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CHANGES IN SOVIET PARTY AND GOVERNMENTAL POLICY MAKING: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Symposium Report

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September 1990

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Occasional Paper OPS-019

92-29321

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Symposium Report

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September 18, 1990
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OPENING REMARKS

Abraham S. Becker
Director, RAND/UCLA Center for Soviet Studies and
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Dr. Becker welcomed the participants to the fifth semiannual symposium in a series dating back to 1988, dealing with the burning issues of Soviet development, including nationalities and the status and prospects of perestroika. These symposia concern the surprising changes in thinking, approach, and policy on the major domestic and international issues facing Soviet society and attempt to provide a clear account of the rapidly changing Soviet scene. Currently, things are changing at the basic level of who gives orders and who, if anyone, carries them out: real issues of power and authority.

The April 1990 symposium on the Soviet political crisis foreshadowed the loss of public confidence in Gorbachev, the acceleration of the internal decolonization process, approaching dissolution of the union, and the rapid deterioration of economic prospects. Recent news items provide snapshot views of the changes underway:

- The repeal by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of Article 6 in the All-Union Constitution which enshrined the control of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) over all government and public affairs.

- The public declaration by the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) that Central Committee apparatus control over law enforcement had been abolished.

- The republics claiming vast new powers at the expense of the center, proclaiming the sovereignty of the republic and the superiority of republic laws over those of the Union.

- The declaration by the premier of Moldavia, based on a decision by the Moldavian Supreme Soviet, that the obligation of Moldavian citizens to serve in the armed services had been suspended.

- The decision by Gorbachev to seek a public referendum on private ownership of land, raising the possibility that the Russian Republic (RSFSR) may move ahead on the "500 Days" proposal for economic reform while the organs of authority of the USSR debate the various proposals. This suggests the spectacle of a divided Moscow where the authorities of the USSR and the RSFSR struggle over the survival of the planning, administrative, and management organs of society.

Despite all of these changes, however, many things are still the same. There is still a CPSU, still a General Secretary, namely, Gorbachev, and many of the organs, including the Politburo, the Central Committee, the Party Congress, and the party newspaper *Pravda*, still exist. This symposium will, therefore, examine the changes on two levels: first, the fundamental level of who is in charge; second, the depth of change in relations between the party, the executive, and the republics. The panelists will be examining an actual or an incipient revolution, extending to all levels of authority in the Soviet Union. They will also discuss the implications of these changes for the future of Soviet society, East-West relations, and U.S. policy.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Jeremy Azrael
Senior Staff Member
Political Science Department, The RAND Corporation

Dr. Azrael opened by noting that, until recently, any serious policy discussion began and ended with the constitutionally recognized leading role of the CPSU. The Politburo and the General Secretary were the key policymakers. The General Secretary might also have been the head of state, but he derived his power from his leadership of the party's strongest organizational weapon, the apparat. The Politburo decided the party line to which all policy had to conform and, in addition, decided all major policy issues, and many minor issues as well. Once made, the secretaries of the Central Committee translated these decisions into detailed operational instructions which were sent down to the politically-appointed cadres who staffed the upper political positions. These cadres saw to it that the instructions were implemented with few questions. Implementation occurred in this manner in both theory and practice with increasingly counter-productive results for the leadership.

Today, however, things work differently, Azrael noted. It is generally recognized that, at the just-completed Twenty-Eighth Party Congress, Gorbachev expended considerable political capital and took numerous risks to win re-election as General Secretary. Azrael maintained that Gorbachev's actions show that not everything has changed conclusively, but that the CPSU's dominance of the political process is gone and that Gorbachev clearly wants it that way. As evidence of this position, Azrael noted the following occurrences:

- Gorbachev's re-organization of the Central Committee apparatus in 1988, which sharply reduced its operational functions.

- The elimination of regular Politburo meetings despite the vociferous and public complaints of its members. By 1989, the Politburo met very infrequently.

- The transformation of the Defense Council (the chief national security policymaking agency) from a body subordinate to the Politburo to a body subordinate to the Presidency.

- The transfer of the political control of the armed services and the KGB from the Central Committee to the Presidency.

- The enlargement of the Politburo at the recent Party Congress, which clearly transforms it into a strictly consultative body. Likewise, key policymakers were reassigned from the Politburo to the Presidential Council.

These moves have dramatically changed the correlation of institutional forces at the center.

In addition, these changes have created a situation in which lower level party cadres are forced to fend for themselves to an unprecedented degree. In the Russian Republic, to which Dr. Azrael confined most of his remarks, the cadres are trying to conduct business as usual in their own jurisdictions. Without the power of the Politburo and the Secretariat to back them up, however, they have often failed, especially in large cities, such as Moscow, Leningrad, and Sverdlovsk. In these cities, party bosses have been unable to prevent the election of independents to public office and, once they were elected, have been unable to keep these independents from threatening the party's remaining positions of strength. The independents have attacked the party's right to occupy prime office space and are attempting to terminate the leases of party committees. They have also challenged the right of the party to run and, in effect, own the select printing plants and newspapers of the major cities. They have challenged the right of the party to allocate scarce housing in the major cities, an important source of power. Finally, the independents have attacked the party's right to vet key appointments to administrative offices. At the present time, the struggle is unresolved, but Azrael believes that the independents will prevail if other things remain equal.

Outside the major urban centers, party officials have been more successful in maintaning their power. In many cases, they have prevented real independents from running for public office by the use of harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive techniques, well-chronicled in the Soviet press. When independents have run for office, they have either failed to win election or been unable to act independently because of the entrenched power of the incumbent party secretaries. Though the situation at present is very different from that of the cities, Azrael does not believe that it can continue much longer. The silent majority of rural Russia may not be liberal democrats, but they will not follow the lead of the communist cadres if these officials can no longer bring down the wrath of the center on the disobedient or extract additional resources from the center for local consumption. The party cadres' lack of power is becoming clearer daily. In Azrael's opinion, the most likely scenario is currently being played out in some mining districts where the local party apparatus has had to shut down operations because of the protests of disconcerted miners they can no longer satisfy or coerce because of their lack of meaningful access to the center through party channels.

In Azrael's opinion, the trend of the de-communization of the policy process will be tough to reverse. It is necessary, however, to look at an effort to reverse the trend: the formation of the Communist Party of the Russian Republic. Russia was the only republic which did not have its own communist party, being governed instead by the CPSU, and the creation of the Russian Communist Party was against Gorbachev's wishes. The Russian party is very right-wing and suffused with a nostalgia for

old-time partocratic rule. Azrael believes, however, that the party's real danger is its potential to act as vehicle for military intervention against Gorbachev. The party's membership includes many very prominent, discontented, members of the military's high command who do not necessarily desire a return to the political *status quo ante*. The Russian Communist Party has, however, legitimized outspoken military criticism. The party is led by backward-looking apparatchiks in an attention-getting effort to reverse the trend. Azrael's position is that the party will be stillborn since it as yet lacks an elaborate infrastructure and organizational weight. While not all observers of the Soviet scene agree, Azrael maintains that both the CPSU and the Russian Communist Party will continue to wither and be whittled away.

THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BODIES

Arnold Horelick
Senior Staff Member,
Political Science Department, The RAND Corporation
Professor of Political Science, UCLA

Mr. Horelick began by noting that there is still a debate about whether or not the transfer of power from the party to the state was a long-laid and carefully executed strategy planned by Gorbachev to undermine the party apparatus and to create federal organs with himself in command. We are now witnessing an ironic situation in which Gorbachev's success in breaking the back of the central party apparatus and putting state structures into place has been accompanied by the serious calling into question of the authority of the all-union political system and its capacity to govern.

Furthermore, political power, rather than being transferred from party to state federal institutions at the center, is being spontaneously diffused to republics, autonomous republics, autonomous regions, major cities, and other local jurisdictions. The new state structure, including the Soviet Union's first standing legislature and president, may be a transitional way-station leading to a new, as yet undetermined, configuration of forces. The key question is whether some stable equilibrium point can be reached in this process in which some equitable, mutually acceptable, and thus a legitimated, balance can be found among the proliferating and competing claimants to power that are emerging from the disintegration.

Two questions are of particular interest to both Soviet observers and the international community as a whole. First, what are the features of the new political institutions at the center, and what is the nature of the interactions between them and the newly emerging institutions springing up elsewhere throughout the country?

Second, what will be the effects of this constitutional and institutional chaos on the policymaking process where old, moribund institutions coexist with new, untested, yet already besieged federal institutions, and newer, unformed, assertive lower jurisdictions in republics and cities?

The Soviet Union still formally has ruling party institutions that, though they have been stripped of central decisionmaking authority, are still influential at the periphery. Theoretically, at least, Gorbachev as general secretary is still subject to party discipline.

At the same time, however, the Soviet Union has a new supreme organ of state power, the 2500-member Congress of Peoples' Deputies. This body was chosen in elections held throughout the nation that fell short of fully free direct elections (one-third of the deputies were chosen by "public organizations," including the CPSU). The Congress of Peoples'

Deputies selects the Supreme Soviet from among its membership. The Supreme Soviet has 542 members in two chambers. One chamber represents the population at large, while the seats in the other are allocated along national/territorial lines. The Supreme Soviet forms commissions and committees and exercises oversight of ministerial activities. Initially, Gorbachev was Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, presiding over meetings of its Presidium, a body with no constitutional power that prepares work for the Supreme Soviet. The Presidium acts as a sort of collective presidency without the other powers once held by the General Secretary.

At first, Gorbachev did not want to create a presidency for himself; he did not wish to concentrate power in one man's hands. But as "creeping chaos became galloping paralysis" earlier this year a new presidency was created. Gorbachev was elected to a five-year term as president by a close vote of the Congress of Peoples' Deputies. In the future, however, the President will be chosen in a direct popular election. The Soviet President has wide-ranging powers. He can rule by decree, with a two-thirds majority of the Supreme Soviet required to override his decisions. He can use dictatorial powers in times of national emergency. He can suspend republican parliaments and nullify republican laws. He can appoint the head of government, the head of the Council of Ministers, subject to confirmation by the Supreme Soviet. The prime minister then appoints the other ministers with the approval of the Supreme Soviet. Last year, some of the proposed ministers surprisingly were rejected by the Supreme Soviet.

All fifteen union-republics duplicate some parts of the federal structure. These republics are now, however, asserting the real right to exercise supreme decisionmaking authority on their own territories and to assume many of the functions previously carried out at the center. Thus far, thirteen republics have delcared their sovereignty. Lithuania has declared its independence, and four or five other republics have declared their intentions to seek full independence. The cracking of the party monopoly and the rise of the republics has facilitated the capture of local governments, especially cities, by radical reformers who want more rapid changes than those now planned by the center. The deterioration of the political and economic systems is proceeding so quickly that it is outstripping the ability of the existing organizations to cope and is leading to the belief that these institutions are not able or do not have the right to govern, and thus, are illegitimate. These feelings may similarly discredit the new liberal democratic forces since they will have neither the time nor the opportunity to stem the tide of deterioration.

As an illustration of these difficulties, Horelick presented two case studies. First, Horelick examined economic reform. The spreading paralysis combined with Gorbachev's desire to seek consensus above all, even at the expense of losing valuable time, has prevented the government from coming to grips with the problem. For several years, the leaders have known that economic reform must be comprehensive, not piecemeal. A year ago they made the decision to move toward the market,

but the market was defined in many ways, ranging from tightly managed market socialism to the free markets existing in the West. In May 1990, a government commission headed by a Deputy Prime Minsiter completed an economic reform program which was presented to the Supreme Soviet by Prime Minister Ryzhkov. By this time, however, the proposed program had been completely overtaken by events and the mindset of economists. In addition, it was politically doomed since it emphasized a sharp rise in prices, including the price of bread, and dealt primarily with the budget deficit rather than stuctural reform.

Before its presentation to the Supreme Soviet, the reform program had been discussed in the Presidential Council, a consultative body charged with advising the president. The program was received hostiley, particularly by Shatalin, a leading economist, and Pedrokov, Gorbachev's top economic advisor. According to information which Horelick received during interviews in Moscow at this time, most Presidential Council members knew that the program would be rejected and wanted Gorbachev to distance himself from Ryzhkov and put forward a new reform program. Following a wave of panic buying, however, Gorbachev supported the plan which the Supreme Soviet subsequently rejected and returned to the commission for rewriting.

At the same time, Boris Yeltsin was elected as president of the Russian Republic. He promptly declared republic sovereignty, formed a government, and established his own economic commission. This commission developed a radical reform program dubbed the "500-Day Plan." Despite having his premier working on a new plan, Gorbachev allied himself with Yeltsin to draft an all-union version of the "500-Day Plan." Since that time, however, Gorbachev has at different times supported both plans. Just when he appeared prepared to accept radical reform, Gorbachev proposed a popular referendum on private ownership and land. This delay will stall out the reform process, though the economy is already at "the edge of the abyss."

The second case, concerning the reliability of control of nuclear weapons by the national command authorities, remains a potential case. It is, however, illustrative of the effects that the institutional crisis and crisis in authority could have on the international community. Approximately 20,000 nuclear weapons are deployed and stored in the Soviet Union. Half of these are assigned to the Strategic Rocket Forces, the long-range air force, and the ballistic missile forces in the Soviet navy. These are commonly believed to be under tight central control under an extensive system of permissive action links (PALs), electronic locks only the central command can exercise. Not all of these weapons are in the RSFSR; some are deployed in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, and other republics.

Of greater concern are the thousands of other weapons, including artillery shells, nuclear mines, and gravity bombs, which are more widely dispersed throughout the periphery. These weapons have been deployed close to the borders in many places, including the Baltic, Transcaucausus, Turkestan, and Far Eastern military districts, where

they could be moved up in case of war. The question now pertains as to what would happen to control of these weapons in case of violent secession, radical deterioration of central control, acts of nationalist terrorism, local insurrection, or civil war. The Soviet leadership has reassured the international community that they have taken precautions to prevent the loss of control of these weapons. There has been some talk of moving all nuclear weapons back into the RSFSR and, since some republics have declared their desire to be nuclear-free zones, this problem could take care of itself. The popular hostility toward nuclear weapons can best be seen in the successful closing of the nuclear test site in the south because of popular protests. While Horelick stressed that he is not sounding an alarm, the fact that control over nuclear weapons is in question and is causing concern shows how far the chaos and dismantling has gone.

THE REPUBLICS

Alexander Alexiev
Senior Staff Member,
Political Science Department, The RAND Corporation

Mr. Alexiev began his presentation by noting that the situation does not look good for the CPSU, the executive, or the republics. In his opinion, what we are seeing now is the penultimate stage of the unraveling of the Soviet Union as a multinational unitary state, the collapse of the last great European empire. Alexiev holds that this dismantling cannot be prevented, but it can be managed so as to avoid widespread violence and turmoil. In recent years, powerful centrifugal forces have come to the surface expressing pent-up frustrations about ethnic grievances, economic exploitation, cultural oppression, and political disenfranchisement. Because of the climate of glasnost and political liberalization, by 1988 nationalist forces were able to make themselves known politically, first in the Baltic region and then thoughout the country, at varying rates of speed. In a short time, these groups began discussing a rapid change in the multinational structure of the union. This talk became reality when, in March 1990, Lithuania declared its independence from the Soviet Union.

It is important to recognize the quick evolution of these events in order to understand the future. Just a short time after the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence was issued, Russia dramatically emerged as the leading force in the dismantling of the union. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Russian people were also victims of the colonial empire run on behalf of a multinational ruling class. The Russians had not profited from the empire, creating a disenchantment now expressed by Boris Yeltsin and the democratic elements. With the rise of democratic expression and the electoral victories and emergence of Yeltsin, the Russian people have a power able and willing to challenge the center. The RSFSR's declaration of sovereignty was a catalyst to other republics to follow suit.

In short succession, most republics declared their sovereignty. For now, this declaration simply means a determination to challenge Moscow. This determination is supported in the republics by both the radicals and the establishment. Even in the Ukraine where two-thirds of the Supreme Soviet can be characterized as conservative, a radical declaration of sovereignty was approved. The establishment seems to have realized that they cannot fight what is happening under the changing circumstances. For example, Gorbachev's Deputy as Party Chairman, Ivashko, at the Communist Party Plenum in December railed against "separatists, extremists, and political hooligans influenced by foreign spy-centers." Yet these very elements now sit in the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet and have forced Ivashko and his colleagues to agree to the declaration of sovereignty.

These declarations of sovereignty, at a minimum, declare the republic's right to self-management of political and economic affairs. Even moderate republics are making such demands. Kazakhstan, for example, is not a radical republic. Kazakh leaders are not separatists and want to save some sort of union. As yet, they have not issued a declaration of sovereignty. Yet even Kazakhstan is on record with an economic agenda which gives local laws priority over union laws and considers all land and natural and financial resources within the republic to be republic property. It also calls for total independence in foreign economic activity and announces intentions to open Kazakh representations abroad. Furthermore, it states that Kazakhstan will no longer tolerate dictates from the center. Indeed, after the USSR Oil Ministry and Chevron had spent several years negotiating a development deal for a Kazakh oil field, culminating in the signing of a protocol of intent, republic officials refused to accept it. They forced a revision of the deal so that the benefits of the development would remain in Kazakhstan. On the more extreme side, the more radical republics have claimed rights in foreign policy, considered developing independent military forces, and discussed the establishment of foreign diplomatic representations. The Ukraine has even announced its desire to become an observer, and later a member, in the non-aligned movement.

In the future, federation laws will legalize this power transfer from the center to the republics. Alexiev cautioned, however, that the republics have problems which limit their possibilities for sovereignty and independence despite the transfer of power. First, many of the republics he noted are like miniature Soviet Unions, suffering from divisions between internal groups desiring sovereignty. Second, few of the republics are economically feasible. Most are incapable of competing in a free-market world system because their infrastructure is designed to complement the Soviet Union. Thus, in Alexiev's opinion, the republics are destined for an uneasy cohabitation with the Soviet Union, whatever shape it may take in the future.

A LOOK AT THE FUTURE

Dr. Azrael maintained that the only certainty for the future of the Soviet Union was continuing uncertainty. At the present time, the Soviet Union is in an almost unique situation where everything is up for grabs. Anything is possible, including starvation, genocidal fire-fights, civil war, and national authorities with possession of nuclear weapons. Republics may break off to form new countries which could destabilize regional situations, particularly for Turkey, Iran, and China. The magnitude of the territory involved and the numbers of people and nationalities involved leads to a frightening, highly unstable situation with unclear policy implications.

Mr. Horelick looked first at the international implications of the changes in the Soviet Union. He noted that we now have a less unstable international environment vis-a-vis the Soviet Union since all parts of the union are looking for inclusion in the world community rather than autarchy. Furthermore, he sees the rise of democratic forces as particularly optimistic. However, he noted that the future will be very different from what we've seen in the past. Soviet policy will have zigs and zags and probably some catastrophes in which the international community will need to be involved. Horelick further described a possible optimistic outcome. At the center of this scenario is a large homogeneous Slavic state with approximately 200 million people, ringed by a series of smaller, unabsorbed states, many with treaty ties to the center, though some states will be more integrated with other regions. The greatest question in this situation is what the Central Asian republics will choose to do.

Mr. Alexiev, on the other hand, was certain that disintegration will continue and that federation is not possible. In his opinion, a commonwealth or confederation might make cohabitation palatable. Some areas of the union are not economically feasible and will require substantial injections of assistance. The prospects of Russia will have an important effect on the entire union. If the democratic elements in Russia show some hope, other republics will follow, this mitigating the possiblities of large-scale bloodshed. Alexiev does believe, however, that some bloodshed is inevitable. Furthermore, Alexiev predicts that within one or two years, the Soviet Union as we know it will no longer exist because of a dramatic devolution of power from the center to the periphery. In addition, he believes that Gorbachev will also have lost his position. Though he will no longer be a key player, he may go into a benevolent retirement as a "Russian Dubcek," respected for past achievements, but having no authority.

Dr. Becker briefly examined the foreign trade outlook for Western business in the Soviet Union. He noted that the idea that perestroika will make the Soviet Union a good business opportunity for the West is dead. Economic catastrophe and inhospitability to Western businesses is highly possible. At the present time, only a few constituent parts of the Soviet Union show any opportunity at all for Western participation.