



Seven Years that Changed the World

Perestroika in Perspective

ARCHIE BROWN

OXFORD

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To Pat

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Preface

This book is divided into three parts. Parts I and III have been written with the benefit of hindsight and with access to the vast store of new information about the last years of the Soviet Union which has become available since that state disappeared from the political map of the world. Part II consists of analyses written in 'real time'. That is to say, this section of the book contains articles—or in one case, a book chapter—written while the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union during the second half of the 1980s were still underway.

I am very grateful to Dominic Byatt, Chief Editor at Oxford University Press, for his support, advice, and patience. I am indebted both to him and to the four readers who advised the Press, and whose identities are not known to me, for concluding that the articles published some twenty years ago are worth republishing. They also concluded that, taken together with chapters written on the basis of what we know today, they would make up a coherent whole. In the organization of the book, I have taken on board several useful suggestions contained in the anonymous readers' reports.

The only changes I have made to the text of those pieces written in the second half of the 1980s, and now republished, are a very few small cuts to eliminate repetitions. I have, however, put in some additional footnotes and those are printed in italics to avoid any confusion between what is written using the information available today and the text as it was originally published. The new footnotes are either (*a*) to correct a misunderstanding or introduce a clarification or (*b*) to update the story with information which has recently become available, especially from the archives. I have neither added nor subtracted anything in order to pretend to a greater foresight than I possessed when writing in the Soviet era.

This book does not purport to be a comprehensive history of the years between 1985 and 1991 in the Soviet Union. Although quite long, it is still considerably shorter than my earlier volume, *The Gorbachev Factor*, published by Oxford University Press in 1996. It is an interpretation of perestroika, understood as a radical reform or 'revolution from above' (as Aleksandr Yakovlev and others have described it) initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev and a handful of allies in the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s. The views of these leaders on the required scope of the changes evolved greatly in some cases and stayed within narrow limits in others. Perestroika meant not only different things to different people but also different things at different times between its launch and its demise.

That was clear even when the changes were in progress, as I note in Chapters 4 and 5. Part II of the book shows how things appeared to me at the time. As a result of the greater openness of Soviet society after 1985 it was possible to follow what was happening in greater depth and detail than could be done in earlier decades while the events were actually unfolding. Up until at least the mid-1980s a certain amount of detective work and reading between the lines was required. The longer perestroika continued, the less this was needed. Yet, Chapters 2 to 5 are written with access to fewer sources than I had available in the mid-1990s when I completed *The Gorbachev Factor*. By then there was already quite a rich memoir literature and much first-hand material gleaned from interviews.

However, Parts I and III of the present volume benefit from access to still more sources than I had when I was working on *The Gorbachev Factor*. Revealing memoirs have continued to be published and in the present volume I am using archival sources on perestroika which I had not seen when writing the earlier book. These include Politburo transcripts, both the detailed notes of Gorbachev's aides—Anatoliy Chernayev and Georgiy Shakhnazarov as well as Politburo member Vadim Medvedev—and the working record (*rabochaya zapis*) of Politburo meetings. Many of the latter are to be found in the archive known as Fond 89. That is a selection from the materials located in the Presidential Archive in Moscow. It was made available for perusal on the instructions of President Boris Yeltsin in 1992 and presented to the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation as part of the attempt to put the Communist Party on trial and to demonstrate that they 'showed a complete disregard for human rights and international law'.¹ Fond 89 contains more than 3,000 documents covering the period from 1919 to the end of the Soviet Union. It is available in Moscow in the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) and also in microfilm in several major Western libraries. I have used it in the National Security Archive in Washington and (especially) in the Hoover Institution Archive at Stanford University. Extracts from the Politburo transcripts are also to be found in the Volkogonov Collection, which I have consulted in the National Security Archive. There is no complete set of transcripts of Politburo meetings for the period 1985–91 currently available to researchers, but I have been able to read a very substantial number.

The provenance of the records of Politburo meetings requires special consideration. Very few scholars, especially those who have written about domestic Soviet politics in the Gorbachev era, have used the Politburo

¹ Vladimir P. Kozlov and Charles G. Palm, 'Foreword' to Lora Soroka (ed.), *Fond 89: Communist Party of the Soviet Union on Trial* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, 2001), p. ix.

minutes. The main exceptions have been people working in the field of international relations, particularly those concerned with the Cold War and its ending. The minutes have been taken at face value and no one, to my knowledge, has paid attention to the process by which they were compiled and approved. This, as I have discovered, is not a straightforward matter. In the text I use both the 'official' *rabochaya zapis*²—with many of those working records available in Fond 89 and some also in the Volkogonov Collection—and those compiled by associates of Mikhail Gorbachev (in particular, Anatoliy Chernyaev) and kept in the Gorbachev Foundation. I have found no internal evidence of distortion or grounds to doubt the reliability of either. Yet, we should be aware of the possibilities of bias, at least in the *selection* of what is recorded in these transcripts, both in the Gorbachev Foundation archival materials and, especially, in the case of the more 'official' records.²

No stenographers were allowed inside Politburo meetings, though the hall in which the Politburo met was large enough to accommodate about eighty people. Those who attended (without the right to speak) included the aides of the General Secretary. Politburo members themselves, as Anatoliy Chernyaev has pointed out, were aware of a strict prohibition, dating from Stalin's time, not only on stenographic records but on any kind of note-taking in sessions of the Politburo.³ If, as seems probable, Gorbachev was conscious of this unwritten rule, he turned a blind eye to it. His aides, Chernyaev and Shakhnazarov as well as Politburo ally, Vadim Medvedev, were, indeed, the most assiduous note-takers.⁴ There is no reason to doubt the integrity of the notes taken and transcribed by those three attendees at Politburo sessions. From my reading of the transcripts, I would say that the only bias is that the note-takers were more interested in capturing as fully as possible what Gorbachev had to say than in recording in similar detail the contributions of every other member of the Politburo. Occasionally, there is just a name of another Politburo member who spoke with no account given of what he said. Since Gorbachev's aides were *not* writing official minutes, but looking for policy pointers and guides to action, the gaps are fully understandable.

² I put 'official' in inverted commas, for though the Politburo transcripts kept in the Russian state archives would appear thereby to count as official, secrecy surrounded the way in which they were recorded as well as their content, with even Politburo members not given access to the full versions. For help in throwing light on the way in which Politburo transcripts were compiled and approved, I am especially grateful to Anatoliy Chernyaev, Alexey Gromyko, and Olga Zdravomyslova.

³ Personal communication from Anatoliy Chernyaev dated 14 July 2006.

⁴ Notes at the meetings were evidently taken also by Politburo member Vitaliy Vorotnikov who incorporates some of them in his diary-based book, *A bylo eto tak... Iz dnevnika chlena Politbyuro TsK KPSS* (Sovet veteranov knigoizdaniya, Moscow, 1995).

Gorbachev's views were more significant in that context than the opinions of any other member of the Politburo, given the hierarchical nature of the system. Chernyaev, Shakhnazarov, and Medvedev were themselves serious reformers who were, and who remained, strongly supportive of Gorbachev. That may, however, have had the effect that their notes underplayed the reservations about Gorbachev's policies expressed by other members of the Politburo, especially since those interventions rarely took the form of outright opposition but were almost invariably couched in diplomatic language. While a variety of opinions certainly emerge in the Gorbachev Foundation transcripts, less space is devoted to the views of the conservative members of the Politburo than is to be found in the 'official' records.⁵

The 'official' working record of the Politburo proceedings was made under the supervision of the head of the General Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU—the department through which all documents (including letters from citizens to the Central Committee or General Secretary)—passed. The departmental head *may*, it seems, have been greatly assisted in this task by the secret recording of the proceedings for stenographers.⁶ On one version of the process by which the recordings were made, the stenographers worked in a room below the hall in which the Politburo met and had the proceedings transmitted to them. On another, they worked from a cassette.⁷ What seems to be clear is that stenographers worked in a separate room and *recorded verbatim* sessions of the *Central Committee* and also of meetings of the *Presidium of the Supreme Soviet*. This was *not* supposed to happen with meetings of the *Politburo* and if a cassette was, indeed, given to stenographers, that was highly unofficial. Yet, that there were note-takers who were not in the room in which Politburo meetings were held is suggested by the fact that some speakers are identified simply as *Golos* (voice). That lends credibility to the idea that stenographers were involved since, not being present, they are sometimes unable to identify a particular contributor to the discussion. Normally, the task of any note-taker was simplified by the fact

⁵ The notes by Chernyaev and his colleagues are undoubtedly a significant source of illumination for students of late Soviet politics. A broader readership will be able to judge their value for themselves, for, just as this book was going to press, about two-thirds of these materials were published in Russian in a book entitled *V Politbyuro TsK KPSS... Po zapisyam A. Chernyaeva, V. Medvedeva i G. Shakhnazarova* (Al'pina Biznes Buks, Moscow, 2006).

⁶ Personal communication of 14 July 2006 from Anatoliy Chernyaev. Information I have received independently from Alexey Gromyko suggests that the meetings were, indeed, recorded. However, in another personal communication, Olga Zdravomyslova reports the stenographers telling her that Politburo *protokoly* were dictated to them by the head of the General Department of the Central Committee two days after the Politburo meetings and that they were not listening in to Politburo sessions.

⁷ Anatoliy Chernyaev says the stenographers 'transmitted the text from cassette to paper' (ibid.).

that Gorbachev, when chairing the Politburo meetings, would call upon the next person to speak by using his first name and patronymic.

Whether or not stenographers were involved in taking notes of Politburo meetings—and the evidence so far is conflicting—it is clear that it would not be left to them to decide what remained on the record and what did not. In fact, the institutional aspect of this was revealed by Valeriy Boldin in his critical account of his years working with Mikhail Gorbachev published more than a decade ago.⁸ Describing the seating plan at Politburo meetings, he wrote: ‘To the left of M.S. Gorbachev was a table at which the head and first deputy head of the General Department worked. They kept the working record (*rabochaya zapis*)’.⁹

The fact that it was the head of the General Department who was in charge of the record-keeping is of political significance, for the successive heads of that department during the Gorbachev era were Anatoliy Lukyanov and Valeriy Boldin, with Boldin succeeding Lukyanov in 1987. What they had in common, apart from heading this department, was that they were both parties to the coup against Gorbachev in August 1991 and spent, as a result, some time in prison. In the early part of the perestroika period, it is reasonable to assume that both were loyal to Gorbachev, but with the radicalization of the agenda for change from 1988 onwards their increasing disenchantment brought them closer to more conservative forces within the leadership. Boldin had been an aide to Gorbachev from 1981 until his promotion to head the General Department in 1987, in which capacity he still worked closely with the General Secretary. After Gorbachev became President of the USSR in March 1990, he appointed Boldin as his chief of staff. Not surprisingly, his defection in 1991 was seen by Gorbachev and those close to him as a particularly bitter betrayal.

On Boldin’s own account in his part-memoir, part-critical biography of Gorbachev, he was already, some years before the August 1991 showdown, resentful of the style and mistrustful of the decisions of the leader he was supposedly serving. As the person responsible for signing off the working record of the Politburo meetings in the years of most dramatic change and turmoil, it is likely that his selection of which statements to include or

⁸ V.I. Boldin, *Krushenie p’edestala: Shtrikhi k portretu M.S. Gorbacheva* (Respublika, Moscow, 1995). Boldin’s book contains many errors and falsehoods as well as some useful and accurate information. It gives a persistently distorted and negative portrait of both Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa. The book has, therefore, to be used with extreme caution. There seems, though, no reason to doubt the accuracy of Boldin when he is describing the institutional arrangements for maintaining a record of Politburo proceedings.

⁹ Ibid., p. 212. The ‘official’ transcripts of Politburo meetings to be found in Fond 89 and the Volkogonov Collection are headed ‘Sov. sekretno. Ekz. edinstvennyy (*Rabochaya zapis*)’, which means ‘Top Secret. One and only copy (working record)’.

exclude from the verbatim reports prepared by stenographers does no favours to Gorbachev, but gives full weight to warnings and criticisms from other members of the Politburo. In that sense, the 'official' record may be seen as complementary to the transcripts produced by Gorbachev's aides. The *rabochaya zapis'* must be regarded, though, as less than a definitive record, given Boldin's growing animosity towards his political master and the strong likelihood that this imparted a bias to his reporting. Not surprisingly, Mikhail Gorbachev himself does not believe in the 'authenticity' of the Politburo records approved by Boldin.¹⁰ In common with the small number of other scholars who have used the 'official' minutes, I have accepted them as a valuable source of data, giving detailed information on some of the things that were said at Politburo meetings. To the extent that they should be used with caution, this is not—so far as I can judge—because of inaccurate reporting but because of possible editorial intervention and probable selection bias, especially in the crisis years of 1990–1.

It is worth noting that there were two sets of minutes of different types produced officially. The *rabochaya zapis'*, or working record, which reproduced verbatim much of what had been said by Politburo members, was not distributed to them—or even, it seems, to the General Secretary, who had a mountain of other papers to contend with. The single copy that was made was kept in the General Department of the Central Committee.¹¹ In addition to the working records there were, however, *protokoly* (which can also be translated as minutes or as records of the proceedings), distinguished from the *rabochie zapisi* by being guides to action. They consisted of guidelines and decisions that emerged from Politburo meetings. In contrast with the non-circulation of the accounts of what people had actually said, these documents—often in the form of an *extract* from the protocol (*Vypiska iz protokola*)—were sent to the General Secretary and to all or some members of the Politburo, depending on the relevance of the subject matter, by the Secretariat of the Central Committee. Many of these documents are also now available in the Fond 89 archive.

Politburo meetings were held on Thursdays, and Boldin dictated the texts of the *protokoly* to stenographers on Saturdays. Presumably at the same time he finalized the text of the *rabochaya zapis'*. Amid some continuing uncertainty about the methods of compiling the quite detailed accounts of the Politburo discussions to be found in the working record, now kept in RGANI, the one thing that is clear is that the head of the General Department had the last word on what went into these minutes. Thus, for the years in which divisions within the leadership widened, it was Boldin—whose long-fester-

¹⁰ Personal communication from Anatoliy Chernyaev of 14 July 2006.

¹¹ Boldin, *Krushenie p'edestala*, p. 256.

disagreement with, and resentment of, Gorbachev came into the open in August 1991—who drew the conclusions on who said what and whether it mattered enough to be preserved for posterity.

In the early years of perestroika major debate in the West concerned whether or not this was an attempt at fundamental reform or whether, on the contrary, the policies of Mikhail Gorbachev and his allies amounted to little more than cosmetic change. The question about how far Gorbachev was prepared to go should by now have been settled, but there is still quite a widespread lack of understanding of the extent to which his views evolved. It is all too common for scholars to cite Gorbachev's *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* as if it were the last and only word on Gorbachev's political thinking. Yet that book was published in 1987 and Gorbachev's political ideas became substantially more radical in 1988 and continued to evolve. A hitherto unknown archival source is of interest in that regard. Although the outside world has remained unaware of it, Gorbachev completed another book manuscript in March 1989 which, however, he decided not to publish. In this work his thinking had already moved on significantly from 1987 but it can be seen to be just a stage in the evolution of his political thinking if compared, for example, with the platform he presented to the 28th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1990 or, still more, the draft party programme he commended to a Central Committee plenum on 25–26 July 1991, which those bodies approved, even though it became evident that many of those present had not the slightest intention of implementing them. Although the unpublished book remains very far from being the last word on the development of Gorbachev's ideas, it is an interesting historical document. I much appreciated being given access to it by the Gorbachev Foundation. The book was to be called *Perestroika—ispytanie zhizn'yu. Dnevnikovye zapisi* ('Perestroika tested by life. Diary Notes') and it is cited in more than one of the chapters which follow.

During perestroika there were vigorous debates in Western scholarship and in the mass media about its scope and significance, in which I was fully engaged. Many of the issues remain hugely contentious, among them argument over the causes of systemic change in the Soviet Union and of the disintegration of the USSR as well as debate over the end of the Cold War. How important to the Cold War's ending were the hard-line policies attributed to the Reagan administration is an issue of contemporary relevance, from which politicians are still drawing lessons, and not necessarily the right ones. That relates to the even broader issue—also of great consequence today—of how change in a highly authoritarian system can be brought about. These are among the major themes of this volume.

I have a number of debts which it is a pleasure to acknowledge. Some of the earlier travel for research related to this book was supported by the Elliott Fund of the Russian and Eurasian Studies Centre of St Antony's College and

recent work benefited from a Small Research Grant awarded by the British Academy. Both sources of funding have been of great help. In gathering material, I have had particularly productive visits to the Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow, the National Security Archive in Washington, DC, and the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University. My visit to the last-named institution was courtesy of Stanford University's Centre for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies and their invitation to me to give the Alexander Dallin Memorial Lecture for 2006.

For permission to study materials, not all of which were on general access (including the Chernyaev, Shakhnazarov, and Medvedev reports of Politburo meetings), at the first of those institutions, I am particularly grateful to Mikhail Gorbachev, Irina Virganskaya-Gorbacheva, and Anatoliy Chernyaev. At the Gorbachev Foundation I am also indebted to Viktor Kuvaldin, Olga Zdravomyslova, Pavel Palazchenko, and Sergey Kuznetsov. My research at the National Security Archive in Washington benefited from the excellent advice and detailed knowledge of Svetlana Savranskaya and I am most grateful to her. In addition to Fond 89 and the Volkogonov papers, I was able to use the National Security Archive's 'End of the Cold War' collection. In California Mary Dakin of Stanford University, and Carol Leadenham and Lora Soroka, Assistant Archivists at the Hoover Institution, were helpful in introducing me to the documentary riches of that institution. As well as making extensive use of Fond 89—with the highly efficient research assistance of Martina Podsklanova, for which I am grateful—I had the opportunity to read the interviews deposited there as part of the 'Hoover Institution and Gorbachev Foundation (Moscow) Collection' on the end of the Cold War.

I am also much indebted to people nearer home. The Secretary of the Russian and Eurasian Studies Centre of St Antony's College, Oxford, Jackie Willcox, very kindly re-entered on the computer the older articles, those which appear in Part II of this book. Jackie somehow manages to combine the posts of Centre Secretary and Librarian and in the latter capacity was also helpful in locating useful books for the Russian and Eurasian Studies Library of St Antony's College. I am indebted, too, to Nina Kozlova for some skilled research assistance in Oxford and to Eugene Mazo for drawing my attention to several very useful articles. I am hugely grateful to my wife, Pat, who compiled the thorough index. She has accompanied me on a majority of the more than forty visits I have made to Russia (between 1966 and 2006) and it is to her that this book is dedicated.

I have found helpful the observations of other scholars on two of the chapters in this volume. Professor Viktor Kuvaldin gave me valuable comments on Chapter 6. That same chapter benefited also from the questions of participants in the VII World Congress of the International Council for

Central and East European Studies (ICCEES), held in Berlin in July 2005, where a preliminary version of the chapter was presented as a paper. Chapter 9—on the end of the Cold War—was read in draft by Alex Pravda and Sam Charap. I am grateful to both of them for their useful comments. Needless to say, those who kindly commented on Chapters 6 and 9 are not to blame for my interpretations or any errors of fact or judgement. Visits to Moscow are always a pleasure because of the number of good and knowledgeable friends I meet there. I cannot name them all, but for their generous hospitality as well as their friendship I would particularly like to thank Rair and Tatiana Simonyan, Sasha Obolonsky and Olya Obolonskaya, and David and Marna Gowan.

I wish to acknowledge, with warm thanks, the permission of various editors and publishers (all of them in the United States) to reproduce material which first appeared under their auspices. Chapter 2 did not require any permission, for the journal in which that piece appeared, *Problems of Communism*, accorded full republication rights to its contributors and, in any event, ceased publication in 1992, a decision unsurprisingly connected with the fact that by then Communist systems in Europe and the Soviet Union no longer existed. Although *Problems of Communism* was funded by the American taxpayer, through a vote in Congress, it had the merit of publishing analyses that were not only highly topical but also written from a variety of different standpoints, by no means necessarily in accord with the predominant view within the American administration of the day.

Where a chapter was first published elsewhere or draws upon my previously published articles, the reference to the original is given in the first footnote to that chapter. For permission to republish, I am very grateful to the following: the publishers of *World Policy Journal* for Chapters 3 and 4; Abraham Brumberg, the editor of *Chronicle of a Revolution* and Pantheon Books for Chapter 5; the editor of *Slavic Review*, Diane Koenker, and the journal's publishers, the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, for permission to draw extensively in Chapter 7 from an article I published in that AAASS quarterly; and the editor, George Breslauer, and Bellwether Publishing, for allowing me to republish as the basis of Chapter 8 an article which first appeared in *Post-Soviet Affairs*. Since the articles which are the starting points of Chapters seven and eight were written some years after the Soviet Union had come to an end, I was not under the same moral compunction as in Part II of the book to avoid making changes of substance. I have added much new material to them as well as making some cuts. The reference system has also been standardized; in Chapters 5 and 8 I brought it into line with the rest of the book by switching from endnotes in the former case and the Harvard system in the latter to footnotes. Footnoted books are given their full bibliographical reference on first mention in each chapter.

I have tried to standardize the transliteration scheme used in the volume, adopting the British standard system which, as it happens, was also that employed by *Problems of Communism* and is that used by *Post-Soviet Affairs*. In the text of the chapters, I have, though, simplified ‘skiy’ endings to ‘sky’ and ‘yy’ endings to one ‘y’. I have used ‘perestroika’ rather than ‘perestroyka’ because the word has become familiar in English with the former spelling. I have also used ‘glasnost’ without italics, since it, too, was a Russian word which entered the English language in the second half of the 1980s. For similar reasons, names well known to English-speaking readers are presented in the text in their most familiar forms—for example, Yeltsin and Aitmatov—and soft signs are used only in the footnotes (where the titles of books and articles are transliterated strictly). As usual, when transliterating cyrillic into the Latin alphabet (other than in specialist journals), one has to find a compromise between total linguistic consistency, on the one hand, and familiarity and accessibility, on the other.

ARCHIE BROWN
Oxford, 2006

Glossary and Abbreviations

<i>Apparat</i>	apparat (apparatus), bureaucracy
<i>Apparatchik</i>	apparatchik, bureaucrat, full-time official (especially Communist Party official in the Soviet era)
BBC SWB	British Broadcasting Corporation Summary of World Broadcasts
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
CPRF	Communist Party of the Russian Federation
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington, DC)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
<i>Glasnost'</i>	glasnost, openness, transparency
Gosplan	[<i>Gosudarstvennyy planovyy komitet</i>] State Planning Committee
HIA	Hoover Institution Archives (Stanford University)
IMEMO	[<i>Institut mirovoy ekonomiki i mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy</i>] Institute of World Economy and International Relations
KGB	[<i>Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti</i>] Committee of State Security (name of Soviet security organs, 1953–91)
Komsomol	[<i>Kommunisticheskiy soyuz molodezhi</i>] Young Communist League
<i>Kray</i>	krai, province, region
<i>Kraykom</i>	provincial party committee
<i>Kto kogo</i>	(literally) who-whom, meaning who will dominate or crush whom
MAD	mutually assured destruction
MGB	[<i>Ministerstvo gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti</i>] Ministry of State Security (name of Soviet security organs, 1946–53)
MID	[<i>Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del</i>] Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NEP	[<i>Novaya ekonomicheskaya politika</i>] New Economic Policy (of Lenin in the 1920s)
NKVD	[<i>Narodnyy komissariat vnutrennikh del</i>] People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (name of the Soviet security police during the worst of the purges)
<i>Nomenklatura</i>	nomenklatura, Communist system of appointments; also used to refer to the people appointed to high positions by this system as an especially privileged social stratum
NSA	National Security Archive (Washington, DC)

<i>Obkom</i>	obkom, regional party committee
<i>Oblast'</i>	oblast, region
PCI	Italian Communist Party
<i>Perestroyka</i>	perestroika, reconstruction (or restructuring)
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party
<i>Politologiya</i>	political science
<i>Pravovoe gosudarstvo</i>	law-governed state; state based on the rule of law
PUWP	Polish United Workers' Party
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (what is now the Russian Federation)
<i>Samoupravlenie</i>	self-management
SDI	Strategic Defence Initiative
<i>Siloviki</i>	people from the 'power ministries', i.e. the KGB (known by other initials at various times), the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Defence
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VTsIOM	All-Soviet (subsequently all-Russian) Centre for the Study of Public Opinion
<i>Zakonomernost'</i>	zakonomernost, law (of social development), regularity

Part I

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Introduction

No one in 1985 expected that within the space of seven years Communist rule would have ended in Europe and the Soviet Union would have ceased to exist. Yet when this happened, there was no shortage of observers who were quick to see such an outcome as little short of inevitable. It is true that a system as inefficient in many (though not in all) respects as that of Communism could not have lasted for ever, but it was also a system that had seen off numerous threats over seventy years and one which had strong political as well as military defences.

Various oversimplifications or misunderstandings concerning perestroika and the end of the Soviet Union have gained more currency than they deserve. Among them have been the idea that the Soviet system was on its last legs and doomed to imminent collapse by the 1980s; the rather different view that the transformation of the Soviet system, the ending of the Cold War, and the breakup of the USSR were mainly brought about by the Reagan Administration; the no less fallacious notion that Boris Yeltsin was primarily responsible for dismantling a Communist system in Russia; as well as the widespread misconception that Yeltsin's rule was a continuation of perestroika but in a more democratic form. Each of these oversimplifications or fallacies will be discussed at various points in this book and, in particular, in the final chapter.¹

Peaceful change is not easy to bring about in a consolidated, highly authoritarian system. While relative failure on the part of a government in a democracy is liable to lead to that government's replacement, the same does not hold true in conditions of authoritarian rule, especially in as sophisticated

¹ Among the numerous authors who have examined the end of the Soviet system and of the USSR are: Alexander Dallin, 'Causes of the Collapse of the USSR', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 4, October–December 1992, pp. 279–302; Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2001); Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (The Free Press, New York, 1994); Ofira Seliktar, *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 2004); and Wisła Suraska, *How the Soviet Union Disappeared: An Essay on the Causes of Dissolution* (Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1998). Dallin's early analysis is notably perspicacious. The best of the above books by quite a wide margin is Kotkin's.

a Communist system as that of the Soviet Union—one, moreover, that had developed indigenously in Russia, rather than being essentially a foreign imposition as were most of the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe. The skill and ruthlessness with which Communist rulers drew on a wide range of rewards and punishments had by the eve of perestroika reduced the never-large dissident movement to groups that were both miniscule and marginalized. It is quite fanciful to imagine that the Soviet state was near breaking point in the mid-1980s and to believe that, no matter what happened within the highest echelons of leadership, it was doomed to imminent collapse.

Political systems change over time and highly authoritarian systems, in particular, do not last for ever. However, even though they may be economically inefficient as well as repressive, that does not necessarily prevent such systems from sustaining themselves far longer than they deserve to survive. The Soviet regime had wide-ranging possibilities for manipulating public opinion through control over the educational system and the mass media, as well as for employing whatever force should be necessary to eliminate organized dissent. When the day after Konstantin Chernenko's death on 10 March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was chosen as the new leader of the country, that decision was taken exclusively by the inner leadership of the Communist Party—the Politburo and the Central Committee, with the latter body promptly endorsing the choice of the former. For the average Soviet citizen such events were no more subject to his or her control than the weather.²

Although there was no overt pressure from below on the party leadership for departure from previous policies, there were, nevertheless, important stimuli to change for the more thoughtful elements within the political elite. The technological gap between the Soviet Union and Western countries (and, indeed, some of the recently industrialized countries of Asia) was widening rather than narrowing, and there had been a secular decline in the Soviet rate of economic growth from the 1950s to the first half of the 1980s. While these, then, were not new phenomena in 1985, and previous Soviet leaderships had generally preferred to avert their gaze from them, a desire to

² What is perhaps more surprising is that even high officials—at the level of deputy heads of department—in the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party not only had no influence on the outcome but also, more than two weeks after Gorbachev had been unanimously chosen by the Politburo to be the Soviet Union's next leader, did not know whether or not his election had been contested within that inner sanctum. Anatoliy Chernyaev in his diary entry of 30 March 1985 reports agnostically 'rumors going around Moscow that the General Secretary election at the PB [Politburo] was "not without a fight"'. See 'The Diary of Anatoliy Chernyaev' for the year 1985 (translated by Anna Melyukova, edited by Svetlana Savranskaya), published on the National Security Archive (NSA) website on 25 May 2006: <http://gwu.edu/~nsarchiv>.

get the country moving again and to tackle serious problems were major impulses to Gorbachev's initial reformism.

Knowing how much the breakup of the Soviet Union is still regretted by Russians,³ including himself, Gorbachev has at times suggested that there was no alternative to perestroika—that the Soviet Union was in a 'pre-crisis' condition or even in a 'serious crisis'.⁴ On other occasions he has, however, said that he could have presided over the system, not changed in its essentials, for many years to come, even though he has invariably added that he would have found such a course morally and politically unacceptable.⁵ Both reflections contain their own elements of truth. The Soviet Union—or Russia—could certainly not have flourished in the long run within the confines of an essentially unreformed Communist system. Yet minor reform, combined with a tightening of the screws when there were signs of restlessness within the society, could have kept both the Soviet system and the Soviet Union going into the twenty-first century. In a book which he completed in March 1989, and then decided not to publish because it was already falling behind his own thinking and the pace of political developments, Gorbachev—quite accurately—did not say that there was no alternative to perestroika but, more precisely, that 'perestroika was a necessity' because there was no '*reasonable, constructive* alternative' to it (*italics added*, AB).⁶

Fundamental reform cumulatively destroyed the pillars of the Soviet regime. It was not so much a case of crisis producing reform as of reform precipitating crisis.⁷ As Stephen Kotkin has observed: 'In the 1980s, Soviet society was fully employed and the regime stable. The country had low foreign

³ Russian public opinion, both in the perestroika period and in post-Soviet Russia, favoured the preservation of the Soviet Union. As Matthew Wyman has noted, there was only one brief moment—at the end of 1991—when a majority of Russians went as far as to accept the breakup of the Union. See Wyman, *Public Opinion in Postcommunist Russia* (Macmillan, Houndmills, UK, 1977), pp. 172–3.

⁴ For example, writing in 1987, about the impetus to the launch of perestroika, Gorbachev said: 'An unbiased and honest approach led us to the inexorable conclusion that the country was in a pre-crisis state.' See M.S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenie dlya nashey strany i vsego mira* (Politizdat, Moscow, 1987), p. 18. In his most recent book, Gorbachev says: 'Bureaucratic supercentralization fettered the country, the people and society. And from that point of view—yes, the Union was experiencing a serious crisis': Mikhail Gorbachev, *Ponyat' perestroiku... pochemu eto vazhno seychas* (Al'pina Biznes Buks, Moscow, 2006), p. 19.

⁵ See, for example, the interview with Gorbachev in *Komosomol'skaya Pravda*, 2–9 March 2006, pp. 4–5. Asked if he could not have remained in the Kremlin for 20 years but for the fact that he embarked on perestroika, Gorbachev responded (p. 5): 'Yes, it would have been possible to renovate and patch things up a bit and to sit in the chair of the General Secretary up to now. But to live, as in the past, was unacceptable.'

⁶ M.S. Gorbachev, 'Perestroika—ispytanie zhizn'yu. Dnevnikovye zapisy', unpublished book manuscript, p. 41, The Gorbachev Foundation Archives.

⁷ What Gorbachev had, however, from the outset of perestroika called 'pre-crisis phenomena' were clearly visible to the less blinkered minority within the Communist Party hierarchy.

debt and an excellent credit rating. It suffered no serious civil disorders until it began to reform and even then retained the loyalty of its shrinking but still formidable Armed Forces, Ministry of Interior, and KGB.⁸ Similarly, Leon Aron has written:

In 1985, the Soviet Union possessed much the same set of natural and human resources that it had ten years before. Perennial shortages...were nothing new. Indeed, things had been much worse....In any case...in totalitarian regimes the connection between popular deprivation and a change of policies is tenuous at best and often results not in liberalizing reforms but in heavier repression. [Moreover] the Soviet Union was hardly crumbling under external pressures. On the contrary, in 1985 it was at the height of its world power and influence, anchored in a state of strategic nuclear parity with the United States.⁹

At some point in the early decades of this century the system would surely have faced a full-blown crisis. The resultant systemic change *could*, however, have been very different from perestroika. It need not have been in the direction of making the country more liberal or more democratic. Within the Soviet elite there were strong statist and Russian nationalist tendencies as well as reformist and more liberal elements. In the professional apparatus of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), not to mention the large military-industrial complex, the former were more numerous than the latter. Given the multinational character of the Soviet Union, the coming to power of Russian nationalists would, in all probability, have led to bloodshed and to a more repressive regime than that headed for eighteen years by Leonid Brezhnev. The Brezhnev years were not only an 'era of stagnation', as the period was dubbed during perestroika, but also a period of stalemate between neo-Stalinist and Russian nationalist trends, on the one hand, and reformist and internationalist tendencies, on the other. Perestroika was a victory for the forces representing the latter, but there was nothing preordained about that outcome.

THE UNREFORMED SOVIET SYSTEM

To understand how much was changed by perestroika—even before the process of change slipped out of the control of the reformist wing of the Communist Party leadership, as it had done by 1990–1—some brief attention

⁸ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2001), p. 173.

⁹ Leon Aron, 'The "Mystery" of the Soviet Collapse', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 2006, pp. 22–3.

to the unreformed Soviet system is necessary. The CPSU had a monopoly of power which was euphemistically known as 'the leading role of the party'. Not only were other political parties banned but so were any independent associations aspiring to influence political events. The highest policymaking body within the party, the Politburo, was also the most authoritative decision-making organ in the state. The General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU was the chief executive within the country, not merely the party leader.

The Communist Party was seen by Vladimir Lenin and his successors as a 'vanguard party'. That is to say, its leaders intended it to be a mass party with an organization in every workplace but at the same time a selective organization which would recruit more from some social groups than from others. In the Soviet case it did not (and was not intended to) embrace more than 10 per cent of the adult population. In the mid-1980s the party included approximately 6.5 per cent of the total population and about one in ten adults. In absolute numbers the party grew from just under 7 million members on the eve of Stalin's death in 1953 to close to 20 million in 1990 before dropping to about 15 million by the summer of 1991, by which time the party was, indeed, in crisis.

In between the five-yearly Party Congresses, which according to the rules of the CPSU constituted its most authoritative forum, the party was run by the Central Committee and, in particular, by its inner bodies—the Politburo and the Secretariat of the Central Committee.¹⁰ The Central Committee as a whole met only a few times a year for a day or two at a time, whereas the Politburo and the Secretariat met as collective bodies in most weeks. When, however, Soviet citizens spoke about the Central Committee deciding this or that, they were not necessarily being naive or ill-informed. They were generally referring *not* to the 'elected' members of the Central Committee (who in reality were co-opted) in plenary session, but to the work of the bureaucracy which went on in the Central Committee buildings. The professional apparatus of the Central Committee was divided into some twenty departments and a great deal of day-to-day policy was made within them. The system, though, was extremely hierarchical, and Secretaries of the Central Committee had a significantly greater authority than those department heads who did not possess that title. The most powerful of all were the senior secretaries—people who were both members of the Politburo *and* Secretaries of the Central Committee and who had extensive supervisory responsibilities.

¹⁰ The congresses themselves were stage-managed by the party leadership, and the documents they approved were prepared over many months in advance under the supervision of Secretaries of the Central Committee.

Mikhail Suslov was one such person of great authority within the CPSU, a conservative Communist who was the overseer of both ideology and foreign policy. He combined membership of the Politburo with a Secretaryship of the Central Committee from 1955 until his death in January 1982.¹¹

Although the Communist Party leader, the General Secretary, was the most powerful figure of all within the system, there is a sense in which Communist systems had a dual executive. There was a ministerial network as well as a party hierarchy—indeed, many more ministries and state committees (the latter were the equivalent of ministries or, in the case of the Committee of State Security [KGB], a super-ministry) than departments of the Central Committee. The Chairman of the Council of Ministers was a major figure within the system. The Communist Party and the Council of Ministers were, however, closely intertwined. The Chairman of the latter was invariably a member of the party Politburo and the departments of the Central Committee were overseers of the ministries. In the Brezhnev period decisions taken together by the departments and their corresponding ministries sometimes took the form of decrees issued in the joint names of the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers.

By tradition the Chairman of the Council of Ministers was in charge of the management of the economy with the exception of agriculture, which came within the General Secretary's domain. The General Secretary was primarily responsible for foreign policy and had broad oversight of every other sphere of political activity. Even on economic issues, should there be disagreement between the General Secretary and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, the former would eventually come out on top. Thus, Aleksey Kosygin, who became Chairman of the Council of Ministers in October 1964, at the same time as Leonid Brezhnev was chosen as party leader, espoused a modest economic reform in 1965 which ended in 1968. Brezhnev responded both to those party officials who were concerned that it was encroaching on their prerogatives and to worried ideologues who linked Kosygin's very modest concession to market forces with the more alarming combination of economic and political reform which had emerged that year in the 'Prague Spring'. Nevertheless, Kosygin retained his post at the head of the ministerial network, and as a senior member of the Politburo, until shortly before his death in 1980.

¹¹ On the CPSU, see Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Methuen, London, 2nd edn., 1970); Ronald J. Hill and Peter Frank, *The Soviet Communist Party* (Allen & Unwin, London, 3rd edn., 1986); and Graeme Gill, *The Collapse of a Single-Party System: The disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994).

Kosygin's successor, Nikolay Tikhonov, was a long-standing friend and ally of Brezhnev who, however, established a sufficiently strong position that he outlived his patron politically as well as biologically, serving from 1980 until his removal by Gorbachev in 1985. While the Politburo was the highest policymaking body within the Soviet state, in practice—and especially during the Brezhnev years—it was frequently approving on the nod decisions that had been taken either in the Central Committee bureaucracy or within the ministries, particularly the State Planning Committee (Gosplan).¹² Speaking on 8 September 1988 in the Politburo,¹³ where a number of those present knew at first hand the truth of what he was saying, Gorbachev observed that the pre-perestroika Politburo used to rubber-stamp whatever came up from the Central Committee apparatus. Interestingly, he extended this generalization to include decisions taken in the ministerial network. In a remark which embraced both the party and the ministerial bureaucracy, he said: 'Generally speaking, we rubber-stamped in the Politburo, in the Secretariat, and even in plenums of the Central Committee whatever was proposed to us by the departments (*vedomstva*), starting with Gosplan and below.' Referring to the ministries specifically, he said that if one tried to change anything in the proposals brought to the Politburo by the Council of Ministers, one was 'put in the camp of permanent and eternal enemies by Comrade Tikhonov'.¹⁴

The General Secretary set the tone in the Politburo. In Brezhnev's Politburo Tikhonov could count on the party leader's backing. The Politburo remained, though, the body whose support was necessary for any important new initiative. That continued to be the case until well into the perestroika period.

¹² Aleksandr Yakovlev, noting the existence of three distinct *apparaty* within the Soviet system—the party apparatus, the coercive force apparatus (*apparat nasiliya*, by which he had in mind the KGB and the Ministry of Interior), and the economic apparatus, goes on to observe: 'The party and coercive *apparaty* retained levers sufficient to control an economic planner but not the economic apparatus (*khozapparat*) as a whole' (Yakovlev, *Predislovie. Obval. Posleslovie*, Novosti, Moscow, 1992), pp. 137–8. That stress on the power of the economic apparatus is very much in line with the arguments of Stephen Whitefield who, in his *Industrial Power and the Soviet State* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993), emphasizes more than most scholars the power of the Soviet economic bureaucracy. He stresses the centrality of the ministerial network 'within the old system' and argues that 'radical anti-ministerialism was both difficult and dangerous' for reformist politicians, including Gorbachev (*ibid.*, p. 180). The terminology of the 'leading role' is, I would suggest (though for Whitefield even that might be overstating the case), more appropriate than 'monopoly of power' when the party apparatus's relationship with the ministries is considered in the pre-perestroika context. That is not in contradiction with the view that the Communist Party had a monopoly of power *within Soviet society*, since all the senior officials in the ministries were members of the CPSU, as were army and KGB officers.

¹³ The major business of this meeting was to consider Gorbachev's wide-ranging plans for reorganizing and reducing in size the Communist Party apparatus, involving the elimination of more than half of the departments of the Central Committee.

¹⁴ 'Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS', 8 September 1988, Hoover Institution Archives (HIA), Fond 89, Reel 1.1003, opis 42, file 22, p. 181.

Eventually Gorbachev—following the creation of an executive state presidency in March 1990—at least partially freed himself from the constraints imposed by the Politburo, although, as a result of his radical reforms, he faced a formidable range of new pressures from outside the Communist Party as well as from within it.

In the unreformed Soviet system—and also, though not to the same degree, in the perestroika period—another major force was the coercive power apparatus and, in particular, the KGB. The KGB in the post-Stalin period was subordinated to the top party leadership—and it was, accordingly, a promotion for Yuriy Andropov when he succeeded Suslov in the early months of 1982 as the *second* Secretary of the CPSU (not to speak of his assumption of the General Secretaryship in succession to Brezhnev in November of that year). The head of the KGB could, however, be a dangerous enemy for a party leader. Both in 1964 and in 1991 the Chairman of the KGB turned against, and attempted to oust, the General Secretary—in the earlier year Vladimir Semichastny against Khrushchev and in the latter year Vladimir Kryuchkov against Gorbachev. In neither case, though, did the KGB chief act alone, but in cooperation with other leading party and state officials.

The military-industrial complex cannot be left out of the political equation. It enjoyed a privileged place in the Soviet Union in the years before perestroika. More resources were devoted to military expenditure than made economic sense and an obsession with secrecy meant that there were few spin-offs for civilian industry from military production. In terms of the influence they then wielded and of the promotion of their narrow occupational interests, Soviet military men would look back with nostalgia to the Brezhnev era,¹⁵ although many of the policies actually pursued in those years, such as the armed intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, were longer-term disasters.

The highest organ of state power, according to the 1977 Soviet Constitution, was the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. In reality, that body—the country's nominal legislative assembly—had vastly less power than the institutions already discussed in this chapter. Its constitutional pre-eminence was a legal fiction. Both the legislature and the judiciary were totally dominated by the executive in the pre-perestroika Soviet Union.¹⁶ The Supreme Soviet met for only a few days each year and passed unanimously whatever laws were laid in front of it. Although it was an honour to be a deputy of the Supreme Soviet,

¹⁵ Aleksandr Yakovlev aptly described Brezhnev as a 'lover of the military-industrial complex, for which he did not spare the people's money' (*Predislovie, obval, posleslovie*, p. 101).

¹⁶ These points were recognized, and critically assessed, by Aleksandr Yakovlev in two memoranda he sent to Gorbachev in December 1985. For the texts of the documents, see Yakovlev, *Sumerki* (Materik, Moscow, 2003), pp. 376–83.

such a position was within the gift of the CPSU Central Committee apparatus. In the 'elections' for the Supreme Soviet there was only one candidate for each constituency and that person was duly returned with votes recorded as not less than 99 per cent. The Supreme Soviet was truly a rubber-stamp assembly that could be taken for granted in a way in which no party official (not even the General Secretary) could ever take the Politburo for granted. Oddly, local soviets, although enjoying less prestige than the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (or the Supreme Soviets of the union republics), were in many respects more serious political institutions than the federal legislature, for in the towns and districts the soviets performed not only the tasks which fell to local government in Western countries but also many which were peculiar to a Communist system. Even shops, hairdressers, and laundries were state-owned and so came under the management and control of the local soviet. The local soviet deputies prior to perestroika were, it should be added, chosen in non-competitive, single-candidate elections, which were as manipulated by the party apparatus as were the elections for the Supreme Soviet.¹⁷

NEED FOR A TRIPLE (OR QUADRUPLE) TRANSFORMATION

If the highly authoritarian Soviet system was to become pluralistic and substantially democratized—and those goals only gradually became central components of Gorbachev's reformist agenda—this required not one transformation but several. A centralized command economy was incompatible with democracy as well as with economic efficiency. That does not mean that, as a corollary, a market economy must inevitably be accompanied by democracy—there has been no shortage of market economies coexisting with right-wing authoritarian regimes. There are, however, numerous market democracies, but *no* example of a state combining a command economy with democratic governance.

The fact that transformative change both of the economic system and of the political system was required made the Soviet transition peculiarly difficult, even in comparison with other Communist states, since a Communist polity and economy had existed for much longer in the USSR than anywhere else.

¹⁷ Moreover, the local party organization played a 'leading' (albeit not a monopolistic) role in the decision-making processes at the subnational level, and the regional, city, or district party first secretary enjoyed a higher authority than the chairperson of the local soviet on the same rung of the vertical power structure.

The task was still more demanding than that which faced those engaged in the transition from authoritarian rule in Spain and Portugal more than a decade earlier where the transformation of a dictatorial polity was not matched by a need for root-and-branch transformation of the economic system. Right-wing dictatorships did not require transition from a completely state-owned and state-directed economy to one embracing private ownership and the market.

While in the course of perestroika, part of the Soviet leadership (including Gorbachev) came to realize that prices of commodities would have to be determined by market forces (rather than fixed by the State Committee on Prices), the question of *how* to move to a market was never adequately resolved. Whether, for example, this could be done in an evolutionary process, whether it required a 'big bang', or whether demonopolization should precede price liberalization remained controversial issues. In the last years of the Soviet Union Boris Yeltsin gained popularity by combining support for a market economy (though he avoided saying that he supported 'capitalism') with attacks on existing inequalities and an emphasis on social justice. By implication, the move to a market was going to bring more equality, and much of Yeltsin's support, even among committed democratic activists, rested on his supposed egalitarianism.¹⁸

Alexander Lukin, who has made by far the most serious study of the belief systems of those who identified themselves as 'democrats' in the final years of the Soviet Union, has shown why there was bound to be tension between marketization and democratization, especially in the light of the specific interpretation given to the latter notion by most self-professed Russian democrats. As Lukin observes:

The understanding of democracy (and of legality as its essential part) *as a means to the introduction of justice* is highly characteristic of Russian 'democrats'. In this line of argument the notions of 'justice' and 'legality' came before the notion of 'democracy' and were more fundamental. Such an understanding contained the possibility of disillusionment with democracy itself in the event that it did not lead to justice. Not surprisingly, many supporters of social justice and legality left 'democratic' groups and some did indeed become disillusioned with democracy when, after the coming to power of Boris Yel'tsin's 'democratic' leadership, it became clear to them that the politics of the new leadership did not lead to the elimination of privileges and the arrival of justice. (*italics added*, AB)¹⁹

It was more evident to Gorbachev than it was to Yeltsin that the move to the market, however necessary, was liable to lead to greater inequality than that

¹⁸ See on this Alexander Lukin, *The Political Culture of the Russian 'Democrats'* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

characteristic of the unreformed Soviet economy and, moreover, that living standards would become worse for millions of vulnerable people. Gorbachev's own evolution was in the direction of social democracy, but there was never a consensus about how to move to a social market economy. This was an area in which Gorbachev found himself swayed at different times by conflicting opinions and baulked by entrenched institutional interests, and he did not succeed in finding a consistent strategy for economic transformation.²⁰

Nevertheless, there were many obstacles in the way of transforming the Soviet economic system. As Alec Nove observed just two years into perestroika:

It is necessary to stress how inherently complex are the problems of transition from centralized planning to a new alternative. This would be so even if this new alternative already existed in the form of a consistent and agreed model, and even if all concerned were doing their best to implement the desired change. . . . Soviet citizens at all levels have learned how to live with and within the system. . . . One of the most significant obstacles to radical reform is that this is a conservative society at all levels.²¹

Similar reflections to those contained in Nove's last sentence were voiced by Aleksandr Yakovlev, writing well after perestroika had passed into history: 'In trying to reform the country we, and here I include myself, underestimated a great deal—above all, the psychological conditions of the society, which turned out to be more inert, indifferent, and dependent than we had imagined.'²²

The difficulties of changing the political and economic systems were exacerbated by the need for change in another, but closely connected, area in which a third fundamental transformation was required. That was the interrelationship between the multinational composition of the Soviet state and the federal administrative structure of the USSR. Prior to perestroika the Soviet Union was in essence a unitary state, but one with federal forms. With the partial exception of the largest of the fifteen Union Republics, Russia, each republic—whether Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, or Uzbekistan—had its 'own' republican party organization (with Central Committee and republican First Secretary), Council of Ministers, Supreme Soviet, and Academy of

²⁰ Gorbachev has himself recently observed that perestroika began with great support from the people, but gradually that support was lost: 'The time wasn't used for resolution of the problems of price formation and the market. . . . It was necessary to balance the consumer market, and more boldly and toughly to turn military industry into providers of good products for the people' (*Ponyat' perestroiky* . . .), p. 373.

²¹ Alec Nove, in his contribution to a symposium, 'What's Happening in the Soviet Union?', *The National Interest*, No. 8, Summer 1987, p. 17.

²² Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2002), p. 24.

Sciences. Russia was an exception because it contained half the population of the USSR and three-quarters of its territory. It did not, therefore, have its own party organization (or Academy of Sciences, although it had its own Council of Ministers and Supreme Soviet), since that would have meant too much duplication with the all-Union Central Committee and its apparatus. There may also have been a concern that a Russian Central Committee, with its own first secretary, could become a divisive counterweight to the union-wide Central Committee.²³

The most essential point, however, is that prior to the Gorbachev reforms, the highly centralized nature of the Communist Party meant that there was a strong, top-down vertical organization of the society which cut through and dominated the 'national' institutions that constituted the second echelon of the political hierarchy. The federal forms, however, which appeared to be of comparatively little value other than as a sop to national consciousness during the Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev eras, turned out to be of huge significance, acquiring real substance under conditions of liberalization and democratization. What happened in this sphere during perestroika testified not only to the mobilizing (and, in this instance, disintegrative) force of national sentiment but also to the latent importance of institutional arrangements which had appeared to most internal and external observers as little more than a meaningless façade throughout the greater part of the Soviet period.²⁴ It is also of great consequence that there were more than 100 different nationalities in the Soviet Union, many of which below the Union

²³ That, indeed, became the case when late in the perestroika period conservative opponents of Gorbachev succeeded in their demand to have a Russian Communist Party formed. Admittedly, this was after the political system had become *de facto* pluralist and so it was not altogether surprising that the Russian Communist Party organization (with encouragement from like-minded people within the apparatus of the all-Union Central Committee) promptly adopted ideological and policy stances in sharp contrast to those espoused by Gorbachev. On the emergence of the Russian Communist Party, see the detailed account by Gordon M. Hahn, *1985–2000. Russia's Revolution from Above: Reform, Transition, and Revolution in the Fall of the Soviet Communist Regime* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 2002), pp. 127–42. The imminent organization of a Russian Communist Party was the subject of lengthy Politburo discussion on 3 May 1990. Yuriy Manaenkov, a Secretary of the Central Committee, pointed to the fact that the members of the Russian Communist Party would make up 58 per cent of the total membership of the CPSU and warned of the danger of two centres within the party and of *dvoevlastie* (dual power). Gorbachev accepted that this threat was a real one, and he had long tried to stave off the establishment of such a party organization, initially creating a Party Buro for the Russian Republic, with himself as the head of it, when demand for a Communist Party organization for the Russian republic (corresponding with those of other republics) first arose. For the Politburo discussion on the eve of the founding Congress of the Russian Communist Party, see HIA, Fond 89, Reel 1.1003, opis 42, file 28.

²⁴ On the importance of the combination of these institutional arrangements—federal forms based on national territories—see the perceptive works of Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford University Press,

Republican level had territorial units that bore their name, such as the 'autonomous republics' of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan within the Russian republic. Although the Soviet Union eventually broke up into fifteen separate states, which corresponded exactly with the territorial boundaries of the fifteen Union Republics, this did not mean that all national problems had been solved, as some of the nationalities which did *not* achieve independent statehood held that the breakup of the Union had made things worse, not better, for them.²⁵

It is arguable that if the Soviet Union were to make a successful transition from a Communist system to one that was pluralist and democratizing, not only a 'triple transformation' but a quadruple change of fundamentals was needed. The fourth challenge was to put an end to the already-noted excessive militarization of the Soviet economy. The size of the military-industrial complex in relation to the rest of the economy gave the military and military industry an overwhelmingly privileged place within the system. It did not grant them autonomy, for the interpenetration of the party and the military was vast.²⁶ The Communist Party leadership had the last word, and the influence of the military within it depended to a substantial extent on the party standing of its principal representative within the highest echelons of the CPSU. When that person was Dmitriy Ustinov, especially during the eight years between 1976 and 1984 when he was both Minister of Defence and a full member of the Politburo, the voice of the military counted for a great deal—and it was a conservative voice. Discussing the political attitudes of the military during the Brezhnev era, Timothy Colton appositely observed:

Stanford, CA, 1993); Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996); Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 1996); Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999); and Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002).

²⁵ Writing, while the USSR was still in existence, about its need for a 'triple transformation', I noted (with respect to the required third transformation): 'In this area solutions are even less clear-cut than in the other two. It is not enough to support independence for the republics or national self-determination in every case, for the one can conflict with the other. One nation's independent statehood can become a minority nationality's perceived oppression, as the current example of Georgia and its Abkhazian and Ossetian minorities illustrates clearly' (Archie Brown, 'No Role Models for Soviet Transition', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 April 1991).

²⁶ However, in a Politburo meeting of 30 May 1987, Eduard Shevardnadze said that the army always had 'a certain autonomy' because of its special regime and that 'this served as a barrier for information about the situation in it'. He went on: 'But I consider that we must have full information about the state of affairs in the army' ('Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 30 Maya 1987 goda', p. 499, NSA, Volkogonov Papers).

On most basic questions facing Soviet society soldiers are firmly wedded to the status quo. Military leaders can be expected to oppose increased autonomy for national minorities, investment priority for the consumer economy, concessions to intellectuals, and greater openness to the outside world. As for political forms and procedures, the central concern of democratic theory, Soviet officers have displayed indifference to almost every aspect but their own access to national leaders.²⁷

These military predispositions did not alter significantly during perestroika and Gorbachev initiated a transformation of Soviet foreign policy not only because of the dangers inherent in the Cold War but also as a prelude to changing the priorities of domestic politics. Radical political and economic reform involved reducing the weight of the military in the decision-making process and of military expenditure as a share of the budget.²⁸

Gorbachev and those who shared his view on the need to make the army more responsive to their foreign policy goals, and to deprive the military-industrial complex of its specially privileged position within the Soviet economy, used whatever means they could to combat the institutional inertia which made such a change of priorities an uphill task. The May 1987 unscheduled arrival in Moscow of a young West German, Matthias Rust, who not only flew his light aircraft for hundreds of miles into Soviet air space but landed it just off Red Square, provided Gorbachev with an opportunity which he skilfully exploited. At the Politburo meeting held on 30 May, the day after Rust's arrival, Gorbachev took the chance to berate the top echelon of the military leadership and to replace the Minister of Defence, Marshal Sergey Sokolov, as well as General Aleksandr Koldunov, the Chief of the Air Defences. Responding to the criticism of this scandalous breach of Soviet air defences (albeit one which caused amusement in sections of Soviet society as well as the outside world), General Koldunov admitted that he learned about the aircraft only after it had landed in Moscow. Gorbachev sarcastically asked him if his source of information had been the Moscow traffic police ('*Uznali ot GAI?*').²⁹ After a lot of criticism from Gorbachev, backed especially by Shevardnadze, Marshal Sokolov, who was present throughout, said: 'If that is the unanimous opinion of the Politburo, then nothing remains for me but to leave the post of Minister of Defence.'³⁰ In truth, he had no option. After an interval in the Politburo proceedings Gorbachev proposed to unanimous approval that Dmitriy Yazov be appointed the new Minister of Defence, a decision that had been prepared in advance.

²⁷ Timothy J. Colton, *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority: The Structure of Soviet Military Politics* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1979), p. 288.

²⁸ See Mikhail Gorbachev, *Ponyat' perestroiku*, p. 30.

²⁹ 'Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 30 Maya 1987 goda', op. cit., p. 485.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 501.

Although Yazov was part of the attempted coup against Gorbachev little more than four years later, initially his appointment weakened military opposition to the foreign policy being pursued by Gorbachev with the active support within the leadership of Shevardnadze and Yakovlev. Anatoly Dobrynin, who attended the Politburo session at which Sokolov's resignation was accepted—and observes that the interval between the resignation and the resumption of the meeting at which Yazov was appointed was only fifteen minutes—wrote that Gorbachev had made 'perfect use of the military's state of confusion and its badly damaged prestige'.³¹ Dobrynin adds:

Yazov was far more obedient to Gorbachev than Sokolov, and thus Gorbachev accomplished a quiet coup. The new defense minister knew little about disarmament talks, and had nothing to do with them. With Yazov as defense minister, Shevardnadze felt much more at ease during the talks. Opposition by the military became more moderate. Sokolov was followed into retirement by about one hundred generals and colonels, conservative military leaders who also opposed Gorbachev's reforms and his concessions to the Americans. But the military establishment remained discontented with Gorbachev, and this would show time and again.³²

It became a cliché of the later perestroika era to assert that Gorbachev was 'indecisive'. That was, to say the least, an oversimplification. There were many occasions when he acted boldly and decisively. This was one of them.

WHAT WAS PERESTROIKA?

As I have already noted in the Preface, and it is a point which will recur in subsequent chapters, perestroika meant different things to different people at different times. However, it should not be used as a synonym for everything that happened in the Soviet Union between March 1985 and December 1991. It refers specifically to a momentous effort by a small minority in the leadership of the Communist Party, backed by a larger minority within the political elite of the country, initially to reform the Soviet system and, subsequently, to transform it. There were tensions from the start within the highest echelons of the Communist Party over the pace and direction of the changes set in motion, and the discord became increasingly overt as the substance and meaning of perestroika became more radical. There were even tensions in the minds of those (including, crucially, Gorbachev) who had

³¹ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962–1986)* (Random House, New York, 1995), pp. 625–6.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 626.