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Domestic and International Influences on the Collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) and Russia's Initial Transition to Democracy (1993)

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**Domestic and International Influences on the Collapse of the Soviet Union (1991)
and
Russia's Initial Transition to Democracy (1993)**

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Introduction

Before the democracy promotion efforts of Iraq or Afghanistan in the early 21st century, there was the Soviet Union in the late 20th century. For much longer, and with much greater capacity than Saddam Hussein's regime or the Taliban, the Soviet regime threatened the United States. The destruction of the Soviet regime and the construction of a pro-Western, democratic regime in its place, therefore, was a major objective of American foreign policy. Some presidents pursued this goal more vigorously than others: Nixon cared less, Reagan rather more. Yet, even during the height of Nixonian realism, Senator Jackson and Congressman Vanik made sure that the human rights of Soviet citizens were not ignored. Containment of Soviet power always remained a primary objective of U.S. policy, but democratic change inside the USSR survived as a hope, if not a policy goal for most of this period. Some administrations even devoted real resources and strategic thinking to the issue. Perhaps most boldly, President Reagan launched his strategic defense initiative in part to push the Soviet regime into bankruptcy.

Almost twenty-five years after Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and quickly began the process of political change within the USSR, it is still not at all clear that Russia will consolidate as a democracy. It did, however, successfully transit from Soviet-style autocracy and so we count it among the transitional "success" cases for the purposes of this project. To date, however, the influence of the United States in fostering regime change inside the Soviet Union and then Russia has been relatively limited. The US played at best only an indirect role in facilitating the collapse of the Soviet system. Indeed, in the final months immediately prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, then President George H.W. Bush may have actually done more to preserve the old system than to destroy it. During the second phase of the Soviet/Russian transition between 1991 and 1993, when the basic institutional framework of the new political system was created, Americans did provide information about the various options available to Russian policy makers, but offered really only limited guidance about what choices to make regarding institutional design. Russians made these decisions based on immediate political interests, and not with reference to the long-term viability of Russian democratic consolidation. After the transitional phase of institutional design, American actors helped keep afloat important participants in the democratic process, such as political parties, trade unions, and civic groups, but these efforts at fostering an organized and democratic society within Russia likewise were not sufficient to withstand or impede later autocratic rollbacks by both President Yeltsin and later President Putin.

At certain moments regarding specific issues, the United States government and various American non-governmental actors (many of which were in fact funded by the United States government) have been able to nudge the course of Soviet and later Russian democratization in a positive way. At critical moments, senior American government officials were able to engage directly with Russian elites to help prevent autocratic moves or reverse a few seemingly authoritarian decisions. At key moments, in the design of Russia's political institutions, American organizations provided information about Western experiences with different electoral laws, legal practices or federalism, which provided Russian officials with templates upon which to base some of their policy decisions. More generally, and very difficult to quantify precisely, America's greatest

contribution to the initial transition to democracy within Russia was primarily in the realm of ideas as opposed to huge amounts of financial aid aimed specifically at democracy promotion.

Yet despite some episodic successes, what is more striking are the setbacks or missed opportunities. Although the United States is the most powerful hegemon in recent history, the U.S. government was relatively ineffective, weak, and generally unable (although partially unwilling) to foster democratic transition in the Soviet Union and then Russia. The primary source of transition from communism came from within the Soviet Union, not from without.

Section I: Defining the Point of Transitional “Success”

Although the date of the collapse of the Soviet Union – December 25, 1991 – is clear, it is less clear that this should be the date from which we define the end of Russia’s successful transition to at least a modest form of democracy.¹ Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, Russia under president Boris Yeltsin became the clear international successor state of the former empire. It assumed its own seat at the United Nations shortly thereafter, as did the new states that came out of the 14 other republics that had composed the Soviet Union.

Despite the unequivocal demise of the Soviet state by the end of 1991 and the formal emergence of Russia as a state internationally, however, the transitional struggle did not end quickly. Hot debate over the nature of the political system continued between the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, elected to this newly created position in June of 1991, and the Russian Congress of People’s Deputies that had been elected in 1990. This debate erupted into violence in October of 1993 when Yeltsin used force to evict renegade parliamentarians who had refused to follow his decree to disband and hold new elections and a referendum for a new constitution that would redefine executive-legislative relations. (A reasonable argument, however, also could be made for December 1995 being a more solid point of transition when more free and fair elections were held for the Russian parliament given that the Duma elections of 1993 took place in the wake of the violence of the fall of 1993.)

We therefore define Russia’s successful transition as occurring in two steps. The first step ended on December 25, 1991 and the lowering of the Soviet hammer and sickle flag over the Kremlin and its immediate replacement with the Russian tri-color flag. The second, more definitive step, however, took place following the acceptance of the constitution of 1993 that established completely new democratic political institutions for the country. Although under President Putin the parliament became largely a rubber stamp and he took full advantage of the powers granted to the president in the 1993 constitution, until December 2008 no significant changes were made to Russia’s basic formal institutional framework, and it is for this reason that we take December 1993 as the end of the transition from communism. That Russia has thus far failed to consolidate its democracy is clear, but beyond the scope of this paper, and we focus here on the

¹ Note that we are following the convention of the research guide of this project in defining Russia as being a case of successful transition to democracy, but in the next phase of this project, Russia is a case of failed democratic consolidation.

internal and external factors by which the initial *transition* occurred in December 1991 and then the second stage in December 1993.

Section 2: Domestic Causes of Transitional Breakthrough in 1991

i. Long term structural causes

As Valerie Bunce has noted, “the collapse of communism was both abrupt and long in the making.”² Retrospectively, the internal causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the initial breakthrough of democracy were in a sense over-determined yet paradoxically far from inevitable. Long term structural factors clearly played a key role in precipitating the collapse, while the short term factors described in the next subsection of this paper provided the spark.

Although the sophisticated planning system that was able to modernize a predominantly peasant agricultural economy in the 1920’s and 30’s was well suited to huge developmental projects, it proved unreliable and unwieldy by the 1980s. The power of ideology also waned in the declining years of the Soviet system. Finally, the Communist Party itself, had become a bloated bureaucracy by the mid 1980’s and Brezhnev’s death – a far cry from the revolutionary party Vladimir Lenin had envisioned in 1917. The fallacy of the constitutional position of the party as “the leading and guiding force of Soviet life the nucleus of its political system, of all state organs and public organs,” was increasingly in question by the time Gorbachev acceded to power as the last General Secretary in 1985. Indeed, his plan under perestroika was to reconstruct the party and the Soviet political system around it.

Successive leaders tried to make changes to the system before Gorbachev initiated perestroika in 1985. Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin’s immediate successor, was the first in a line of Soviet reformers. His bifurcation of the Communist Party, sovnarkhoz, and limited political and cultural thaws were all undone, however, by Leonid Brezhnev when he assumed leadership following Khrushchev’s ouster in the early 1960’s. Under Brezhnev’s long reign, the system stagnated. The large developmental projects that had benefited in many ways from the extreme centralization of the party and command economy were largely completed under Stalin. A backward, agrarian country had been rapidly industrialized (even over-industrialized); adult literacy was raised to 98%; the Soviet Union was challenging American hegemony not just on earth, but in space by the 1960’s.

In contrast, by the 1970’s and early 1980’s, the system began to decline. First, there was a growing *crisis of regime legitimacy within Soviet society*. As Moshe Lewin has argued, “The country went through a social revolution as Brezhnev slept.”³ With rapid rises in education levels came increased undermining of the ideology of high mobilization that the system required. The Soviet “social contract” – whereby the state

² Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institution: The Design and Destruction of Socialism and the State*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.xi.

³ Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1991), p xx

provided cradle to grave services and guaranteed employment – was gradually failing. The adage among Soviet citizens, “we pretend to work, while you pretend to pay us,” gained increased currency through the 1970s. Increasingly, a chasm opened between the promises the regime made in its propagandistic claims regarding the superiority of the socialist way of life, and the regime’s growing inability to deliver on its outsized promises. Social services, while free, were of poor quality. The growing insufficiencies of a planning system not designed for a complex modern economy meant that increasingly, consumer goods were in high demand, yet short supply. Moreover, citizens’ expectations were much greater than the regime’s ability to come through on its promises. Timothy Colton noted in 1986, “studies of Soviet buying habits observe that citizens now feel entitled to more and better goods than in the past and that, ‘the demands of people have significantly grown, and industry trails along behind them.’”⁴

Second, and related, as Gorbachev assumed the office of General Secretary of the Communist Party in March 1985, *the Soviet economic system was badly in need of reform*. Despite Khrushchev’s boasts in 1961 that the Soviet economy would surpass the GNP per capita of the US within twenty years, in 1980 in reality it was only about one third of that of the US.⁵ In the 1970’s annual growth dipped to below about 3% on average, but by 1985 had declined further to 1.6%. This steady decline in growth rates was driven by declines in production outputs in previously stellar industries like coal and steel. Further, oil production was also sliding by the mid-1980’s and agricultural production was “anemic” by 1982, purportedly dipping below plan levels.⁶

There were multiple causes of the weakness of the Soviet economy by the mid 1980’s. Dropping rates of worker productivity were certainly part of the story. Absenteeism was a growing problem, in part driven by alcoholism that had grown so rampant that it was deemed worthy of note in the 1985 Party Congress by Gorbachev himself.⁷ But time spent in long lines attempting to purchase scarce goods was another inefficiency created by a faltering planning system and that also helped to drive absenteeism. With very little for Soviet consumers to buy, savings rates were artificially high and this also may have depressed worker output – why bother to work hard or often when you have many months of savings stuffed in your mattress?

Beyond this, an aging capital stock, and low investment rates also proved problematic in boosting Soviet production. Soviet firms were also not required to live within their means, or to adjust production in response to demand for their products. There was also no hard budget constraint.⁸ Bureaucrats in Soviet ministries found inputs for production and markets for finished goods. If a manager needed more money or

⁴ Timothy J. Colton, *Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1986), p. 49.

⁵ Colton, p. 47.

⁶ Colton, p. 35.

⁷ Colton, p. 51.

⁸ For an explanation of hard versus soft budget constraints see, for example, Anders Aslund, *How Capitalism Was Built: The Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 15.

inputs to stay apace of the plan, money could be printed. It had little meaning or value in the system anyway. By the time of the Soviet collapse, inflation rates approached 100%.⁹

The Soviet Union also was not immune to some of the problems that affected the broader world economy – particularly in the 1970s when world oil prices declined. This economic slowdown, combined with the relentless pressure to fulfill ever-rising production plans, led to further economic inefficiencies. Enterprise managers would pad their reporting of production outputs. Colton reports that when the public prosecutor's office conducted a random accounting of enterprise production in 1985 in three industrial ministries, it found inflated production numbers in 50-85% of the factories studied.¹⁰ Underreporting of production figures was also at times problematic as managers would hoard and resell excess production output on the side. This type of behavior, often with the overt (for a fee) or at least tacit acceptance of bureaucrats who were supposed to oversee and stop this activity, and helped to fuel the growth of the black market (or shadow) economy and official corruption, further dragging down economic performance.

Third, *negative demographic trends* also fuelled economic problems. Soviet population growth dropped about 50 percent between 1960 and 1980, causing a decline in the size of the work force and an increase in pensioners in need of state support. Death rates for both men and women were on the increase by the time Gorbachev came to power in the mid-1980's. Colton reports that in 1960, life expectancy for Soviet men was 67 years, but declined by 1980 to 62 years. The same trend was visible in the same period for women whose life expectancy declined from 76 to 73 years. Certainly alcohol abuse and a lack of good healthcare fuelled these problems. Overall standards of living were rapidly declining from the 1970's onward in comparison to OECD countries, especially in areas like housing (in chronic short supply) and education.¹¹

These disturbing statistics may have in some ways also contributed to a fourth long term structural cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union -- *growing restiveness among the many diverse nationalities* that comprised the 15 republics of the Soviet Union. The annexation of the Baltics, for example, in the 1939 Soviet Nazi pact had always been viewed as illegitimate by Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, despite regime attempts assimilate the native populations to Soviet society and the resettlement of ethnic Russians in these republics. In 1972 there were public demonstrations against Soviet language policy in Lithuania and Georgia in 1978. In 1977 there was a bomb blast on the Moscow subway masterminded by an Armenian secessionist group. Ethnic friction was also fuelled by the noted preference of Russians over other ethnicities for plumb jobs (although at times Russians were disfavored in this way themselves in favor of indigenous candidates). All of this occurred at a time when non-Russian, non-European birthrates within the Soviet Union were increasing four times faster than those of the ethnic Russian majority.¹²

These then were the main contributing long-term structural problems with which Gorbachev had to deal when he announced his plan of reconstruction or *perestroika* in 1985. They were not, however, alone determinative causes of the ultimate collapse of the

⁹ Aslund, 2007, p. 19.

¹⁰ Colton, p. 52.

¹¹ Colton, p. 36.

¹² Colton, p. 45.

Soviet regime in December 1991. The system could have limped forward for an indefinite period had these factors not combined with short term precipitating factors that contributed to the downfall of the *ancien regime*.

ii. Short term precipitating factors

Although the Soviet system was clearly in structural decline, and had been for perhaps as long as two decades, as we argue above, its collapse was far from inevitable in December 1991. Indeed, writing in 1986, Timothy Colton, an undisputed leader in the field of Soviet studies, wrote confidently in a comprehensive accounting of what was wrong with the Soviet system that, “As the post-Brezhnev era takes shape, the survival of the Soviet system is not in question, but the utility of many of its policies is.”¹³ Only five years later, the Soviet Union collapsed spectacularly, but relatively peacefully. Despite occasional defensive claims to the contrary, Colton was of course far from alone in missing the proximity of the system’s demise. Few, if any, Soviet specialists predicted the timing or the exact cocktail of problems that would bring about the system’s ultimate downfall, although Colton, Alexander Dallin and several others certainly accurately diagnosed what ailed the Soviet system by the mid-1980s.¹⁴

Despite, then, the structural weaknesses, that had developed as the Soviet system matured documented in the section above, short term factors – and the role of agency in particular – tipped the system toward collapse between 1985 and the first stage of transition in December 1991.

a. *Role of agency* – It is not unreasonable to ask whether the Soviet Union might have survived indefinitely, despite all of its problems, if not for the fateful decisions (or the indecisions) of Mikhail S. Gorbachev. Although Gorbachev certainly cannot bear sole responsibility for the sudden collapse of the system, his halting economic and social reforms certainly helped to contribute to the unanticipated collapse of the system.

Mikhail S. Gorbachev was himself a product of this system. Born in the Stavropol region of Russia in 1931, Gorbachev climbed the ranks of the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) and then the party apparatus to become a provincial party secretary by the late 1970s. In his own autobiography and the various biographies and accounts of his life that have been published in the last 15 years, we know that he was greatly influenced by the period that he spent as a student in Moscow in the 1960s during Khrushchev’s troubled, but at times, innovative rule.¹⁵

He became a political client of Brezhnev’s immediate successor as General Secretary, Yuri Andropov and it was Andropov who first brought Gorbachev from

¹³ Colton, p. 32.

¹⁴ Colton, *Dilemma of Reform*; Alexander Dallin, “Causes of the Collapse of the USSR,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 1992, vol. 8, no. 4, p. 279-302; Janos Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ See for example, John Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

Stavropol to Moscow to work on the enduring problem of Soviet agriculture. This enabled Gorbachev to take a few foreign trips, as well as to join the Politburo first as a candidate member, and later as a full member. Like Andropov, Gorbachev was aware of the failings of the Soviet planning system in particular, and knew the party needed rejuvenation. He did not, however, intend to bring the Soviet system down. Indeed, by his own admission, he was a committed communist, proclaiming proudly in 1989 even as he pursued modes democratization through the partially competitive election of the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies that, "I am a Communist, a convinced Communist! For some that may be a fantasy, but for me, it is my main goal."¹⁶

Although perhaps best remembered for his attempts to democratize the Soviet system through the introduction of partially free and fair parliamentary elections in 1989, and his policy of glasnost or openness which revolutionized the heretofore closed Soviet media, Gorbachev actually began perestroika by attacking the troubled Soviet economy. But his first foray into economic reform – the anti-alcohol campaign of 1985-1986 -- proved to have disastrous social effects from which his reputation within the Soviet Union never fully recovered. The intention of the reform was to decrease the availability of alcohol in an effort to attack the rampant alcoholism that had become a plague on the Soviet workforce. The problem, however, in executing the policy would be indicative of a recurring theme during Gorbachev's rule – good intentions and unintended outcomes. The state's sudden decreased production of alcohol meant that there was decreased revenue to the state budget at the same time that Gorbachev was attempting to increase investment in key sectors of the Soviet economy. Further, the policy had the unintended effect of causing a sugar shortage as some enterprising citizens turned to the production of bootleg alcohol made in private apartment stills. This caused a further public health risk since there was no way of regulating the quality or safety of bootleg alcohol. In the end, Gorbachev was forced to retreat from the policy, but incurred the wrath of planners, bureaucrats and the general public in the interim.

Gorbachev's other tentative economic reforms included the partial trade liberalization of 1986, the 1988 Law on Enterprises, and the 1988 Law on Cooperatives. Again, as with the anti-alcohol campaign, these were well-intentioned policies, but with negative, evidently unintended and unanticipated, outcomes. The Soviet Union was an autarkic state with little external trade beyond other communist countries. By partially liberalizing trade in 1986, Gorbachev enabled a select number of enterprises to engage in private foreign trade. Although this was intended to boost the level of Soviet exports, and resulting revenue, the result of this incomplete reform was to encourage favoritism and corruption of the process of selecting the enterprises that could participate in the program. Since it was also a relatively limited opportunity to open trade ties, it did little to boost the quickly declining gdp. Similarly, the unclear policies on private property embodied in the laws on enterprises and cooperatives had other unintended consequences. They did little to create actual private property, but they had the evidently unanticipated effect of further disrupting the already faltering planning system. The result was that tight regulations of enterprise directors were loosened, the availability of certain goods declined rapidly (or at least, the legal sale of these goods declined) as some managers

¹⁶ As cited in the New York Times, 1989 and available at: http://quotes.liberty-tree.ca/quote/mikhail_gorbachev_quote_e403, accessed February 25, 2009.

resold their products on the black market.¹⁷

Beyond the economy, Gorbachev also evidently unwittingly made fateful decisions that severely weakened the grip of the Communist Party on the economic and political system rather than strengthening it. His *demokratizatsiya* policy had been intended to rejuvenate the party by exposing it to forms of limited competition. In this regard, he was following in an old Bolshevik tradition of creative destruction – that is, the idea that stagnating elements should be purged, and that internal criticism was an important vehicle by which to keep the party responsive and healthy. But his decision to hold limited competition for elected positions to a new super parliament – the Congress of People’s Deputies – proved fateful. Rather than reestablishing the Communist power as the intellectual and political guiding force of the system, communist candidates repeatedly lost seats in open competition with either former party members or new challengers. In another fateful decision, Gorbachev himself opted not to stand for popular direct election to the new post of Soviet president that he had created for himself, nor did he participate in open competition for his own seat in the Congress of People’s Deputies. Instead, he ran and was “elected” as a representative of the Communist Party in the portion of the CPD seats reserved for members of social organizations. When faced with a strong political challenger in the form of Boris Yeltsin, Gorbachev retreated to the right in the summer and fall of 1990, and then attempted to retreat to the left by the summer of 1991 just as the ill fated coup attempt by the GKChP took place on August 19 of that year.

b. The Role of Agency – Boris Yeltsin

Boris Yeltsin, whom Gorbachev brought into the Politburo as First Party secretary of the city of Moscow in order to help with reconstructing and rejuvenating the system grew increasingly impatient with the unsteady nature of Gorbachev’s perestroika program. He formally broke with Gorbachev in his own “secret speech” in October 1987 at a Party plenum, where he criticized what he deemed to be the slow pace of perestroika, and what he saw as a growing cult of personality around Gorbachev himself.¹⁸ Although Gorbachev then tried to keep Yeltsin from politics forever, dismissing him from his posts in Moscow and the Politburo, he clearly underestimated his rival. Yeltsin reemerged in 1989 to run and win a seat in the Congress of People’s Deputies of the Soviet Union and then in 1990 as leader of a democratic (non-communist) faction in the newly created and competitively elected Russian Congress of People’s Deputies. At about the same time, Gorbachev’s foreign minister Eduard Shevardnaze and long time Politburo colleague, Aleksandr Yakovlev both formally broke with Gorbachev warning in December 1990 of the possibility of a coup attempt against him.

Having lost the support of the democratic faction in the politburo, and surrounded by more conservative forces, Gorbachev tacked first toward the conservatives and showed himself by January 1991 willing to use mild force in quelling the increasingly restive republics of the Soviet Union. In an incident known as Black Sunday, Gorbachev ordered or at least presided peacefully over the attack on unarmed protesters at a television station in Vilnius, Lithuania. Fourteen protesters were killed and another 500

¹⁷ See Aslund, 2008, ...

¹⁸ Timothy J. Colton, *Yeltsin: A Life...*

wounded. ¹⁹Through the spring and summer of 1991, however, Gorbachev became increasingly isolated from conservative forces within the politburo (like Yigor Ligachev) that opposed his attempts to renegotiate the Union Treaty with the 15 constituent republics of the Union. (Independence declarations in the other republics had begun in March 1990 in Latvia and Lithuania, but other republics made the less ambitious claim of sovereignty beginning at about the same time. Following the August 1991 coup attempt against Gorbachev, Moldova, Estonia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the Central Asian Republics gained independence. Russia and Ukraine declared independence in December 1991.)

At the same time, Boris Yeltsin led a movement within Russia to declare itself sovereign from the Soviet Union in June 1990 and by June 1991 created distinct Russian political institutions – including a presidency to which he was directly elected in a free and fair competition in June of that year. This was a further challenge to the territorial and political survival of the Soviet Union, for without Russia, how could the Soviet Union survive? Gorbachev again tacked to the left and desperately renegotiated a much looser confederation of republics through the summer of 1991. This, coupled with Yeltsin’s immediate ban of the CPSU on Russian soil, proved to be the main precipitant of the August 19-21 coup attempt against Gorbachev.

The “gang of eight” or State Committee on the State of Emergency (the Russian acronym was GKChP) attempted to take control of the Soviet Union at 4:00 am on August 19, 1991.²⁰ A statement was released in the Soviet media that Gorbachev was ill, and that the GKChP would be assuming control of the country. The members of the GKChP included the vice president of the USSR, the prime minister, the head of the KGB, the minister of defense, the minister of internal affairs, the Chairman of the Union of Peasants, the first deputy chairman of the the USSR defense council and the president of the Asociation of USSR State industries. They were strongly in favor of maintaining the Soviet Union as a unitary state, and were provoked by the middle of August by Gorbachev’s attempts to negotiate a new Union Treaty, the most recent version of which was to have been signed on August 20. They claimed in a document released to the Soviet public on August 19 that the country was in “mortal” danger and that they would restore the Soviet Union to its proper place and former glory.

Despite the powerful offices the coup plotters represented, the entire attempted coup had a “keystone cops” element to it. The coup plotters miscalculated the amount of support and mobilization they would actually receive from Soviet citizenry – especially outside Moscow. They also did not anticipate the determination or importance of Boris Yeltsin in the process of change that had already taken place. Inexplicably, they allowed him to slip out of his dacha. He eventually made his way to the Russian White House, then the seat of the Congress of People’s Deputies, of which Yeltsin had served as Chairman, before being elected President of Russia in June 1991. He managed to convince the Soviet military or “guys with the guns” to side with him and Russia and not fire on Soviet citizens. The coup attempt unraveled on August 21.

¹⁹ John Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 11.

²⁰ See John Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Union*, chapter 5, for the most authoritative account of the coup attempt.

Gorbachev, who had been held (ostensibly) against his will at his southern dacha, returned to Moscow broken politically.²¹ Through the fall of 1991, Yeltsin and his government methodically took over Soviet ministries and other political institutions, moving them under Russian control. Gorbachev, still under the illusion that he could save the Union, continued to try to rally republican leaders around the idea of a loose confederation that he would lead. But the writing on the wall was clear by December 1, 1991 as Ukrainians voted in a popular referendum to secede from the Union. The signing of an agreement days later by Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus to create a new Commonwealth of Independent States put the final nail in the coffin of the Soviet Union.

Distinct from transitions from authoritarian rule in Latin America, there was no pact between Gorbachev or other members of the old regime that peacefully ended the Soviet Union. There was no deadlock or negotiated outcome that produced democratic breakthrough. The military was not a major player in producing a regime breakthrough. There was also remarkably little blood spilled in this first phase of the Russian transition from communism (three people died in central Moscow during the coup attempt). The democratic opposition, led by President Yeltsin, decisively took over the reigns of the Russian state through 1991, and were momentarily united in the task of democratic breakthrough and the fall of the ancien regime until economic reform began in earnest in January, 1992.

ii. Short term causes of the second stage of breakthrough in the fall of 1993.

The second phase of Russia's democratic breakthrough began in January 1992, and as we argued in section 1 of this paper, continued to December 1993 with the adoption of the new (and current) Russian constitution. The adoption of the new basic law of Russia came on the heels of the violent dissolution of the old Russian Congress of People's Deputies by President Boris Yeltsin. The coalition of Russian political actors that had come together to declare Russian sovereignty from the Soviet Union in 1990, and the creation of a Russian presidency in 1991, came apart violently in the fall of 1993 after a prolonged and fractious debate over the shape of a new Russian democracy and its institutional underpinnings. The short term causes of this second phase of breakthrough were first, institutional weakness inherited from the patchwork constitution of 1978, fundamental disagreements over the nature of economic reform, and a lack of the ability to compromise on the part of both Yeltsin, and members of the Congress of People's Deputies led by Ruslan Khasbulatov at that point.

a-institutional weakness inherited from old constitution

Yeltsin, although emerging clearly and unequivocally as the leader of the new Russia was left with a parliament elected in 1990 prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. This legislature was large and unwieldy and proved internally factionalized as well as at odds with Yeltsin over economic policy in particular. Its existence and

²¹ Dunlop provides some evidence on pp. 202-203 that Gorbachev may in fact have been able to act more freely when he was supposedly in custody in Crimea than he did. He allegedly had his communications system in tact and could have contacted Yeltsin and Moscow, but may have been adopting a wait and see posture before declaring himself a prisoner of the GKChP.

functioning had been hastily grafted onto the 1978 Constitution of the Russian Republic, as had the job of President, created in 1991, just prior to the Soviet collapse. The Constitution was a thicket of conflicting and confusing articles, some of which still referred to the leadership of the communist party of the Soviet state. The creation of the Russian presidency in 1991 certainly strengthened executive power in Russia, parliamentary power was not correspondingly decreased. Hot debate over a new constitutional framework ensued in 1992 and 1993, with the most heated aspect of the debate, therefore, over the relative powers of the legislature and executive. Yeltsin, of course, argued in favor of a strong presidency, while the speaker of the Congress of People's Deputies, Ruslan Khasbulatov, favored a strong legislature and parliamentary system. They ultimately produced dueling constitutional documents by the fall of 1993.

b.-fundamental debates about role of state in economy

The sharp political disagreement over the power of the president versus the legislature took place against the backdrop of a crowded economic agenda. In January 1992, Yeltsin's reformist Prime Minister, Yegor Gaidar, initiated a bold neo-liberal economic reform program. On January 2, 1992, prices were liberalized across Russia causing average price increases of 245% (inflation or price increases?) throughout the country. Although prices stabilized within a few months, inflation remained high throughout 1992, and there was heavy criticism within the Congress of People's Deputies of this and other aspects of the reform program. These included the initial restriction on credits to failing state enterprises (a policy that was reversed by mid 1992 in response to lobbying by enterprise directors), as well as the speed and nature of the massive privatization program that began in July 1992. These divisions split relatively neatly such that the Congress under Khasbulatov, himself an economist, as well as a faction of communists and fascists (the "red brown coalition) opposed the neo-liberal agenda, while Yeltsin supported Gaidar and an aggressive neo-liberal menu of reforms. The Congress, therefore, was slow in passing laws on privatization, land ownership, and bankruptcy, for example. By the winter of 1992, as Yeltsin's temporary decree making powers were set to expire he was forced by the Congress to sacrifice Gaidar, his acting prime minister and to replace him with the ostensibly more conservative, Viktor Chernomyrdin, former Soviet Minister of Gas.

c.-lack of ability to compromise

The conflict between president and parliament in this period was both structurally produced but also sharpened by personalities. Structurally, the 1990 amendments to the constitution that created the Congress and the later change in 1991 that grafted on the presidency had left power relations ambiguous. As Richard Sakwa notes,

the distinctive feature of the crisis was that while policy initiative lay with the presidential side, control over implementation and administration lay with parliament. This dualism was reflected in the very nature of the struggle, with parliament by necessity reduced to blocking measures: they

had the power to impede presidential initiatives but lacked the power to develop policies...the Congress had power without responsibility.²²

Yeltsin was certainly partly to blame for the ongoing disputes with the Congress of People's Deputies. He had shown an inability to build coalitions for his policies with the legislature. Yeltsin also failed to build support among the group of democratic reformers that had helped him win power first as speaker of the Congress of People's Deputies in 1990 and then the presidency in 1991. Indeed, he even had difficulty convincing his own vice president, Aleksandr Rutskoi, of the value of his economic reforms. Rutskoi tacked to the side of parliament in this debate and soon became a political encumbrance to Yeltsin in his struggle with Khasbulatov and the Congress of People's Deputies.

Finally, Khasbulatov also used his authority within the Congress as an independent base of power. He replaced Yeltsin as speaker in October 1991, following the attempted coup against Gorbachev (and Yeltsin's earlier election as president of Russia in 1991). He was able to use the power of his role as Speaker of the Congress to manipulate the legislative voting process, to control information that reached individual deputies, and finally to control the access of deputies to trips abroad and even their parliamentary offices. Some journalists in the Russian media characterized him as dictatorial, and some parliamentarians, complaining that he regularly exceeded the authority of his office, even called for his removal.²³

Beyond personalities, however, structurally, the Russian Congress of People's Deputies was particularly susceptible to manipulation by a strong and independent speaker. Internally, the parliament was under-institutionalized and highly fluid. Political party alliances, committee structures, and other institutions that might provide coherence and structure to the formation of parliamentary majorities over particular pieces of legislation proved difficult to form and sustain. This situation enabled Khasbulatov to dominate and lead the parliament without resorting to compromise and negotiation internally.²⁴

By the spring of 1993, the governing process in Russia was deadlocked over the distribution of legislative and executive power, and could not hold new elections for either president or parliament until the issue was resolved. By March, the parliament moved to lift Yeltsin's decree making authority, and passed other legislation severely constraining his rule. The conflict seemed intractable. But Yeltsin gambled and won with a popular referendum held on April 25, 1993. The referendum asked four questions:

1. Do you have confidence in the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin?
2. Do you approve of the socioeconomic policies carried out by the President of the Russian Federation and the government of the Russian Federation since 1992?
3. Do you consider it necessary to hold early elections to the presidency of Russia?

²² Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, Fourth Edition, (Routledge: 2008), p. 47).

²³ Sakwa, p. 47.

²⁴ See Josephine Andrews, *When Majorities Fail: The Russian Parliament of 1990-1993*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

4. Do you consider it necessary to hold early elections to the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation?

On the first question, despite the serious economic hardship that most people endured at the time, 58.7 per cent of voters affirmed their trust in Yeltsin, compared with 39.3 per cent who did not. Even more amazingly, 53 per cent expressed their approval of Yeltsin's socioeconomic policy, while 44.5 per cent disapproved. Regarding questions three and four a plurality (49.5 per cent) supported early presidential elections, while a solid majority (67.2 per cent) called for new parliamentary elections.

These results reflected the highly divided and polarized nature of Russian politics at the time. In essence, voters were being asked their opinion about the revolution midstream in the revolution: half supported it, half did not. This electoral result, therefore, did little to defuse the constitutional crisis in Russia. The questions, designed by the Congress, gave the outcome greater legitimacy for Yeltsin since he emerged with a narrow mandate to continue on his current policy path with the confidence of the electorate. He convened a constitutional assembly by July 1993, but the referendum results were largely ignored by parliament as the deputies too continued their efforts to write a constitution more sympathetic to parliamentary rule. Parliament itself, though, was clearly fragmenting, as some deputies resigned.

d.- *The October Crisis of 1993*

Feeling as though he had exhausted all avenues of possible compromise, Yeltsin issued Decree No. 1400 on September 21 (illegally) disbanding parliament and calling elections for a new bi-cameral parliament and a referendum on a new constitution for December 12, 1993. He did this as the parliament was taking further action to curtail presidential authority.

When the parliament went into a rogue, emergency session, he demanded the electricity and all communications into the parliament building be cut. Khasbulatov and the remaining deputies proved to be out of step with public opinion, and few supporters answered his call to come to defend the Russian parliament building at the time, the Russian "White House." Ultimately, after a few parliamentarians left the building on October 3 to seize the Moscow mayor's office, and then were rebuffed by Interior Ministry troops as they attempted to take over the Ostankino television station, Yeltsin had convinced the Russian military to surround the White House on October 4 and open fire. Rutskoi (whom the deputies had declared the new President of Russia), Khasbulatov and the other parliamentarians holed up inside surrendered, although as many as 150 people may have been killed during the conflict.

e. *The Breakthrough Elections of December 12, 1993 and a New Constitutional Framework*

The December elections occurred, therefore, under less than auspicious circumstances. The Congress had been disbanded, and Yeltsin triumphed in his efforts to gain more executive power. The constitution that was ultimately passed by popular referendum in December 1993 established Russia as a presidential republic. The new document was an improvement over what had existed prior to its adoption -- there was a clear outlining of the power of the president versus the new bi-cameral Federal Assembly

(with the 450 seat popularly elected Duma as the lower house, and the Federation Council or Senate as the upper house). The constitution, however, threatened the establishment of a “super-presidential” republic in Russia. Yeltsin’s reaction to the prolonged and ultimately bloody conflict with the parliament had led to a severe imbalance between parliamentary and executive authority in the final document. The president retained the ability to rule by decree in a few areas, although notably, this power was not applicable to the budget, for example. Although the Duma retained the right to approve the president’s choice of prime minister, if it refused to approve a candidate three times consecutively, then the president could disband the Duma and call for new parliamentary elections. Although he came close to testing this rule in 1998, Yeltsin was ultimately kept in check by successive Dumas (elected in 1993 and 1995) that were dominated by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

Despite their inauspicious beginning, the December 1993 elections served as the founding elections for Russia’s new political system. A majority of Russian voters ratified Yeltsin’s draft constitution, giving popular legitimacy to a set of political rules for governing Russia.²⁵ The new constitution outlined difficult procedures for amendment, meaning that adoption of this constitution was likely to produce a lasting set of political institutions for post-communist Russia. Since 1993, the constitution has not been amended, although there was some discussion about doing so in order to enable Putin to run for a third time as president. The December 1993 vote was also the first election in Russia’s brief democratic history in which political parties had the opportunity to participate fully, with proportional representation being an additional incentive for stimulating party participation and development.

The basic rules of the game for elections to the Duma established during this tumultuous period in the fall of 1993 endured for the first four of the (so far) 5 parliamentary elections. Yeltsin himself was narrowly reelected president in 1996 according to the new constitution and supporting electoral laws. Although relatively short lived, Russia’s democratic breakthrough was complete by December 12, 1993. Unlike phase 1 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the second phase of breakthrough was violent and tumultuous, but ultimately decisive in establishing a (short lived) democratic regime. The interplay of starting conditions, institutional choices, and actors worked together to bring the breakthrough to fruition.

²⁵ While it seems clear that a majority of voters did support the constitution, it is not clear that the fifty per cent of eligible voters participated in the referendum, the required minimum to make the election valid. Some electoral observers amassed serious evidence suggesting that the turnout numbers had been falsified (Sobyanin and Sukhovolsky 1995).

Section 3: External Causes of Transitional Breakthrough in 1991 and 1993²⁶

To date, tracing a direct causal link between American foreign policy and Soviet regime change has eluded social scientists. The relative success of Western capitalism in producing a higher standard of living compared to the Soviet economic model most certainly played a role in Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to initiate economic reforms in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. The American example of a more prosperous and efficient economy inspired anti-communist leaders to address the poor performance of the Soviet economy. The democratic principles of the American system also played an inspirational role for Soviet dissidents and influenced the thinking of important reformers in Gorbachev's politburo, like Aleksandr Yakovlev who spent time in the 1960's studying as an exchange student at Columbia University. Some evidence exists, as will be discussed below, that the American defense build up and the initiation of the Strategic Defense Initiative in the early 1980s shaped Soviet calculations about reform. Later in the Soviet/Russian transition, external actors helped to shape the ideas and tactics of the central players involved in the Soviet and Russian drama. For instance, Yeltsin and his allies adopted more radically pro-Western positions during their struggle against Gorbachev to help win recognition from the West. They also refrained from using violence to overthrow the Soviet regime or resisted punishing Gorbachev after they seized power (a popular figure in the West at the time) in part to win favor in the West.²⁷ There should be no question that the distribution of ideologies in the international system at the time of Soviet internal change influenced the kind of regime change that unfolded in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Had Poland not moved steadily toward democracy in the late 1980s, or had the US been a fascist rather than democratic state, it is highly unlikely that democracy would have emerged as the ideology of opposition for Boris Yeltsin and his allies.

The direct role of American foreign policy in undermining the Soviet communist regime is, however, difficult to isolate. American efforts most certainly did not compel the Soviet leadership to experiment with political reform. Gorbachev made that decision alone. Once the process of political reform gained some momentum as a result of Gorbachev's initiatives, the dynamic of change was driven almost entirely by internal factors. Still, at certain key points external factors provided an essential nudge toward one outcome or another in the process of change that occurred in the Soviet Union between 1985 and 1991 and in Russia between 1991 and 1993. We catalogue these in what follows.

The story really starts following WWII when Soviet Union and the West faced off directly in East Germany, and territories were claimed by both sides shortly thereafter. The Soviet Union set about communizing Eastern Europe, and the West set about rebuilding European democracy and markets.

²⁶ We are particularly grateful to Rachel Silverman for her able research assistance in helping us to complete this section of this report.

²⁷ See Michael McFaul, "The Sovereignty Script: Red Book for Russian Revolutionaries," in Stephen Krasner, ed. *Problematic Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

As animosity increased, and successive administrations felt more threatened by Soviet territorial and ideological ambitions, US policy makers created a number of instruments to try to disrupt politics and economics within the Soviet Union. There was rather wide variation in the extent to which these tools appear to have been effective except in the very long term. Indeed, it is difficult to draw any straight lines between some of these policies and the eventual collapse, decades later. Further, some external factors – like for example, the fluctuations in the international oil market that proved so devastating to the Soviet economy – were of course, not conscious policies on the part of the US or Western governments, but did ultimately contribute significantly to the economic difficulties the country suffered later.

In what follows, we outline what we view to be the most significant external factors that contributed to the internal political and economic turmoil that forced Mikhail Gorbachev to attempt the reforms that eventually brought the system down from within as well as Yeltsin's pursuit of democratic reform thereafter.

Military Challenges: The Influence of SDI and the Soviet War in Afghanistan on Gorbachev's Decisions

Although much has been made of the influence of Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) – a missile defense program that was designed to catch Soviet missiles in mid-air before they reached the United States – in bringing down the Soviet Union, analysts disagree on the true effect of the program on Gorbachev's decisions to reform the Soviet Union and also to participate in disarmament talks with the US in the latter 1980s.

Mira Duric, for example, argues for SDI's likely importance, although she acknowledges that the depth of its impact will remain unknown without declassified internal Soviet documents.²⁸ Duric points to the Soviet Union's contradictory statements as evidence that it was concealing its fear of an operational SDI; while Soviet officials publicly declared the SDI to be technologically unfeasible, Soviet leaders also repeatedly criticized the program as a dangerous threat to world peace and stability. They also claimed to have their own missile-defense program, which would be wasteful if the program were actually impossible.²⁹ However, Duric also notes that the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh has partially reconciled the apparent contradiction. According to Bessmertnykh, "different people in the government felt differently about the SDI. Those in the foreign ministry including Bessmertnykh, Eduard Shevardnadze and Gorbachev himself, believed that because of the SDI there was 'a good opportunity to work with the military and with the defense sectors of the economy to go further with arms control.' In contrast, the military (defense) part of the government wanted to 'increase the production of their offensive weapons' to counter SDI."³⁰

In her comprehensive study of SDI, Duric summarizes the competing views. On the one side are former Reagan officials, including Caspar Weinberger, Richard V. Allen, Edwin Meese and William Lee, who contend that SDI helped end the Cold War.

²⁸ Duric, 174.

²⁹ Duric, 42-44.

³⁰ Duric, 44.

Duric concludes that SDI was important, but that individual agency from both sides was crucial as well:

The Soviets would not have necessarily made the concessions that they made had any leader other than Ronald Reagan been in power. Albeit for reasons of retrenchment and pragmatism, Gorbachev would not have made the unilateral concessions which he made if he had not been sure that the US side would not exploit the Soviet actions. Gorbachev was sure that Reagan would not exploit the Soviet actions. Similarly, without Gorbachev, if there had been a hard-line Soviet leader in power Reagan's policies would have resulted in a hardening anti-American Soviet policy. In conclusion, it can be resolutely asserted that the SDI confronted Gorbachev with the option of an ever-increasing arms race or cooperation with the US, which he chose ...³¹

Similarly, Peter Schweitzer of the National Review argues that the military build-up and increasing pressure of the Reagan years were crucial factors precipitating the Soviet collapse:

As the Soviets faced this catastrophic drop in their income, they also faced the prospect of spending more of their dwindling resources on an arms race. U.S. defense procurement budgets rose by 25 per cent in each of the early Reagan years. By the mid 1980's, U.S. military expenditures were exceeding those of the Soviet Union for the first time since the late 1960's. More than anything else, the defense build-up—from SDI to conventional weapon—was predicated on high technology, a profound Soviet weakness. Computers and other advanced technologies were threatening to make old weapon systems obsolete—much as the tank had done to horse cavalry...Gorbachev himself shared this view, noting: 'The competition that has grown more acute under the impact of scientific and technological progress is affecting those who have dropped behind ever more mercilessly.'³²

The Soviets could not keep up with US spending. Schweitzer reports that, "by 1984 General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko declared that 'the complex international situation has forced us to divert a great deal of resources to strengthening the security of our country.' In 1985 General Secretary Gorbachev pushed for an 8 per cent per year jump in defense spending. 'The U.S. wants to exhaust the Soviet Union through a race in the most up-to-date and expensive weapons,' he ominously warned."³³

In response, as American defense procurement allocations increased, so too did Soviet defense budgeting. Under Reagan, American defense spending increased from \$134 billion in 1980 to \$253 billion in 1985, with an emphasis on strategic modernization.³⁴

³¹ Duric, 172-174.

³² Peter Schweitzer (1994), "Who Broke the Evil Empire?" *National Review*; May 30, 1994. Page 4.

³³ Schweitzer, 4.

³⁴ Andrew E. Busch (1997), "Ronald Reagan and the Defeat of the Soviet Empire." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Summer 1997, v. 27 n. 3 p. 452.

But even with a projected rise of 45% between 1981 and 1985, leading Soviet military analysts argued that even this would not be enough: “It was a shift that further weighed on the already sickly Soviet economy.”³⁵

Andrew Busch sees SDI as possibly the single biggest factor in the ending of the Cold War:

Though it did not produce a functioning ballistic defense during the 1980’s, SDI fundamentally altered the strategic context in favor of the United States... SDI quickly became an obsession of the Soviet leadership... Having failed to win elimination of the program, the Soviets were prodded by SDI into seeking greater modernization of their own society—which could only be achieved by liberalization. The threat of having to compete with SDI led to greater toleration of reform by the military. Indeed, former Soviet officials have indicated that in many respects, perestroika was a military initiative, aimed at redressing the military implications of Soviet technological weakness.³⁶

Archie Brown, in contrast, contests the idea that SDI played an important role in ending the Cold War, instead arguing that new leadership and new ideas played the decisive role in the change. He also rejects realist explanations for the end of the Cold War, as articulated by William Wohlforth and others. Given that even a successful SDI would not change the balance of power for at least 20 years, Brown maintains that it did not necessitate immediate changes in Soviet policy. Brown argues, “The Soviet Union’s existing force of inter-continental ballistic missiles with multiple warheads was more than ample to make any potential American reliance on SDI catastrophically risky.”³⁷ In an earlier book, Brown also discussed the interplay of individual agency with SDI, specifically with regard to Gorbachev’s role. He argues that while SDI may have slightly influenced Gorbachev’s thinking, it would not have had a similar effect on other leaders had Gorbachev specifically not been in power in the late 1980s.”³⁸

William Wohlforth presents a realist explanation for the fall of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War. Though he does not specifically mention the Reagan buildup, Wohlforth contends that changing perceptions of relative military power had an important role in ending Cold War competition. Wohlforth argues that, “Gorbachev may have had numerous reasons for seeking to withdraw from the rivalry with the United States, but a necessary precondition was the perception of *reduced capability* to compete.”³⁹

In concluding a lengthy book on American-Soviet relations at the end of the Cold War, Raymond Garthoff takes a similar position on the impact of SDI and Reagan’s military pressure. Instead, Garthoff stresses the importance of Gorbachev’s agency in

³⁵ Peter Schweizer (1994), *Victory*. Page 195-196.

³⁶ Busch, 4.

³⁷ Archie Brown (2007), “Perestroika and the End of the Cold War.” *Cold War History*; February 2007. Page 6.

³⁸ Archie Brown (1996), *The Gorbachev Factor*. Page 226-227.

³⁹ William Wohlforth (1994), “Realism and the End of the Cold War.” In *International Security* 19, No. 3 (1994): 91-129. Page 96.

wanting to change the relationship between the Soviet Union and the world.⁴⁰

“The West did not, as is widely believed, win the Cold War through geopolitical containment and military deterrence. Still less was the Cold War won by the Reagan military buildup and the Reagan Doctrine, as some have suggested. Instead, “victory” came when a new generation of Soviet leaders recognized how badly their system at home and their policies abroad had failed.”⁴¹

Similarly, Celeste Wallander also disputes the primacy of Western pressure on the Soviet collapse, seeing it as a small contributing portion to overall economic decline. Even if Western pressure did force increases in Soviet defense spending, she argues, low total factor productivity in the Soviet economy meant that those resources, had they not been allocated to the defense industry, would not have spurred substantial economic growth.⁴² Moreover, Wallander argues that the economic crisis of the late 1980s was internally precipitated by Gorbachev’s own policies, rather than the strain of the defense spending; especially important was the campaign against alcoholism that lowered government tax revenues on alcohol, triggering a budget crisis and inflation.⁴³

Wallander points to evidence showing that Gorbachev’s decision to embark on a path of economic reform between 1985 and 1987 was little influenced by the American military build-up. Though Gorbachev did look to pursue arms control agreements, which would decrease the needed defense spending, cuts in defense spending through 1987 “were obviously not a precondition for reform at home, which was implemented even as military spending was increasing.” Finally, Sarah Mendelson briefly discusses the role of SDI, arguing that its impact was at best minimal and possibly even strengthened the hands of the hard-liners by reinforcing their self-image as a nation under siege. She also points to evidence that most Soviet analysts thought it was extremely unlikely that SDI would actually work, negating its overall importance.⁴⁴ Moreover, Mendelson quotes an interview with Georgii Arbatov in which Arbatov adamantly downplays Reagan’s role: “*Perestroika* is without a doubt *not* the result of Reagan’s politics and armament. This is a stupid idea... This could only interfere. It could only make the military and the conservatives stronger.”⁴⁵

Although, therefore, SDI and US arms build up under Ronald Reagan in particular may have helped to bring Gorbachev to the negotiating table, the scholarly consensus seems to be that it most certainly did not single handedly bring down the Soviet Union.

Another military conflict, however, may have hastened reform in the Soviet Union. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. By December of that year, the Soviet army quickly became bogged down in a bloody, disastrous conflict. The US in 1980 worked with the mujahideen resistance fighters to harass Soviet soldiers.⁴⁶ Saudi

⁴⁰ Raymond Garthoff (1994), *The Great Transition*. Washington: Brookings, 1994. Page 769.

⁴¹ Garthoff, 753.

⁴² Celeste A. Wallander (2003), “Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union.” *Journal of Cold War Studies*; Fall 2003. Page 146-147.

⁴³ Wallander, 149.

⁴⁴ Mendelson, 70-71.

⁴⁵ Abatov, in Mendelson, 100.

⁴⁶ Mendelson, 68-69.

Arabia agreed to contribute matching funds, and China also aided the operation.⁴⁷ In total, the U.S. would funnel over \$2 billion to the mujahideen during the 1980s.⁴⁸ By 1985, the United States established National Security Directive 166, shifting the policy goal for Afghanistan from mere harassment to forcing a Soviet withdrawal. From this point, American intervention in Afghanistan escalated. The amount of money provided to the mujahideen by the Americans increased greatly.⁴⁹ One anonymous Western official described the escalation as “directed at killing Russian military officers,” and beginning in 1985, the CIA also started providing the mujahideen with satellite reconnaissance data of Soviet targets, intercepts of Soviet communications and high-technology weaponry.⁵⁰ By 1986, the US sought to undermine Soviet reliance on air power in Afghanistan and shipped Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to the mujahideen. Blowpipe missiles, the British equivalent, were also provided.⁵¹ Between September 1986 and August 1987, 1150 missiles were shipped to Pakistan and 863 were received in Afghanistan.⁵² However, accounts of their effectiveness are mixed, and Soviet casualty rates did not increase after the missiles’ deployment.⁵³ By 1987, Gorbachev announced a decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and the withdrawal was completed by February 1989.

Wallander briefly examines the role of American aid to guerillas in third-world conflicts, especially Afghanistan:

In Afghanistan...the United States provided (along with China, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia) huge amounts of weaponry assistance to guerillas fighting the Soviet Army. Even so, at the height of the Soviet troop presence in Afghanistan only about 2.1% of Soviet forces were deployed. Soviet casualty rates and losses actually declined after the United States supplied Stinger missiles, which were first deployed in 1986 and became effective in 1987, and Moscow continued to supply the Kabul government \$300 million a month even after Soviet troops had withdrawn in 1989. U.S. support for the Afghan rebels certainly made life more difficult for the Soviet Army, and this in turn affected Soviet society’s view of the strength of the state and the military forces that sustained it. Afghanistan also helped spur the rise of social movements and organized protest in the Soviet Union, notably the condemnations of the war by mothers of soldiers who were fighting in Afghanistan.⁵⁴

But Wallander stops short of actually claiming that there is a direct relationship between the pressure the US put on the Soviets in Afghanistan, the Soviet withdrawal and then the subsequent collapse of the Soviet state. She argues that Soviet military commitments abroad, including Afghanistan “were economically costly, but not on a scale that undermined the Soviet economy or that would have saved the economy had the resources

⁴⁷ Steve Coll (1992), “Anatomy of a Victory: CIA’s Covert Afghan War; \$2 Billion Program Reversed Tide for Rebels.” In *The Washington Post*; July 19, 1992. Page 2.

⁴⁸ Coll, 3.

⁴⁹ Mendelson, p.69 and p. 96.

⁵⁰ Coll, 2.

⁵¹ Mendelson, 97.

⁵² Mendelson, 98.

⁵³ Mendelson, 99.

⁵⁴ Wallander, 165.

been freed.”⁵⁵ Sarah Mendelson agrees that the impact of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was negligible. Instead, the withdrawal of Soviet troops was caused by the rise of reformist leadership within the Soviet Union; troops would have remained in Afghanistan past 1988 had Gorbachev not come to power.⁵⁶

The Impact of Economic Sanctions and the Global Economy on the Soviet Collapse: Trade Sanctions and Conditionality

Following World War II, the United States came to recognize that American “security interests would be served best if the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and People’s Republic of China were isolated from, rather than integrated into, the liberal world economy.”⁵⁷ World War II had shown the West “that comprehensive economic denial was a necessary and attractive strategic weapon in a struggle with hostile and implacable adversaries.”⁵⁸ In 1948, the Truman administration instituted a policy that placed all exports to both Eastern and Western Europe under licensing control. Between 1948 and 1949, the U.S. used licensing control to effectively implement a ban on the export of arms, ammunition and advanced technology to the East.⁵⁹

For a policy of economic denial to be effective, however, the U.S. needed the cooperation of other Western governments. Western European countries were reluctant to cut important trade ties to the East and impede post-war economic recovery. Even so, by 1948 the West European states, led by Britain and France, had initiated their own selective export bans on strategic goods; in 1949 they coordinated their efforts and compiled the Anglo-French list of prohibited items. Under U.S. pressure, Italy and West Germany agreed to abide by the more restrictive American list. Despite these measures, however, Western Europe still faced a coordination problem; each country expressed a reluctance to ban export of an item unless all other countries did the same. Moreover, they were wary that the appearance of economic warfare would provoke a military confrontation with the Soviet Union.⁶⁰

After a series of negotiations, in November 1949 the U.S. and West European allies agreed to form the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Bans, abbreviated as CoCom.⁶¹ CoCom was to be an independent association, disassociated from other transatlantic institutions like NATO and the OEEC.⁶² In the following years, the list of prohibited exports continued to expand under U.S. pressure and growing European fear of invasion in the aftermath of the Korean War.⁶³

By the mid 1950’s, however, European support for CoCom was waning; Britain proposed a 50% cut in items on the control list and called for greater economic integration with the East. In a new set of negotiations, the list was cut in half and the

⁵⁵ Wallander, 167.

⁵⁶ Sarah Mendelson (1998), *Changing Course*. Pages 11-12.

⁵⁷ Michael Mastanduno (1992), *Economic Containment: CoCom and the Politics of East-West Trade*. Page 64.

⁵⁸ Mastanduno, 64.

⁵⁹ Mastanduno, 69-70.

⁶⁰ Mastanduno, 75-77.

⁶¹ Mastanduno, 78-80.

⁶² Mastanduno, 81.

⁶³ Mastanduno, 82-93.

allies agreed to focus attention on items of industrial and military significance.⁶⁴ Despite the revisions to CoCom policy, the U.S. continued its stricter unilateral embargo. Although the embargo was largely ineffective as an economic weapon without European cooperation, continued economic warfare “demonstrated, to the Soviets and the rest of the international community, the profound discontent of the United States with Soviet foreign and domestic policies and the willingness of the United States to stand in opposition to them.”⁶⁵ Moreover, throughout the late 1950’s European enforcement of CoCom regulations appeared lacking, and the U.S. became greatly concerned about the leakage of strategic goods from West to East Germany.⁶⁶ But by the mid-1960’s, pragmatic considerations led American leaders to reconsider the efficacy of continued unilateral economic warfare.⁶⁷ A 1963 Policy Planning Council report showed that the Soviet bloc was generally self-sufficient, and that the U.S. embargo had only a minimal effect on Soviet military capacity. Trade liberalization would have no appreciable effect, but could carry significant political benefits as a bargaining chip.⁶⁸ As a result, “the primary objective would shift...from an effort to weaken Soviet economic capabilities to an attempt to influence Soviet behavior.”⁶⁹ Johnson tried to proceed with conditional liberalization, but faced opposition from Congress. In 1969, however, Congress finally passed the Export Administration Act, a bill that lifted trade restrictions on the President and allowed businesses to operate in Eastern Europe.⁷⁰

Evaluations of CoCom’s effectiveness in the 1960’s vary, largely due to a lack of clarity about its mission. Though the Soviet Union did increase its military power during the period, the controls do appear to have delayed “Soviet acquisition of military relevant Western technology,” helping the West maintain its lead in the arms race.⁷¹

In 1972, the U.S. started negotiations in full to normalize trade relations with the East. The Nixon administration used Most Favored Nation status and the relaxation of export controls to leverage political concessions from the Soviets. At the 1972 Nixon-Brezhnev summit, the SALT I treaty was signed and Brezhnev promised to pressure the North Vietnamese to negotiate a political settlement. In return, the Nixon administration agreed to an agreement that would triple bilateral trade and relax the unilateral export controls.

In 1973 Nixon requested that Congress grant the Soviet Union MFN status, but Congressional opponents concerned with Soviet human rights policy wished to extract additional concessions, specifically a relaxation of emigration restrictions. Seventy-two senators cosponsored the Jackson Amendment to the Trade Reform Act of 1974, an amendment that would “prohibit the extension of credits or MFN to nonmarket economies that restricted or taxed emigration by their citizens.” The Soviets responded by relaxing emigration restrictions (particularly on Russian Jews), but made clear that the

⁶⁴ Mastanduno, 93-94.

⁶⁵ Mastanduno, 97.

⁶⁶ Mastanduno, 101-105.

⁶⁷ Mastanduno, 126-128.

⁶⁸ Mastanduno, 132-133.

⁶⁹ Mastanduno, 133.

⁷⁰ Mastanduno, 140-141.

⁷¹ Mastanduno, 119-120.

amendment's passage would be met with Soviet displeasure.⁷² Despite Nixon's pleading, the amended act passed in 1975 and was signed by President Ford. In response, "the Soviets announced they would not abide by its conditions, thereby making it impossible for Congress to grant them MFN or access to export credits. More important, the Soviets abrogated the entire trade agreement of 1972, contending that the emigration provision was in violation of it."⁷³ In the following years, popular and Congressional sentiment in the U.S. grew suspicious of détente and wary of increasing trade links. "Without MFN or credits, the Soviets had no economic incentive to moderate their foreign policy, and the administration could remove neither as punishment."⁷⁴

Though Carter came to power promising to abandon tactical linkage, the Carter administration quickly reversed itself, deciding to pursue economic diplomacy. Though Congress would not grant MFN and Carter could not negotiate with merely symbolic concessions, the administration believed that it could influence Soviet behavior with a substantive economic advantage. In response to Soviet human rights abuse and intervention in Somalia, the U.S. placed critical energy extraction technology on the embargo list. The U.S. also retroactively retracted a license for a U.S. company to export a computer for a Soviet press agency during the 1980 Moscow Olympics.⁷⁵ However, Western allies refused to cooperate, and West Europeans stepped in to supply the Soviets both the computer and the needed energy technology. "Because the Soviets experienced little difficulty in acquiring Western computing systems or energy technology, the Carter administration's 1978 foreign policy controls did not provide leverage."⁷⁶

During this period of general trade liberalization, COCOM continued to exist, but experienced a decrease in effectiveness. Lax enforcement, confusion in interpretation of the control list, rapidly changing technology and an increase in requested exceptions undermined its effectiveness and legitimacy. Moreover, the U.S. had ceased to serve as an effective leader for the organization as its behavior appeared inconsistent and undisciplined; by the 1970's, it alone requested a majority of all control-list exceptions, sparking copycat behavior from other member-states.⁷⁷

Following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States showed a new drive to step up sanctions and economic warfare. In January 1980, the Carter administration announced a grain embargo, a potentially devastating move in a poor-harvest year that was "intended to punish the Soviets for their foreign policy and, more important, to send a signal of U.S. resolve regarding future Soviet aggression."⁷⁸ In cutting agricultural exports, the U.S. hoped to inflict economic damage on the Soviet Union. However, the move backfired when other countries failed to follow suit. As it turned out, the USSR could turn to other suppliers of agricultural products and the US simply lost a significant share of exports to the USSR as Argentina, Australia and Canada took America's place. On the whole, moreover, "American trade pressure on the Soviet

⁷² Mastanduno, 149.

⁷³ Mastanduno, 150.

⁷⁴ Mastanduno, 153.

⁷⁵ Mastanduno, 153-155.

⁷⁶ Mastanduno, 155-156.

⁷⁷ Mastanduno, 170-175.

⁷⁸ Mastanduno, 223

Union was with regard to agricultural products, unsuccessful.”⁷⁹ Also early in 1980, the administration decided to additionally boycott the upcoming Moscow Olympics and embargo fertilizer shipments as well. The measures were seen as conditional, with the administration prepared to lift them in exchange for Soviet good behavior. By March, the U.S. had prepared a new export control list that prohibited all exceptions on exports to the Soviet Union, further restricted technology transfer to lower-grade technologies and “process know-how” of militarily significant sectors.⁸⁰

The Reagan administration placed an even greater emphasis on strengthening the strategic embargo, especially by placing even greater limits on the transfer of Western technology and know-how, endorsing a return to economic warfare.⁸¹ Evidently, Mastanduno argues, “some administration officials believed economic warfare might bring changes in the internal political structure of the Soviet Union. Without Western economic assistance, if the Soviets were determined to maintain both domestic consumption and investment goals as well as military and foreign commitments, they would be forced eventually to undertake major economic reform. Economic liberalization, however, would probably lead to the decentralization of political power.”⁸²

The Western European allies were less enthusiastic about a return to economic warfare. At a January 1982 meeting, CoCom member states reaffirmed the strategic embargo but resisted Reagan’s efforts to tighten restrictions.⁸³ Conflict between the U.S. and Europe escalated when Poland imposed martial law and cracked down on Solidarity, an independent trade union, leading to more American sanctions and European reluctance.⁸⁴ In 1981, further conflict arose regarding a proposed natural gas pipeline from Siberia to Western Europe, which the Reagan administration vehemently opposed. In June 1982, after the Europeans refused to suspend activity on the pipeline, Reagan extended American pipeline sanctions to cover the activities of U.S. firms acting in Europe, effectively halting construction. Western European governments were furious, and pledged to proceed regardless, forcing companies to defy the U.S. In response, the U.S. imposed retaliatory sanctions.⁸⁵ Sanctions were dropped in November 1982 when an agreement was reached that lifted pipeline sanctions in exchange for reexamining the CoCom control list.⁸⁶ By 1985, the list had been updated to reflect the new technological environment and enforcement measures had been significantly enhanced.⁸⁷

Though most observers deem the set of sanctions between 1980 and 1982 a clear failure, some argue that the pipeline sanctions had at least a marginally negative effect on the Soviet economy. For instance, Peter Schweitzer of the *National Review* argues that despite the eventual construction of the pipeline, sanctions were somewhat effective

⁷⁹ Mohammed Ishaq (1999), *The Politics of Trade Pressure: American-Soviet Relations 1980-1988*. Pages 71-72.

⁸⁰ Mastanduno, 223-226.

⁸¹ Mastanduno, 234-236.

⁸² Mastanduno, 237.

⁸³ Mastanduno, 243-244.

⁸⁴ Mastanduno, 245-247.

⁸⁵ Mastanduno, 247-260.

⁸⁶ Mastanduno, 261-263.

⁸⁷ Mastanduno, 267-275.

within the greater context of Reagan's offensive posture:

In tandem with the geopolitical counteroffensive in Eastern Europe, the Administration fired the first volleys of what would become a secret economic war against the Kremlin. Using Poland as a justification, the Administration in 1982 imposed sanctions on Moscow, intended to cut off most of the technologies needed for a massive new natural-gas pipeline from Siberia, and for an energy program on the Sakhalin Islands being co-developed with Japan. The sanctions went to the heart of Soviet income: energy exports, which accounted for 80 per cent of Soviet hard-currency earnings. U.S. sanctions, which Western Europe resisted, did not stop construction of the pipeline, but delayed it two years, and cut it back in size. The Kremlin was out \$15 to \$20 billion.⁸⁸

There is some evidence that trade sanctions did have some effect on Gorbachev's thinking. In his memoirs, he writes that,

...it was – and still is – my conviction that there can be no fruitful cooperation between two nations without economic ties. Apart from our grain imports, there were practically no such ties between the United States and the Soviet Union. We were isolated from each other by political decision and restrictions aimed at preventing the transfer of new technologies. The notorious Cocom lists impeded not only the United States but also many other countries from co-operating with us on a modern technological and economic level. Linking trade to human rights caused many difficulties for those who genuinely wanted to do business with us.⁸⁹

During President Bush's July 1991 visit to Moscow, Gorbachev "reminded Bush of the serious obstacles that the discriminatory laws of the United States and the Cocom lists were creating for our economy," indicating that they had had at least some effect in weakening the Soviet system.⁹⁰

The record of trade pressure is slightly brighter in having helped the Americans achieve their political aims. During the 1980's, "the United States government made clear the areas in which it was looking for changes with regard to Soviet domestic and international behavior."⁹¹ The first issue was the Soviet human rights record, particularly with regard to questions of dissent and restrictions on Jewish emigration. The USSR was a signatory to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Helsinki Final Act, agreements that bound the Soviet Union to some Western conceptions

⁸⁸ Peter Schweitzer (1994), "Who Broke the Evil Empire?" *National Review*; May 30, 1994.

⁸⁹ Mikhail Gorbachev (1995), *Memoirs*. Page 448.

⁹⁰ Gorbachev, 622.

⁹¹ Ishaq, 124-126.

of human rights. “The West saw CSCE as a broad multilateral negotiating process aimed at not only lessening East-West tension but gradually encouraging the possibility for development of freedom and democracy (as they defined them) in Eastern Europe.”⁹² In the short term, Washington was looking for greater tolerance of dissent and emigration liberalization.⁹³

Though it is unclear to what extent reforms were motivated by external pressure, tolerance of dissidence increased greatly under Gorbachev’s policy of glasnost starting in 1987. Some evidence suggests that the Soviets were influenced by international human rights regimes: “In an article in *Pravda* in September, Gorbachev suggested that the United Nations play a leading role in the promotion and protection of human rights. He also stressed that governments had a duty to make their laws conform with international standards. 1987 also saw the Soviet Union ratify the UN convention against torture.”⁹⁴ Overall, however, it did not appear that trade pressure had directly impacted Soviet human rights policy.

As with the influence of the military buildup and SDI, scholars have differing views on the Soviet Union’s vulnerability to the ongoing economic sanctions and the overall effect they had on the demise of the Soviet Union. In his 1986 assessment of the internal wellbeing of the Soviet system, for example, Timothy Colton discussed the role of sanctions in potential reform. He argued that sanctions may be necessary as an occasionally used instrument to express moral outrage or concern, or to raise the cost of Moscow making undesirable foreign policy decisions, this is not the same thing as actively promoting systemic reform. That, he predicted, would come as a “result of trends and pressures internal to Soviet society.”⁹⁵ In part this was due to the relatively tiny proportion of American imports to the Soviet Union (0.1% in 1985), making sanctions relatively ineffective on the state of the overall Soviet economy.⁹⁶

The International Oil Market

Beyond the pressures of the cold war and arms race, and the difficulties of the conflict in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union by the mid 1980s was suffering economically. This was in part due to the general inefficiencies of the planning system, and Brezhnev’s failures to undertake major reform to address the shortcomings of the overall economy (as discussed in Part I of this study). It was, however, also due in no small part, to the fall in oil prices that occurred between 1982 and 1986. The Afghan war had been costly not just in terms of the lives of Soviet servicemen, but it had also soaked up a great deal of Soviet oil revenues which accounted for a majority share of all domestic revenues. This fact had not gone unnoticed in the West. Richard Pipes purportedly pointed out the vulnerability of the Soviet state in this regard, and even recommended using the Soviet

⁹² Ishaq, 125.

⁹³ Ishaq, 128.

⁹⁴ Ishaq, 135.

⁹⁵ Timothy J. Colton (1986), *The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union*. Page 220.

⁹⁶ Colton, 222. See also Philip Hanson (1988), *Western Economic Statecraft in East-West Relations*.

dependence on oil prices to destabilize the regime.⁹⁷ Indeed, Yegor Gaidar, Yeltsin's former reformist prime minister asserts that,

The timeline of the collapse of the Soviet Union can be traced to September 13, 1985. On this date, Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the minister of oil of Saudi Arabia, declared that the monarchy had decided to alter its oil policy radically. The Saudis stopped protecting oil prices, and Saudi Arabia regained its share in the world market. During the next six months, oil production in Saudi Arabia increased fourfold while oil prices collapsed by approximately the same amount in real terms. As a result, the Soviet Union lost approximately \$20 billion per year, money without which the country simply could not survive.⁹⁸

World oil prices collapsed from \$76 per barrel in 1982 to \$20 a barrel in 1986. Desperate for hard currency, and to cover its growing trade deficit, the Soviet Union increased its debt burden considerably. It finally ran out of loan prospects from commercial banks abroad. The head of the State Planning Committee, Yuri Maslyukov, warned that the situation would lead the system to collapse.⁹⁹

Gaidar argues that the financial and hard currency situation in the country by 1989 largely explain Gorbachev's subsequent policy decisions. The desperately needed foreign loans would only come from foreign governments at this point, and, "if the Soviet military crushed Solidarity Party demonstrations in Warsaw, the Soviet Union would not have received the desperately needed \$100 billion from the West."¹⁰⁰ In sum, Gaidar quite explicitly attributes Gorbachev's decision to let Poland and the East European communist countries peacefully exit the Soviet bloc in the fall of 1989 to falling oil prices and decreased revenue within the Soviet state.

Linkage, Integration, Convergence: The Influence of Foreign Broadcasting into the Soviet Union

Perhaps the best investment the US government made in its efforts to destabilize the Soviet Union was in Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. These radio channels are now widely credited with being one of the West's most effective tools in promoting US "psychological warfare" against the USSR. The State Department's Voice of America provided a third branch of attack. Founded in the 1950's and originally funded by the Defense Department, the Voice of America began broadcasting during World War II, with a mission to provide accurate news about America and the war.

After the war, VOA went in decline until its revival during the Cold War. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty began operating in 1949 and 1951 respectively. They were privately operated but covertly funded by the CIA. In 1971 the CIA's role was revealed so Congress began overt funding. Incredibly, Voice of America claimed to reach 127 million listeners in 1988, defined as those who tune in at least once a week, in

⁹⁷ Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of An Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia*. 107.

⁹⁸ Gaidar, "The Soviet Collapse: Grain and Oil," 4-5.

⁹⁹ Gaidar, "The Soviet Collapse: Grain and Oil," 5-6.

¹⁰⁰ Gaidar, "The Soviet Collapse: Grain and Oil," 6.

more than 160 countries. The reach of RFE/RL was less extensive, although it estimated that at about the same time, it reached 55 or 56.5 million listeners at least once a week. Within the Soviet Union, “popular surveys showed that nearly 50 percent of the populace in the Soviet Union listened to Western broadcasters at least once a week, 28 percent to VOA and 15 percent each to RL and to the BBC.”¹⁰¹

Significantly, former KGB agent, [Oleg] Kalugin testified that, “of all the Soviet groups it was the political elite that Radio Liberty most influenced. After years of listening to RL’s programming without interference (and in the case of the Party elite, reading the daily transcriptions of broadcasts prepared by the KGB), these Party members understood that the Soviet Union needed fundamental change. This realization laid the groundwork for the reform process that ultimately spelled the end of the USSR.”¹⁰²

Voice of America was designed to provide accurate news from the American perspective, while RFE and RL were “supposed to represent the voice of the opposition forces from the countries to which they broadcast.”¹⁰³ International radio broadcasts quickly became important sources of information in the Soviet bloc. There were several key moments when RFE/RL and VOA proved invaluable in getting around Soviet media controls. One of these was the revelation of Khrushchev’s secret speech in February 1956, where he denounced Stalin’s crimes. This was followed by his initiation of significant reform. It shocked Soviet system, and perhaps gave disgruntled or disillusioned Soviet citizens hope that things might change.

Foreign media broadcasts also provided Soviet leaders with important information about their own populations and internal challenges to the regime. For example, in the 1950’s,

Their analyses of Soviet youth demonstrated that many were indifferent to the political changes occurring; some students could not even name the First Secretary of the Party, Khrushchev. Furthermore, those who were politically attuned admitted that foreign broadcasting had become their primary source of information. KGB interrogations also revealed that students who listened to foreign radio often did so because their parents, even Party members, listened on a regular basis.¹⁰⁴

The amount of effort and money that the Soviet state spent on jamming efforts indicated the extent to which RL and VOA were of Kremlin concern over the possible impact of foreign media on the population.¹⁰⁵ In the 1970s, Radio Liberty devoted substantial airtime to reading *samizdat*, eventually establishing a special program specifically for that purpose and allowing dissidents opinions to reach millions.¹⁰⁶ Eugene Parta confirms that, “In the 1970s the *samizdat* phenomenon and the related human rights movement in the USSR was a major topic of broadcasting. There is a

¹⁰¹ Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America’s Democracy Abroad*. Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1991. 190-191.

¹⁰² “Cold War Broadcasting Impact,” p 37.

¹⁰³ Muravchik, 191.

¹⁰⁴ “Cold War Broadcasting Impact,” p 33.

¹⁰⁵ Foglesong, 145.

¹⁰⁶ Puddington, 171-172.

strong correlation between listening to Radio Liberty and approval of this form of dissident activity, decried by a majority of the Soviet population.”¹⁰⁷

The Carter administration looked to greatly expand radio broadcasting. Total RFE/RL funding rose from \$64 million in 1978 to almost \$100 million in 1981. The administration also made an effort to reach listeners in the satellite republics by increasing broadcasts in seven languages.¹⁰⁸

Western broadcasters and listeners within the Soviet bloc were ingenious in discovering methods by which they could avoid jamming. In a 2004 report, it was estimated that between 1978 and 1990, these forms of western media reached as many as 25 million listeners inside the Soviet Union every day and over twice that many in an average week. VOA purportedly had the largest audience during this timeframe, apparently reaching 15% of the adult population of the Soviet Union per week.¹⁰⁹ Yet this does not tell the whole story, as the data indicate that information from Western broadcasts was often spread by “word of mouth” which served to amplify broadcast impact to a much larger part of Soviet society.”¹¹⁰ Radio Liberty broadcast such items as the samizdat writings of dissident Soviet author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in full.¹¹¹ Further, Western radio is credited with having a significant impact in informing Soviet society about the military quagmire into which their government had stumbled in Afghanistan:

An analysis of information sources on Afghanistan shows that Western radio played a significant role in informing the Soviet population about the war. 45% of the urban population received information on the war from Western radio, compared with ca. 55% who cited Soviet press and 50% who cited Soviet TV... When attitudes toward the war were correlated with information sources on the war, it became apparent that those who received their information from Western radio or via word-of-mouth communication were considerably more critical of Soviet policy than those who relied on official sources.¹¹²

Yeltsin too should have sent foreign broadcasters a note of thanks during the August 1991 coup attempt against Gorbachev. In Moscow, many citizens gained information from fuzzy images of CNN that they were able to pick up through the microwave relay running through Moscow to the Kremlin:

¹⁰⁷ Parta, 53.

¹⁰⁸ Foglesong, 170.

¹⁰⁹ “Cold War Broadcasting Impact.” Report on a Conference Organized by the Hoover Institution and the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at Stanford University, October 13-16, 2004, p 15.

¹¹⁰ “Cold War Broadcasting Impact,” p 15-16.

¹¹¹ Puddington, 273-274.

¹¹² Eugene R. Parta *Discovering the Listener: An Assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR During the Cold War*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2007,, 49.

‘The morning of August 19, at about 8 a.m., when they cut off Ekho Moskvyy, the situation [of those trying to follow events] seemed almost hopeless,’ wrote Moscow media critic Lydia Polskaya. ‘You couldn’t listen endlessly to the ‘appeal’ of Yanayev! But at about 10 a.m., without any hope, I pushed the button for the fourth channel, where I can get CNN, and I was stunned: there were Americans working as if nothing had happened...That’s how I survived for three days, knowing for certain what was happening not far from my home.’¹¹³

In his comprehensive study of Radio Liberty and Western broadcasting into the Soviet Union, Parta reports on a Vox Populi survey indicating that as many as 30% of Muscovites may have heard Radio Liberty broadcasts between August 19-21 and that this accounted for thousands making their way to the streets to join Boris Yeltsin at the White House.¹¹⁴ Further testimony to the importance of the outside press during the attempted coup comes from Leonid Ionin in *Neavisimaya Gazeta* who concluded that, “Radio Liberty and the BBC defeated the KGB and the CPSU...If the high-level plotters had followed the tested recipe of General Yaruzelski [in declaring martial law in Poland]—seized the newspapers, radio stations, television, cut off telephones and isolated the White House from Moscow and Moscow from the rest of the Soviet Union and the world—they most likely would have succeeded. Any other way, they were doomed.”¹¹⁵

In sum, the influence the media had on Soviet citizens, had some intangible effect on their attitudes toward the regime and may have contributed to the cognitive divide that grew up under Brezhnev in the 1970s. It also exposed Soviet leaders to the truth of the regime’s failings. It undeniably helped bring people onto the streets to defeat the coup plotters in 1991, and so should be given significant weight as a key external contributor to the Soviet collapse.

Diplomacy, Normative Pressure, Persuasion

Clearly, democracy promotion in the Soviet Union and then Russia was always an objective of American foreign policy, but never the primary objective. When the Soviet regime began to shake, George H.W. Bush and most (not all) of his senior foreign policy advisors placed territorial preservation ahead of democratization as an American national interest. Bush also acquired tangible benefits for American national security from Gorbachev. Bush believed that helping Gorbachev stay in power, therefore, was more important than fostering regime change. For most of the Clinton era, fostering economic reform trumped supporting democratic change. Clinton was also willing to sacrifice American influence over shaping Russia’s internal developments in the pursuit of other foreign policy goals, be it NATO expansion or the war against Serbia. In these various lists of priorities, promoting democratization has not only ranked lower than other issues, but the pursuit of higher ranking issues actually hindered the parallel pursuit of

¹¹³ Scott Shane, *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994, p264.

¹¹⁴ Parta, xv.

¹¹⁵ Shane, , p266.

democracy promotion by American and other actors, and later may even have impeded the development of democratization inside Russia post 1999.

But even if American presidents had made democratic regime change in the USSR and Russia their number one priority, they and their governments lacked any coherent strategy for achieving this goal. There was no game plan, no set of priorities, no guidance about the sequence of political reforms or the relationship between reform plans for fostering capitalism versus democracy. Would or should the project of democracy building in the largest country in the world cost \$50 million, \$1 billion or 100 billion? Everyone just guessed. Would it take 2 years, 10 or 20? No one knew. What should come first, founding elections or a constitution? Which is better for Russia, presidentialism or a parliamentary system? What should be the strategy for dealing with communists – engagement or destruction? Should the focus be on helping the state democratize or reshaping society? No senior US official tried to answer these questions. And how could they? After all, the Russian experts in government at this time were experts in arms control and communism, not democratization. We look in greater detail at diplomatic interactions between the US and the Soviet Union and then Russia below.

Though initially skeptical of Gorbachev's true intentions George HW Bush eventually embraced Gorbachev as a Soviet leader ready to deliver on foreign policy outcomes that the US desired, be it the fall of the Berlin Wall, German unification, or Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Bush administration did not want to do anything that might weaken or undermine America's trusted friend in the Kremlin. Moreover, for many in the Bush administration, the alternative, Boris Yeltsin did not look appealing. At a White House visit in 1989, Yeltsin allegedly arrived drunk and acted boorishly, creating the strong impression that he was untrustworthy and unstable. Yeltsin's call for Russian sovereignty in 1990 made him particularly radioactive for many Bush administration officials, since this move breached one of the principal rules of the game of the international system in which states recognize one another's right to exist.

Consequently, even as Yeltsin grew in strength, President Bush maintained a firm policy of noninterference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union. Regarding the battle between the Soviet Union and Russia and the very personalized contests between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the White House firmly sided with the internationally recognized leader of the USSR, Gorbachev. For President George W. Bush, and his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, the paramount importance of stability in the US-Soviet relationship and the sense that Gorbachev could deliver for them on matters of importance to the United States led them to stand by their man and not actively promote regime change. Scowcroft recommended that the United States "avoid involvement in Soviet domestic political wars."¹¹⁶ Others in the Bush team, including Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, deputy undersecretary of defense Lewis "Scooter" Libby, assistant secretary of defense for international security policy, Stephen J. Hadley and senior CIA analysts wanted the US to do more to aid Yeltsin and the democrats, but on this issue Scowcroft evidently prevailed. As Bush wrote in his diary in March 1991, "My view is, you dance with who is on the dance floor – you don't try to influence this succession, and

¹¹⁶ George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (..), p. 499.

you especially don't do something that would [give the] blatant appearance of [encouraging] destabilization."¹¹⁷

In fact, Bush went out of his way to aid the Soviet Union's survival, including most famously in a speech in Kiev in August 1991 when he warned that the dangers of ethnic conflict within the Soviet Union (including conflict with Russia) fueled state collapse. Bush clearly proclaimed, "We support the struggle in this great country for democracy and economic reform." But he also warned advocates of Ukrainian independence that,

freedom cannot survive if we let despots flourish or permit seemingly minor restrictions to multiply until they form chains, until they form shackles.... Yet freedom is not the same as independence. America will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred. We will support those who want to build a democracy.¹¹⁸

Later the same month, of course, Yeltsin and his democratic allies defeated a coup attempt against right wing members of Gorbachev's government. Incredibly, only on the second day of the coup did Bush forcefully denounce the coup plotters.¹¹⁹ But in truth, Bush's views did not really matter; the coup was an internal matter with which Russian democrats dealt without really any real external assistance. Just a few months later, the Soviet Union disappeared, and despite Bush's warning, Ukraine and the other fourteen republics became independent countries.

Although Bush did not develop a close relationship with Yeltsin, his successor as president of the United States, Bill Clinton did. Wilsonian ideals infused President Clinton's thinking about Russia. In an address devoted to US Russia relations on the eve of his first trip abroad as president to meet Yeltsin in Vancouver in April 1993, Clinton argued,

Think of it—land wars in Europe cost hundreds of thousands of American lives in the twentieth century. The rise of a democratic Russia, satisfied within its own boundaries, bordered by other peaceful democracies, could ensure that our nation never needs to pay that kind of price again. I know and you know that, ultimately, the history of Russia will be written by

¹¹⁷ Bush and Scowcroft, p. 500.

¹¹⁸ President Goerge H.W. Bush, "Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Ukraine in Kiev, Soviet Union, August 1, 1991, available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/1991/91080102.html>.

¹¹⁹ On the first day of the coup, Bush stressed, "There's very little we can do right now... We're not going to overexcite the American people or the world. And so, we will conduct our diplomacy in a prudent fashion, not driven by excess, not driven by extreme." August 19, 1991 available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/1991/91080102.html>, pp. 5-7.

Russians and the future of Russia must be charted by Russians. But I would argue that we must do what we can and we must act now. Not out of charity but because it is a wise investment... While our efforts will entail new costs, we can reap even larger dividends for our safety and our prosperity if we act now.¹²⁰

During his first meeting with Yeltsin as president at the Vancouver summit, Clinton not only pledged financial support for the Yeltsin government in Russia, but openly endorsed the Russian president as America's horse in the showdown between the president and parliament, saying to Yeltsin in front of the press, "Mr. President, our nation will not stand on the sidelines when it comes to democracy in Russia. We know where we stand... We actively support reform and reformers and you in Russia."¹²¹ When the conflict with parliament escalated into violence in October 1993, Clinton yet again defended Yeltsin's use of military force and demonized the parliament as anti-reformist communists. In his first public reaction to Yeltsin's dissolution of parliament, Clinton affirmed, "I support him fully."¹²² Clinton explained to the American people that, "there is no question that President Yeltsin acted in response to a constitutional crisis that had reached a critical impasse and had paralyzed the political process. Clinton officials said Yeltsin's precarious hold on power was a reason for the US Congress to support with even greater speed the administration's \$2.5 billion aid package for the region."¹²³ Clinton's support was aimed at Yeltsin the man, but it also translated into support for the institution of the presidency. US officials subsequently praised the new constitution ratified by popular referendum in December 1993.

Democracy, Financial and Technical Assistance

The rhetorical devotion to democracy's advance especially during the Clinton administration was not matched by actual deeds. Facilitating economic reform became the real focus of Clinton's aid to Russia following the Soviet collapse. Political reform was a much smaller priority. Beginning with a first meeting on February 6, 1993, a senior group in the new administration met for three months to devise an overall strategy toward Russia and the other newly independent states. Participants included President Clinton, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and his deputy, Samuel Berger; Vice President Gore and his national security adviser, Leon Fuerth,; senior NSC staffers for this region Toby Gati and Nicholas Burns; Ambassador-at-large for the NIS Strobe Talbott; and presidential advisor, George Stephanopoulos.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ President Bill Clinton, "A Strategic Alliance with Russian Reform," April 1, 1993, in *US Department of State Dispatch*, vol. 4, no.13, April 5, 1993, pp. 189-194.

¹²¹ Serge Shmemann, "Summit in Vancouver: The Overview," *The New York Times*, April 5, 1993, p. A1.

¹²² "Clinton sends Yeltsin His Full Support," *Associated Press*, September 23, 1993.

¹²³ Fred Kaplan, "Yeltsin Suspends Legislature, Faces Impeachment Bid," *Boston Globe*, September 22, 1993, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Rosner, *The New Tug of War*, pp.49-50.

At this early stage, officials at the Treasury Department and on the NSC staff had different priorities, and despite Talbott's overall status, the State Department was relatively less important in this area, primarily because Talbott by all accounts (including his own) had little expertise in economic matters. During his tenure, he focused primarily on traditionally defined strategic issues in the US-Russian relationship, which had been the subject of many of the books he had written earlier in his career. Many former Clinton officials reported that Talbott was not engaged in the technical issues of privatization, stabilization or social policy reform.¹²⁵

In retrospect, former acting prime minister of Russia in 1992, Yegor Gaidar, believed that the absence of a major political figure behind the aid effort had negative consequences. "I don't think that the leaders of the major Western powers were unaware of the magnitude of the choices they faced. The trouble, in my view, was that there was no leader capable of filling the sort of organizing and coordinating role that Harry Truman, and George C. Marshall played in the post war restoration of Europe."¹²⁶

Instead a Christopher plan or a Clinton plan, Russia got a Summers-Lipton plan. In the early years, Summers and Lipton provided the intellectual guiding principles for assistance to Russia in the Clinton Administration. They prevailed in large part because they had a plan for reform, a theory behind it, and a clear idea of the tools needed to be used to implement it. These two new Treasury officials believed in the imperative of sequencing economic reform ahead of political reform. As Lipton recalls, "Our view was that America should make clear its support for reform in Russia. We thought that U.S. support for reform in Russia with Yeltsin, with the elites, with the public would be helpful to people who wanted to carry out reform."¹²⁷ The thinking was that if Russia could not stabilize its economy, then democracy would have no chance.

US Advocates of emphasizing economic over political reform were supporting the beliefs of Russian reformers who believed that economic reform was paramount at this time. After the failed putsch in August 1991 and the dissolution of the USSR in December of that year, there was a consensus within the Russian government that Yeltsin had a popular mandate to initiate radical economic reform. It is not surprising, therefore, that Yeltsin's supporters within the US endorsed this idea as well. Finally, Russian economic reformers believed that they had a finite reserve of time before trust in Yeltsin and support for reform would wane. Gaidar, after all, was already out of power by the end of 1992. Driven by this perceived time constraint, Russia's reformers wanted to transform the economy as fast as possible to make reforms irreversible before they were forced out of office. Their American counterparts, particularly in the Treasury Department, shared their view.

The budgets to support economic versus political reform reflected these priorities. The IMF, which focused almost exclusively on economic reform, played the central role

¹²⁵ McFaul interview with Brian Atwood, former Clinton administration official, January 19, 2001.

¹²⁶ Yegor Gaidar, *Days of Defeat and Victory*, (University of Washington Press, 1999), p. 152.

¹²⁷ McFaul interview with Lipton, January 19, 2001.

in aiding Russia in the beginning of the 1990s and throughout the decade.¹²⁸ US bilateral assistance – the package of aid handled directly by the US government and not by the multilateral financial institutions – also reflected the “economics first” strategy. Especially in the early years of aid to Russia, the lion’s share of Western assistance was devoted not to political reform but to economic reform. Of the \$5.45 billion in direct US assistance to Russia between 1992 and 1998, only \$130 million or 2.3 percent was devoted to programs involved directly in democratic reform.¹²⁹ When US government expenditures channeled through the Department of Commerce, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the US Export-Import Bank, and the US Trade and Development Agency are added to the equation, the primacy of economic reform becomes even clearer.

There were no counterparts working on democratization to the Clinton officials in the Treasury engaged in assisting with Russian economic reform. Instead, the job of promoting democracy was delegated to lower level officials working primarily at the US Agency for International Development. Clinton never made democracy a top issue in US-Russian relations. For instance, the US and Russia had established joint commissions on defense conversion, the environment, and trade at the 1993 Vancouver summit, but did not create a similar working group for political reform.

Given the strong rhetoric from senior US officials about the importance of Russian democracy, the relatively small amount of aid for democracy and rule of law assistance is curious. It may be that democracy promotion was deemed too politically sensitive and might imperil progress in the area of economic reform. Another argument is that democracy assistance did not need as much money because this kind of aid was cheaper to provide than economic assistance. As Brian Atwood explains, “Democracy programs don’t cost that much money. Even if it’s a case of running a successful election, you may spend 15-20 million dollars on the mechanical equipment and ballots: that’s not a lot of money.”¹³⁰

USAID did join with the National Endowment for Democracy to fund the operations of the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute and the Free Trade Union Institute (AFL-CIO) in Russia. AID also supported democratic assistance programs run by ABA-CEELI, ARD0-Checchi, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Internews, the Eurasia Foundation, and a host of other nongovernmental organizations.¹³¹ These groups focused on fostering the development of

¹²⁸ Between 1992 and 1999 the IMF loaned \$22 billion to Russia, which was roughly three quarters of all multilateral lending to Russia in the 1990s. See Augusto Lopez-Claros, “The Role of International Financial Institutions During the Transition in Russia,” unpublished manuscript, September 2002.

¹²⁹ McFaul’s calculations based on analyses of budgets described in the annual reports of the aid compiled by the Office of the Coordinator of US Assistance to the NIS called US Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union, (Department of State, 1992-1999).

¹³⁰ McFaul interview with Atwood.

¹³¹ Regrettably, no comprehensive history or assessment of these programs in Russia has been written. On some individual sectors, see James Richter, *Evaluating Western Assistance to Russian Women’s Organizations*, and Leslie Powell, “Western and Russian

political parties, business associations, trade unions, civic organizations, as well as promoting electoral reform, the rule of law and an independent press. Their budgets were only shadows of the amounts spent on economic technical assistance. NGO's though did help introduce Russian politicians to the effects of different types of voting systems. For instance, in 1992, NDI convened a series of working group meetings on the relationship between electoral systems and parties, which included electoral experts on the American single-mandate system as well as the Portuguese, German and Hungarian electoral regimes.¹³² NDI also translated into Russian electoral laws from several countries. All of Russia's key decisionmakers on the electoral law at the time participated in these meetings, including People's Deputies Viktor Balala and Viktor Sheinis – the two leading authors of competing electoral law drafts at the time—and senior officials from Yeltsin's presidential administration.

In these design decisions, American organizations claimed to have no design preference, although in fact groups like NDI did have an implicit preference for proportional representation (PR), since they believed that it would help stimulate the development of a party system and enduring parties and this was NDI's primary task in Russia. It was, therefore, no accident that NDI invited experts on party systems from Germany and Portugal to Russia instead of the United States.

Before the dissolution of the Russian Congress in September 1993, a vigorous competition took place regarding draft electoral laws within the parliament. Sheinis and PR were losing the debate; advocates of single mandate districts were winning. Once Yeltsin closed down the Congress with armed force in October, he needed to choose an electoral system quickly. Sheinis secured an audience with Yeltsin and convinced him that a mixed electoral system – with half the deputies elected by PR and the other half by single mandate – would serve Yeltsin's political interests best. PR, Sheinis argued, would help the pro-Yeltsin liberal parties and hurt the communists. Yeltsin was convinced by this argument and adopted by decree Sheinis' electoral law for the December 1993 parliamentary vote.

Despite the fact that the 1993 elections did not go exactly as Sheinis and Yeltsin had hoped, (Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia won almost a quarter of the PR vote), the liberal Russia's Choice did secure 15% of the PR vote and other Democratic parties won a combined additional 10%. The Russian Communist Party and their rural comrades, the Agrarians combined for less than 20% of the vote, while new "centrist" groups combined for nearly a quarter of the vote. As expected, the PR vote did stimulate the formation of a party system at the national level in Russia. Unexpectedly though, the arrival of multi-party politics in Russia was dominated initially by an extreme nationalist party.

Environmental NGOs: A Greener Russia?" in Sarah Mendelson and John Glenn, eds., *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, "Strength from Without? Transitional Influences on NGO Development in "Democracy Assistance and Political Transition in Russia: Between Success and Failure," *International Security*, vol. 25 (Spring 2001), pp. 68-106.

¹³² McFaul headed the NDI office in Moscow at this time.

Despite Zhirinovsky's unexpected gains in the election, the new electoral law did help to stimulate the development of a few liberal parties – including Russia's Choice and Yabloko – that would remain partners of NDI and IRI for another decade. Further, facilitated by Western actors, the Western idea of proportional representation was brought to Russia and incorporated into law.

Section 4: The Interaction Between Domestic and International Factors in Bringing About Democratic Breakthrough in the Soviet Union and then Russia (Conclusion)

In sum, although the West provided invaluable assistance at important junctures, this assistance did not cause the collapse of the Soviet Union, or the democratic breakthrough of 1993. Ultimately, Russians brought the Soviet Union down, and provided a democratic breakthrough, although perhaps short lived. This is despite the fact that American officials truly did seem to want this second Russian revolution to succeed. George H.W. Bush expressed his desire to see democratic and market institutions take hold in the Soviet Union and then Russia, even if he was skeptical of the West's role in facilitating these transformations and reluctant to commit scarce (in his view) American resources to the project. The Clinton administration demonstrated the greatest commitment to assisting the emergence of market and democratic institutions in Russia, because the Clinton team believed both that a democratic and market-oriented Russia integrated with the West would no longer constitute a threat to American national security and that the United States could play a role in this transformation.

More than two decades later, however, it is striking how little real power the United States exercised over democratic change in the Soviet Union and then Russia. The US emerged from the cold war as the world's only superpower and has often been described as the most powerful country in history. Yet this uber-superpower proved either unable, inept or unwilling to influence significantly domestic change in the Soviet Union and Russia. Dramatic change in the Soviet Union and Russia occurred, to be sure. But the US role in facilitating this revolution has been much less than advertised. US policy did help nudge Russia toward integration with the West and some American interventions (in particular the media) did prod domestic transformation in the intended direction, but there was no Marshall Plan; the US did not provide Russia with a blueprint on how to build democracy from scratch.

Why and what lessons can we draw from this case about the interaction between democratic and international factors in bringing about regime collapse and democratic transition?

Could greater US effort have helped Russia create a firmer basis for the development and consolidation of democratic institutions? Was America's marginal influence a result of a lack of ideas, effort and resources or simply the size and complexity of bringing about change in a country the size of Russia, regardless of the amount of money was spent or attention devoted to the task?

To be sure, American efforts to foster Russian democracy were limited by the strength of democratic allies within Russia. Democratic assistance is most effective when strengthening and empowering (through the transfer of skills, ideas and money) democratic forces that form and take root from within. Russia had such an indigenous democratic movement which surged and played a pivotal role in Soviet and Russian

politics in 1990 and 1991 in particular, but as the power of this democratic movement waned, so too did American influence.

Ultimately, transition came from within, not from external factors. Still, at crucial junctures, external policies and decisions clearly influenced internal decision making. The sustained American efforts to encourage economic distress within the Soviet Union by driving up the cost of the arms race and by pursuing SDI clearly had an indirect effect on Gorbachev's decision making in the mid 1980s. But this alone did not cause the collapse of the Soviet Union. As we explained elsewhere in this report, the Soviet system was already in deep decline by this point – largely because communism had exhausted itself as an economic model. Certainly, the ill-fated attempt to take over Afghanistan hastened the system's demise, and the US support of the mujahideen created an additional obstacle for the Soviet military, but the US had little influence over the dramatic decline in world oil prices, and expanding Soviet debt. These factors had a much greater impact on decisions Gorbachev made to reform the system.

Clearly, there was an important transfer of ideas over constitutions and the distribution of authority between the president and parliament, electoral systems, and economic reform. But the US was limited in its efforts to promote democracy by the strength of internal political actors with whom it chose to partner. When their influence on the process declined again, so did that of the US. Further, while American NGO's may have been helpful in designing institutions associated with democratic states, to date they have done little to affect how these institutions actually function.

The Soviet empire is gone and will never be reconstituted, however. The market in Russia is also now permanent. Doubt, however, still remains about the future of democratic institutions. The American role in the overall drama was relatively limited. At the end of the day, when we finally are able to determine whether Russia's democracy has succeeded or failed, it will be Russians who should be blamed or praised, not Americans.