patriarchate, who confessed that he had collaborated with the *Securitate*, the Romanian equivalent of the KGB, and had defrocked the priest Fr. Calciu for false political reasons, but nevertheless declared that if he had not made such compromises he would have been forced to abandon his post, "which in the conditions of the time would not have been good for the Church". In other words, as Vladimir Kozyrev writes: "It means: 'I dishonoured the Church and my Episcopal responsibility, I betrayed those whom I had to protect, I scandalized my flock. But all this I had to do for the good of the Church!'"¹⁰⁸

The patriarch showed that the poison of Sergianism was in him still during the attempted *coup* of August, 1991. When the Russian vice-president, Alexander Rutskoy, approached him on the morning of the 19th, the patriarch pleaded "illness" and refused to see him. When he eventually did issue a declaration – on the evening of the 20th, and again in the early hours of the 21st – the impression made was, in Fr. Gleb Yakunin's words, "rather weak".¹⁰⁹ He called on all sides to avoid bloodshed, but did not specifically condemn the plotters. As Jane Ellis comments: "Though Patriarch Alexis II issued statements during the *coup*, they were bland and unspecific, and he was widely thought to have waited to see which way the wind was blowing before committing himself to issuing them. It was rather the priests in the White House – the Russian Parliament building – itself, such as the veteran campaigner for religious freedom, Fr. Gleb Yakunin, as well as the Christians among those manning the

¹⁰⁶ Grabbe, "Dogmatizatsia Sergianstva", *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ *30 Dias* (Thirty Days), Rome/Sao Paolo, August-September, 1991, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Kozyrev, "[orthodox-synod] Re: The Orthodox Episcopate of the Russian persecuted Church", orthodox-synod@yahoo.com. 28 November, 2002.

¹⁰⁹ Hieromonk Tikhon (Kozushin), personal communication; Natalia Babisyan, "Sviashchenniki na barrikadakh" (Priests on the Barricades), *Khristianskie Novosti* (Christian News), № 38, August 22, 1991, p. 21.

barricades outside, who helped to overthrow the Communist Party, the KGB and the Soviet system."¹¹⁰

It was not until Wednesday morning that the patriarch sent his representative, Deacon Andrew Kurayev, to the Russian parliament building, by which time several dissident priests were already established there. And it was two priests of the Russian Church Abroad, Fr. Nicholas Artemov from Munich and Fr. Victor Usachev from Moscow, who celebrated the first supplicatory service to the New Martyrs of Russia on the balcony of the White House. Not to be outdone, the patriarchate immediately responded with its own prayer service, and at some time during the same day the patriarch anathematized all those who had taken part in organizing the coup.

By these actions the patriarch appeared to have secured his position vis-à-vis Yeltsin's government, and on August 27, Yeltsin attended a memorial service in the Dormition cathedral of the Kremlin, at which the patriarch hailed the failure of the coup, saying that "the wrath of God falls upon the children of disobedience".¹¹¹ So in the space of thirteen months, the patriarch had passed from a pro-communist, anti-democratic stance to an anti-communist, pro-democratic stance. This "flexibility" should have surprised nobody; for the essence of sergianism, the root heresy of the Moscow Patriarchate, is *adaptation to the world, and to whatever the world believes and praises*. In view of this, it is not surprising that the successful counter-revolution against Communism that took place under Yeltsin in 1991, having no spiritual support in the True Church, quickly ran into severe difficulties. Not being nourished and supported by true religious feeling, it withered and died in the midst of rampant corruption, bloodshed and the disillusion of the people with the "freedom" they had now received.

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After the failure of the *putsch* articles began to appear revealing the links of the Church hierarchy with the KGB. Rattled, the patriarch wrote to Fathers Gleb Yakunin and George Edelstein that their articles were "full of the spirit of unscrupulous blasphemy against the Church."¹¹²

However, in January, 1992, a Commission of the Presidium of the Russian Supreme Soviet was established, investigating the causes and circumstances of the 1991 *putsch*. It confirmed that for several decades at least the leaders of the

¹¹⁰ Ellis, "The Russian Church: hopes and fears", *Church Times*, September 13, 1991. During the 1993 attack on parliament he showed a similar indecisiveness. "He promised to excommunicate the first person to fire a shot, but when shooting... thundered around the 'White House', he forgot about his promise." (Eugene Sokolov, "Tovarisch Drozdov - Vor Hevrons-kij" (Comrade Drozdov - the Thief of Hebron), *Russkoe Novoe Slovo* (New Russian Word), 18 July, 1997)

¹¹¹ He said that the Church had not supported the coup (although there is clear evidence that Metropolitans Philaret of Kiev and Pitirim of Volokolamsk supported it), but had "taken the side of law and liberty" (*Report on the USSR*, vol. 3, № 36, September 6, 1991, p. 82).

¹¹² *Zhurnal Moskovskoj Patriarkhii* (Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate), 1991, № 10.

Moscow Patriarchate had been KGB agents. Members of the commission - L. Ponomarev, V. Polosin and Fr. Gleb Yakunin – obtained access to the records of the fourth, Church department of the KGB's Fifth Directorate (in which the future president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, had worked), and revealed that Metropolitans Juvenal of Krutitsa, Pitirim of Volokolamsk, Philaret of Kiev and Philaret of Minsk were all KGB agents, with the codenames "Adamant", "Abbat", "Antonov" and "Ostrovsky".

This "news" was hardly unexpected. In 1989 Kharchev, Chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs, confirmed that the Russian Orthodox Church was rigorously controlled by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, especially its Ideological Department, and by the KGB.¹¹³ Again, Victor Sheimov, a former KGB major with responsibilities for upgrading the KGB's communications security system until his defection in 1980, described the Fifth Directorate as being "responsible for suppressing ideological dissent, running the Soviet Orthodox Church and laying the groundwork for the First Chief Directorate's subversive promotion of favourable opinion about the country's position and policy."¹¹⁴ One of Sheimov's jobs was to draft agents to infiltrate the "Soviet Orthodox Church". Again, in 1992 a former KGB agent, A. Shushpanov, described his experiences working in the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Ecclesiastical Relations. He said that most of the people working there were in fact KGB agents.¹¹⁵

But it was the Commission's report on March 6 that contained the most shocking revelations: "KGB agents, using such aliases as Sviatoslav, Adamant, Mikhailov, Nesterovich, Ognev and others, made trips abroad, organised by the Russian Orthodox Department of External Relations [which was headed by Metropolitan Cyril (Gundiaev), the future patriarch], performing missions assigned to them by the leadership of the KGB. The nature of their missions shows that this department was inseparably linked with the state and that it had emerged as a covert centre of KGB agents among the faithful."

Again: "The Commission draws the attention of the Russian Orthodox Church leadership to the fact that the Central Committee of the CPSU and KGB agencies have used a number of church bodies for their purposes by recruiting and planting KGB agents. Such deep infiltration by intelligence service agents into religious associations poses a serious threat to society and the State. Agencies that are called upon to ensure State security can thus exert uncontrolled impact on religious associations numbering millions of members, and through them on the situation at home and abroad."¹¹⁶

The findings of the Commission included:- (i) the words of the head of the

¹¹³ Kharchev, *Argumenty i Fakty* (Arguments and Facts), 1992, № 8, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Sheimov, *Tower of Secrets*, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1993, p. 418, in "The New Soviet Man", *Orthodox Christian Witness*, June 3/16, 1996.

¹¹⁵ Shushpanov, *Moskovskie Novosti* (Moscow News), 12 July, 1992, p. 20, in "The New Soviet Man", *Orthodox Christian Witness*, June 3/16, 1996.

¹¹⁶ Fr. George Edelshtein, "Double Agents in the Church", *Moscow News*, August 26, 2005.

KGB Yury Andropov to the Central Committee sometime in the 1970s: “The organs of state security keep the contacts of the Vatican with the Russian Orthodox Church under control...”; (ii) “At the 6th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, the religious delegation from the USSR contained 47 (!) agents of the KGB, including religious authorities, clergy and technical personnel” (July, 1983); (iii) “The most important were the journeys of agents ‘Antonov’, ‘Ostrovsky’ and ‘Adamant’ to Italy for conversations with the Pope of Rome on the question of further relations between the Vatican and the Russian Orthodox Church, and in particular regarding the problems of the uniates” (1989).¹¹⁷

The Commission also discovered that the patriarch himself was an agent with the codename “Drozdov”. This was not made public because, writes Fen Montaigne, “members of the parliamentary commission had told the patriarch that they would not name him as an agent if he began cleaning house in the church and acknowledging the breadth of cooperation between the church and the KGB. ‘So far, we have kept silence because we wanted to give the patriarch a chance,’ said Alexander Nezhny, a journalist who said his comparison of the archives and church bulletins convinced him that Alexis II is indeed ‘Drozdov’.”¹¹⁸

Later investigations confirmed the fact. Thus on March 18, 1996 the Estonian newspaper *Postimees* published the following KGB report from the Estonian SSR: “Agent ‘Drozdov’, born in 1929, a priest of the Orthodox Church, has a higher education, a degree in theology, speaks Russian and Estonian perfectly, and some limited German. He enlisted on February 28, 1958 out of patriotic feelings in order to expose and drive out the anti-Soviet elements among the Orthodox clergy, with whom he has connections, which represents an overriding interest to the KGB agencies. At the time of enlistment it was taken into consideration that in the future (after securing his practical work) he would be promoted through the available channels to Bishop of Tallinn and Estonia. In the period of his collaboration with the organs of the KGB, ‘Drozdov’ has proved

¹¹⁷ For more details of the parliamentary commission's revelations, see *Priamoi Put'* (The Straight Path), №№ 1-2, January, 1992, p. 1; № 3, February, 1992, p. 1; February, 1992; Alexander Nezhny, "Tret'e Imia" (The Third Name), *Ogonek* (Little Fire), № 4 (3366), January 25 - February 1, 1992; Iain Walker and Chester Stern, "Holy Agents of the KGB", *The Mail on Sunday*, March 29, 1992; John Dunlop, "KGB Subversion of Russian Orthodox Church", *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 1, № 12, March 20, 1992, pp. 51-53; "Three Leading Moscow Hierarchs Unveiled as KGB Operatives", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 42, № 3, May-June, 1992, pp. 25-29; Protodeacon Herman Ivanov-Trinadtsaty, "A ne nachalo li eto kontsa?" (Is this not the Beginning of the End?), *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), № 9 (1462), May 1/14, 1992, pp. 609; "Ne bo vragom Tvoim povem..." (I will not give Thy secret to Thine enemy...), *Vestnik Germanskoj Eparkhii Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Tseroki za Granitsei* (Herald of the German Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad), № 1, 1992, pp. 16-22; Fr. Victor Potapov, "Molchaniem predaetsa Bog" ("God is Betrayed by Silence"), Moscow: Isikhia, 1992, pp. 36-39; Joseph Harriss, "The Gospel according to Marx", *Reader's Digest*, February, 1993, pp. 59-63. See also I.I. Maslova, "Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov' i KGB (1960-1980-e gody)" (The Russian Orthodox Church and the KGB (1960s to 1980s), *Voprosy Istorii* (Questions of History), December, 2005, pp. 86-87.

¹¹⁸ Montaigne, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on May 3, 1992; quoted in "The Church of the KGB", *Living Orthodoxy*, vol. XIV, № 2, March-April, 1992, pp. 22-23.

himself in a positive manner, is accurate in his reports, energetic and sociable. He understands theological matters and international situations well, is eager to carry out tasks given him by us and has already presented a good quantity of worthy material... After securing the agent in practical jobs for the agencies of state security concretely worked out, we intend to use him to further our interests by sending him into the capitalist countries as a member of ecclesiastical organizations."¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, what had been revealed was so shocking that the parliamentary commission was closed down by Ruslan Khasbulatov, the President of the Supreme Soviet, at the insistence, according to Ponomarev, of Patriarch Alexis and the head of the KGB, Yevgeny Primakov. Again, one of the commission's members, Fr. Gleb Yakunin, was accused of betraying state secrets to the United States and threatened with a private prosecution. Fr. Gleb remained defiant. He wrote to the Patriarch in 1994: "If the Church is not cleansed of the taint of the spy and informer, it cannot be reborn. Unfortunately, only one archbishop - Archbishop Chrysostom of Lithuania - has had the courage publicly to acknowledge that in the past he worked as an agent, and has revealed his codename: RESTAVRATOR. No other Church hierarch has followed his example, however.

"The most prominent agents of the past include DROZDOV - the only one of the churchmen to be officially honoured with an award by the KGB of the USSR, in 1988, for outstanding intelligence services - ADAMANT, OSTROVSKY, MIKHAILOV, TOPAZ AND ABBAT. It is obvious that none of these or the less exalted agents is preparing to repent. On the contrary, they deliver themselves of pastoral maxims on the allegedly neutral character of informing on the Church, and articles have appeared in the Church press justifying the role of the informer as essential for the survival of the Church in an anti-religious state. The codenames I discovered in the archives of the KGB belong to the top hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate."

After citing this letter, Vasily Mitrokhin, former chief archivist of the KGB, and Professor Christopher Andrew of Cambridge University comment: "The letter to Aleksi II was unprecedented in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church - for, as the Patriarch must surely have been aware, DROZDOV, the most important of the KGB agents discovered by Father Gleb in the KGB archives, was in fact himself..."¹²⁰

In April, 1992, Archbishop Chrysostom of Vilnius admitted the charges against him: "I cooperated with the KGB... but I was not a stool-pigeon.... Yes,

¹¹⁹ *Estonian State Archive*, record group 131, file 393, pp. 125-126; James Meek, "File links church leader to KGB", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 13, 1999; Seamus Martin, "Russian Patriarch was (is?) a KGB agent, files say Patriarch Alexei II received KGB 'Certificate of Honour'", *Irish Times*, September 23, 2000; Arnold Beichman, "Patriarch with a KGB Past", *The Washington Times*, September 29, 2000.

¹²⁰ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, London and New York: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1999, p. 661.

we – or, at any rate, I, and I am saying this in the first place about myself – cooperated with the KGB. I cooperated, I gave my signature, I had regular meetings, I gave reports. I have my pseudonym or nickname, as they say – ‘Restavator’. I cooperated with them consciously so as insistently to pursue my own church line – a patriotic line, too, as I understood it, with the help of these organs. I was never a stool-pigeon, I was not an informer... But together with those among us hierarchs, there are still more among the priests, there is a mass of unworthy, immoral people. It was this immorality, in the absence of a church court among us, that the KGB used. They defended them from us, the ruling bishops, so that we could not punish them.”¹²¹

As he said to the Council of Bishops: “In our Church there are genuine members of the KGB, who have made head-spinning careers; for example, Metropolitan Methodius of Voronezh. He is a KGB officer [code-name PAUL], an atheist, a liar, who is constantly advised by the KGB. The Synod was unanimously against such a bishop, but we had to take upon us such a sin. And then what a rise he had!” According to ex-KGB Lieutenant-Colonel Konstantin Preobrazhensky, Methodius was in fact not a KGB agent, but “a regular officer of the GRU, the Chief Intelligence Directorate of the Defence Ministry”. In the KGB they call such people ‘officers of deep cover’. There are quite a few of them in today’s Moscow Patriarchate.”¹²²

At the same Council, a commission of eight MP bishops headed by Bishop Alexander of Kostroma was formed to investigate the charges of collaboration with the KGB. This commission has up to now produced absolutely nothing!

In view of the lack of a clear-out of KGB hierarchs, it remained true that, as the saying went, “the MP was the last surviving department of the KGB” or “the second administration of the Soviet state”.

Writing in 1995, John Dunlop concluded that “the overwhelming majority of the current one hundred and nineteen bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate were ordained to the episcopacy prior to August of 1991. This suggests that each of these bishops was carefully screened and vetted by both the ideological apparatus of the Communist Party and by the KGB.”¹²³

In fact, according to Preobrazhensky, “*Absolutely all* [my italics – V.M.] the bishops and the overwhelming majority of the priests worked with the KGB. After all, the Church was considered to be a hostile medium, and it had to be controlled through agents. Even the very mechanism of appointing bishops allowed only agents there.

“Bishops were put into the nomenklatura of the Central Committee of the

¹²¹ *Rossijskaia Gazeta*, 1992, № 52, p. 7.

¹²² Preobrazhensky, “Ecumenism and Intelligence”.

¹²³ Dunlop, “The Moscow Patriarchate as an Empire-Saving Institution”, in Michael Bourdeaux, M.E. Sharp (eds.), *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, 1995, Armonk, NY, p. 29. Keston College came to the same conclusion.

CPSU, and so each one was confirmed by the Ideological department. And what department sent documents there for important personnel appointments? You're right: the KGB. The certificate on the future bishop was prepared by the Fifth administration, which carried out a general watch over the Church, together with the spy service, if he had been even once abroad. Each of the certificates ended with the same phrase: 'He has been cooperating since such-and-such a year'.

"This was precisely the most important thing for the Central Committee of the CPSU! This phrase witnessed to the fact that the future bishop was not only loyal to Soviet power, but was hanging from it by a hook: after all, there are unfailingly compromising materials on every agent! And this means that no dissident outbursts were to be expected from this bishop..."¹²⁴

Other leading hierarchs in the Soviet bloc were communist agents. Patriarch Ilia of Georgia had been an agent since 1962. Metropolitan Savva of Poland, later head of the Polish Church, was recruited by the Polish communist security forces in 1966, with the codename "Yurek".¹²⁵

Being unrepentant KGB agents, it was impossible for these hierarchs to repent of their Sergianism. In September, 1991, Patriarch Alexis said, in justification of the Moscow Patriarchate's cooperation with Stalin in the 1920s and 30s: "A church that has millions of faithful cannot go into the catacombs. The hierarchy of the church has taken the sin on their souls: the sin of silence and of lying for the good of the people in order that they not be completely removed from real life. In the government of the diocese and as head of the negotiations for the patriarchate of Moscow, I also had to cede one point in order to defend another. I ask pardon of God, I ask pardon, understanding and prayers of all those whom I harmed through the concessions, the silence, the forced passivity or the expressions of loyalty that the hierarchy may have manifested during that period."¹²⁶

This is closer to self-justification than repentance (and was in any case contradicted by later statements). It is similar to the statement of Metropolitan Nicholas (Corneanu) of Banat of the Romanian Patriarchate, who confessed that he had collaborated with the *Securitate*, the Romanian equivalent of the KGB, and had defrocked the priest Fr. Calciu for false political reasons, but nevertheless declared that if he had not made such compromises he would have been forced to abandon his post, "which in the conditions of the time would not have been good for the Church". In other words, as Vladimir Kozyrev writes: "It means: 'I dishonoured the Church and my Episcopal responsibility, I betrayed those whom I had to protect, I scandalized my flock.

¹²⁴ Preobrazhensky, *KGB v russkoj emigratsii* (The KGB in the Russian emigration), New York: Liberty Publishing House, 2006, p. 41.

¹²⁵See also "World Orthodoxy: Savva of Poland admits collaboration with Secret Police", <http://newsnftu.blogspot.com/2009/05/world-orthodoxy-sava-of-poland-admits.html>.

¹²⁶ *30 Dias* (Thirty Days), Rome/Sao Paolo, August-September, 1991, p. 23.

But all this I had to do for the good of the Church!"¹²⁷

In another interview in 1997 Patriarch Alexis said, referring to the Church in the time of Patriarch Tikhon: "The Church could not, did not have the right, to go into the catacombs. She remained together with the people and drank to the dregs the cup of sufferings that fell to its lot."¹²⁸ Patriarch Alexis here forgot to mention that Patriarch Tikhon specifically blessed Michael Zhizhilenko, the future Hieromartyr Maximus of Serpukhov, to become a secret catacomb bishop if the pressure on the Church from the State became too great. As for his claim that the sergianists shared the cup of the people's suffering, this must be counted as conscious hypocrisy. It is well known that the Soviet hierarchs lived a life of considerable luxury, while lifting not a finger for the Catacomb Christians and dissidents sent to torments and death in KGB prisons!

On November 9, 2001, the patriarch threw off the mask of repentance completely, stating in defence of the declaration: "This was a clever step by which Metropolitan Sergei tried to save the church and clergy. In declaring that the members of the Church want to see themselves as part of the motherland and want to share her joys and sorrows, he tried to show to those who were persecuting the church and who were destroying it that we, the children of the church, want to be loyal citizens so that the affiliation of people with the church would not place them outside the law."¹²⁹

So the greatest act of betrayal in Russian history was "a clever step", which did not destroy the Judas and those who followed him but "saved the church and clergy"!

In October, 2002 Alexis had a frightening vision, news of which the MP immediately tried to suppress. St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves (+1054) appeared to him and said: "You have fallen away from God - you and many of your brothers - and have prostrated yourself before the devil. And the rulers of Russia are not real rulers, but crooks [there is a pun here: "*ne praviteli, a krivoteli*"]. And the church is pandering to them. And you will not stand at the right hand of Christ. And there await you the torments of gehenna, the gnashing of teeth, endless sufferings, if you accursed ones do not come to your senses. The mercy of our Lord is boundless, but your path to salvation through the redemption of your countless sins is too long for you, the hour of reckoning is near." Then he disappeared. The patriarch was in shock, he had never experienced anything of the sort before, and always responded with scepticism to such miracles. Shortly after this he felt ill. Those who gave him first aid affirm that the sick man was whispering, scarcely audibly: "It can't be, it can't be!"¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Kozyrev, "[orthodox-synod] Re: The Orthodox Episcopate of the Russian persecuted Church", orthodox-synod@yahoo.com. 28 November, 2002.

¹²⁸ Quoted by Anatoly Krasikov, "Tretij Rim' i bolsheviki (bez grifa 'sovershenno sekretno')" (The Third Rome and the Bolsheviks), in Filatov, S.B. (ed.), *Religia i prava cheloveka* (Religion and Human Rights), Moscow: Nauka, 1996, p. 198.

¹²⁹ <http://www.ripnet.org/besieged/rparocora.htm?>

¹³⁰ "Agentsvo Russkoj Informatsii", <http://www.ari.ru/doc/?id=1410#555>.

Many Russians, while not blind to the corruption in the patriarchate, supported it for the sake of the Fatherland; for Russia, they thought (correctly), could not be resurrected without a Church, and the MP was the only Church that they saw (incorrectly) as being able to become the religion of the State. However, as Protopriest Lev Lebedev wrote, “fatherland”, “Russia”, “the State” had become idols, more important than the true Faith, without which they were worthless: “The ideological idol under the name of ‘fatherland’ (‘Russia’, ‘the state’) has been completely preserved. We have already many times noted that these concepts are, in essence, pagan ideological idols not because they are in themselves bad, but because they have been *torn out* from the trinitarian *unity* of co-subjected concepts: Faith, Tsar, Fatherland (Orthodoxy, Autocracy, People)... Everything that one might wish to be recognized and positive, even the regeneration of the faith, is done under the slogan of ‘the regeneration of the Fatherland (Russia)’! But nothing is being regenerated. Even among the monarchists the regeneration of the Orthodox Autocratic Monarchy is mainly represented as no more than the means for the regeneration of the Fatherland. We may note that if any of the constituent parts of the triad – Orthodoxy, Autocracy, People – is torn away from the others and becomes the only one, it loses its power. Only *together* and in the indicated hierarchical order did they constitute, and do they constitute now, the spiritual (and all the other) strength and significance of Great Russia. But for the time being it is the ideological idol ‘fatherland’ that holds sway...”¹³¹

¹³¹ Lebedev, *Velikorossia* (Great Russia), St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 655.

12. UKRAINIAN INDEPENDENCE

The Union could probably have survived the breakaway of, for example, the Baltic republics or Georgia. The real problem was *Ukraine*, the second-largest republic, which, writes Judt, “had a history of independence (albeit chequered), last asserted and promptly lost in the aftermath of World War One. It was also intimately associated with Russia’s own history in the eyes of many Russian nationalists. Kievan ‘Rus’ – the thirteenth-century kingdom based on the Ukrainian capital and reaching from the Carpathians to the Volga – was as integral to the core identity of the empire as Russia itself. But of more immediate and practical consideration were the material resources of the region.

“Sitting squarely athwart Russia’s access to the Black Sea (and the Mediterranean) as well as to central Europe, Ukraine was a mainstay of the Soviet economy. With just 2.7 percent of the land area of the USSR it was home to 18 percent of its population and generated nearly 17 percent of the country’s Gross National Product, second only to Russia itself. In the last years of the Soviet Union Ukraine contained 60 percent of the country’s coal reserves and a majority share of the country’s titanium (vital for modern steel production); its unusually rich soil was responsible for over 40 percent of Soviet agricultural output by value.

“The disproportionate importance of Ukraine in Russian and Soviet history was reflected in the Soviet leadership itself. Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev were Russians who hailed from eastern Ukraine – Khrushchev returning there in the 1930s as First Secretary of the Ukrainian Party; Konstantin Chernenko was the son of Ukrainian ‘kulaks’ deported to Siberia, while Yuri Andropov had risen to the top as a consequence of occupying the strategically central post of KGB head in Ukraine. But this close association between the Ukrainian republic and the Soviet leadership did not imply any special regard for its inhabitants.

“Quite the contrary. For much of its history as a Soviet republic, Ukraine was treated as an internal colony: its natural resources exploited, its people kept under close surveillance (and, in the 1930s, exposed to a program of punitive repression that amounted to near-genocide). Ukrainian products – notably food and ferrous metals – were shipped to the rest of the Union at heavily subsidized prices, a practice that continued almost to the end. Following World War Two, the Ukrainian Socialist Republic was considerably enlarged by the annexation from Poland of eastern Galicia and western Volhynia: the local Polish population, as we have seen, was expelled westward in exchange for ethnic Ukrainians forced out of Poland itself.

“These population exchanges – and the wartime extermination of much of the local Jewish community – resulted in a region that was by Soviet standards quite homogeneous: thus whereas the Russian republic in 1990 contained over one hundred minorities, thirty-one of them living in autonomous regions,

Ukraine was 84 percent Ukrainian. Most of the rest of the population were Russians (11 percent), with the remainder comprising small numbers of Moldovans, Poles, Magyars, Bulgarians and the country's surviving Jews. Perhaps more to the point the only significant minority – the Russians – was concentrated in the industrial east of the country and in the capital Kiev.

“Central and Western Ukraine, notably around Lviv, the second city, was predominantly Ukrainian in language and Eastern Orthodox (Greek-Catholic) in religion.¹³² Thanks to the relative tolerance of the Habsburgs, Ukrainians in Galicia had been allowed to preserve their native tongue. Depending upon district, anything from 78 percent to 91 percent of the local inhabitants used it as their first language in 1994, whereas in the territories once ruled by the Czar even those who identified themselves as Ukrainians often spoke Russian more readily.

“The Soviet constitution.... ascribed national identities to the residents of its separate republics and indeed defined all its citizens by ethnic-national categories. As elsewhere, so in Ukraine – particularly the recently-annexed Western Ukraine – this had self-fulfilling consequences. In earlier times, when the local language was mostly confined to the remote countryside, and the cities were Russian-speaking and Soviet-dominated, the theoretically decentralized and federal character of this union of national republics was of interest only to scholars and Soviet apologists. But with the growing number of urban-dwelling Ukrainian-speakers, Ukrainian-language media, and a political elite now identifying itself with self-consciously ‘Ukrainian’ interests, Ukrainian nationalism was the predictable accompaniment to Soviet fragmentation.

“A non-Party movement – RUKH (the ‘People’s Movement for *Perestroika*’) – was founded in Kiev in November 1988, the first autonomous Ukrainian political organization for many decades. It gathered considerable support, notably in the major cities and from ‘60s-era reform Communists; but in marked contrast to independence movements in the Baltic it could not automatically count on mass backing and did not reflect any groundswell of national sentiment. In elections to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet in March 1990 the Communists secured a clear majority, RUKH won less than a quarter of the seats.

“Thus it was not Ukrainian nationalists who were to seize the initiative but rather the Communists themselves. The Communists in the Ukrainian Soviet voted, on July 16th 1990, to declare Ukrainian ‘sovereignty’ and asserted the republic’s right to possess its own military and the promise of its own laws.”¹³³

¹³² This is a mistake. The Greek-Catholics commemorate the Pope, so they are Catholic, not Orthodox. (V.M.)

¹³³ Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 648-650.

However, writes Serhii Plokhy, “Boris Yeltsin shared Gorbachev’s stand on Ukraine. Both believed that the second-largest Soviet republic could not be allowed to go its own way. If Gorbachev, in his conversations with Bush, raised the possibility of civil strife and even war involving Ukraine and other Soviet republics, Yeltsin was calmer but no less determined. ‘Ukraine must not leave the Soviet Union,’ he told the American president during their meeting in Yeltsin’s Kremlin office. Without Ukraine, Yeltsin argued, the Soviet Union would be dominated by the non-Slavic republics. His ‘attachment’ to Ukraine reflected the attitude of the Russian population in general. According to a poll sponsored by the United States Information Agency in February and March 1991, only 22 percent were opposed.”¹³⁴

Some of Yeltsin’s advisors believed that Russia should now take the place of the Soviet Union as the new imperial masters – an idea that was anathema to the Ukrainians.

In August, 1991, President Bush visited Kiev and delivered his famous “Chicken Kiev” speech, hoping to prevent Ukraine from leaving the Union. “Freedom is not the same as independence”, he said. “Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism.” Not only were the Ukrainians being exhorted to remain part of “the evil empire”: their own government was being called “a local despotism”! As if responding to this thought, on August 24 the Ukrainian parliament voted for independence; the decision would be submitted to a referendum to be held on December 1. And a little later the Ukrainian communist party – Ukraine’s “local despotism” - was outlawed...

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Plokhy writes: “August 24 marked a turning point, not only because of the declaration of Ukrainian independence but also because, on the same day, the three Baltic republics, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, received recognition of their independence from Yeltsin himself. The Russian president signed three letters that same day recognizing the independence of Russia’s western neighbors without attaching any conditions or questioning the newly independent states’ Soviet-era borders. His action left hundreds of thousands of ethnic Russians, most of whom had moved to the region after World War II, beyond the borders of Russia and the Union. Their concerns did not seem to be those of Yeltsin’s government.

“The new, democratic Russia refused to use force, economic pressure, or legal and diplomatic tricks to keep the Baltics republics in the Soviet Union. Territorial issues and minority rights did not seem to be significant issues at the time. In previous years, many members of Russian communities had opposed independence for the republics they called home. They joined the Moscow-sponsored and communist-run Interfronts, which welcomed

¹³⁴ Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom*, p. 49.

Moscow's crackdown on Baltic independence in early 1991. Their leaders, who had openly supported the coup in Moscow, now feared revenge on the part of local majorities. Yeltsin's Russian government largely ignored their worries. Its allies were national democrats in Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius, not Russian minorities who had sided with the Kremlin conservatives.

"Many in the non-Russian republics of the Union wondered whether the Baltic example set a precedent for Russia's dealings with other republics. It soon became apparent that it did not. The Baltics held a special place in the hearts and minds of Yeltsin's democrats, and Russian diplomatic recognition did not extend to all the Soviet republics that had declared their independence before or during the coup. Georgia, which had declared independence on April 9, 1991, much earlier than Estonia or Latvia, was not granted recognition. It was not clear whether Ukraine's declaration of independence would place it in the same camp as the Baltics or Georgia. Given that Yeltsin's reaction to Kravchuk's phone call on the eve of the independence vote in parliament was much calmer than Gorbachev's, there was some hope that Ukraine's position would be treated with respect and understanding in Russia. As it turned out, there was only a weekend pause. Kravchuk called Yeltsin with the news on Saturday, which meant that Russian reaction would not come until Monday, August 26, when the session of the Soviet parliament promised by the plotters on the first day of the coup finally convened in Moscow."¹³⁵

Yeltsin sent Ruts koy to Kiev to reason with the deputies; but he failed. And soon Kazakhstan, too, voted for independence. Yeltsin quickly understood which way the wind was blowing, and withdrew his objections to independence, as also his threat to redraw the boundaries between the two republics so as to include the Crimea and Donbass, with their large Russian populations, within Russia.

Putin would correct these "mistakes" by his invasion of the two regions in 2014...

As the summer of 1991 passed into autumn, it became clear that the Ukrainians were going to vote for independence in the referendum. Only Gorbachev among the major players stood out against independence. For a time he was supported by his friend and admirer President Bush, still worried about nuclear proliferation if the Union should go under, as also by the prospect of civil war between the republics on the model of what was happening in Yugoslavia.

However, by the end of November, under pressure from the Ukrainian lobby and the Defence department under Dick Cheney, he, too, had given in – to Gorbachev's great mortification. Gorbachev was still in control of the Soviet army and the Union ministries, but by a decree of November 30, Yeltsin withdrew funding for them. Without money, the Union was now all but dead.

¹³⁵ Plokyh, *Lost Kingdom*, pp. 174-175.

As the power of the Soviet Union collapsed in Ukraine, so did that of the “Soviet Church” of the Moscow Patriarchate in the republic. The collapse was most significant and important in Western Ukraine, the most nationalist region, where the MP had recruited many of its clergy since the region’s conquest by Stalin at the end of World War Two.

The MP’s spiritual impotence was illustrated by its surrender of its western borderlands to the resurgent Uniates. As we have seen, at the council of Lvov in 1946 Stalin integrated the Uniates or Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), who were Catholic by faith, but Orthodox in ritual, into the MP, and forced those Uniates who did not want to become Orthodox to go underground. When Gorbachev came to power, the Uniates began agitating for a restoration of their independence and the legalization of their Church. They were supported, surprisingly, by the chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs, Konstantin Kharchev, who insisted that local authorities keep the law in their dealings with believers and suggested the legalization of the Uniates and the free election of bishops. This roused the MP and others to complain about Kharchev to the Supreme Soviet. Kharchev was removed in June, 1989. But he made a telling comment about those who had removed him: “I suspect that some members of the Synod, from force of habit, have counted more on the support of the authorities than on their own authority in the Church.”¹³⁶

The UGCC finally achieved legalization in January, 1990, just after Gorbachev met the Pope in Rome. This represented the second major diplomatic triumph of the Vatican in the communist bloc (after the legalization of Solidarity in Poland) and the beginning of the re-establishment of Catholic power in Russia. However, even before they had recovered their freedom in law, the Uniates started taking over churches in Western Ukraine which they considered to be theirs by right. By December, 1991, 2167 nominally Orthodox parishes had joined the Uniates. Deprived of the help of the local authorities, who showed every sign of being on the side of the uniates, and discredited by its associations with communism, the MP seemed helpless to stop the rot.¹³⁷

They were also helpless to stop the revival of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church... In October, 1989, a retired patriarchal bishop, Ioann Bondarchuk, announced the creation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). He was immediately placed under ban by the patriarchate. However, the patriarchate decided to make some concessions to Ukrainian nationalist feeling by creating, in January, 1990, a supposedly autonomous but pro-

¹³⁶ *Ogonek* (Little Fire), № 44, October, 1989; *Keston News Service*, № 339, 30 November, 1989, pp. 16-18; № 341, 11 January, 1990, pp. 13-14.

¹³⁷ One reason was that for years the MP had been teaching its seminarians, many of whom came from the Western Ukraine, that the Orthodox and the Catholics were “sister churches”. 60% of those who joined the uniates graduated from Leningrad theological schools.

Moscow Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC-MP), led by Metropolitan Philaret (Denisenko) of Kiev. Later, Philaret was defrocked and anathematized by the MP, so he formed a third independent Orthodox Church in the Ukraine – the so-called “Kievan Patriarchate” (UOAC-KP).

Meanwhile, relations between the Orthodox and Catholics continued to deteriorate; and in March the Uniates withdrew from quadripartite discussions between Roman Catholics, Uniates, Russian Orthodox and the UOC-MP. Then, in June, the UAOC convened its first All-Ukrainian Council in Kiev, at which Mstyslav (Skrypnyk), who had been the leader of the Ukrainian autocephalists in the USA, was enthroned as the first patriarch in Ukrainian history. The UAOC received a further significant boost after the Ukraine achieved independence at the end of 1991.

In spite of tensions between the Orthodox and the Catholics, and between different Orthodox churches, the process of religious liberalization that was well under way throughout the Soviet Union continued also in Ukraine as the referendum on independence drew nearer. Thus on November 20, 1991, the presidential candidate Leonid Kravchuk “addressed the first all-Ukrainian religious forum. The former self-described chief atheist of Ukraine (under his supervision, the ideology department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine oversaw the country’s religious organizations) asked forgiveness of religious leaders, not on behalf of the defunct party but on that of the state he now represented. As communism and atheism lost their ideological appeal and religion returned to the religious sphere, religious denominations began to play an ever more important role in society. Ukraine, which accounted for two-thirds of all Orthodox Christian parishes in the USSR and was home to most Soviet Protestants, was considered the Bible Belt of the Soviet Union. It had become a religious battleground with the arrival of perestroika and glasnost’. Kravchuk called for interreligious toleration and support for independence. He wanted religious leaders to work towards the independence of their religious institutions but to avoid strife in doing so. On November 20, leaders of sixteen religious organizations in Ukraine pledged their support for government policy on religion. It was, in effect, a gesture of support for independence.”¹³⁸

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The newly elected Ukrainian President Kravchuk travelled to the Belavezha hunting lodge in Belarus to meet with his counterparts from Russia and Belarus. The avowed purpose was to sign a new Union treaty proposed by Gorbachev. But Kravchuk rejected that on the first day; in general, he would allow no treaty or agreement that included the word “Union”.

On the second day, the three Slavic nations signed an “Agreement on the Establishment of a Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS]” containing

¹³⁸ Plochy, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

fourteen articles. "The three leaders agreed to create the Commonwealth and recognize the territorial integrity and existing borders of each now independent republic. They declared their desire to establish joint control over their nuclear arsenals. They also declared their willingness to reduce their armed forces and strive for complete nuclear disarmament. The prospective members of the Commonwealth were given the right to declare neutrality and nuclear-free status. Membership of the Commonwealth was open to all Soviet republics and other countries that shared the goals and principles declared in the agreement. The coordinating bodies of the Commonwealth were to be located not in Moscow – the capital of Russia, the old tsarist empire, and the vanishing USSR – but in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

"The three leaders guaranteed the fulfillment of the agreements and obligations of the Soviet Union, while declaring Soviet laws null and void on the territory of their states from the moment the agreement was signed. 'The operation of agencies of the former USSR on the territory of members states of the Commonwealth is terminated,' read the final paragraph of the agreement. It was a natural concluding statement for a document that began with the following declaration: 'We, the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation (RSFSR), and Ukraine, as founding states of the USSR that signed the union treaty of 1922... hereby establish that the USSR as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality ceases its existence.'" ¹³⁹

The three leaders returned to their respective republics fearful for their own safety. They had reason: Gorbachev was still in charge of the army and the KGB, and could have imprisoned them for treason. However, Gorbachev, though very angry and refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the Belavezha Agreement, did nothing. Most importantly, Shaposhnikov, the Soviet Minister of Defence and *de facto* ruler of the army, decided to support Yeltsin, and soon became *Russian* Minister of Defence. Then, in the middle of December the American Secretary of State James Baker visited Moscow, received the assurance he needed about nuclear arms, and became convinced that the USSR was no more...

But one major problem remained: the attitude of the non-Slav and non-Baltic republics to the CIS. For various complicated reasons, they all agreed to join this necessary, albeit necessarily weak new centre. These reasons included the need to preserve economic ties between the republics, the need for some protection against Islamic fundamentalism in the non-Slavic republics (and even also in Russia, where trouble was brewing in Chechnya), and the potential for ethnic conflicts in the individual republics on the model of the conflicts that had broken out in Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and of Moldova in Transnistria.

On December 21 the Presidents of eleven States, but excluding Gorbachev, met in Almaty. They "focused on two big subjects: the dissolution of the USSR

¹³⁹ Plokhyy, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-309.

and the creation of a new Commonwealth that would now include not three but eleven republics. It took the heads of the post-Soviet states only three and a half hours to agree on the principles of the new international structure, which would include most of what remained of the Soviet Union after the departure of the Balts. By 3:00 p.m. the final drafts of the agreements had been sent to the typists, and two hours later they were signed at an official ceremony. At the insistence of the Central Asian republics, the leaders of the post-Soviet states, including Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, signed the declaration on the formation of the commonwealth anew. Now all present in Almaty were founding members of the Commonwealth.

“Most of the decisions were adopted on the initiative of the Russian delegation. First, the presidents agreed to form two coordinating institutions, the Council of Presidents and the Council of Prime Ministers. They also agreed to abolish all remaining Soviet ministries and institutions – an issue of paramount importance to Yeltsin in his ongoing struggle with Gorbachev. Russia also received the participants’ approval to declare itself the successor to the USSR, which meant, among other things, permanent membership in the Security Council of the United Nations. The agreement on joint control of nuclear arsenals was in full accord with the scheme that Yeltsin had described to Baker a few days earlier in Moscow: only the president of Russia could authorize a launch of nuclear weapons, while the other presidents with a nuclear arsenal would be consulted but would have no technical ability to order a launch. By July, 1992, strategic and tactical nuclear weapons would be moved from Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to Russia for disassembly. The leaders of the four nuclear republics, including Kravchuk, Nazarbayev, and Shushkevich, endorsed that solution...”¹⁴⁰

On December 25, 1991, while the Americans were celebrating Western Christmas, the communist red flag came down for the last time over the Kremlin and the red, white and blue of Russia, which had also been Russia’s pre-revolutionary flag, was raised in its stead. A few days later, President Bush, in his State of the Union address, “referred to the implosion of the Soviet Union in a year that had seen ‘changes of almost biblical proportions,’ declared that ‘by the grace of God, America won the Cold War,’ and announced the dawning of a new world order. ‘A world once divided into two armed camps,’ Bush told the joint session of the US Senate and House of Representatives, ‘now recognizes one sole and preeminent power, the United States of America.’ The audience exploded in applause...”¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Ploky, *op. cit.*, pp. 362-363.

¹⁴¹ Ploky, *The Last Empire. The Final Days of the Soviet Union*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2015, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

CONCLUSION. WHO WON THE COLD WAR?

Only fools and God-haters – who, of course, are all fools in accordance with the word: “The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God” (Psalm 13.1) – could fail to rejoice in the fall of the Soviet Union, the world’s first officially atheist state, that had caused the spiritual and physical destruction of hundreds of millions people around the globe, and whose destructive influence has by no means disappeared at the present time. Of all the despotisms of world history this was the most evil, beside which the regime of the Nazis, utterly evil as it was, was a mere twelve-year interlude. It is not only that the Soviet Union killed far more people than the Third Reich: its influence was far more widespread insofar as internationalism, however corrupted, will always seem more plausible to an international audience than nationalist delirium.

But if it is easy to identify the loser in the Cold War, it is not so obvious who or what won it...

The obvious answer is: the West, and especially the United States, which for the third time in seventy years the globe like a colossus. All three victories – those of 1918, 1945 and 1991 – can plausibly be claimed to have been victories of American democracy over one or another species of totalitarianism. But the differences between them were important. In 1918 the proto-totalitarian state of Germany had been defeated, but it had been the Europeans who had borne the main brunt of the war, while Germany herself had been neither occupied, nor purged of her totalitarian spirit, which went on to grow in fierceness under Hitler, necessitating a second world war. Moreover, a new totalitarian empire, that of Soviet Russia, had been growing simultaneously with equal speed and ferocity... In 1945 America’s share in the final victory was much larger, and the demons of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan were finally exorcised. But Germany’s loss had been the Soviet Union’s gain; and that empire was now at the height of its powers and more than ever dangerous, making the Cold War inevitable (the only alternative was a hot war, which thankfully was avoided). In that war, America’s share in the victory was larger still: the other western powers – essentially the NATO powers, as well as various anti-communist regimes in the Third World – had contributed a little, but not much by comparison. Moreover, by 1991 only China, which had nipped the democratic virus in the bud on Tiananmen Square, appeared as a possible future rival of the all-conquering American colossus and potentially capable of raising the standard of despotism against democracy. It really looked as if America had finally “made the world safe for democracy”. One Harvard political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, even celebrated “the End of History”.

But there were disturbing resemblances between 1918 and 1991. Once again, the defeated power had not been occupied, nor its totalitarian spirit exorcised. As in 1918, so in 1991, the defeated power felt that it had been “stabbed in the back”, betrayed by foreign and domestic enemies.

To make things worse, Russia, resentful and still undefeated militarily, was still a nuclear power... In December, 1994 Russia, Ukraine, the United States and the United Kingdom signed "the Budapest Memorandum", thereby guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Belarus' and Kazakhstan in exchange for their giving their nuclear weapons to Russia. This solved the problem of nuclear proliferation that had so worried the Americans. But it gave Russia still more power to blackmail its neighbours. And, as events in 2014 were to prove, Ukraine's territorial guarantees (like Czechoslovakia's in 1938) were not worth the paper they were written on...

Scott D. Sagan writes: "In 1947, the American diplomat George Kennan outlined a strategy for the 'patient but firm and vigilant containment' of the Soviet Union... He predicted that such a policy would eventually lead to 'either the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power.' He was right."¹⁴²

But was he really right? The Soviet Union "mellowed" in its later years in that it killed and tortured fewer people; and the essentially social democratic and non-violent regime of Gorbachev certainly constituted a "mellowing" and "softening" by comparison with his predecessor. But from the perspective of 2020 it is difficult to say that Sovietism has really disappeared. In fact, the evil spirit laid in it at its very foundation has not only not disappeared, but appears to have mutated into a new, but no less virulent power. Nor could it be otherwise. For evil spirits do not "mellow", nor can they be "contained" indefinitely: if they are not to break out again; they must be *exorcised*...

The Soviet Union appeared to be dead... But could "the Long War", in Philip Bobbitt's phrase, between democracy and totalitarianism that began in 1914 really be over? Was there not a final battle still to be fought, whose consequences this time would surely be a nuclear holocaust wiping out most of humanity? As President Bush soberly noted, the prospects for such a war had dramatically receded, but they had not gone away completely... They had not gone away, fundamentally, because of the wrath of man, on the one hand: those still imbued with the spirit of Soviet Russia were burning to avenge its defeat in the Cold War. And on the other hand, because the wrath of God had not been expiated through repentance for the terrible, unprecedented sins of the Soviet period...

In the euphoria of this great, but incomplete and inevitably temporary triumph over evil, it was necessary to recall the words of the Apocalypse concerning the red beast: "And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the earth marvelled and followed the beast" (Revelation 13.3). The beast has been wounded, but it is not yet dead...

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The point is: final victory can never be defined in purely material terms,

¹⁴² Sagan, "The Korean Missile Crisis", *Foreign Affairs*, November/December, 2017, p. 82.

either in its causes or in its essence. In our materialist age, it is tempting to see economic or technological factors as the causes of victory in war. Certainly, there is no denying that technological factors have been important in past wars. We think of the “Greek fire” used so successfully by the Byzantines against the Persians and Muslims; and the horsemanship displayed by the Mongols against the Russians in the thirteenth century; and the long bow used by the English against the French in the Hundred Years’ War; and the heavy cannon invented by the Hungarian Urban and successfully used by the Muslims against the Byzantines in 1453; and the copper plating giving extra speed to the British ships in the Napoleonic Wars; and the railways used so effectively by Bismarck against the French at Sedan; and the Maxim gun used by the British to slaughter the Sudanese at Obdurman; and the German use of tanks in World War Two; and the British use of radar and Turing’s computer to crack the German enigma code in the same war...

Nevertheless, material factors are never as important as spiritual or psychological ones – morale, patriotism and, above all, faith. For “some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will call upon the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 19.7). The Vietnamese defeated the Americans largely through their superior discipline and morale, in spite of being far inferior in technological and economic resources. And in general American patriotism flagged in the 1970s, allowing the Soviets to gain a series of victories in the Third World. But the West recovered confidence under Reagan and Thatcher, and in the late 1980s the Soviets began to lose faith in their own system, while the glorification of the Holy New Martyrs of Russia by the Russian Church Abroad in 1982 gave new power to the drive to destroy Sovietism...

Material advantages create the opportunity, and morale consolidates that advantage, or even reverses the material deficit. But final victory in war is attained only in two ways: either by completely destroying the enemy, or by converting him to your side. There is no third way: a victory attained in any other way is no real victory, but only a battle won, which may end in final victory – or in defeat. The victory of the West over the Soviet Union in the Cold War in 1989-91 was one such inconclusive victory, a battle won that may yet end in final defeat in the long war that began in 1917, but has not come to an end yet...

The victories won by annihilation of the enemy are many. One of the most famous in ancient times was Rome’s victory over Carthage. The Romans so respected their enemies, who had dealt them their worst ever defeat at Carrhae that they did not stop at reversing that defeat and defeating them at Zama in 202 B.C., but declared: *Carthago delenda est*, “Carthage must be destroyed”. And Carthage was destroyed – completely – in 146 B.C. It never rose again.

Another victory by annihilation was the Allies’ conquest of Germany in 1945. The victory over the Kaiser’s Germany in 1918 had been incomplete. No Allied army stepped foot in Germany; its economic and war-making potential, though damaged, was not destroyed. Most important, the Germans did not *feel*

defeated; they felt they had been “stabbed in the back”. Reparations were insufficient to repay the losses suffered by the Western powers, especially France. By the time Hitler came to power, they had been remitted completely. So the still living snake was able to rise again because the seat of its power – its head – had not been crushed. That took place only in 1945, when Nazi power was crushed utterly, as was its capital. This was a real “twilight of the gods”. The false gods of German nationalism had been truly destroyed. And the population was converted to a new god – democracy.

Victories by conversion are much rarer and, of course, much greater from a moral point of view. Such a victory was the triumph of the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred the Great over the pagan Danes under King Guthrum in 878. Alfred defeated the Danes in battle at Ethandune; but, knowing that his victory could not be final, and that his enemy still occupied the whole of East Anglia, he offered him something quite different: baptism into the Orthodox Church (Alfred became Guthrum’s sponsor), followed by a twelve-day baptismal feast and the present of the whole of East Anglia as a baptismal gift. Nor was this a superficial charade. The Danes remained Christian, and were fully integrated into Orthodox England...

In the Cold War the enemy was neither crushed nor converted. It was a very long war, beginning soon after World War Two, in which many millions died around the globe. And yet the main antagonists – the NATO allies and the Soviet Union – never fired a single shot against each other in anger (if we exclude the shooting down of the U-2 plane in 1960), preferring instead to fight by proxy and by the threat of mutually assured destruction. Nor did the supposed victors ever set foot on Soviet soil. The Communist enemy simply melted away, changing its name and its ideology at the same time...

Not having occupied the communist homeland, the victors were able to make only a feeble attempt to convert them. By contrast, the Germans after 1945 were subjected to a denazification programme which took time to produce the necessary good fruits – real repentance for the horrors of Nazism – but eventually did produce them. But there was no decommunization programme in Eastern Europe after 1989-91, and the Russian people, after making a fitful start at repentance for the unprecedented crimes of the Soviet period after the fall of communism, now appear to be indulging in an orgy of self-justification. Not a single Communist leader or Gulag commandant was brought to trial for his crimes. Even the Communist Party was “acquitted” in a mock trial in 1992.¹⁴³

There was some economic aid, but – with the exception of the aid given to the former East Germany by West Germany – it came nowhere near the levels needed or asked for – and so generously provided by the Americans in 1948. The Germans were given a vast sum of money in the Marshall Plan that helped them rebuild their economy and become again a prosperous and peaceful

¹⁴³ See Vladimir Bukovsky, *Moskovskij Protsess*.

nation. But Gorbachev's request to the G-7 in 1990 for a new kind of Marshall Plan was rejected (understandably, perhaps, in view of the fact that the Soviets still had a command economy that could not respond to capitalist stimuli). Moreover, as Simon Jenkins writes, "There was no lowering of tariffs or other barriers to trade with the east, and therefore little stimulus to growth in the post-communist economies. Brussels lobbyists opposed any inrush of low-cost produce, especially food, into the EEC's protected markets. Despite initial pleas from Gorbachev, there was no new Marshall Aid, nor substantial inward investment, at least until former communist states joined the EU. At the same time there was a torrent of low-cost labour migrating westwards, bleeding the east of talent and further aiding the west's economies.

"More dangerous was an instant NATO welcome to Russia's former Warsaw Pact allies. Those republics closest to Russia, such as Belarus, Ukraine and the central Asian 'stans', formed a Commonwealth of Independent State under Moscow's aegis. But the Baltic states together with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary turned their backs on the east and began negotiations with NATO as guarantor of their future security. There is no doubt this is what these countries wanted, but the alacrity with which NATO seemed ready to advance its frontier eastwards rubbed salt into the gaping wound of Russia's national pride. Yeltsin pleaded with the west to hold back, describing NATO's expansion as 'a major political mistake'. He warned that 'the flames of war could burst out across the whole of Europe'. He was ignored. In this respect, there was an ominous sense of the cold war's demise replicating the casual triumphalism of Versailles..."¹⁴⁴

"In 1999," writes Simon Jenkins, "Yeltsin anointed a former Leningrad KGB boss, Vladimir Putin, as his successor. The contrast was total. Putin was the epitome of a tough, communist-era apparatchik. The ex-intelligence officer had no time for the niceties of democracy, but a keen sense of the need to restore Russian pride. He would issue pictures of himself hunting and bare-chested on horseback. His court of oligarchs made sure he secured as much overseas wealth as they had [Putin is now probably the richest man in the world]. Putin's policies, endorsed at increasingly rigged elections, made no mention of civil rights or market economics. He was a populist and a nationalist, his pledge merely to restore Russia's integrity and self-confidence. Opponents were bribed, imprisoned or killed. The west might have felt able to humour and torment Yeltsin. It now faced the pastiche tsar of a macho state. That Russia's economy was debilitated was irrelevant. Dictatorship thrives on poverty."¹⁴⁵

Putin has openly declared his intent to avenge Russia's defeat in the Cold War, just as Hitler set out to avenge Germany's defeat in World War One. He is able to say this because Communism was not truly defeated in the Cold War. Its leaders were not tried and punished, its ideology not exposed for the fraud it undoubtedly is.

¹⁴⁴ Jenkins, *A Short History of Europe*, London: Weidenfels & Nicholson, 2018, pp. 288-289.

¹⁴⁵ Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

As for Putin's new – or rather, old – ideology of Fascist-style nationalism, it is even admired in the West, even by many Orthodox Christians, who mistake his Communist Christianity mixed with neo-Soviet patriotism for the real Orthodox article and regard Putin himself as “the new Constantine”. Putin's secret service agents have retained their stranglehold over the Orthodox Church and Russia's foreign embassies and very many of her émigrés. Thus the Orthodox Church under Patriarch Cyril (KGB “Agent Mikhailov”) glorifies the victory of Stalin and militant atheism in 1945 as something to be celebrated on a par with Christ's Resurrection!

Just as the incomplete and mismanaged victory celebrated at Versailles in 1919 led to the rise of an avenging angel in the form of Hitler, so the incomplete and mismanaged victory over Communism in 1991 has given birth to another avenging angel in the form of Putin, whose murderous desires only a truly useless idiot can fail to see. But he knows that he can achieve final victory only by completely *annihilating* his opponent. That is why he gives full rein to his propagandist, Alexander Dugin (who likes to say: “Putin is *all!*”), when he calls for “the closing down of America” as “our religious duty”.¹⁴⁶

Dmitri Kiselev, another Putinist propagandist, appeared to rejoice on TV when speaking about the reduction of the West to ashes. These men know that their and their master's goal – final victory over the West – can only be achieved by the West's complete destruction. Of course, Putin would prefer to defeat the West while preserving its wealth (for himself and his oligarch friends), but that has not prevented him from making it quite clear that he is prepared to use the nuclear option if he feels threatened – although it is he, of course, that is the real threatener. The only way in which he could achieve final victory over the West without an annihilatory war is by destroying its last values and the last remnants of its will to live through his hidden support for Cultural Marxism, that deadly mutant of Leninist Marxism which is well on the way to destroying America today (in 2020), so bringing about the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elder Ignaty of Hebron: *What began in Russia will end in America*.

All this leads us to believe that the Cold War was only a phase of a long, still-uncompleted struggle, the final resolution of which is still in the future. And it is by no means certain who will win. For it is possible to win all the battles in a war while losing the last, ultimately decisive one...

Even if Communism in its new, Fascist mutation loses the final battle of this coming war, a deep and long-lasting peace is guaranteed only if the whole Enlightenment philosophy that gave birth not only to Communism, but also to Fascism and Democracy, is renounced by both victors and losers. The only teaching which does not simply oppose this triple-headed monster but *conquers* and *destroys* it is the Orthodox Christian Faith. For “this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith” (I John 5.5). It was the renunciation of that faith

¹⁴⁶ Dugin, *Absolutnaia Rodina* (The Absolute Homeland) Moscow: Arktogeia, 1999, p. 658.

by Russia in 1917 that set in motion the long cycle of extremely bloody and inconclusive wars that we have witnessed over the last century. Only the resurrection of that faith, and the true repentance of Russia, will bring the final victory and true peace on earth, God's good will among men...