

1991 AUGUST COUP

Official Background Guide

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Topic 1: Democracy in Russia & Succeeding Soviet Republics

Topic 2: Coup Threats

Structure of Government

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had a powerful central government but it began to weaken towards the end of the 20th century. The official title for the leader of the USSR from 1946 to early 1991 was Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Ministers were one of the only executive powers in the Government. The legislative aspect of the USSR was the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. This was the only group with the power to amend the constitution. The Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union also has the responsibility to elect the head of state, the Presidium, appoint the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court, and the Procurator General of the USSR. In over 50 years the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union only passed 80 laws, about 1% of the total legislation. In addition the Supreme soviet of the soviet union only meets once every 6 to 8 months. Therefore the Presidium is elected to serve when the Supreme Soviet isn't meeting. The presidium is accountable to the Supreme soviet but the chairmen of the presidium is similar in power to a head of state. After December of 1988 The supreme soviet has been made up of 542 seats, one is elected to a seat every 5 years, and the seats are divided between 2 houses. The Soviet of the Union represents the population and every seat represents an equal number of citizens. Then the Soviet of Nationalities represents ethnic populations with different numbers of deputies for republics, autonomous republics, autonomous oblasts (regions), and autonomous okrugs (districts). This house is unaffected by population size.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union or CPSU was the largest party in the USSR and held a monopoly over the seats in the supreme soviet. The CPSU chose who could work where so everyone in a powerful position was loyal to them. The elite class of citizens who received the best occupations were known as Nomenklatura. The full time workers with political or bureaucratic power were known as apparatchiks. In 1987 19 million, or 9.7% of the adult population, belonged to the CPSU. This allowed for secret police and an absolute hieratical structure which granted immense leverage over governmental institutions, the press, cultural and economic organizations and labor unions. The CPSU is divided into 3 main organs, the politburo for decision making, the central committee for generating the party's policy, and the secretariat for managing the party and its bureaucracy.

Power is further delegated to Union Republics each one with their own supreme soviet serving as their legislature. The Largest Union Republic is the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic or RSFSR. Some of the republics are larger union republics with the constitutional right to secede from the USSR, while some ethnic minorities and smaller republics can not. Republics were then divided into small regions such as Oblasts. Oblasts function similar to states within the U.S.

Eastern Bloc and Allies

The Eastern bloc were Marxist–Leninist countries aligned with the Soviet Union. These countries were known as second world countries. In opposition was the capitalist Western Bloc or first world countries. Third world countries were unaligned. Afghanistan, Albania, Angola,

Benin, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Maoist China, Congo, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea bissau, Hungary, Iraq, Kampuchea, Laos, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Nicaragua, North Korea, Poland, Romania, USSR, Vietnam, Yemen, & Yugoslavia were all in the Eastern bloc or were soviet allies at some point in the Cold War.

Dissatisfaction with the soviet influences and system of government had simmered until they boiled over in the Revolutions of 1989. Tensions built around the Chernobyl disaster of 1986 where Gorbachev announced the Soviet Union spent 18 billion rubles (18 billion USD equivalent) to clean up after the disaster nearly bankrupting the USSR. The Catholic Church also supported reform efforts furthering motivations for devolution. The first tremors of independence began with student protests in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, a Union Republic of the USSR. Followed by strikes of Polish workers in 1988. This trend continued in Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. Then in November 1988, the Estonian SSR issued a declaration of sovereignty. On 4th June 1989, Poland's Solidarity trade union won an overwhelming victory in partially free elections, leading to the peaceful fall of communism in Poland. That same month Hungary began breaking down the Iron Curtain by opening a border gate to Austria. On 7 July 1989 Gorbachev gave a speech outlining the purpose of the Sinatra doctrine to not use force to prevent a republic from leaving the USSR. Mass demonstrations led to the Berlin Wall's fall. The collapse of the wall triggered the Malta summit, A meeting between U.S. president Bush and then chairman Gorbachev. At the summit the heads of state announced the end of the cold war. Many of the revolutions of 1989 were instigated by peaceful civil resistance except in Romania where things turned violent.

In contrast, while Yugoslavia wasn't a USSR ally it was communist until its devolution in 1990. Albania had it's first free election in March of 1991 and has been slowly moving away from communism for a couple of years. Other Communist countries like Czechoslovakia, North Korea, Ethiopia, Angola, Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, Mozambique, Somalia, and South Yemen are making noises towards the end of communism. Simultaneous to the end of communism in Poland, protests occurred in Tiananmen square mainland China. Images of bravery at the protests have galvanized anti communist sympathies in Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Mongolia. On the other hand, communism looks strong in China, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam. Revolutions in 1989 have caused a domino effect toppling multiple dictatorships worldwide. On 1 July 1991, the Warsaw Pact was officially dissolved at a meeting in Prague.

Gorbachev's Reforms

In 1985 Gorbachev announced *Uskorenie* or acceleration as his new slogan for accelerating economic, political, and social growth. He later announced *perestroika* (restructuring), *glasnost* (transparency), new political thinking, and *demokratizatsiya* (democratization) as succeeding slogans. *Uskorenie* focused on promoting heavy industry, *khozraschet* (commercialization), modifying central planning, and supporting the work force. However it led to greater disparities and was abandoned in 1987. However The USSR economy began industrializing rapidly in the late 60s and early 70s. The USSR has also become the 3rd largest producer of petroleum behind the US and Saudi Arabia with discoveries in the Volga-Urals region and Siberia. RSFSR accounts for $\frac{2}{3}$ of the electricity produced in the soviet union. On the other hand the price of oil fell dramatically in 1986 which strained the Soviet

economy even further. The costs of being a global superpower—the military, space program, subsidies to client states—were out of proportion to the Soviet's turgid economy.

Gorbachev then introduced perestroika in 1987 to end what he called the Era of Stagnation. It gave more independence to the ministries and attempted to make the work of socialism more efficient in the economy. But this backfired and instead exacerbated shortages, which is often blamed for some republics pushing for independence. In 1987 the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union passed the Law on State Enterprise. Enterprise's could decide how much to produce but still were required to fill state orders and buy materials at negotiated contract prices. The State controlled means of production but under perestroika elected officials were in control not ministers. In addition, the state could not save an enterprise from bankruptcy. In 1988 the Law of Cooperatives was passed and for the first time in 60 years allowed private ownership of businesses. Therefore cooperative restaurants, shops, and manufacturers began appearing in the Soviet Union. Furthermore Gorbachev allowed businesses to make their own trade deals or through an appropriate minister instead of needing to go through the Minister of foreign trade as before. However Gorbachev kept price controls, exclusion of private property ownership, and government monopoly over most means of production. As well as not focusing heavily on foreign investment and international trade.

To continue his reform efforts he introduced Glasnost. With Glasnost, Gorbachev targeted abuses of power of the CPSU, reduced corruption in the top of the government, eased travel restrictions, and freed political prisoners plus dissidents. He wanted Glasnost because he feared the next president of the soviet union would roll back perestroika and Gorbachev believed openness would allow for greater opposition. One of the most important processes of glasnost was that it allowed citizens to openly criticize the soviet system and its leaders. One of the unforeseen consequences was that the loosening of the totalitarian grip with republics of different ethnic groups would be a major centrifugal force within the USSR. Another miscalculation was assuming the US would aid in the effort to democratize the USSR. While the US approved of Gorbachev's efforts they didn't provide assistance. Furthermore, the changes Gorbachov implemented were slow and haven't had time to change the soviet union to another style of governing to date.

Some of the Issues with Glasnost perestroika made themselves clear. With the increased freedom of the press issues the government had long concealed came to light, such as poor housing, alcoholism, drug abuse, pollution, outdated Stalin-era factories, extensive corruption, war crimes from WWII, use of gulags, treaty with Adolf Hitler, the Great Purges, the war in Afghanistan, and the mishandling of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. As well as extreme dissent in the Eastern bloc and ethnic tension within the union. This greatly diminished the unity felt by soviet citizens. With an alcohol prohibition taxes were lower and republics withheld taxes. Under perestroika enterprises failed and needed government assistance. Also, increased freedom in production led to breakdown of suppliers. This all culminated in economic disaster for the soviet union.

Gorbachov went on to implement "New political Thinking". This challenged much of the previous soviet ideology. It deemphasized military might, unglorified international politics, moved away from the idea of class struggle, & focused on heightened independence. All steps were in a suspected effort to move away from Cold War driven competition. This was seen to partial fruition with the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and replacing the Brezhnev Doctrine with

the Sinatra Doctrine. While Gorbachev is the name history remembers for all these reforms, they are believed to have been developed by Alexander Yakovlev, the Head of the Propaganda Department of the CPSU.

Finally, Gorbachev introduced demokratsiya as an effort to side step the CPSU and appeal to the people. Unfortunately Gorbachev faced criticism from conservatives who wanted to stop the reform and liberals who wanted to accelerate it. Eventually all of Gorbachev's reforms contributed to the weakening of the Soviet Empire as its republics tried to pull out of the soviet union. This amidst the USSR's hegemony over its satellite states beginning to wane set up the USSR for a difficult road ahead.

Gorbachev's Political Machination?

In 1985, once Gorbachev was elected, he felt constrained by the older leadership of the CPSU and began installing new people as part of Uskoreniye. As Gorbachev pushed glasnost , people began to air their grievances more. Eventually an article, "I Cannot Forsake My Principles" was published by Nina Andreyeva on March 13th 1988. This article was pro-communist and a push back against the reforms being undertaken in the USSR. Forcing Gorbachev into a Politburo meeting where almost half agreed with the sentiments in the article. After a multi day meeting, on the 5th of April the Politburo released a resolution that was a point by point rebuttal of the article.

Later at the 19th meeting of the CPSU Gorbachev pushed to establish the Congress of People's Deputies (CPD) which allowed for other candidates to run for office, however it still would ban organized parties. Previously the Supreme Soviet was the highest legislative power but the CPD became that as it elected the members of the supreme soviet. Therefore the entire Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union had to be replaced. It shrank from 1,500 members to 542. It was such a reduction that one of the opposition leaders, Boris Yeltsin, only received his position when another minister relinquished it. At the same time the CPD was elected in 1989 and yielded the largest turnout in Russia's history. While $\frac{1}{3}$ of the seats in the CPD were permanently reserved for the CPSU by Gorbachev, over 300 reformers managed to get seats (about 13% of the caucus). After the election of the CPD, for 2 weeks on live television, the new representatives berated Gorbachev, the KGB, and the military. Gorbachev was at great risk because if the communist apparatus became too displeased with him they could force him to leave office. Because of this, at the same meeting, Gorbachev used his power to create the office of the president which would be elected by the public. However he argued that they couldn't hold an election at this tumultuous time and suggested they elect him to the new office. The Supreme Soviet then elected Gorbachev chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, giving Gorbachev the attributes of power that previously Leonid Brezhnev had. Anatoly Lukyanov became chairman of the Supreme Soviet in Gorbachev's place. Gorbachev's election marked the third time in a year he had been elected to an office equivalent to that of Soviet head of state. He was elected by the Congress of People's Deputies on all three occasions. These changes meant that the Secretariat of the CPSU, until that time solely responsible for the development and implementation of state policies, had lost much of its power. As a reaction to this, in 1989, the Inter-Regional Group formed of Liberals and Russian nationalists in the CPD as the opposition led by Boris Yeltsin.

Gorbachev, still feeling constricted by the CPSU, helped the opposition and repealed article 6 of the Soviet constitution in February of 1990 at the Central Committee plenum. The anti-CPSU pressure and repeal of article 6 forced the Communist Party to give up their monopoly of power in the Supreme Soviet in 1990. With this new appointment and a Weakened CPSU Gorbachev became almost entirely independent from the Politburo and the party leaders. At the 28th congressional meeting the CPSU had been weakened so greatly the CPSU branches in the republics began to splinter. At this same meeting almost the entirety of the politburo was replaced. This CPSU meeting is the last meeting to date.

While, as president, Gorbachev could now appoint government ministers, he was vulnerable to all-union ministries. Gorbachev proceeded to strong arm the Supreme soviet to grant him temporary powers of unrestricted decrees on the economy, law and order and appointment of government personnel until 31 March 1992. With many of these changes the model for the USSR government began to trend towards the presidential and semi-presidential system of America and France respectively. The CPSU had been the force holding the Union Republics in but as it began to weaken the Republics pushed for greater independence.

To-date the two most powerful executive offices have been the office of the president and the council of ministers. In January of 1991 Gorbachev began abolishing the Council of Ministers and replacing it with the Cabinet of Ministers. This consolidated the power into Gorbachev as the cabinet answered directly to the president. The newly created prime minister had power over the All-Union state budget, overseeing technological innovations, implementing Soviet foreign policy, maintaining defense and state security, public transport, utilities, social programs, military appointments, and could issue decrees and resolutions. While the other ministers had large amounts of power over the economic development and foreign policy of the USSR. Congress ratified the amendment to the soviet constitution on the 20th of March 1991 establishing the cabinet of ministers. On the other hand, glasnost allowed Republican governments to petition the Cabinet of Ministers at any time, and the Cabinet of Ministers was forced to take all questions from republican governments into consideration.

The Build Up

Gorbachev began working on a treaty to reform the Soviet Union. The scheduled time for the signing of the treaty is August 20th 1991. Gorbachev first broached the idea in 1990 at the 26th congressional meeting. A drafting committee of the supreme soviet of the Soviet union began work on the New Union treaty January 1st of 1991. However Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are already moving towards independence and boycotted the treaty. The other 9 republics in the union were polled and 76% of respondents supported keeping the USSR the way it was. Finally on 23 April the The New Union Treaty was agreed upon by the 9 nations involved. It would convert the Soviet Union into a confederation of independent republics with a common president, foreign policy, and military. By August all 9 of the supporting nations except Ukraine had agreed to the treaty. The treaty entails decentralized taxation, decentralized public expenses, decentralized industries, granted ownership of resources, republics can make their own external trade deals, and republic laws take precedence over all-union laws. However the central government keeps control of the armed forces, gold, diamonds, and the ruble must still be used. The CPD is to be disbanded and ministers reduced.

When Gorbachev began decentralizing, individual republics gained power and grew bolder. Hard-line communists were concerned that more republics would try to do what Lithuania did and push for independence. Eventually the CPSU decided to revolt against Gorbachev. In 1991 the State Committee on the State of Emergency began initiating a coup to stop the enactment of the New Union Treaty. Valentin Pavlov, is at the front of the coup opposing Gorbachev. As are most All-Union organs and the cabinet of ministers. The hardliners hope to catch Gorbachev at his Cimean dacha.