

STUDY GUIDE

JCC: Dissolution of the USSR

Open Agenda

JCC: Dissolution of the USSR Study Guide

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Letter from the Secretary-General

Dear Participants,

My name is Batuhan Bera Karagüzel and I am a senior student of International Relations at the Middle East Technical University. As the Secretary-General of the EUROsimA 2022, it is my utmost pleasure to welcome you to the 18th annual session of our conference on behalf of our Director-General Ms. Beyza Güler, and the entire EUROsimA 2022 team.

In the EUROsimA 2022, we have chosen “The Dissolution of the Soviet Union” as the topic of this year's Joint Crisis Committee (JCC), which will consist of two sub-committees as the “Soviet of the Union” and the “Soviet of Nationalities”. The Dissolution of the Soviet Union not only represents the end of the Cold War but it signifies a process that had lasting effects on the political atmosphere of the European Continent. In an attempt to capture the complexity of the topic, we designed a committee structure that requires not only competition and rivalry but also interaction and cooperation between sub-committees of the JCC.

Designing such a complex committee would be a challenge for anyone, but I believe academic team members responsible for JCC did their jobs flawlessly. In this regard, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General responsible for the Joint Crisis Committee, Mr. Toprak Sezgin whose work ethic and academic rigor never ceases to amaze me. I also would like to thank Academic Assistant Mr. Alkım Özkazanç for working tirelessly and efficiently during the preparation process for this committee.

I highly encourage participants of the JCC to carefully read this study guide in order to fully grasp the historical background which will be the basis for the debates of the JCC.

Kindest Regards

Batuhan Bera Karagüzel Secretary-General of EUROsimA 2022

Letter From the Under-Secretary-General

Dearest participants, Hello there, my name is Toprak Sezgin, and I will be serving as the Under-Secretary-General of the Joint Crisis Committee: Dissolution of the USSR in EUROsimA 2022. In this letter, I hope to adequately address those for whom this study guide will act as a navigator throughout the committee.

Before that however, I would like to dedicate a part of this page to express my gratitude to certain special people. First and foremost, I would like to thank Bera Karagüzel, the Secretary- General of this year's EUROsimA, for being a good friend and for vesting his trust in me. Although what we have here is a rather ambitious and complex committee, Mr. Karagüzel has never withheld his support and interest. His leadership, which was marked by understanding, compassion, and competence, made the preparation process one that I could speak no ill about. Moving on to my assistant Alkım Özkazanç, I would like to thank him for his continued support, which came in many forms, ranging from guide writing to idea consultancy. I am certain that without him, the committee would have fallen short of its potential. By extension, the crisis team also warrants a honorable mention in my eyes, as they have provided a healthy environment of collaboration as well as competition, which I believe has pushed forward the quality of our committees and guides. Lastly, I feel inclined to thank the entirety of the team for their well- placed effort and cooperative behavior, as well as their friendly nature. Ms. Beyza Güler, our Director-General, is the exact embodiment of all this, and I cannot imagine our conference being where it is had it not been for her. For this and her continued friendship, I would like to thank her.

With that out of the way, I can speak briefly about the committee we have at hand. A parliament-crisis hybrid, Dissolution of the USSR focuses on the so-called last days of the Soviet Union, starting in June 1989. As can be understood from the summary we have on EUROsimA's website, the committee is broken down into the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities, two chambers of the Supreme Soviet, the most authoritative legislative body of the USSR. Unlike most JCCs where the two committees are diametrically opposite, Dissolution of the USSR uniquely has cross-cutting loyalties, meaning that alliances are possible between different participants in different chambers. Factors like political beliefs, party loyalty, ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic identity all play a part in shaping a parliamentarian's actions, and the committee is set up to be a political simulator, full of lobbying, backstabbing, and reaction. Speaking of reaction, crises will be many and very frequent, and the two committees' response ability to these developments will characterize the fate of not just themselves but of the union at-large.

I am hoping that the committee is able to please all who take part in it. I look forward to seeing you all and meeting you all. Take care until then!

Sincere regards, Toprak Sezgin

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1. Introduction: Russian State and Society in the Early 20th Century

By the dawn of the 20th century, the Russian Tsardom was in a peculiar situation. Historically left behind and unable to effectively compete with its neighbors, the regime of Nicholas II was one in need of change. Russians from many sections of society had become hostile to the regime and it was apparent that the state lacked both the mechanisms and the solutions to address the ills of the ailing crowds.

Continuation of Antiquated Practices and Rising Class Consciousness

The reason easiest to observe regarding the collapse of state-society relations and then the dissolution of the Russian state is the prevalence of outmoded and ineffective policies since the abolishment of the serfdom in 1861. Such insistence has, in turn, contributed significantly to the class consciousness of Russians, which had already been time and time again imprinted on the populace. The *Sobornoe Ulozhenie*, conceived under Alexis' reign in the 17th century and remained in practice until the 1830s, had, for instance, codified that the peasants would require internal passports to move elsewhere within Russia.

Although the institution of serfdom had been abolished in 1861 by decree, no long-term reforms regarding newly-liberated serfs had been put into practice. This may be partly explained by the fact that the tsardom itself was not very much interested in actually “emancipating” serfs but was keener on using them as a “mobile workforce” to help along with the industrialization drive of Alexander II, itself motivated by a desire to bolster the army after the horrific Russian defeat in the Crimean War (Boyar). Notwithstanding the lack of reform, Russian peasants continued to be actively exploited in the aftermath of 1861. Forced to incur **redemption payments** in 1886 (and **obrok** before that), newly-freed serfs and non-serf peasants suffered under this practice meant to fuel the industrialization project of the state.ⁱ

Another instance of an antiquated practice was the continuation of the Tsardom's traditional autocratic characteristics. Up until before the humiliating defeat against Japan in 1905, the Russian state had remained unphased by the parliamentary reforms that had swept Europe and elsewhere. Instead, the Russian emperor made use of the **Okhrana**, the state's secret police first instituted in the late 19th century, to crush the opposition coming especially from the Proletarian class in industrial regions such as Moscow and St. Petersburg.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, the

continuation of dynastic politics, and palace intrigue in the capital city both contributed to the weakening of the state and its disconnect from many different groups of the Russian society.



The Development of Russia's Worker Class

One of the reasons why Russia would later become the first socialist state in the world was because of its sizeable worker class.

With the industrialization drive of the Russian tsars in the 19th century, starting with Alexander II's reign, a "mobile workforce" of former peasants to occupy industrial jobs was created.

In time, as this process was limited to certain cities, workers were more readily united under unions. Thusly, it was not surprising that leftist groups found the majority of

Political Inertia and Hesitance Toward Reform

Considering the tsardom's lack of self-awareness and fondness for autocracy, it is unsurprising that no proper reform took place in this period. One instance of a quasi-reform was the **October Manifesto** in 1905 when a parliament, the Duma, was inaugurated. Tsar Nicholas II had acceded to the so-called **October Revolution** that broke out after the **Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905)**, when a crowd of people marched on to St. Petersburg to hand over a petition to the Winter Palace. After palace security opened fire on the protesters, worker strikes took place in retaliation, which turned the situation dire for the tsardom.ⁱⁱⁱ The October Manifesto was the product of this desperation.

However, it was not a proper reform unlike the ones initiated by Nicholas II's predecessors throughout the 19th century. Particularly, far-left elements were quite displeased with what they considered a sham of a constitutional reform and thus showed their reaction. An example was when revolutionary hothead Lev Trotsky took to the streets of Moscow and used

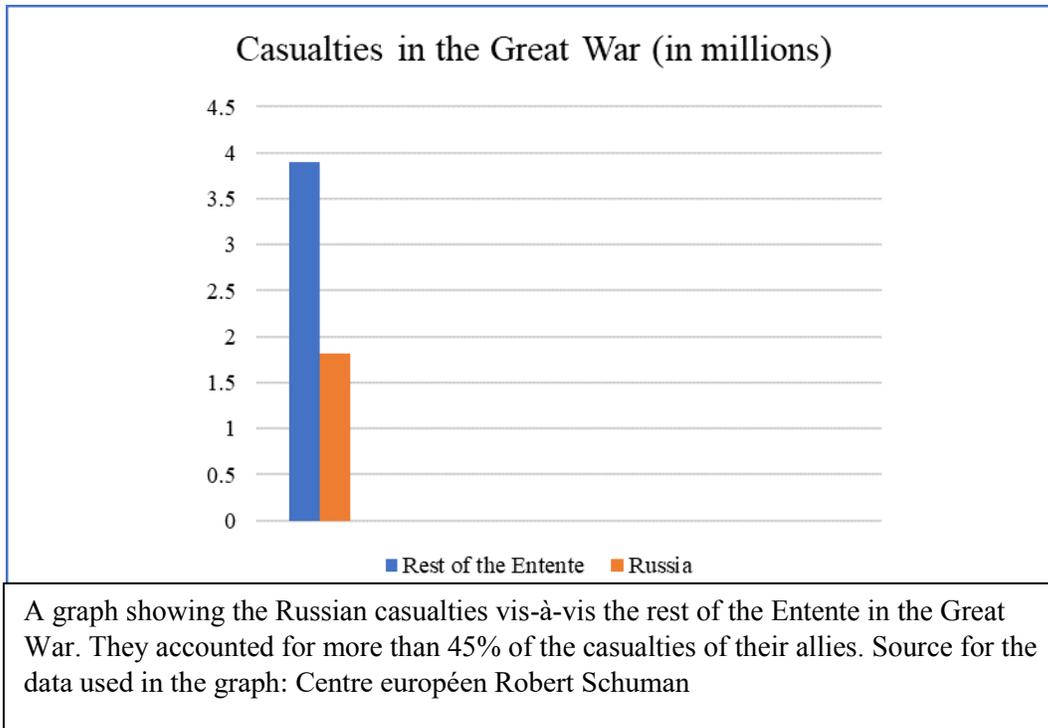
his knack for fiery speeches to rile members of the Social Democratic Party to reject the October Manifesto and instead push for total political revolution.^{iv} This rejection of “popular” politics was perhaps best signified by the parallel alternative that the radical leftists formed to the Duma, which were called the Soviets.

Commencing its operations one year later and being sent off to vacation in 10 weeks, the Duma ended up producing mixed reactions from the opposition. The conservative groups were satisfied with the developments and did not exhibit a major response when the Duma was shut down. Liberals, although highly displeased, did not show the revolutionary fervor that their leftist colleagues were exhibiting. This was partly because of their already privileged situation in the Russian Empire and the electoral laws of the Duma, which were skewed in favor of landed classes. In fact, no group left of social democracy was being represented in this first iteration of the Duma: although the October Manifesto had legalized the Social Democratic Labor Party, which was far-left, it had generally boycotted the elections.

In 1907, a Second Duma began its operations with another election that was not boycotted by the Social Democratic Labor Party. Likely alarmed by the sudden domination of the assembly by non-propertied interests, the Tsar’s government killed the Duma once again, through what was called (Peter) **Stolypin’s Coup**, named after the iron-fisted prime minister of the period who was attempting to prolong the Tsardom’s demise through a mix of reforms and practices of suppression.^v Returning in the same year and continuing until 1917, the Third and Fourth Dumas did not yield much in the way of political developments as Nicholas II rooted out reformists (particularly Stolypin) and used the Great War to further entrench his autocracy.

The Downfall of the Tsardom and the Search for Alternatives (1918-1919)

Of course, this management or lack thereof was bound to have adverse results for the Tsardom. In particular, as was mentioned regularly, there was a threat posed by the rising far-left opposition, particularly by the **Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP)**. Although a hotbed of factionalism, the most prominent one being the split between the **Menshevik** (Russian: *minority*) and the **Bolshevik** (Russian: *majority*) groups, the RSDLP was able to capitalize off of the popular discontent against Nicholas II’s regime to inspire revolution.



Effects and the Conduct of the Great War

The main reason for this was the incompetent conduct of the war and the terrible casualties that had to be born mainly by the soldiers, peasants and workers. Although, notes history professor Howard Sachar, Slavs are a people accommodating of “fate”, the mismanagement of the war was all too clear to see.^{vi} In particular, Nicholas II’s decision to let infamous Rasputin into his court and his entrustment of the government to his wife Alexandra and Rasputin, while he sought to be more closely involved with the Eastern Front was a painful anecdote justifying the discontentment with the war.^{vii}

Russia’s disastrous participation in the war also brought with it shortages country-wide, particularly, that of bread. Starting with the war (1914), Russia’s sources were devoted mainly to keep the troops well-fed. By the last two years of the war (1916-1918), the situation had grown grim: As military mobilization intensified, rural labor force was appropriated into the army, and prices of agricultural goods were plummeting at the same time.^{viii} Not only were the farmers disheartened by the low prices they would receive for their work, but they were also held back by labor shortages. As the supply chain received blow after blow, essential goods readily became

unavailable, in turn deeply affecting the already poverty-ridden workers located in industrial centers.

Resultantly, a series of “bread riots” broke out in Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg, renamed to Petrograd after the breakout of the war) on 8th of March, 1917.^{ix} Unlike what transpired in 1905, troops ordered to strike the rioters refused, instead joining the popular demonstrations.^x Faced by opposition even from right-wing politicians in the Duma, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated the throne on the 15th of March to his son Michael, who did not want to become the new tsar. As the line of succession had been exhausted, there was suddenly no Tsardom.^{xi} Thus, with this February Revolution (it was called this as Russia was still using the Gregorian calendar) arose the **Russian Republic**, under the guidance of a provisional government.

A Stillbirth State: The Russian Republic (1917-1918)

Seizing the opportunity arising from the political power vacuum caused by the end of the monarchy, the previously unimportant Duma took the initiative to form the Provisional Government under the premiership of Prince Lvov and four months later, Alexander Kerensky. The previously observed split between moderate and right-wing groups, and far-left ones was at full force here as the Soviets continued to act as parallel bodies to the Duma, particularly the Petrograd Soviet. Formally called the **Councils of Workmen’s and Soldiers’ Deputies**, these Soviets were powerful enough to share power with the Duma and the Provisional Government.

In this dual structure, Kerensky became increasingly unpopular for several reasons. Firstly, he had decided to continue Russian belligerence in the Great War. As was touched upon, the war was deeply unpopular among the lower classes for many reasons. Secondly, he allied himself with Lavr Kornilov, former tsarist general and fervent anti-revolutionary, by appointing him to the top military post.^{xii} This created a certain contradiction that was not easy for the Kerensky government to maintain: simultaneous cooperation with two diametrically-opposed camps. The Soviets, being partners to the government, had stronger sway over policies and were therefore favored more, much to the chagrin of Kornilov.^{xiii} Thirdly, the popularity of the Provisional Government vis-à-vis the Soviets suffered after amnesty was granted to political

prisoners and exiles, which saw the return of the popular leader of the Bolsheviks, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (better known as Vladimir Lenin), to Russia in April.^{xiv}

Up until summer, tensions were running high between Kornilov and the Petrograd Soviet, and the Provisional Government was unable to mediate between the two. Partly encouraged by Kerensky's half-hearted promises to keep him aligned, Kornilov staged a coup attempt between 27 and 30 August 1917, known more famously as the **Kornilov affair**, meant particularly to topple the Petrograd Soviet.^{xv} Seeking and receiving the support of the Soviets, Kerensky was able to defeat the conspirators on 30 August, however this ironically set the stage for his own downfall.^{xvi}

Already unpopular due to the continuation of the war, the Kerensky government was further hit by the Kornilov affair, which proved that there were indeed elements within the country that wanted a return to the former regime, counterrevolutionaries, and that Kerensky was somewhat complicit in the coup attempt, as he had initially cooperated with the army man. Furthermore, it was with the assistance of the Soviets that the Provisional Government was able to overturn the destabilizing attempt against Russia's nascent democracy. Therefore, Kerensky was as loathed as ever and the Soviets were as popular as ever.



Lavr Kornilov (far left) and Alexander Kerensky (middle) meeting French socialist politician Albert Thomas (1917). Source: Thomas' photographer

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day after Kornilov's failure, the Bolsheviks captured the majority in the Petrograd Soviet. Until October of that same year, they had also managed to dominate the Moscow Soviet.^{xvii} Although popular, Lenin's faction was definitely not supported throughout Russia. In fact, Kerensky's administration was still the legitimate government of the country. Thus, in the fateful month of October, the Bolsheviks, in a bold strike, took control of the Duma to proclaim the first socialist

state in the world, in what would be known as the **October Revolution**. After years of suppression under the tsarist regime, the Bolsheviks had taken power in “ten days that shook the world”, according to American journalist John Reed.^{xviii}

2. Emergence of the Soviet Union Under Lenin (1918-1924)

Historian Eric Hobsbawm notes that, for the decrepit Russian Empire, there were only two options at the year of 1917: Either dissolution or the ascendance of the communists^{xix}. By the month of November of that year, it seemed that the latter was the path to be followed. The Bolsheviks, having successfully exploited the shortcomings of Kerensky’s Provisional Government, had risen to control the Duma. However, this was simply not enough.

The Bolshevik regime was not entirely popular, and Russia was still in the war. Lenin’s cadre started working to realize their motto of “**Peace, Land and Bread**” to tackle these two issues. Firstly, all lands were nationalized and distribution to peasants started being undertaken. Secondly, the Bolshevik government, after consolidating its hold over the country by destroying the last vestiges of democratic rule by abolishing the Constituent Assembly, which the Bolsheviks themselves had set up but got rid of after failing to capture the majority there, held communications with the German Empire. The end result of these negotiations was the **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** in March 1918 which, to say the least, was painful for an empire like Russia. With the treaty, they lost the lands as denoted by the continuous black line:



(History 12, n.d.)

Although the treaty only negotiated losses to the Central Powers, a Transcaucasian entity also appeared in the Caucasus independent of the German-led bloc. Lowe also links the loss of

Finland to the territorial concessions of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.^{xx} Nevertheless, the war ended for Russia and the losses were seen as being not permanent, which would prove itself a correct assumption in the upcoming years.

The issue of popularity was another matter, however. Even though the Bolsheviks were able to keep their promises of ending the war and pursuing nationalization, many elements of the Russian society, including those related to the regime of the tsar as well as the supporters of the Kerensky government, were still deeply hostile to the communist government. To this end, a civil war encompassing the vast Russian lands broke out in April 1918, which pitted the so-called **Whites** against the Bolsheviks.

Under the leadership of such accomplished military men as Alexander Kolchak and Anton Denikin and with both the material and ideological support of the West, specifically by the United Kingdom, France, and the USA, the Whites were serious contenders to throw off the communist rule. However, the disjointed leadership of the Whites, Trotsky's effective organization of the Bolshevik military, and Lenin's adoption of **war communism** economics gave the Bolsheviks the necessary edge to end the reactionary uprising in 1920, though Sander notes that some pockets of Whites' resistance remained well until 1922.^{xxi} In the meanwhile, the Soviets failed to beat back the revanchist Polish invasion of Ukraine in 1921, which resulted in the Treaty of Riga that same year. This treaty was significant in its own right, redrawing many borders in Eastern Europe which would only be revised with the Second World War, and disputing the Soviet belief that the communist revolution would also sweep Europe according to Christoph Mick.^{xxii}

With its borders mostly consolidated, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was declared on 30th December, 1922 with the **Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics**, also known as the **Union Treaty**. The USSR began as the unions of **Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia**, with Moscow of the **Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR)** as the capital since 1918. At the helm was Lenin, who had many plans to transform the ancient Russian state, society, and economy through various means.



30 December 1922: The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is formed by the Byelorussian SSR, Russian SFSR, Transcaucasian SFSR, and Ukrainian SSR, which become union republics; and the Bukharan PSR and Khorezm PSR, which are not union republics.

(Golbez, 2019)

One of Lenin's most encompassing reforms was the **New Economic Policy (NEP)**, in implementation since spring 1921. Although a proponent of an undiluted strain of Marxist economics, as demonstrated in the war communism policies during the civil war, Lenin believed that a transitional phase to reconstruct the battered and impoverished Soviet economy would be necessary to achieve this end goal of restricted trade and full state control over agriculture and industry^{xxiii}. The NEP was the product of this line of thought, and it featured a mixed economic model that also sought to deeply involve the private sector. Peasants were allowed to keep land and work it as they desired, which would result in the emergence of the **kulak** class of wealthy peasants^{xxiv}. Factories of relatively smaller sizes remained in private hands and private trade returned, which itself led to the emergence of the **nepmen** class of well-off traders^{xxv}. Foreign

trade was also a reality, fueled by the recovery made possible thanks to the NEP^{xxvi}. Nevertheless, the state held the monopoly on sectors like transportation, public utilities, banking, and heavy industry^{xxvii}.

The tenure of the Bolsheviks' first leader also marked the emergence of certain political characteristics of the union. Most importantly, Lenin introduced the concept of **democratic centralism** to the Communist Party, which denounced **factionalism** and held that all inner party debates had to be conducted in respect to certain rules, so as not to hinder the workings of the Bolshevik organization^{xxviii}. In practice, this meant the prohibition of all opposition to Lenin in March 1921^{xxix}. This concept would last well into the lifespan of the USSR. More insignificantly, Lenin believed in the equality of the republics, though also in the preponderance of Moscow. Furthermore, the policy of **korenizatsiia**, making Communist Party members of non-Russian citizens of the union, was also implemented^{xxx}. These ideas would be reversed quickly in due time after Lenin's death.

In terms of foreign policy, Lenin's period oversaw the creation of the **World Congress of the Communist International (Comintern)** in 1919. The Comintern purported to gather communist parties from all around the globe to create plans for joint action, particularly regarding leftist organizations found in colonial territories with the express aim of challenging European powers economically^{xxxi}, since Lenin, as outlined in his **theory of imperialism**, believed that the colonial periphery was being used to tide over class conflict in the European core.

Even though Lenin had concisely outlined his program for the USSR, he could not see them all through, and many of them would end up being revised at the hands of his successors. While alive, party members would not criticize his policies directly, owing to the democratic centralist ideology, but this did not prevent factionalism as Lenin had hoped. Indeed, Trotsky's clash with **Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin** would go down in history as one of the most infamous cases of intraparty splits, eventually ending in the ascendance of Stalin and thus a new era for the USSR, one that would be distinct from that of Lenin's.

3. Totalitarian Transformation: The Rule of Stalin (1922-1953)

Though Lenin was a respected leader whose rule had not been challenged in a noteworthy fashion, a sizable portion of his policies would not be carried out in the decades following his death. In his place, the iron-fisted Georgian and fervent ally to Lenin, Josef Stalin, transformed the Soviet state, society, and economy in his own image: one that was more so based on repression, global isolation, and inner consolidation.

It is therefore not surprising that Stalin's rise to power was anything but peaceful. His struggles with famed revolutionary Trotsky have already been documented extensively by history books and even fictional novels. In a process which mirrored his bloody accession to the position of the Secretary General of the Communist Party, Stalin created a Soviet Union that would serve as the basis of the Western understanding of the country during the upcoming Cold War, of one that is shrouded in mystery and characterized by the oppression of society as well as hostility to the Western bloc. Winston Churchill's notorious *Sinews of Peace* speech adequately demonstrates this understanding.

Stalinism, an original strain of Marxism put forth by the actions of the Secretary General, meant in practical terms policies of industrialization, collectivization, dekulakization, totalitarianism, and the perpetuation of the "socialism in one country" doctrine. In the meanwhile, global developments in the interwar coincided with the intense paranoia of Stalin, while this situation somewhat eased towards the end of the Cold War and onwards, when the Soviet Union emerged as one of the primary powers that would go on to dictate the fate of the international realm for decades to come.

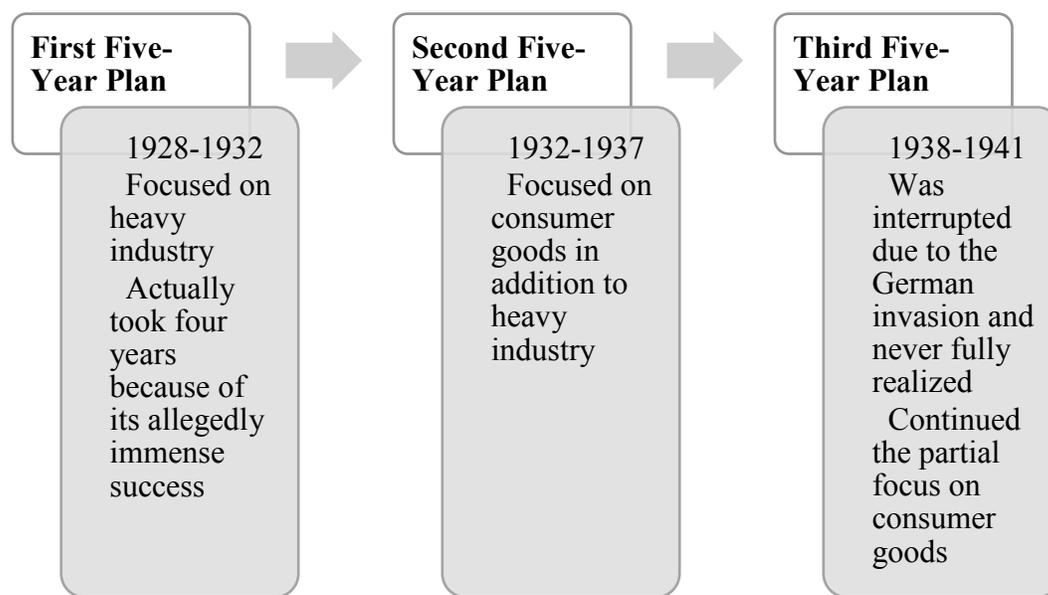
Economic Stalinism

One of Stalin's first priorities was to dismantle the NEP. In Lenin's later years, Stalin was a primary supporter of this model, standing in opposition to Trotsky who wanted to do away with it. However, Stalin's years as party boss were paralleled by systematic efforts to take the NEP apart and shift the Union's economic policy from one being focused on post-war recovery to one that would be focused on build-up.

To this end, the main economic concerns were underlined in general terms by the strengthening of heavy industry and the reorganization of the rural economy, both meant to

maximize output, which was Stalin’s priority. As he explained in early 1931: “We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in 10 years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed.”^{xxxii} At the time, the Soviet heavy industry was lagging behind those of European majors, as well as that of the United States.

The main policy tool that Stalin used for the development of heavy industry was the **Five-Year Plan**, of which there were three. These policy packages aimed to grow the number of factories in the USSR, modernize production techniques, improve worker discipline, and increase the manufacturing of final goods for the consumption of the Soviet public. Funding for these plans was provided from within the USSR, although foreign experts were called on to help out with modernization and training of workers.



The drive for industrialization was a success according to mainstream accounts of history. Data from the period indicates that the Soviets overtook the United Kingdom and France in terms of production of heavy industry goods such as steel and pig iron by 1940 and came just short of overtaking the Nazis at that same time. In addition, Stalin’s regime also promoted the creation and progression of institutions of technical learning as well as those of the scientific nature throughout the USSR, with a prominent example being the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, established in 1925. Worker discipline and optimization of labor output were also given importance, as employees were subjected harsh sanctions and had to toil in conditions not

unlike those experienced during the last years of the tsardom. On the flip side of the coin, workers who proved themselves with high efficiency were rewarded by the government and the trend of **heroic realism**^{xxxiii} in arts was actively promoted by the government.^{xxxiv}

Transformations in the rural production and economic relations could not be thought separately from those in the Soviet industry. Indeed, as part of the First Five-Year Plan, Stalin introduced the notorious dual policies of collectivization and dekulakization, as direct antitheses of the NEP. Stalin was deeply suspicious of the kulaks and the nepmen that emerged partly due to the consequences of Lenin's economic policies. He was not acting merely on paranoia, as the kulaks withheld grain from the relatively free market of agricultural goods to maximize profit in the late 1920s, when a so-called "grain crisis" was afoot due to speculative supply shocks.^{xxxv}

While political campaigns to root out the nepmen were more straightforward and achieved quick results,^{xxxvi} getting rid of kulaks was not as simple. Initially, with the policy of collectivization, two types of farm collectives for farmers, the *kolkhozy* and the *sovkhozy* were created in. While the second was made up of farmers in service to the state, the former was more "private" in nature, meant for farmers that were "consensually" joining productive forces. This was far from the truth, as any kulak or regular peasant that objected to being made part of a kolkhoz was subjected to grave punishment, which could come in the forms of seizure of private property and confinement in gulags that would often result in death. The aim was particularly to increase production of foodstuffs and therefore help along the process of industrialization, though the policy of collectivization, starting earnestly in 1929, seems to have resulted in just the opposite, creating shortages in Ukraine and causing the **Holodomor** in the early 1930s.^{xxxvii}

The accompanying process of dekulakization brought much of the same consequences with collectivization, as rural exodus to urban areas increased while production and economic activity suffered drops. In the meanwhile, gulags themselves, as sources of penal labor, gained a certain relevance in the Soviet economy for the sectors of agriculture and resource extraction.

Political Stalinism

The Soviet political sphere under Stalin was one deeply permeated by the Communist Party, which itself was under the pervasive effect of Josef Stalin's cult of personality. Just like the economic model he espoused, Stalin favored centralization for the political realm, and he

sought to limit public participation as much as possible, aiming to even further reduce the role of the population into merely acting as actors of permissive consensus. Politics would only be practiced among the select few elites of the Communist Party, though rank-and-file members were expected to maintain their support for the organization and its leader in all aspects of daily life. As scholar David Shearer notes, the aim of the Stalinist regime was to eradicate the separation between public and private, so as to be able to intervene more readily in the lives of Soviet citizens.^{xxxviii}

An example to this was the inauguration of a new constitution and the establishment of the **Supreme Soviet** in 1935. Although initially portrayed as democratic endeavors where the organ's members would be elected by the public, the Supreme Soviet quickly devolved its authority to another body called the **Presidium**, which then devolved its authority to the **Union Soviet of Commissars** chaired by Stalin. Furthermore, Stalin had largely abandoned the concept of democratic centralism introduced during Lenin's time, as he uprooted all major opposition from within the party. The most famous victim was Trotsky undoubtedly, but other communist bosses like Sergei Kirov and Nikolai Bukharin, as well as ideological malcontents from the army like Mikhail Tukhachevsky were killed, either under suspicious circumstances or direct execution by the government. During the years of 1936-1938, the infamous **Great Purge** took place, motivated by Stalin's paranoia, in which the Communist Party was aligned strictly to the Stalinist faction for more than a decade with the exiling or execution of political opponents. The gulag was an important symbol of Stalinist oppression in this period, as documented perhaps most famously by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his printed series, *The Gulag Archipelago*.

Underlining political Stalinism was Stalin's cult of personality, which was achieved through immense propaganda campaigns and extensive usage of secret police units to inspire fear in the population. As was mentioned, the traditional distinction between the public and private spheres was largely ignored in this time period. Propaganda material insinuating Stalin as the "great architect of communism" was widespread: portraits of Stalin could be found on regular citizens' walls, while children played games in which they simulated the Russian Civil War.^{xxxix} Furthermore, hero worship was commonplace, as evidenced by the government's support for heroic realist pieces of art.



Soviet propaganda from 1932. Anti-Bolshevik leaders (among which are Kadets and Mensheviks) depicted on the left hand side claim that revolutionary rule would only last two weeks in 1919, while a Bolshevik worker is depicted on the right, stating that Soviet socialist rule has been well established by 1932.

“Socialism In One Country”

The namesake of this section is used oftentimes in reference texts to categorize Stalin's policies at-large, though for the purposes of this study guide, this part shall only refer to the foreign policy of Stalinist USSR in tandem with international developments in the period.

Much like those in the economy, foreign policies of the Union went through a practical inflection point with Stalin's rise to power. More specifically, Stalin pronounced the theory of “socialism in one country” in December 1924 with support from Bukharin, who helped him in

the conception of the theory. This grouping of ideas, partially based on Lenin's own writings, held that countries could separately undergo revolutions in the path to a global communist society. Stalin revised the theory to suit his own goals, claiming that "a hostile encirclement of our Union which takes the form of an entire system of military conferences, agreements, and support for the measures taken by different governments against the USSR, and also of campaigns based on forgeries and lies." in the Third Soviet Congress in 1925.^{xi} This represented a break from the more internationally-oriented foreign policy of the Lenin era and instead emphasized the exceptionality of the USSR. Such a shift was not surprising considering Stalin's perception of the international conjecture, which saw generally hostile Soviet-British relations, the failure of German communists in overtaking the government, and USSR continued isolation from global politics, notwithstanding their relations to Weimar Germany, which were relatively warm.^{xli}

The progression of years accomplished little to improve Stalin's paranoia. By the 1930s, the general international unease caused by the Great Depression and the failure of the League of Nations, of which the USSR was also a member, in preventing Japan's invasion of Manchuria started fueling the path to the Second World War. As Europe descended into war and chaos, the Soviet Union remained behind iron drapes and emerged only partially to broker the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Germany in 1939, which created a non-aggression regime between the two countries and divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence and invade Finland in 1940. Stalin was so surprised when Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa in 1942 that, according to some accounts, he had a nervous breakdown when he was informed that Hitler had broken the non-aggression pact.

In no small part thanks to intensive industrialization policies of the government as well as Allied pressure from France, the Soviets were eventually able to beat back Germans to Berlin and they played a key role in ending the fascist menace of Europe in 1945. With this, Eastern European lands like Romania, the Baltics, Poland, and eastern regions of Germany had come under the occupation of the Soviet Union. Suddenly, Stalin was one of the strongest men in the world. To show that his newfound power would not go uncontested, Harry Truman, President of the United States at the time, detonated two nuclear bombs in Japan. The sheer magnitude of

these attempts at intimidation serve as evidence of the international power Stalin had come to accumulate at the immediate post-war period.

By this point, the formulation of the socialism in one country principle had somewhat been transformed to accommodate this reality. The iron curtain had expanded outward to encompass the newly-consolidated Soviet bloc and in 1949, the **Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON)** was established by the USSR to not only counter US recovery aid to Europe, but to also promote the economic and cultural cohesion of the new bloc, paving the way for further integration in the coming years.

4. Denouncing Stalinism: The Years of Khrushchev (1955-1964)

Nikita Khrushchev, a longtime member of the Communist Party and influential Ukrainian leader, was the eventual winner of a bitter power struggle that emerged in 1953 with the passing of the “great architect”. Considering the immense factionalism that Stalin had built into the party, it would not have been surprising for a like-minded General Secretary to follow in his footsteps, and this was the case, at least initially. Georgy Malenkov, Stalin’s deputy, was expected to lead the USSR, but through intrigues and smart political maneuvering, Khrushchev eventually fully consolidated his rule in March 1958 by completely eliminating Malenkov. By 1955 however, the Ukrainian was already in charge.^{xliii}

Although an ally of Stalin before, Khrushchev emerged as a major critic of Stalinism at the time of the Georgian dictator’s death. As will be discussed, Khrushchev was unhappy with the cult of personality that Stalin had established over the country, how he got rid of important figures like Tukhachevsky, and his policy failures. Thus, the general idea behind Khrushchev’s tenure was **de-Stalinization**, the effects of which could be seen in many aspects of Soviet policy during these years.

In the meanwhile, the Soviets had already come to control an empire to rival the United States and the rest of the Western bloc: the Berlin crisis of 1949 where Stalin exerted pressure on the namesake city to challenge the Western powers was a relevant example to this fact. Khrushchev had his own ideas as to how to position the Soviet Union globally and in its own neighborhood, and the reactions that the USSR showed to diplomatic challenges in this time period foreshadowed the responses of the Brezhnev and even Gorbachev governments.

De-Stalinization as a Means of Policy Reform?

Khrushchev's pursuit of de-Stalinization meant the reversal of Stalin-instituted policies in the last 3 decades, though the degree with which these repudiations were carried out varied. To begin with an aspect of government policy that remained relatively the same, the economy and agriculture can be considered. Here, Khrushchev attempted to reform the bureaucracy to which both industrial and farming production were tied to by favoring further centralization of the economy. **Territorial production administrations** were created to manage agricultural production, and there was even a proposal to create two sections within the Communist Party, one of which would specialize in industry, while the other in agriculture, though both policies failed to create the impact that Khrushchev had expected. Agriculturally, production increased throughout the 1950s but suffered a huge blow in 1960 due to a particularly weak harvest.^{xliv}

The phantom of collectivization loomed large. Khrushchev was aware that the mode of production in the USSR, which was akin to the **Asiatic mode of production (AMP)** as put forth by Karl Marx, had to be somewhat transformed to reflect the capitalist one, which was driven by self-interested motives to maximize economic gain, in order to be globally competitive. However, his government fell short of taking the necessary radical steps, further delaying Soviet economic reform. Consequently, the post-1957 years of Khrushchev witnessed economic growth rates that were far from the expectations of the Soviet state.^{xlv}



Nevertheless, standards of living were ameliorated during Khrushchev's years. Although the USSR could not exactly compete with the USA, the economic instability and huge exodus of the Stalin period somewhat disappeared. Consumer goods became more readily available, while wages increased.^{xlvi} Furthermore, the infamous ***Khrushchyovka*** low-income housing project helped to create shelter for many in the cities, irrespective of the less-than-stellar quality of the houses themselves.^{xlvii}

Khrushchev in 1959, sourced from Life magazine.. He was a corn aficionado.

Politically, de-Stalinization was constantly on the forefront, even though its actual effect is debatable. The take-off point for de-Stalinization and, in particular, its application in politics, was Khrushchev's notorious **Secret Speech** in February 1956 in the Twentieth Party Congress where he unleashed harsh criticisms of Stalin and his conduct regarding many aspects of Soviet governance, ranging from immense political censure to supposed blunders in dictating agricultural policy. After 30 years of oppression under Stalin's regime, an audience with whom the speech resonated appeared and Khrushchev capitalized on this: 8-9 million of political malcontents were let go from confinement within months after the speech.^{xlviii} Moreover, two "cultural thaws" took place (in 1956 and 1961-1963), partly reducing censorship of cultural elements within the context of de-Stalinization. Khrushchev also used this approach as a pretext to create smaller scale political witch-hunts against those who supposedly were still supporting the old Stalinist regime. This was ironically how Stalin himself also achieved total political loyalty some years ago.^{xlix}

However, there were limits to de-Stalinization. Firstly, as explained, it was easily turned into a political tool at the hands of Khrushchev, indicating that it was not as normative as the General Secretary had claimed. Secondly, it was Stalin that was being targeted by Khrushchev rather than Stalinism. Indeed, as observed in the economy, Khrushchev opted to preserve the old regime. Reduction of censorship was also a half-hearted affair as can be deduced from the small time frames in which it was practiced, and the fact that there was no institutional reform to increase public participation in politics and widen the political arena more than proves that political de-Stalinization was incomplete at best and malicious at worst.

Settings Precedents: Khrushchev's Foreign Policy

In actuality, when thought of comparatively, de-Stalinization was much more visible in Soviet foreign politics rather than its domestic politics and economics. Khrushchev pursued a thaw with the countries that Stalin had feuds with, while he feuded with the countries that Stalin was getting along well with and, in a limited fashion, preached **peaceful coexistence**, the idea that communist regimes could live side-by-side with capitalist ones.¹ This represented a break with the traditional Soviet foreign policy idea that a communist revolution would eventually transform the entirety of the world. In short, Khrushchev's approach to foreign policy would go on to

influence the actions of not just the newer generations represented by Gorbachev, but also those of the old guard, like Brezhnev.

Defining tests of foreign policy came in the forms of the **Hungarian revolt in 1956**, the **Berlin Crisis of 1961**, the **Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962**, and the **deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations** at this same time.^{li} In general terms, Khrushchev went on to define the USSR's approach to its backyard (the Eastern bloc, organized into the **Warsaw Pact** in 1955) and its relations to greater powers like the US, Europe, and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

To briefly summarize, the Hungarian revolt, itself partly provoked by the Secret Speech, was a revisionist but leftist uprising to topple the Stalinist regime of Hungary, which was recently made a Soviet satellite state. Khrushchev, notwithstanding the fact that the rebels were leftists themselves, sent in tanks to violently crush the revolt and execute its ringleaders, fearing a capitalist penetration into the Eastern bloc. As Noam Chomsky notes, Khrushchev had used the pretext of international relations to strengthen Soviet control over its bloc.^{lii} Indeed, Khrushchev also ended the first cultural thaw by using the Hungarian revolt as an excuse. This scenario would go on to repeat in other cases, like in Brezhnev's handling of the Prague Spring.

Similarly, the other tests of Soviet foreign policy helped dictate the long-term relations of the USSR to the relevant countries. In the cases of the Berlin Crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis, the former of which also significantly culminated in the construction of the **Berlin Wall**, a deep distrust of European NATO countries against the USSR emerged. However, the Old Continent, in this time period, was more preoccupied with European integration and was strongly anti-war, meaning that no power strong enough to act as a counterbalance to either the USSR or the USA emerged. On the other hand, although it could be never considered as a *détente*, at least for now, US-USSR relations improved to the point of a mutual understanding that the two nuclear superpowers represented a bloc of their own against the other. Particularly during the Kennedy period, US-USSR relations were warm, though with John Kennedy's death and the accession of Lyndon Johnson to the American presidency, it was made clear that the rivalry between these two states could never exactly dissipate nor even be tempered down significantly, at least for the time being. Sino-Soviet relations reflected an entirely different reality, where the diplomatic proximity that the two countries enjoyed during the Stalin years metamorphosed into total

hostility. This was a long-term strategic mistake on the part of the Soviets, as the US later pursued the One China policy to align with the PRC and isolate the USSR.

Khrushchev's Last Days

As could be potentially deduced, Khrushchev's tenure was a far cry from the diplomatic successes of the Stalin period and was also much less propaganda-worthy. Stagnation in the economy and the image of a Soviet Union unable to overtake the US in terms of production and global politics rendered the Ukrainian an unpopular leader in the final analysis.^{liii} Although maybe not to the general public, but for the Soviet elite, particularly Brezhnev, Khrushchev had to be removed, literally.^{liv}

In the end, in late 1964, Khrushchev was politically eliminated, if not killed. He left behind him a complicated legacy, though his effect on later leaders, particularly on Gorbachev, would prove important in the coming decades.

5. The Brezhnev Era: Stability in the USSR (1964-1982)

Spanning 18 long years (the longest rule of any Soviet leader after Stalin), Leonid Brezhnev's rule as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is marked by the establishment of a stable (and a mostly rigid) political system that governed both the USSR's internal and foreign affairs. Under this system, the Soviet Union and the life therein gained many characteristic properties that are still thought of to this day when the name "Soviet Union" is mentioned. Most importantly, however, the Brezhnev era political system holds importance since the reforms introduced during the final years of the USSR were directly aimed at changing this very system, so any attempts at understanding those reforms require a sufficient knowledge of the Brezhnev era first.

Reversal of Khrushchev's Reforms

Following Khrushchev's (forced) resignation as the General Secretary in late 1964 due to his chaotic governing style and disagreements with the Politburo, a "collective leadership" was proclaimed by the five members of the Brezhnev Politburo (including Brezhnev himself, whose power had notably increased by 1971).^{lv} The members of this Politburo hold ideals that were different from those of Khrushchev. While Khrushchev, still bearing the memories from the time of the October Revolution, set the goal of building "full communism by 1980"; the age-wise

younger Politburo dismissed this idea. Instead, they concluded that the post-Stalin Soviet system already represented a successful “dictatorship of the proletariat” capable of properly addressing the domestic and international problems.^{lvi}

The change of ideals entailed the reversal of many reforms adopted under Khrushchev’s rule. First, the Communist Party, which had been separated into two branches for agriculture and for industry under Khrushchev, was unified again. Following that, the decentralized economic institutions known as *sovnarkhozy* (regional economic councils) were abandoned in favor of central planning. De-Stalinization efforts and the cultural thaw following it were halted; heavy state censorship over cultural activities and art was swiftly reinstated.^{lvii} However, the most important change would be the introduction of the “**trust in cadres**” policy. Canceling Khrushchev’s policy of rotating the party officials between different positions regularly, the Brezhnev administration claimed that allowing individuals to hold the same position for their working life created a more stable and effective state. With all those policy reversals, the Soviet governance came under the domination of a conservative (or Orthodox) stance, pursuing Stalinist policies.^{lviii} Even though there were a number of reforms during the first years of the Brezhnev administration such as the systematic prioritization of the **light industry** over heavy industry and collective agriculture, the regime’s commitment to the Orthodox Leninist-Stalinist doctrine was reinforced following the Prague Spring in 1968.



Leonid Brezhnev (Britannica, 2022)

The Developed Socialist Model and the Social Contract

When analyzing the administration of domestic affairs (most notably, the economic and the social affairs), scholars usually point out that the Brezhnev administration established a **social contract** between the state and the society.^{lix} The Politburo, having dismissed the idea of building a full communist order, promoted **developed socialism** as a new organization and administration model. Under this model, the state (controlled by the central government in Moscow) held an authoritarian control over both the economic and political affairs, controlling various resources and overseeing the production processes through the union.^{lx} However, the state was required to closely cooperate with both the enterprises it oversaw (like factory and farm managements) and with its citizens in order to create a stable order and maintain legitimacy. Thus, the regime would assist the enterprises by setting reasonable production targets and incorporating these enterprises into the process of formulating economic policies and decisions. In return, the enterprises would carry out their assigned duties without complications while staying loyal to the regime. A similar “deal” also existed between the state and the citizens; this time, the citizens’ loyalty and productivity was exchanged for the economic benefits distributed by the state, therefore formulating a welfare state system.^{lxi}

Moreover, this social contract between the state and the society manifested itself in the form of different policies. Stephen Hanson classifies these policies under five key elements: “job security, low prices for basic goods, the de facto toleration of a thriving ‘second economy’, a limited form of social mobility, and the creation of tightly controlled spheres for the expression of non-Russian national identities”,^{lxii} all of which will be briefly explained.

Unlike Stalin’s mass purges and Khrushchev’s institutional turbulences, Brezhnevian policies helped the citizens retain their positions for the entirety of their working life, regardless of their occupation. In the industry and the agriculture sector, this phenomenon was encouraged by the state’s subsidies that did not account much for efficiency; in the administration sector (including the Communist Party and other state institutions), this was directly the result of the “trust in cadres” policy.

Another economic improvement that came under the Brezhnev regime was the easing of the access to common consumer goods. The priority given to the light industry (promoted by Alexei Kosygin, the Prime Minister and a member of the Politburo) was a move directly aimed

at protecting the interest of consumer lobbies and the working class.^{lxiii} Apart from that, the Brezhnev administration was especially cautious at keeping the prices of those consumer goods low, often at the expense of shortages caused by the discrepancy between the supply and the demand of goods. Nevertheless, the easy accessibility of goods, combined with the easy accessibility of public services (like health, education, and recreation) was appealing to the populace as it meant a significant increase in living quality compared to just a few decades prior. Even though the state was not able to always provide the population adequately due to its rigid planning system, it nevertheless allowed the existence of a second economy, in the form of **kolkhoz markets** introduced under Stalin. There also existed an extensive system of black markets for a wide variety of products, though they were illegal and were often linked with corruption among the state officials.^{lxiv}



Alexei Kosygin, Prime Minister of the USSR (1964-1980) and the architect of economic reforms during the early Brezhnev era. (Cros, 1966)

As the Stalinist economic system settled, a social hierarchy defined by the place of residency emerged during the 1970s. At the bottom were the villages, suffering from a lack of proper welfare service and an aging, rather unproductive farmer population. Open cities (cities

with no or few residency controls), with more satisfactory public services and cultural activities were the next in the hierarchy. Following them, **closed cities** (residency in which was permitted only to the political elite and the workers of some state enterprises) with better living standards and a variety of cultural activity came. Finally, the cities of Leningrad and Moscow were at the top of this hierarchy, being superior to other settlements in every imaginable aspect. Though the social mobility in this hierarchy was limited, it was still possible for one to work their way up, creating an incentive for the privileged to stay loyal to the regime.^{lxv}

Lastly, the Brezhnev era saw the creation of tightly controlled spheres for the expression of non-Russian national identities. Even though there was still an emphasis on the creation of a supranational “Soviet man”, national and ethnic identities of **titular groups** were reinforced during the Brezhnev era. Education in national languages was permitted, and the Soviet Republics (except Russia) were allowed to have national parties & state bureaucracies which helped the entrenchment of powerful ethnic networks under the “trust in cadres” policy. However, the Russian dominance still persisted through the USSR: ethnic Russians were appointed as “second secretaries” for every republic, elite positions required the knowledge of Russian and non-Russians in the army had to serve outside of their home republic. Nevertheless, the promotion of ethnic identity, especially in political structures, entailed the development of strong nationalist subcultures that would later go on to resist Soviet rule.^{lxvi}

Overall, a system that promoted stability was established via introducing little institutional modifications to the Stalinist system; but it was supported by the creation of a social contract between the state and the society. The government received substantial support from the people as an economic growth rate of up to 6 percent a year enabled for the allocation of more resources towards improving living standards, while it was still able to maintain investments in heavy industry (especially military industry). As a result, the Soviet government now managed a system which seemed to satisfy the people, the military, and other state institutions at the same time.^{lxvii}

Soviet Foreign Policy Under Brezhnev

After the economic reforms implemented during Brezhnev’s first years in office proved fruitful, many **Eastern Bloc** countries started enacting similar reforms. This was particularly the case in Czechoslovakia, where economic reforms soon evolved into a series of political reforms

aimed at the liberalization of the country's government and the promotion of greater freedoms (like the freedom of speech & the freedom of the press) for a brief time period in 1968, known as the Prague Spring. Czechoslovakian leader Alexander Dubček, the architect of the Spring, claimed to be creating "socialism with a human face" with those reforms, and the people showed great support for them^{lxviii}. However, the leadership of the USSR and of the other Warsaw Pact countries perceived this wave of liberalization as a threat to socialism. This resulted in a joint military invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact countries (including USSR) in August 1968, causing the Czechoslovakian reforms to be abandoned and Dubček to be deposed. The subsequent announcement of the Soviet Politburo that 'the USSR's armed intervention is justified whenever the socialist system in a Soviet bloc country is threatened' summarizes the **Brezhnev Doctrine**, a key part of the USSR's foreign policy under Brezhnev.^{lxix}

Along with the Brezhnev Doctrine, **détente** (French for relaxation) was also a key policy (or more broadly, a period of coherent policies) that shaped the USSR's foreign affairs and its relations with the West. As the Soviet leadership believed that a military parity with the United States had been achieved in the late 1960s, it saw the new "equal superpower status" as a motive for USSR's rivals (especially the US) to make some concessions in USSR's favor when a conflict of interest arose. Thus, it was now favorable to relax the tensions with the West and to foster cooperation between sides. As a result, the USSR increased its trading volume with the West and encouraged the investments from Western capitalists in its industries, especially in the energy sector. Even though this policy might seem to contradict with the notion of "developed socialism", Brezhnev argued that the capitalist order was doomed to fail at some time, so any investments in the country would automatically benefit socialism in the long term since it provided the USSR with more resources to spread socialism.



US President Richard Nixon meets Leonid Brezhnev on June 19, 1973 during Washington Summit (Knudsen, 1973)

Apart from its economic benefits, the détente is also notable for slowing down the arms race between the US and the USSR. Following three years of negotiations, the two sides signed the SALT I Treaty which set ceilings on the number of nuclear missiles that could be deployed by both sides. However, starting from the mid 1970s, there was a rising pressure from domestic groups in the US and in Western Europe to stop cooperating with the USSR until the USSR allowed for basic human liberties within its borders. This, combined with the fact that the USSR still continued its efforts towards spreading socialism in post-colonial nations, affected Western politicians' approach towards the USSR negatively, making it harder for the USSR to continue cooperation with the West day by day.^{lxx} Even though the Helsinki Accords, a document that aimed at improving détente by securing both sides' acceptance of the post-World War II status quo in Europe^{lxxi}, was signed in 1975, the détente ended following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.^{lxxii}

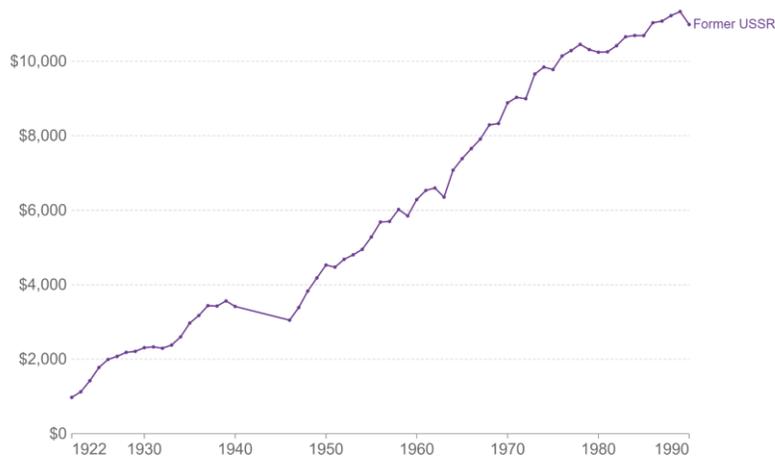
The Demise of the Developed Socialist Model

The developed socialist model, which was underlined by stability and a firm acceptance of Orthodox Leninism-Stalinism, and the social contract established thereunder started facing problems in the mid-1970s. During that time, the overall economic productivity in the USSR started to falter, causing the GDP growth to falter as well. This phenomenon was actually a result of different factors, all of which were related to the non-reformist approaches of Soviet governance. Most importantly, the increasing complexity of the Soviet economy had reached to a point where it was not possible to depend mainly on the subsidies provided by the state, and new methods to bolster the production were necessary.^{lxxiii} However, the inefficiency of the agricultural & industrial management and the government's ignorance about articulating new, structural solution proposals only exacerbated the problem. There was a need for the introduction of new production technologies during the production process, yet the Soviet leadership chose to rely more and more on oil & gas exports instead of conducting adequate adjustments about the production processes. So, the late Brezhnev era, with its GDP growth rate close to zero percent, came to be known as the "Era of Stagnation" in the USSR.^{lxxiv}

Moreover, economic problems entailed a change in the public's approach towards the state, putting the aforementioned social contract at risk. Even though the economic growth rate stagnated, the Brezhnev government still gave importance to supplying the heavy industry and the military (mostly because it was necessary to do so in order to keep the military content and be able to continue détente), which took a toll on the light industry and the production of consumer goods.^{lxxv} Shortages became more common, and the life quality of the citizens decreased. At the same time, the citizens were growing disenchanted with their work as their absolute job security did not mean much when any incentive to work harder and bolster production were curtailed by the complex yet ineffective mechanism of central planning and the bureaucracy connected thereto. As a result, the people started losing their faith in the state and its social contract. Meanwhile, the regime ignorantly continued to promote the decades old Leninist-Stalinist ideal of a "Soviet" person, ironically trying to use "revolutionary" appeals during an era where stability led to routinisation. Thus, the ideological loyalty started to wane as well (especially among the younger population), paving the way for the rise of nationalistic and ethnic sentiments across the USSR.^{lxxvi}

GDP per capita, 1922 to 1990

GDP per capita adjusted for price changes over time (inflation) and price differences between countries – it is measured in international-\$ in 2011 prices.



Source: Maddison Project Database 2020 (Bolt and van Zanden (2020))

OurWorldInData.org/economic-growth · CC BY

The USSR's GDP per capita from 1922 to 1990, notice the stagnation after mid-1970s (Bolt and van Zanden, 2020)

While the domestic conditions were not bright, foreign affairs and the worldwide public image of the USSR deteriorated too. As Western politicians' approach towards the USSR took a negative turn during the 1970s, sanctions such as the US embargo on grain sales followed. This negative attitude was reinforced with the election of Margaret Thatcher as the UK Prime Minister in 1979 and the election of Ronald Reagan as the US President in 1980, both of which publicly showed anti-communist sentiment and led to their countries to adopt more hostile policies against the USSR. Also, the Brezhnev Politburo ordered an invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 following a political turmoil that threatened the communist rule in Afghanistan. The invasion was costly both for the military and for the Brezhnev government; the prolongation of the war (which ended in 1989) required for costlier military maneuvers and the international public opinion blamed the USSR for acting just like the "imperialistic powers" the Leninist ideology claimed to despise. Another foreign crisis emerged in Poland where an organized workers' movement known as the Solidarity Movement threatened the legitimacy of the ruling communist party in Poland. Even though the USSR opted not to intervene (due to the high costs of the ongoing invasion in Afghanistan), the harsh crackdown led by the Polish government in late 1981 further caused damage to the reputation of communist governments.^{lxxvii}

While different crises emerged both in domestic affairs and in international affairs, the Soviet governance was not able to articulate any proper solution proposals. Due to the “trust in cadres” policy, the Soviet governance had become very old and outdated, just like the institutions they supported stubbornly. By the early 1980’s, even Brezhnev and his Politburo members were coping with serious health problems, which rendered their capacity to lead the country very low^{lxxviii}; and this was happening while a younger generation of officials with better resolutions aimed at solving problems were waiting in the line.^{lxxix} The faithful trust in political cadres, which once brought stability, now plagued the Soviet state. After Brezhnev passed away in November 1982, his like-minded successors Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko too passed away due to complications related with their old age, respectively in 1984 and in 1985.^{lxxx}

6. Soviet Interregnum: Gorbachev’s Rise under Andropov and Chernenko (1982-1985)

Two days after Brezhnev’s death, the 68 year-old Yuri Andropov was announced as the new Secretary General of the Communist Party. At the time, he had been the head of the KGB since 1967, and his actions as the head of KGB had become the subject of criticism by many Western human rights activists.^{lxxxi} After becoming the Secretary General, Andropov continued imposing strict measures against political dissidents. Even though he stayed loyal to the fundamental Socialist principles, he believed that some policy changes and small reforms would help the country overcome problems. His priorities were incentivizing workers and fighting corruption, while closing the gap between the Communist Party and the ordinary citizens.^{lxxxii}

One of the most important developments under Andropov would be the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev as an important figure in the Politburo. Being the youngest member of the Politburo, Gorbachev’s energy was admired by Andropov. Andropov gave the responsibility of the whole economy to Gorbachev (whose duties had been confined to agriculture), effectively increasing Gorbachev’s power within the Politburo. Andropov also wanted to designate Gorbachev as his successor by suggesting that he chair the Politburo meetings during his absence (which would make him the Second Secretary) in late 1983. However, this concerned many conservatives in the Politburo, including Konstantin Chernenko, who feared losing their positions under Gorbachev’s rule. They prevented the ill Andropov from realizing his goals, and Andropov died in February 1984.^{lxxxiii}

Andropov was replaced by the 72 year-old, terminally ill Chernenko, who was a non-reformist like Brezhnev. However, Chernenko appointed Gorbachev as the Second Secretary and extended Gorbachev's field of responsibility to cover ideology and foreign affairs; both were the results of a compromise between the two. Even though Gorbachev was not perceived as a reformer at the time, it was easy to distinguish his approach from those of the conservatives in Soviet governance, who tried to prevent Gorbachev's rise. Nevertheless, Gorbachev managed to consolidate his power after the death of Chernenko in March 1985, being recommended unanimously by the Politburo and being elected unanimously by the Central Committee as the new Secretary General.^{lxxxiv}



Konstantin Chernenko (left) and Yuri Andropov (right) in 1983

7. Gorbachev's Reform Agenda (1985-1989)

“The strategic line, worked out at the 26th Congress, at the subsequent Plenary meetings of the Central Committee with vigorous participation of Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov and Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko, has been and remains unchanged. This is the line towards speeding up the country's social and economic development, toward perfecting all aspects of the life of society. The point at issue is restructuring the material and technical base of production.

The point at issue is the perfection of the system of social relations, above all economic ones. The point at issue is also the development of the individual, qualitative improvement of the material conditions of his life and work, of his spiritual makeup.”^{lxxxv}

This excerpt, taken from Mikhail Gorbachev's first speech as the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on March 11, 1985, could be easily taken at face value. After all, there is an expression of faith in the current system. However, Gorbachev's later accomplishments, when analyzed in conjunction with this excerpt, show that the new Secretary General had planned immense reform for his tenure as the head of the USSR. Hinting at his policies of *uskorenie*, *perestroika*, and *glasnost* Gorbachev pointed to a new era for the USSR, one made up of uncharted territories and turbulent transformations.



The Prelude: *Uskorenie* (1985-1986)

Uskorenie, meaning “**acceleration**” in English, was Gorbachev's main principle of economic policy in his first two years at the head of the USSR. Like the rest of the elite, Gorbachev was well aware that all was not well with the economy. Issues dating to the years of Brezhnev and Khrushchev had created a globally non-competitive USSR that trailed behind other countries like the US, UK, France, Germany, and even Japan. During a visit to Europe with his wife Raisa in the 1960s, Gorbachev witnessed firsthand how the Western bloc enjoyed superior economic indicators with better

technology.^{lxxxvi} However, he remained initially ignorant about the weaknesses inherent in the Soviet economic model in comparison to the one used by the capitalist bloc.

Owing to this partial understanding of the woes of the Soviet economy, Gorbachev, acting in accordance with what he termed *uskorenie* tried to improve the civilian economy by supporting technological innovation in the “machine-building sector”. He had hoped that better equipment in this regard could increase the manufacturing of consumer goods to improve the lives of Soviet citizens.^{lxxxvii} Otherwise, there were no proper reforms as the command economy continued to be exalted by the communist elite.

The policy of *uskorenje* came to an abrupt and tragic ending with the disaster at the Chernobyl. As if it was a metaphor of the Soviet system itself, the dilapidated and badly-managed nuclear plant underwent a meltdown in Spring 1986. Recovery efforts were draining economically, and there were many tragic deaths. Moreover, the budget deficit had tripled over the course of 1986 and state-controlled economic ventures were failing, with 13% falling under 0 profit at that same time.^{lxxxviii}

New Thinking in Diplomacy: Continual Instances of Reform

Thusly, Gorbachev turned to another concept that he had espoused in 1985 alongside *uskorenje*, which was perestroika. Commonly translated to English as “**re-structuring**”, *perestroika* came to denote Gorbachev’s reforms at-large. It also served as a trigger word that deeply disturbed his political opponents, who all interpreted it differently. Initially, perestroika remained a buzzword in all aspects but the foreign policy of the Union.

In this regard, Gorbachev was firstly similar to Khrushchev: he pursued reforms externally rather than in the domestic realm. The new Secretary General continued where Khrushchev and the détente period had left off, seeking to further abandon certain foreign policy habits of the Union and to improve relations with non-communist countries. By the early 1980s, what Boyar terms as a “**Second Cold War**” was already afoot, fueled by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the accession of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, two hardline anti-communist interventionists, to the top leadership positions in the US and the UK respectively.^{lxxxix} Therefore, Gorbachev’s foreign policy was particularly significant in these years, as he sought to create rapprochement with the West: arms limitation treaties were negotiated (most significantly, the **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty [INF Treaty]**), Soviets pursued actions of good faith (like the cancellation of the deployment of SS-20 missiles in European bases),^{xc} and Gorbachev put himself at the forefront of the USSR’s foreign policy. He was well-educated, spoke English impressively, and was unlike the old guard, to whom orthodox Western leaders like Reagan and Thatcher were used to dealing with. They confidently believed that Gorbachev was someone who they could do “business” with, as put by Thatcher herself.^{xc1}

Gorbachev termed his foreign policy approach “*novoe myshlenie*”, translated to “**new thinking**” in English, and prioritizes it immensely. He informally consulted with the intellectuals that surrounded him, as well as his wife Raisa, on matters pertaining to Soviet diplomacy and made

impressive headway in transforming the Union's foreign policy, perhaps more so than he was able to accomplish the same for the Union's political system and its economy.^{xcii} According to scholar Vladislav Zubok, "[b]y 1987, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, helped by a handful of loyal assistants, were monopolizing the making of foreign policy."^{xciii} Edouard Shevardnadze is Gorbachev's foreign minister and trusted aide by the start date of the committee.

Of course, the foreign policy priority of Gorbachev was and is to keep stability in the Warsaw Pact, which itself has been going through political convulsions on its own. This is not surprising, considering that attempts to reform the communist system have already taken place with the 1956 Hungarian revolt and the 1968 Prague Spring. In both cases, the Soviets utilized military force to quell the insurrections. However, the Brezhnev Doctrine seems to have lost its practicality by 1989, as anti-communist social and political forces in these countries have started to swell. To attempt to keep the Warsaw Pact together, Gorbachev has promised increased autonomy to the Eastern bloc countries and has withdrawn the previously-existent direct Soviet support for communist movements worldwide. The Secretary General has also expressed his wish to export the ideas of *perestroika* and *glasnost* to Warsaw Pact countries, though this wish remains currently unimplemented.^{xciv}

Transforming the Soviet State and Society

Even though Gorbachev was able to centralize policymaking in diplomatic relations, the process was much more complicated and difficult when it came to the domestic realm. What Gorbachev saw was a crumbling bureaucracy, a profoundly mismanaged economy, rampant nepotism in all aspects of daily life, ethnic separatism, and a disillusioned public that was far removed from the highly-oblivious population that Stalin dominated. With the failure of *uskorenie*, Gorbachev took a view to actually implementing what he deemed *perestroika* and *glasnost*, which meant taking steps that were immensely unorthodox by Soviet standards. The latter of these policies came sometime after the first one was inaugurated, in 1986, and it meant "**openness**" in English, practically implying a lessening of political censorship in all walks of life.

Regarding domestic politics, Gorbachev's priority was always the reorganization of the economy, which itself was profoundly tied to politics as they were both based on the principle of decentralization. The Secretary General deeply valued this concept since he believed that the sluggishness of the bureaucracy and economy was being partly caused by how everything was centralized in Moscow. His experiences during the *uskorenie* years more than proved this assumption.

To try and begin the transformation process, Gorbachev gradually but quickly got rid of main political rivals and assembled himself a loyal cabinet, as well as an informal support base made up of certain intellectuals. Notable names here were prime minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, Shevardnadze, deputy secretary Yegor Ligachev and Victor Chebrikov, who was the director of the **KGB**, the Soviet intelligence agency, until 1988.^{xcv} In terms of intellectuals' support, Gorbachev, with the *glasnost* policy, ended the censorship of many important publications and pieces of art, which garnered him sympathy across the intellectual community.^{xcvi} Alexander Yakovlev, Gorbachev's close associate and Politburo member by the beginning of the committee, was the main intellectual that greatly influenced Gorbachev's views, particularly regarding foreign policy. As was previously mentioned, Gorbachev's inner circle was made up of intellectuals and was a scene for many discussions regarding policies of the Union.

By 1989, Gorbachev had made important strides in the economy, but these have so far been superficial and not effectively implemented. Important legal milestones are the **1968 Law on Individual Economic Activity**, the **1988 Law on the State Enterprise**, and the **1988 Law on Co-operatives**.^{xcvii} Gorbachev has additionally pushed for further international trade, though irrespective of all these reforms, the USSR is still not a market economy. Although Gorbachev's reforms have achieved the goal of weakening Moscow as the center of economic control, this was not fully followed up by the transition to a market system. As a result, economic growth has stagnated, and input prices have declined per Ryzhkov's report in 1987,^{xcviii} contributing to a general loss of welfare of the Soviet public. The situation in agriculture is no different, as grain, a previously primary export item of the USSR, has to be imported due to diminishing production. Furthermore, public debt and the trade deficit have also increased,^{xcix} weakening the state vis-à-vis not just its international competitors, but also domestically, against opposition forces who claim that the economy is being incompetently managed.

Year	Debt
1981	24.7
1985	27.2
1986	39.4
1987	38.8
1988	40.8
1989	46.3

Source: R. G. Pikhoya, *Sovetsky Soyuz: Istoriya Vlasti 1945–1991* (1998).

Politically, there is a rosier image although the risks loom large. Even though Gorbachev has consolidated his rule, so far, certain attempts at political reform are potentially dangerous. The weakening of the Communist Party's monopoly on politics by **constitutional reform in 1988** and the inauguration of new bodies to increase political participation, particularly the **Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union** and the reorganization of the Supreme Soviet has created a major opportunity for alternative ideologies to find a footing in official Soviet politics.^c **For further information about Gorbachev's political reforms and the new system, the handbook has to be consulted.**

Another important area of concern was the territorial integrity of the Union itself. Chebrikov, when he was head of the KGB, submitted a report in December 1986, urging Gorbachev to consider the matter of nationality when making new additions to the bureaucracy. This recommendation was made because Chebrikov believed that national consciousness was on the rise throughout the USSR, and he was not far off. The social contract put forth by Brezhnev during his tenure was disappearing and the failures related to perestroika somewhat showed the ethnic republics that they were more fit to practice self-determination rather than be ruled by Moscow. Furthermore, ethnic disagreements and conflicts in regions like **Nagorno-Karabakh**, **Crimea**, and **Transnistria**, though not explicitly related to the central authority, also served to create instability between different republics.^{ci}

Conclusion

By 1989, Gorbachev's USSR looked to be in an unsalvageable situation. With failures of government policy regarding the economy to domestically-sourced opposition pressures, the Union looks to be in dire straits. However, it is yet soon to decide the fate of the Union and its position in world politics. A new generation of politicians are arriving, and power still firmly

rests at the hands of the reformist government. With bold leadership and a good reading of external and internal political balances, the Union could find solutions to its problems. On the other hand, anti-Union forces can act accordingly to the weaknesses of the system and exploit them, creating the groundwork for its eventual dissolution. As 3rd of June, 1989 dawns out of the elections of the Congress, parliamentarians in the Supreme Soviet are to see the nation through. Will it survive? Or will it collapse under immense pressure?

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