

Forum: Historical Security Council

Issue: Addressing the impact of the fall of the USSR (26 December 1991)

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INTRODUCTION

“This society has acquired freedom. It has been freed politically and spiritually, and this is the most important achievement that we have yet fully come to grips with. And we haven't, because we haven't learned to use freedom yet.” Gorbachev states in his speech on December 26th, 1991 after having resigned from the position of President of the USSR (Union of Socialist Soviet Republics) one day earlier.

For almost 30 years the Berlin Wall served as a tangible symbol for the Cold War, a period of tensions and hostility between the United States, aligned with the Western European countries, and the USSR, supported by its satellite states. The cause of the conflict were ideological differences, as the Western Bloc identified with capitalism, while the Eastern Bloc supported communism. Shortly before the USSR dissolved, the Union started liberalizing its economic and political system. The Soviet Republics adopted elements of the capitalistic system and gave their citizens more rights, such as the freedom of the press. The liberty that was given to the inhabitants of the Soviet Republics and countries aligned with the USSR, resulted in huge crowds demonstrating, demanding for more. The Berlin Wall fell, the Cold War officially ended, and the Soviet Union dissolved. The public and politicians globally viewed the fall of the Soviet Union as proof that socialism had failed and the former Soviet Republics were obliged to transform their economic system into a market economy, after years of a completely state-controlled economy and political repression of fundamental human rights. The 15 countries went through transitional phases while adapting to Western ideals and due to the rapidity of their implementation there was high political volatility. Among others, causes of the political instability were lack of experience, foreign debt, financial shortfall and unemployment.



DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

USSR

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was established in 1922 under Lenin and officially dissolved on the 31st of December 1991 while Gorbachev was in power. It consisted of 15 socialist republics, the dominant one being Russia, and identified itself as a federal Marxist-Leninist socialist republic; its capital was Moscow. The USSR had a one-party system, with the Communist Party (CPSU) as sole ruler.

Warsaw Pact countries

The Warsaw Pact was a military alliance signed in 1955 between the Soviet Union and seven states of Central and Eastern Europe. They were under the hegemony of the USSR, which is why the seven states are often referred to as “Eastern Bloc satellite states”.

Organized Crime (OC)

Organized crime consists of groups of numerous members who engage in criminal actions on a local or transnational level. They are typically nonideological and have the aim of gaining financial or material property. Such groups offer illegal goods and services such as illegal drugs, prostitution, money laundering, racketeering or illegal gambling.

¹ The Berlin Wall: <http://www.wendemuseum.org/collections/facing-wall-berlin-wall>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



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Before the dissolution

General historical background

After World War II the soviet economy went into decline. The gross national product (GNP) fell continually during the 1970s. The USSR exported only scarcely, as its large geographical expanse covered almost all needs in energy and raw materials. The soviet states traded almost exclusively with communist governments. However, they exported oil to Western European countries and traded a few manufactured goods. One great economic issue was that the oil and commodity price had fallen continuously since the 1970s. Additionally, the citizens of the Soviet Union often confronted shortages in groceries.

² <https://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/npr/344044582/can-nato-find-a-way-to-contain-russia>

In March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev was elected Secretary General of the Communist Party of the USSR. He criticized the stagnant economy of the USSR in a speech shortly after his election and was the first soviet leader to do so. He introduced the term “perestroika” in 1986, a policy of political and economic restructuring, and stated in 1988 that he wished to guide the Union into an era of transparency and openness, called “glasnost”. By these means Gorbachev aimed to rehabilitate the relationship of the USSR with Western European countries and the United States. His strategy was undoubtedly one of the catalysts that evoked the fall of the Soviet Union, although the economy was becoming weaker and was in need of reform anyway.

Economic inflation and collapse

The problem with his policies lay in the rapidity of their implementation. His policies encouraged the introduction of some capitalistic elements, although such had not existed in the USSR since 1922. The dissolution led the Soviet Republics into one of the most severe economic crises the world has seen, with the exception of times of war. While the USSR was dissolving (1989-1991), the gross national product (GNP) fell by 20% and the former soviet countries faced an economic crisis. A significant issue was that the economic ties and the trade union between the soviet countries themselves had dissolved.

Furthermore, Gorbachev allowed the formation of private corporations and gave workers more freedom in deciding what to sell and in determining their price. Farmers raised their prices and many consumers could not pay for their products. This resulted in workers requesting higher salaries and in inflation.

Rise of nationalistic movements

Many liberals demanded further and more radical structural changes. Others however, criticized that he was distancing too much from the soviet system, which led to the rise of nationalistic movements. This was also the root cause of the coup d'état in August 1991 led by politicians who were against Gorbachev's policies and devoted to the socialist system, as well as to the CPSU. The attempt failed and the coup ended after two days. Nevertheless, as it destabilized the government to some extent, it did have an impact on the fall of the Soviet Union.

Demonstrations & declarations of Independence

Gorbachev dissolved the secret police and granted freedom of speech. Moscow no longer appeared as powerful and authoritarian as before. This resulted in a period of majority peaceful protests against socialist authoritarianism, totalitarianism and political repression. The demonstrations began in Poland and took place between 1989-1991 in the soviet countries. Demonstrators demanding a democratic system also went to the streets in China, but they did not influence politicians in a positive manner. On the contrary, Chinese troops fired on the peaceful protesters with assault rifles. In November 1989 a sequence of mass public rallies led to the fall of the Berlin Wall. In Europe, Romanian demonstrators used violent means to overthrow their socialist government in December 1989. Over these two years every Soviet Republic held parliamentary elections for the first time in many decades. Some were influenced by voter fraud, but others were truly democratic.

In February 1990 the Communist Party voted to end the one-party rule. At about the same time soviet governments began declaring their independence, referring to Article 72 of the soviet constitution, which specified that any republic was free to disaffiliate from the Union. Lithuania was the first to do so in March 1990, yet Gorbachev opposed this action and imposed sanctions on the country. But already in April 1990, a legislation was approved by Moscow permitting a State to split from the Union if more than two-thirds of its inhabitants voted in favor of it in a referendum. In 1991 the government recognized the independence of Lithuania and the rest of the Baltic countries. The Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine followed afterwards. One year later, all 15 republics were governed by democratically designated governments. In September 1991 the Congress of People's Deputies votes in favor of the dissolution of the USSR. On the 26th of December the Russian government took over the headquarters of the Soviet Union in Moscow and the USSR officially dissolved.

Collapse of public utilities and services

As mentioned above, the fall of the USSR meant that the implementation of communism had failed and the economic system in the former soviet countries would be altered. But there was not enough expertise or regulated legislation that would make a smooth transition possible.

The most crucial issue was that public utilities and police services almost ceased to exist during the collapse. Furthermore, specific positions of public services were withdrawn as they were no longer needed in the new economic system. Therefore, former KGB (Committee for State Security) officers, police officers and soldiers of the Soviet Army that had lost their jobs, became members of Organized Crime, mostly in Russia.

Organized Crime (OC)

OC organizations achieved tremendous influence, because they provided security through violence and intimidation in situations where the government could not fulfill this task. "Mafiya" oligarchs retained many and influential corporations and had connections throughout Russia. They did not encounter much resistance as they principally arrested, harmed, exiled, or murdered anyone who did so.

Collapse of the social system

The social system also collapsed. Social security services, including retirement pensions, fell below the subsistence income. The health and education system were not functioning effectively, often such services were only offered in return for bribes. Poverty rose rapidly and the average life expectancy dropped significantly.

After the dissolution

So far, events before or during the collapse have been analyzed predominantly. A description of events after year 1991 follows, in order to get an understanding of what could have been prevented. They can not be mentioned in debate.

The threat of the establishment of authoritarian governments

The three Baltic states- Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania- pursued Western ideals in the context of democratic and market- economy reforms and therefore entered the European Union in 2004. But in most former Soviet Republics, representatives of the old Soviet elites formed authoritarian regimes only after a short period of democratic governance. In Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, dictatorships have ruled for approximately two decades now, in which elections are now merely symbolic and freedom of press is severely curtailed. Participants in acts of a politically opposing character, demonstrators and critical journalists face incarceration and violent persecution in these countries.

Relevant armed conflicts

In some of the countries mentioned above, violent conflicts broke out with the end of the Soviet Union. Armenia and Azerbaijan entered war over the borders of a specific region. Tajikistan, Georgia and Moldova sunk into civil war

for several years. Russia led two wars in Chechnya to prevent the independence of the region. The Georgian-Russian war in 2008, and armed conflicts in South Kyrgyzstan in 2010, as well as in the Eastern Ukraine in 2014 followed.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

In Russia, since 2012, Russian NGOs that are funded internationally are obligated to register as foreign agents, a term that implies that they are spies. Many already viewed NGOs this way during the dissolution of the USSR. These people associated capitalism, globalization and international cooperation (therefore NGOs) with the political anarchy and economic collapse of the time.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

On the eighth of December 1991 the Russian, Byelorussian and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics stated that the Soviet Union did not exist anymore and would be replaced by the CIS, described as an economic union of sovereign and independent states. They determined that the CIS would accept all former Soviet Republics which had the same political aims. On the 21st of December eight further Soviet Republics joined them. The Baltic states remained distant from the Soviet Union.

The framework of the CIS was established and developed further over the next years. In 1992 the member states agreed to export materials, technologies and services that can be used to generate weapons of mass destruction and missiles. If a country did not meet the requirements, the other member states would impose economic sanctions. In 1993 the CIS expanded the agreement by defining the CIS as an economic space with free movement of products, services, personnel and capital for usage of any kind. Over the years, they cooperated in further fields, one of them being their decision in 1995 to combat organized crime.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1985	Mikhail Gorbachev becomes General Secretary of the CPSU.
1988	Gorbachev becomes president of the USSR. The CPSU decides to permit private corporations.
1989	Demonstrations in Central and Eastern Europe opposing socialist regimes. Fall of the Berlin Wall. The first openly-contested elections for parliament take place.
1990	Gorbachev opposes the independence of Baltic states and enforces sanctions on Lithuania.
February 1991	CPSU votes to end one-party rule.
July 1991	The USA and the USSR sign the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.
September 1991	Congress of People's Deputies votes for the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
December 1991	The Commonwealth of Independent States is formed. Gorbachev resigns as Soviet president. The USSR officially dissolves.

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Gorbachev's statement

In 1988, Gorbachev proclaimed to the United Nations that the soviet military presence in the Warsaw Pact countries would be restricted and that the Soviet Union would not get involved in the domestic affairs of those anymore.

Membership in the United Nations – 1991 and later

On the 24th of December 1991 Boris Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation wrote to the Secretary General of the UN that the Russian Federation will replace the Soviet Union in all UN organs, including the Security Council. The other independent states were also accepted by the UN as member states.

UN-agencies that existed before 1991

The following are UN-agencies and networks that could support the Soviet Republics after the dissolution.

The **UN Development Programme (UNDP)**, for example, can offer technical assistance, create an organizational framework and job descriptions. Generally, it assists the country in recognizing how to utilize natural and human resources in a way it will bring wealth. Moreover, the **UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** can encourage the cooperation between countries through the coordination of educational exchanges. The UNESCO also organizes training for journalists. Additionally, the **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** can support local lawyers in setting up a legal framework that complies with the international laws, such as freedom of press and other regulations concerning the media and telecommunication. The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** takes the initiative of ameliorating the conditions and living standards of workers. It could ensure that while transitioning, no job position is created where the dignity of the worker is not protected. Furthermore, the **United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)**, which protects the rights of children, could aid organizations, which either provide housing or education to children whose parents are impoverished. The **World Health Organization (WHO)** can provisionally replace health facilities for emergency cases. Finally, it is vital that the WHO will support public facilities that offer nursing and health care economically and materially, so that they do not collapse entirely.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Political instability and Organized Crime

In December 1991 or in the beginning of 1992 not many attempts to solve the issue were made. For example, there were Anti-corruption organizations in the former soviet countries, but most began forming in the mid-1990s. Therefore, they cannot be taken in consideration for the debate.

Prevention of armed conflicts

On the 31st of July 1991 the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) was signed between the United States of America (USA) and the USSR. It entered into force in 1994, but already in 1991 the bilateral treaty determined the extent of the reduction and restriction of strategic offensive arms. It was the largest treaty of that kind ever signed, seeing that in 2001, when conditions of the treaty where applied, approximately 80% of the nuclear weapons that existed were removed. This treaty can be seen as an attempt to prevent armed conflicts that began due to the political instability in the Eastern Bloc.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Organized crime

It is crucial that national law enforcement bodies cooperate with international organizations, as well as other states in solving the issue, in order to avoid corruption within law enforcement. The international bodies will have to demand a transparent use of their financial aid if provided. The states will have to invest in an effective protection program for entrepreneurs and other individuals who refuse to cooperate with organized crime organizations, as in this case it is very likely that criminals threaten their corporation, family, friends or own life. This program will also have to protect judges, prosecutors or witnesses, who testify to the corruption or delinquency of criminals. The countries will have to set up a strict legal framework determining the prison sentences for individuals who have engaged in OC, depending of course on their actions and position within the organization. In order to arrange such programs, officials who have been proven to be dedicated to their work will be employed and their salary will have to be high in order to avoid bribery. As job offers will appear, unemployed former soviet officers, who alternatively could have joined an OC organization, can be hired. The governments will have to raise awareness to the danger of engaging in OC and inform the public about their alternatives. Additionally, cooperative relations between organized crime and private corporations will have to be prevented. A legal framework that will

regulate the formation of a free market will have to be set up. It should include requiring regularly a renewal of business certificates and permits.

Unemployment

With the financial help and expertise of NGOs, public institutions which would educate and train people that wish to be employed in the private sector could be set up. Other economic models to combat unemployment exist, but it is possible that they are too expensive for a government that experiences economic collapse, it depends on the case. For example, the government could introduce tax breaks or subsidies for corporations that employ long-termed unemployed individuals.

Democracy

In order to prevent conflicts or the establishment of further authoritarian governments, the countries will have to rapidly establish a legislature that will ensure a democratic system. Independent NGOs or United Nation Bodies can monitor certain procedures throughout some years, for example counting the ballots of democratic elections. Representatives of different political parties and independent citizens can also be present. A means to prevent electoral intimidation is to urge all parties to sign a Code of Conduct before the election. Through their signature, they are obliged to be politically tolerant and avoid intimidating their political opponents. Furthermore, as the inhabitants of former Soviet Republics are used to a one-party system, each party should publish a short information text presenting its key-values and ideas. These can be summarized in one neutral public voting guide, so that it is easy for citizens to be informed.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

In each aforementioned category the assistance of NGOs has been proposed. Nevertheless, there should not only be bodies present that transmit Western ideals and support their implementation, as many viewed such bodies as imperialistic. This can evoke radical nationalistic thought and denial of democracy. There should also be bodies of more neutral political character, that everyone can turn to, such as NGOs that provide medical and psychological assistance while public facilities have collapsed. There can also be bodies that provisionary offer religiously neutral and not propagandistic educational lessons until public early childhood, primary and secondary education facilities are established.

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