quiet support throughout the year. When she found an apartment, Ed even paid a visit to make sure he was satisfied with the security of the building. I am told there are others who received similar warm welcomes upon arrival in Washington.

My association with Ed began a year or two after he completed his graduate work. From the beginning it was clear to me that though he could have developed into a highly proficient technical economist, his desires and interests lay elsewhere. He viewed economic science as a tool, not an end in itself, a tool to be applied for the improvement and benefit of society. His career goal was to play a major role in the formulation of national policy toward the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. He structured his career toward this goal and this goal he achieved.

Though his life was short, it was full, professionally and personally.

Life is often so mixed-up. Parents are not supposed to bury their children and the old are not supposed to outlive the young. Ed spoke at our son’s funeral and now here am I speaking at Ed’s memorial service.

Nancy, along with all those who knew him and knew his work, by God, I will miss him.
The essentialists themselves break down into those who see the Soviet Union as the quintessence of the worst of Russian political culture and those others who see the source of evil—its totalitarianism—in ideology and organization, that is, in Marxism-Leninism and the Communist Party. In fact, the differences between these two camps are not at all insignificant.4

We may take the recent writings of Martin Malia as the most explicit, most elegant, and most systematic exposition of the neo-totalitarian approach, which moreover does claim to provide an explanation for what he calls the “implosion” of the Soviet order.5 Precisely because this argument risks becoming an ideology of its own—and because it is based on assumptions that this observer considers thoroughly mis-

4On the “essentialist” approach, see Dallin and Lapidus (1989, pp. 199–202) and sources quoted therein. The three points made above are taken from the recent writings of Malia. See “2.” (1991), Malia, (1991, 1992a, 1992b). The words in quotation marks above are drawn from these writings. On the genetic code, see Malia (1992a, p. 103). In 1991 “the genetic code born of the October overturn of 1917 at last worked itself out fully, that is, to the extinction of the organism.”

5Six months before Gorbachev became General Secretary, Richard Pipes wrote that the Soviet Union was “by definition incapable of evolution from within and impervious to change from without” (Pipes, 1984, p. 49). On the “hard-line” outlook and argument, see also Dallin (1988). In all fairness, Pipes has changed his views somewhat in the wake of recent events. The changes, after Stalin, within communist regimes, and the differences among them, stimulated widespread discussion about the utility and accuracy, or otherwise, of the concept of totalitarianism. This is hardly the place to refight that battle. For our purposes, it may suffice to recognize that in large measure this is a matter of definition. Certainly the “classic” definition, as provided by Carl Friedrich and Zhigiew Brazezinski (1956) does not fit. If the concept is to be used, there is merit in the approach outlined by Juan Linz (1975) and others. (See Gleason (1984) for the twists and turns of the argument.) Rather than viewing “soft communism” (as Malia does) as an emergency rescue mode adopted when things go terribly wrong, it is far more accurate to consider “soft” and “hard” (or better, right and left) communism—reformist and antireformist orientations—as “two souls in one communist breast,” equally legitimate political temperaments or temperaments. (See Cohen (1980) and Dallin (1969).) Also see Gill (1991). A still different, neo-Marxist perspective is represented by Hillel Ticktin (1992), who sees the Soviet Union as “neither socialist nor capitalist.” He concludes, “There is no mature form of the USSR. It is a historical accident, an accident brought about through the defeat of the October revolution in the form of the seizure of power by a bureaucratic ruling group. Just as Neanderthal man could never become man, so the USSR can never reform to become socialism or capitalism. It is an unfortunate deviation of history, which is now [1991], under Gorbachev, coming to an end” (p. 14).

6See Malia (1991). Pipes and Malia agree that the October Revolution was an illegitimate seizure of power. They also agree that Lenin logically led to Stalin, who was no aberration or traitor to the revolution. Where they differ is described by Malia as follows: for Pipes, “the key to sovietism lies in the Russian national tradition and a virtually changeless Russian political culture virtually changeless Russian political culture—despotism above and servitude below, a tradition in which the country and its inhabitants are the property of the ruler, and sovereignty is confused with ownership . . . Pipes rides his claims of immutable Russianness to implausible lengths” (pp. 25–26).

7I do not believe Malia defines what he means by “implosion.” The collapse of the Soviet Union, hardly foreseen by any analyst, provides Malia with a springboard for a massive attack on—or rather, caricature of—all Sovietology, in fact on all social science. See Malia (1992a, pp. 94–102).
diverged from that vision that provides evidence of social autonomy—of what is properly referred to as unintended consequences. 6

What we are really puzzling over is how as thoroughly controlled, as tightly disciplined, as rigidly programmed, and as heavily indoctrinated a system as the Soviet managed to fall apart, unravel so easily and so completely, and in the process prompt in its citizenry an utter scorn for authority, and a disregard for laws and regulations.

The answers, I believe, have to go beyond social psychology, for they centrally involve political institutions and behavior. They involve both broad secular changes and particular individual choices. There is, I suggest, a cluster of interrelated developments that together, and in their interaction, formed the essential preconditions—necessary but not sufficient—for what occurred in the 1990s. In brief, they are: (1) the loosening of controls; (2) the spread of corruption; (3) the erosion of ideology; (4) the impact of social change on values and social pathologies; (5) the growing impact of the external environment on Soviet society and politics; and (6) the consequences of economic constraints. Against these background conditions, certain decisions of the Gorbachev regime, in turn, appear decisive as catalysts for collapse.

THE LOOSENING OF CONTROLS

One thing that held the Soviet Union together, exacted obedience and compliance, and provided the framework for its sui generis development, was the sweeping Stalinist system of controls. Stalin died in 1953. In retrospect, what we see during the following 30 years is a gradual, unheralded loosening and then breakdown of these controls.

An essential part of the control structure and process was the terror that had reached unbelievable proportions and exacted such an incredible cost in the Stalin years. In the Khrushchev years it was the abandonment of mass political terror that provided the conditions for reducing the scope of controls. It ended the atomization, the silencing of that society—with an impact that did not become fully apparent until a generation later. 7 As T. H. Rigby (1992, pp. 18–19), an astute analyst of the Soviet scene, observed, in differentiating between active and symbolic, covert and overt elements that presaged the emergence of a civil society a generation later:

The most interesting developments came in the covert active elements. I am not thinking so much of the shadow economy and clientelist networks, although these also thrived mightily, especially during the Brezhnev years. Of far greater importance for the future of the civil society was the profuse blossoming of what I have called the covert "market in ideas," a blossoming vastly greater than what was apparent publicly. The key facilitating factor here was the curbing of the political police after Stalin's death. . . . People gradually found they could get away with a great deal in the way of unorthodox opinions and behavior in private—from rock music to listening to western radio broadcasts, from abstract art to passing on forbidden books or samizdat materials. The rehousing program helped here, because tens of millions of city dwellers now acquired some real privacy as they moved from so-called communal apartments to little family flats. The Soviet population was acquiring "freedom of speech in one kitchen."

At the same time, the post-Stalin years unintentionally conveyed to the Soviet citizen a sense of fallibility and uncertainty in the country's leadership. This was suggested both by the tinkering with institutions—Khrushchev's sonarkhozy and the "bifurcation" of the party, for instance—and by the continuous struggle over power and policy within the elite, which found policy expression in, among other things, the anti-Stalin campaign, and which culminated in the ouster of Khrushchev. 8

In the Brezhnev years a remarkable change in mood became apparent. Whether or not it accurately reflected reality, Soviet observers began to speak—rather more candidly than before—of stagnation and the leadership's failure to come to grips with urgent problems, and foreigners noted the change. Thus the economist Joseph Berliner was struck by the contrast between 1958 and 1967. By the later date,

there was in fact an air of gloom in the comments of economists I talked to. Perhaps my impression was heightened by the contrast in their tone with that during my earlier visit to the USSR [in 1958] . . . the USSR was riding the crest of a period of rapid economic growth. Consumption levels had risen rapidly following Stalin's death, and rates of investment were high. . . . There was a mood of exuberance and confidence in the vitality of the Soviet economic system. All this had changed by 1967. One found a candid admission that the economy was facing some nasty problems (Strong, 1971, pp. 50–51).

This is echoed from the perspective of the 1970s as well, when it had become even more apparent. Soon it went beyond the economy. In a very perceptive analysis, based on his own experience, John Bushnell

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6The locus classicus on the concept is Merton (1936).
7See also Dallin and Breslauer (1970).
(1980, pp. 179–182) wrote:

during the 1950s the Soviet middle class became increasingly optimistic about the performance of the Soviet system and about its own prospects for material betterment. . . . In the 1970s it has given way to pessimism. The rise and decline of middle-class optimism can be linked in part to political developments, but the crucial determinant has been the changing perception of Soviet economic performance.

Bushnell detected “mounting skepticism and cynicism about the values and performance of the regime in other areas as well.”9 And Dusko Doder (1988, pp. 31, 38) recalled:

When I arrived in Moscow on temporary duty in the summer of 1978, it was apparent that incremental changes had taken place over the past decade. . . . In the narrow circle of my friends I found something that was new, or at least more pronounced than before—the quest for the comforts of middle-class life: a car, a place in the country, a tiled bathroom, a Japanese stereo, a chance to travel abroad—at least to Bulgaria.

By the early 1980s it was apparent to him that

Brezhnev’s stable regime had produced an amazing proliferation of corruption, a cynicism that undermined all enterprise. An air of stagnation, the timeless inertia of the bureaucracy, a crisis of spirit—all characterized a system that seemed to have accompanied the aging leaders into exhaustion and debility.

These comments touch on the principal arenas in which critical changes were indeed taking place. To what extent the Communist Party itself was affected was not yet apparent, and of course large bureaucratic organizations are capable of conducting routine operations regardless of the morale or enthusiasm, or lack thereof, of their personnel. But something else was becoming evident: what had been aptly described as a “mono-organizational” system (Rigby, 1976) was showing cracks. Party, state, and police officials were working the system for their own benefit.

Blair Ruble (1990) has suggested that (by analogy with Quebec) what was taking place was a sort of “quiet revolution”—with the informal emergence of a second economy, a second culture, even a second politics alongside, and in full recognition of the continuing limits imposed by, the official ones.10 What added to the toleration of the new ambiguities was the fact that the second economy (Grossman, 1977) had its functional aspects insofar as performance was concerned. So, it has been argued, had the crystallization of rival patronage networks cultivated by various Soviet leaders. While the emergence of patron-client relations is a virtually ubiquitous development in all complex societies, John Willerton (1992, pp. 2–8) posits convincingly that, insofar as it promotes individual needs or interests, it undercuts the centrality or priority of government (or party) norms and goals.

THE SPREAD OF CORRUPTION

Far more serious is the massive spread of corruption, in all its many aspects, as a way of life. In a powerful account based on personal experience and replete with well-documented anecdotes, Konstantin Simis, in his USSR: The Corrupt Society (1982), is compelled to conclude:

The Soviet Union is infected from top to bottom with corruption—from the worker who gives the foreman a bottle of vodka to get the best job, to Politburo candidate Mzhavanadze who takes hundreds of thousands of rubles for protecting underground millionaires; from the street prostitute, who pays the policeman ten rubles so that he won’t prevent her from soliciting clients, to the former member of the Politburo Ekaterina Furtseva, who built a luxurious suburban villa at the government’s expense—each and everyone is afflicted with corruption.

I was born in that country and lived there for almost sixty years. Year after year since childhood and throughout my whole conscious life I watched as corruption ate more deeply into society until it turned the Soviet regime in the sixties and seventies into a land of corrupt rulers, ruling over a corrupted people.11

Especially in the late Brezhnev years, scandalous examples multiplied, from the appearance of feudal baronies in Uzbekistan or in the Urals, where high officials were able to operate with impunity, to the involvement of Brezhnev’s daughter, Galina, and her lover with a crowd of circus crooks, the theft of jewels, and the entanglement of high secret-police officials.

No doubt, many instances of corruption remained unexposed. But what is known argues strongly that the corruption presupposed a loos-

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9 See also Feifer (1981).
10 See also Hauslohner (1989).
11 See also Vaksberg (1991) and Zemtsov (1976).
enning of controls, permitting a wanton violation of law to take place in the interstices. It also implied and fostered a new measure of cynicism about the "radiant heights" of communist morality.

Much of this "quiet revolution" became possible because the end of mass terror also meant an end to the individual's paralyzing fear, and because bureaucratic actors saw opportunities for self-aggrandizement with minimal risk or cost. But in Stalin's time, in addition to both outer constraints and often simply the lack of opportunity for autonomous corruption, there had been psychological inhibitions on many well-placed individuals, rooted in their belief in the system and in the cause in the name of which it was all being done. Later, with a change of generations and apparently a change of values, one began to observe an erosion of ideological commitments and a more single-minded pursuit, and at times also a more explicit articulation, of personal priorities.

Perhaps the most interesting conceptualization of this phenomenon is to be found in Ken Jowitt's (1983) writings. Stressing the disappearance of the party's overriding combat task—or transformation agenda—of earlier years, he remarked in the 1980s: "Today what impresses one about the Soviet Union is the party leadership's inability and/or unwillingness to devise a credible and authoritative social combat task capable of sustaining a distinction between the regime elite's particular status interests and the party's general competence and interest. . . ." What is remarkable, he finds, is the increasing tendency of individual members to be "oriented to personal, familial, and material concerns." In Jowitt's post-Weberian vocabulary, "the subordination of office charisma to the incumbents' particular interests" is then identified precisely as "corrupt routinization."12

THE EROSION OF IDEOLOGY

Beginning at an earlier point but most explicit and tangible in the post-Stalin years, some of the millions of communists who made up the Soviet elite, and who were slated to become the regime's next generation of leaders, experienced an unadvertised but far-reaching crisis of identity and self-doubt.

One facet of this crisis was the subtle erosion of faith in the future and of the belief that the Bolsheviks alone had all the answers. This disillusionment, greatly intensified by Khrushchev's anti-Stalin campaign, was accompanied by an unheralded transformation in the dominant orientation: a shift from the pursuit of the millennium to compromising with reality. Seweryn Bialer (1987, pp. 54ff.) was one of those who remarked on the withering of utopianism in the Brezhnev years.

12Jowitt (1983, p. 284). He also (p. 288) quotes from Gregory Grossman (1977, p. 37) that "the prevalence of economic illegalities and corruption elevates the power of money [in Soviet society] to rival that of the dictatorship itself, rendering the regime's implements of rule less effective and less certain."

Wherever the faithful looked, the traditional prophecies had failed to come through: world revolution had not occurred, crime had not vanished, nationalism and religion had not disappeared with the passing of capitalism, as had been predicted. To be sure, the orthodox formulae continued to be reprinted ad nauseam, but inspiration had turned into ritual, and especially in the Brezhnev years there was no longer any serious effort made to reconcile conflicting articles of faith and observation.13

Strikingly, a similar decline may be noted in the rulers' self-confidence concerning their right to rule. Unwittingly, memoirs such as those of Khrushchev's son Sergei and of others close to the leadership testify to this point.14 A number of former Soviet academics have privately related their difficulties in coming to terms with the Stalin phenomenon. How had it been possible in the first place, and how could Stalinism now be explained to the next generation? What were the implications for the Soviet experiment? Within the limits of the permissible, serious questions were raised from within the Marxist-Leninist tradition: for instance, on the nature of "contradictions" under socialism, and the phenomenon of bureaucracy.

A good example is also provided by General Dmitriy Volkogonov, who recently recalled that in the 1970s

I was an orthodox Marxist, an officer who knew his duty. I was not part of some liberal current. All my changes came from within, off on my own. I had access to all kinds of literature. . . . I was a Stalinist. I contributed to the strengthening of the system that I am now trying to dismantle. But lately, I had my ideas. I began asking myself questions about Lenin, how, if he was such a genius, none of his predictions came true. The proletarian dictatorship never came to be, the principle of class struggle was discredited, communism was not built in fifteen years as he had promised. None of Lenin's major predictions ever came true! I confess it: I used my position, I began gathering information even though I didn't know yet what I would do with it (Remnick, 1992, p. 15).

Yet there can be no doubt about the importance of faith for the cohesion of a regime that had chosen to make its ideology so central and weighty a core of the system.

Indeed, it was during the Brezhnev years that we witnessed an unprecedented surge of dissident literature—not from people who had never shared the regime's values or goals but from prominent individ-

13See also Kull (1992) and Dallin (1993).
14See Khrushchev (1990), Burlatsky (1991), and Arbatov (1992a, b).
CAUSES OF THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

Alexander Dallin

... the rate of growth in living standards that is required for the people, or for the intensive technical retooling of production. In our opinion, [the cause of this is] the inability of this system to make provision for the full and sufficiently effective use of the labour potential and intellectual resources of society (p. 88).

While written in a style entirely loyal and conforming to official Soviet norms, the memorandum does point to a number of changes that have occurred in Soviet economy, society, and technology that require recognition and changes in institutions, attitudes, and practices.

In the light of what has been said, we must admit that the social mechanism of economic development as it functions at present in the USSR does not ensure satisfactory results. The social type of worker formed by it fails to correspond not only to the strategic aims of a developed socialist society, but also to the technological requirements of contemporary production. The widespread characteristics of many workers, whose personal formation occurred during past five-year plans, are low labour- and production-discipline, an indifferent attitude to the work performed and its low quality, social passivity, a low value attached to labour as a means of self-realization, an intense consumer orientation, and a rather low level of moral discipline. It is enough to mention the broad scale of activity of the so-called "touts" ("pilferers"—ADJ), the rampant spread of various "shady" deals made at public expense, the development of illegal output, irregular registrations, of procuring wages which are not dependent on the results of labour (p. 106).

As discussed below, the increasing acquaintance and fascination with foreign norms, styles, and practices— and goods—would, in their own way, further contribute to the erosion of commitments to official Soviet orthodoxy.

SOCIAL CHANGE

The Soviet era witnessed a remarkable process of social change. In some measure it had begun even before the 1917 revolutions: urbanization and higher educational attainments are the universal by-product of economic development. To a significant degree, this was ideologically welcome to the Leninists as it promoted "proletarianization" at the expense of the peasantry. Later, the "liquidation of the kulaks as a class" was a conscious policy decision buttressed by ideological, economic, and security considerations (whether spurious or not). Similarly, the mas-
sive employment of female labor, the wholesale resettlement and migration, as well as the expansion of labor camps and forced settlements, were willed by the regime. And to some extent, the new social stratification was the inevitable by-product of choices made on behalf of rapid industrialization, bureaucratization, and centralization. But, whether willed or not, these developments had unforeseen, unintended, and (from the regime's point of view) often undesirable consequences.

The magnitude of the transformations is suggested by Soviet census figures: the urban share of the population rose from some 18 percent in 1926 to about 65 percent in 1985. The number of "specialists"—the so-called intelligentsia—grew from some 2 million before World War II to over 30 million in the 1980s, of whom more than half had specialized training or higher education. The government, party, police, and military bureaucracies grew at a comparable pace.

The resulting sociography of the Soviet Union still awaits thorough study. For instance, the attitudes and values of the working class—and regional variations—remain to be better understood. What is clear, however, is that, in so far as they involved the formation of a new intelligentsia (the equivalent of an urban middle class), and the crystallization of new values, priorities, and aspirations within it, these transformations had profound effects in generating a new sociopolitical force. So, inevitably, did the appearance of a new, postwar generation of citizens, possessions of rising expectations, and whose members had not shared in the hopes and sufferings of earlier years.

An additional factor in the 1970s and early 1980s was the (accurate) perception, spreading in urban society, that the previously axiomatic opportunities for upward social mobility were no longer there. With the slowdown of economic growth, the more or less stable size of administrative and military cadres, the end of massive purges (and the widespread retention of older officials in office); it was plausible that there should be fewer vacancies to be filled. The resulting effect on morale, especially among ambitious younger people, was obvious.

We find then an unmistakable spread of skepticism and widespread cynicism, particularly in the 1970s. Along with the "weakening belief in ideals," cited above, observers pointed to a career-mindedness and materialism, and a combination of consumerism and consumer pessimism. Moreover, it was pointed out, "because economic performance has been so central to sociopolitical stability, the consequences of this stagnation are potentially serious" (Lapidus, 1983, p. 198). There was also a lack of fit between educational opportunities and career needs; and high aspirations combined with a disdain for manual labor to create further tensions. High rates of labor turnover, low productivity, and

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**CAUSES OF THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR**

low worker morale were additional indicators of growing problems (Lapidus, 1983, pp. 204-210).

The loss of optimism and the loss of purpose readily led to a change of attitude. This was reflected, for instance, in the jocular remark, "We pretend to be working; and they pretend to be paying us," as well as in the middle-class view of corruption reported by Bushnell (1980, p. 187): "It's a crime not to steal from them," which is revealing also for the use of "them" for the authorities. It easily spilled over into antisocial behavior. Alcoholism, in particular, became even more of a severe problem than before, with manifest consequences from industrial accidents to family life. Lying and cheating seemed to become pandemic in Soviet society.16

One conclusion of particular interest, prompted by studies of Soviet refugees, émigrés, and "displaced persons," concerns variation of grievances by age groups. The so-called Harvard study of Soviet refugees in the 1950s (Inkeles and Bauer, 1961) had concluded that young people were more thoroughly indoctrinated and less critical of the Soviet system than their elders. But in the early 1980s a corresponding study of Brezhnev-era émigrés (Millar, 1989) found evidence that, on the contrary, young people (as well as those with more education) now tended to be more negative and more disenchanted with the performance of the system than their elders.17

Students of Soviet society concluded, even prior to the accession of Gorbachev, that the potential for instability was greater then than at any time since World War II.

Possibly the most dramatic change of recent years, and one with profound implications for the legitimacy and stability of the Soviet system, has been a shift in attitudes within the Soviet population during the past two decades [i.e., 1960s and 1970s]. Most visible within the middle-class and intelligentsia but extending to the working class as well, it involves growing pessimism about the Soviet future, increasing disillusionment with official values, and an accompanying decline in civic morale (Lapidus, 1983, p. 233).

As Geoffrey Hosking (1990, pp. 4-5), a well-qualified observer, remarked: "There has been evidence for more than two decades that society and politics were out of phase with one another, that society was

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17See in particular the chapters by Donna Dalry and Brian Silver, in Millar (1987, pp. 61-141). Also see Hankiss (1990).
starting to outgrow the crude and rigid integument of the party-controlled political system.”

These attitudes and values need not have been dangerously incongruent with the existing regime. In fact, in large part the new middle class, as well as the workers were dependent on that regime for their own advancement and career, a circumstance that importantly distinguishes Soviet “classes” from their counterparts in liberal-democratic societies. For better or for worse, Soviet citizens had been accustomed—at whatever price to themselves—to distinguish between their private and their public persona and not to give voice to impolitic desires. Moreover, the existence of unorthodox attitudes does not, need not, readily translate into political demands or action programs. Yet, it turned out, especially the new middle class—in and out of the Communist Party—provided a fertile breeding ground and, later, a social base, first for the “reformers” and then for the “democrats.”

As Zbigniew Brzezinski (1989, pp. 33–34) concluded:

the Stalinist system endured [in the Brezhnev years] not only because Brezhnev and his immediate comrades benefited from it and remained loyal to it. It survived because it had become a vast structure of overlapping privileges, controls, rewards, and vested interests. . . . Most important, Stalinism both endured and stagnated because it was a political system without real political life within it. That stagnation could not be forever ignored. Already by the later years of the Brezhnev era, a sense of malaise was developing within a portion of the upper Soviet elite. An awareness of decay, of ideological rot, of cultural sterility was setting in: it began not only to permeate the intellectual circles but also to infect some members of the political elite.

THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

There has been discussion in the West, more of it political than scholarly, about the extent to which the international environment, and more explicitly, American policy, can take credit for the collapse of the Soviet system. In regard to explicit policy by Western powers, it is impossible to find direct evidence of its destabilizing impact on Soviet society or polity, though at least three factors can be assumed to have played some role: (1) the unintended consequences of the inclusion of “Basket 3” (on human rights) in the Helsinki accords of 1975; (2) a heightening of the fear of nuclear war; and (3) almost certainly the strains imposed by the defense burden, discussed below. On the other hand, it remains to be studied whether or not a “tough” Western posture tended to reinforce a siege mentality within the Moscow elite. But, quite distinct from Western policy and conduct, there is good evidence of the importance of simply the existence of the outside world as a challenge to and as a reference group for comparisons by Soviet observers.

The years up to 1985, when Gorbachev came to power, saw a significant increase in the Soviet elite’s familiarity with alternative political and socioeconomic systems and with life abroad, a result of both technology and détente. While on the surface that early détente was a political failure, it worked certain important changes in information and attitude that are relevant to our discussion, by strengthening pro-reform images.

Thus, after many years of imposed isolation, Soviet specialists were allowed to travel abroad, correspond with professional colleagues, read foreign journals and magazines. Tourists began to visit other countries; we saw Soviet exchange scholars and students in the U.S. wandering through supermarkets and reading books that had been forbidden back home. In fact, at a time of growing middle-class wechseln (crass consumerism), rapidly expanding tourism even to Eastern Europe stimulated provocative comparisons. What is more, new technology could be enlisted on behalf of the curious citizenry (and not solely, as George Orwell had posited, on behalf of the regime). Direct-dialing telephones put them in easier touch with émigrés and colleagues abroad, gave them a chance to realize how far behind they were, and stimulated questions about regime policies and the assumptions that had prompted them. Audio cassettes, television, and VCRs (video-cassette recorders) made both information and ideas more accessible.

Nor should we dismiss this new acquaintance as trivial or marginal. We know the importance of reference groups from numerous studies. And we know of historical instances where exposure to other
ECONOMIC DECLINE

Specialists told us that the Soviet economy needed structural reform long before 1985. Above all, the central command economy had failed to keep up its previously impressive growth rate, the GNP plummeting (by Western estimates) from some 6 percent growth rates in the 1960s to perhaps 2 percent or less in the early 1980s. Per capita real income declined as well. One reason was that earlier on, inputs—capital, labor, energy—had been ample and cheap. By the 1970s this was no longer so, and it was necessary to switch from a strategy of extensive development to an intensive one. Moreover, productivity was low, and the system failed to provide adequate incentives for harder work or for technological innovation. If anything, the technological gap and lag behind the West were increasing. Typically, the quality of production and services was substantially below world standards. This reduced Soviet ability to export goods and also added to consumer dissatisfaction, given the rising expectations of the new elite.

This was also the one area where U.S. policy may have had an impact. Given the Soviet leadership's commitment after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 to catch up with American military might, including R&D in advanced technology, a totally disproportionate share of Soviet GNP (clearly over 15 percent, by some estimates a lot more) was allocated for the arms race—in an economy whose total product was a good deal less than that of the U.S. The result of these investments was to seriously distort the economy at precisely a time when the decline in its growth rate required cuts in allocations to other parts of the economy, including welfare, services, and consumption.23

Here then we have a combination of inherent trends and disastrous policy choices by the Soviet leadership. In addition to objective problems that the Soviet economy presented, the trends sketched above were bound to impact subjective perceptions as well. Not only was the unquestioned priority of defense expenditures becoming more apparent, but the resulting "defense burden" no longer went unchallenged. In addition, the implications of the slowdown not only affected other sectors of the economy but also led to questions concerning the axiomatic effect of continued economic growth on the perceived legitimation of the Soviet system. For some years short-term successes (as well as economic and social problems abroad) had concealed the structural inadequacies of the Soviet economic mechanism, but by the early 1980s profound doubts about it had matured, particularly as Soviet observers increasingly tended to judge the system by its performance rather than by its promises.

INTERACTION AMONG THE VARIABLES

All this adds up to a subtle change in the relationship of state and society on the eve of the Gorbachev years. Society gains greater autonomy, grievances and expectations become more critical and more overt, and there occurs an implicit shift to some expectation of accountability. If there is an increasing inclination to judge the regime by its performance, in the 1980s the regime falls short. And, more importantly in 1985, it is essentially this perception of the same trends that shaped the conviction of Mikhail Gorbachev and his friends that "things cannot go on like this."24

I have argued that none of the trends we have examined was the prime mover in this process of change. It is precisely the interaction among these variables that was critical. While we cannot "replay" the events with one variable left out, some inferences as to relative weights are plausibly strong. Thus, had the whole control structure not loosened up, much of the articulation of grievances could not have occurred, acquaintance with the outside world would have been far more modest, and the assertion of autonomy in various venues could neither have been undertaken nor succeeded to the degree that it did. Similarly, the effect of the loosening up on the spread of corruption, the perception of stagnation, and contact with the West all facilitated the erosion of ideological commitments. So manifestly did the social pathologies, the value shift and the rising expectations among the new urban middle class erode the faith among officials and non-officials alike.

True, the economic constraints alone should have been enough to engender doubts, comparisons, and grievances. However, the true economic facts were not widely known; indeed, some "derogatory" facts

22See Gorbachev's speech to cultural leaders, in Pravda, December 1, 1990. For another version, see Shevardnadze (1991, p. 79).
were scarcely known even in the highest leadership circles. Furthermore, at earlier times of economic difficulty—be it 1930 or 1946—there had been no such articulation, essentially because both the actors and the political environment had been so different. We must then conclude that the cluster of trends we have focused on provided a set of necessary conditions for the changes that ensued.

THE GORBACHEV FACTOR

Taken together, the trends and developments discussed above suggest a number of serious flaws and fragilities in the Soviet system. But there are no grounds for arguing that they doomed it. If we had seen them as clearly as we do now in, say, 1984, would we have been led to conclude that a collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable in the foreseeable future? I think the answer has to be “no.”

In that case, do we mean to say that, had Gorbachev and his associates not come to power, the Soviet Union would have hobbed along, and might have continued to muddle through without overt instability? That is the only plausible conclusion. If we reach that conclusion, based on those premises, then we must give serious weight to the proposition that the much-touted “collapse of communism” was perhaps not nearly so inevitable and surely not necessarily so imminent as it has been made out to be.

There is room for counterfactual speculation, and I think the most responsible answer is that, while we cannot be sure, at the very least Moscow might have gained considerable time, might have avoided the destabilization and delegitimation that the Gorbachev years brought, and might have shaped the domestic and international environment very differently from what in fact occurred. What comes to mind as one scenario is something like the evolution of Turkey or Mexico, which experienced radical regimes and transformations in the first quarter of this century, but where revolutionary zeal petered out without an overthrow of governments.

One could point to problems with this sort of scenario, born of differences between the Soviet Union and Mexico or Turkey. Specifically, the Soviet regime propagated an explicit, mandatory ideology based on the notion of two adversary world systems. That ideology, among other things, provided the justification for the inordinately burdensome effort to match the United States in defense expenditures and weapons research. One could argue, therefore, that drastically cutting the military effort—for a nuclear superpower, at that—would have required a fundamental reorientation of the image of the enemy and the whole ideological mind-set. (Moreover, even such a major restructuring of the Soviet budget probably would not have sufficed to address the structural disorders that ailed the Soviet economy.)

This argument is compelling, though not entirely convincing. True,

CAUSES OF THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

rational policy choices are constrained by do's and don'ts rooted in beliefs. But was this true under Brezhnev? To some extent, yes; but it was becoming less so. Precisely the Brezhnev years had been a great exercise in fudging issues and overtly denying realities. Such behavior both reflected and deepened the disillusionment and uncertainty about ideological verities within the political establishment. But precisely because of that change in perspectives, the doctrine became even more pragmatically malleable. With a little semantic effort, Brezhnev's successors, had they been so inclined, could surely have managed to cut defense without giving up such parts of the residual communist vision as they wished to protect and preserve. Thus, they could have made policy adjustments while continuing to legitimize their right to rule by reference to other components of the ideology. They would have sacrificed some measure of credibility in the process. But that is not the same as losing the ability to maintain elite unity against challenges to the system.

If my argument has merit, the implication is that the Gorbachev years, and what is now called katastroka, are an essential part of the explanation of the collapse. They are not sufficient by themselves to explain it, but they are, ironically or tragically, a vital link in the chain of destabilization, delegitimation, and disintegration that led from the superpower status of the 1970s to the new, shrunken, confused, and impoverished Russian Federation of the 1990s.

Unlike some of the earlier trends that we can label impersonal or secular, in the Gorbachev period we are dealing with very distinct acts of will, acts that in retrospect should deaden any temptation to agree with those who seek to transform history and politics into mathematical formulae of rational choice. It did make a lot of difference that these particular individuals, beginning with Gorbachev and soon Yakovlev and Shevardnadze, were the ones taking charge in Moscow. Suffice it to contemplate counterfactual scenarios in which, say, Chernenko remained in office for another five years, or was succeeded by Grishin or Romanov: how different would the country have looked?

Those who see the Soviet period and the dominant Leninist ideology as a seamless web have difficulty explaining how a Gorbachev and his cohort could have emerged in charge of such a system in the first place. Whatever happens elsewhere, here personalities have certainly played a significant part. The fact that they, and not any others, came to power has been critical and may be an essential part of the explanation of the collapse. They would have sacrificed some parts of the residual communist vision as they wished to protect and preserve. Thus, they could have made policy adjustments while continuing to legitimize their right to rule by reference to other components of the ideology. They would have sacrificed some measure of credibility in the process. But that is not the same as losing the ability to maintain elite unity against challenges to the system.

But what was it about the Gorbachev policies—so many of which were brilliant—that contributed to the system's collapse? First and foremost, Gorbachev put an end to the claim that there was one single
truth and therefore one single party that was its carrier. In association with this argument, he fostered glasnost, an end to censorship, an end to widespread political repression, and an end to the official monopoly on rewriting the past. In terms of sociopolitical impact, all this brought about a remarkable sense of having been lied to, of having been deceived of what the rest of the world had had access to, a “desacralization” of the system (Malia, 1990) and delegitimation of the authorities, a transformation of the Communist Party from the unchallenged clan of privilege to a hollow institution without a rational task other than self-preservation. This in turn opened the floodgates to massive and varied grassroots organization and articulation outside the party.

The other major arena in which the new policy of glasnost had an impact was the republics. From Estonia to Azerbaijan, glasnost mobilized opinion around issues of ethnic identity, beginning with language, school, or culture, and ending with national-liberation fronts. And while there had obviously been some sense of national consciousness that had been stifled earlier on, some of its growth was another unintended consequence of the Soviet experience. The organization of the federation by Union republics, each with its dominant nationality, the ethnic identification of all Soviet citizens in their passports, and the promotion of national cultures and histories (in however circumscribed a fashion) all served to nurture memories and identifications that would be mobilized and reshaped later, when conditions permitted.

Yet, one may hypothesize, the big impetus came precisely from the new doubts—about, and the newly perceived challengeability of, the Soviet system. For once their identities as Soviet citizens or communists faded, people looked around for alternative loci of loyalty and identity, and the attachment to nationalities made possible the political mobilization of doubting, contemptuous, and newly emboldened publics, and the invention of new organizations. These acquired an additional ethnic coloration because of the discrediting of alternative identities, which brought to the top of the political agenda the question of the future of the Soviet federal system. That transformation did not come soon enough to avoid the polarization between the centralist “coup plotters” of August 1991 and the separatists at the other end of the center/periphery spectrum.23 A year later, Gorbachev admitted that his failure fully to recognize the seriousness of the “nationality question” had perhaps been his most serious error in office (Wt/My, No. 6 [June 1–14, 1992]).

In arguing that the liberalization of the system from 1985 to 1991 was part of the explanation for its collapse, I am not agreeing with the proposition that the system could not be reformed. That argument comes from both ends of the political spectrum, though it is made with divergent purposes in mind. The Stalinists in Moscow insist that any attempt to “reform” the Soviet system—to alter or abandon its Stalinist cast—was bound to subvert it and therefore must at all costs be avoided; Molotov’s critique of Khrushchev’s policy in the 1950s came close to this view. Likewise, we hear from those at the other extreme that the Soviet system could not be reformed step by step but needed to be totally demolished before a democratic and healthy system could be erected from scratch. The experience of the Gorbachev regime does not answer the question whether its errors—say, on the nationality question or in economic policy—were avoidable or not. I believe they were, as they were errors of individual judgment, not inherent and inescapable trends. While there are many significant differences between the two cases, the “Chinese option” also suggests that—in the regime’s own terms—certain reforms could succeed.

Finally we must ask what, in this setting, provided the trigger for the outward collapse of what remained of the Soviet Union. Here Boris Yeltsin and his successful “second coming” deserve a little credit (or blame). His re-emergence in 1990 in the context of competitive elections was a product of the unraveling of the system and in turn contributed to the shift in the focus of power and popular support away from the old center. His declaration of Russian sovereignty legitimated the other republics’ posture against the “center” and momentarily united democrats and nationalists. His election as president of Russia in June 1991 and, two months later, his stand against the “coup plotters” dramatized both his strength and Gorbachev’s weakness. Yeltsin chose to magnify that asymmetry, and in December he decided to torpedo what remained of the “Union” structure and to erect the improvised “Commonwealth” framework in its place.

Yeltsin could not have pulled off these changes if the system had not already been badly injured. Still, he made the most of it, for himself as well, and in the process permitted the collapse of the Soviet Union itself. Identifying him as the final catalyst of the collapse may be the easiest part of this exercise.

CONCLUSION

It is perhaps natural for us to seek simple explanations, single causes, and yes-or-no answers. More often than not, in real life, things are far more complex. We must take care not to introduce retrospectively a clarity, let alone inevitability, where there was contingency and complexity. A retrospective view should underscore the dynamic and variable character of many Soviet policies and institutions. While it is no doubt true that “the party” or “the secret police” or “the dictator” was an ever-present power in the Soviet state, the limits of each changed
over time. If corruption was a perennial feature, its scope varied greatly. So did dissent and deviance.

And so did legitimacy. From the manifest fact that the Soviet regime, by 1991, was not widely perceived as legitimate by the population, it is important not to draw the inference that the Soviet regime had been perceived as illegitimate at all earlier times—during the NEP, at the end of World War II, or in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance. The recognition of this fact helps us understand why it is not the case that the Soviet system could have collapsed at any given moment during its 74-year history (though, of course, factors other than a lack of legitimacy could have brought about its demise). It turned out that its end required the maturation, as well as the interaction, of the several trends identified above. It also required the particular, albeit understandable, blind spots in the perceptions and policy choices of the Gorbachev leadership.

REFERENCES

One Year After the Collapse of the USSR: A Panel of Specialists

George Breslauer, Timothy Colton, Gregory Grossman, David Holloway, Roman Szporluk, and Victor Winston

Abstract: Six senior American specialists in Soviet, Ukrainian, and Russian affairs reflect on economic and political developments in light of apocalyptic expectations articulated in the West after the collapse of the USSR. Presentations, formulated in November 1992, focus on the lot of the consumer during the winter, a survey of direct foreign investments, the leadership of Yeltsin, military and security considerations, and Russian-Ukrainian relations. Coverage of economic issues also includes discussion of food shortages, pervasive corruption, and Russian nationalist views of pro- or anti-market orientations. A concluding afterword embraces the December Congress of People's Deputies and Yeltsin's departure.

INTRODUCTION

This panel is devoted to the challenge of analyzing the course of events in the former Soviet Union during 1992. The inspiration for our definition of the problem was the widespread apocalyptic rhetoric, both in the West and in the USSR, before and during winter 1991–1992. As this panel had to be organized in November-December 1991, one year in advance of the meetings in Phoenix, it seemed appropriate to convene a roundtable of specialists to look back on that year and reflect on the lessons of what transpired in the interval.

The apocalyptic expectations articulated in a variety of quarters touched upon the following issues: (1) the prospects for consumer unrest in the face of severe shortages or spiraling prices; (2) the slow pace of market reform; and (3) the apocalyptic expectations of the West. In this article, we focus on the last of these three issues, in light of the fact that our panelists are also senior Russian specialists who followed the events in Moscow. This last issue generated a wide range of reactions among the panelists, even from those who had consistently criticized the West for its apocalyptic rhetoric.

MATERIALS


