

Dawn in the East

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Deliberate in his ideals, an advocator of new ways of thinking, Mikail Gorbachev came to power in 1985. His perseverance in attempting to get rid of Brezhnev and post-Brezhnev ideology enabled him to make his mark not only as an idealist, but as a realist. An indication of rapid change came in February 1986 when seventeen out of twenty - four of one of the most senior policy makers, the Politburo, were replaced by younger, more progressive thinkers. In rejuvenating leaderships, the energetic Gorbachev, in his prudent yet pragmatic style, had rapidly reshuffled his personnel. Loyalty thus consolidated his power base.

Soviet economic growth has rapidly declined since the 1960's. The period 1966 to 1970 saw the economy growing at a rate of 5.1% p.a. where 1981 to 1985 saw a drop to 1.9% p.a. The reasons for this decline are many. The size of the labour force decreased. A decline in birth rate and an increase in death rate imposed pressures on an already weakened labour force. Adverse demographic and health rates also contributed to the decline.

Soviet employment figures dangerously lay on the red line of 83% (the minimum employment level). Alcoholism had a domino effect on productivity and health factors. The Soviet Union also lacked adequate investment in the field of technology. In an attempt to counteract this problematic nature of the economy, Gorbachev undertook several resolutions. Firstly, in order to tighten up discipline in factories, an anti-alcohol campaign was introduced. Alcohol could only be purchased between the hours of two and seven p.m. In order to bridge the technical gap, Gorbachev embarked upon the concept of Joint Ventures. On buying computers and equipment from the West, an atmosphere of co-operation was established between Soviet and Western firms. Indeed, a major watershed in the history of Moscow was the establishment of MacDonalds, a previously inconceivable notion. By 1989, one hundred and sixty-four such ventures had materialised. Western investment in the U.S.S.R. escalated to \$500 million. An economy crippled by the effects of a communist regime was undergoing attempts at reformation to a market economy. Gorbachev is trying to respect the demands of the consumer whereas before, it was not the consumer's preference that counted. Now, managers have greater freedom about production Gorbachev has made them self-financing. Now the growth of private co-ops (enterprises) is increasing with nearly 100,000 of them by April 1989.

However, approximately forty million Soviets are below the poverty line. With inflation at 8.5%, the price of a woman's winter coat doubled between 1980 and 1988. Rationing is now widespread with rations in Leningrad reaching World War Two levels. E.C. Summits were held in December 1990 to endorse £570 million in a Soviet aid plan. Chancellor Kohl proposed underwriting a programme of economic aid in order to prevent revolution. He also proposed an additional £600 million for technical assistance. However there is a flavour of bitter sweet irony surrounding the initial food aid - Germany sent all the food from the Berlin Crisis to the U.S.S.R. With Gorbachev under siege from the hardliners, the future looks bleak. However, the E.C. Commission and the British Government met the proposal with reservations. They wanted credits to be used rather than a system of loans. Major realised that the U.S.S.R. was already in grave debt. The French stance was embodied in Delors, who proposed that long term aid be channeled through IMF. Despite the urgency of the situation, there were fears of shoring up an inefficient system and the added fear that the Soviet civilians would be neglected of aid in preference to KGB officers.

However, there is the other side to the coin. What is the U.S.S.R. doing for itself? For the past couple of months, the Red Army has been transporting machinery east (an area not affected by disarmament talks) instead of immediately destroying it. The production of five new types of inter-continental missiles is an active project of the military and a twenty billion rouble rise was allowed for the defence budget for 1991. Thus, do we have a situation where the defence budget has priority over Soviet civilians? These shadows of pessimism cloud the initial enthusiasm with which Gorbachev's policy of glasnost (openness) was met. Democratisation in the political arena strives to create a multi-party state. Multi-candidate elections have taken place since March 1989 yet the political arena has had to contend with the ever escalating problem of nationalism. The events in Eastern Europe in 1989 sparked optimism in the hearts of the people of the world.

The Berlin Wall was erected on the seventeenth of August, 1961. With Nikita Khrushchev in power, there was great urgency in it's construction as concrete was transported from the U.S.S.R. to Berlin. Yet this urgency was reflected in the urgency with which it was dragged to the ground on the ninth of November, 1989. This time another Soviet leader rejected this very concrete and supported the East Berliners in tearing it down. Thus Gorbachev was recognised as the initiator of dramatic change in Eastern Europe with the help of his plan "Perestroika". The eyes of the world turned to the East and the Nobel Peace Prize was bestowed upon Mikail Gorbachev.

Now, with that air of euphoria settled, one can see an Eastern Europe where communist parties hold little ground in influential circles. The hardliners, primarily Yigor Ligachev, condemn the price the U.S.S.R. has had to pay as nationalism eats away at the already weary Warsaw Pact. The Soviet military circle, on envisaging a Soviet troop withdrawal from Eastern Europe, also got cold feet. However, Gorbachev recognised the defects of the Stalinist regime in Eastern Europe and thus implored East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria to start a Perestroika of their own.

However the acceleration with which events occurred after the fall of the wall were not anticipated, Gorbachev and his followers expected, in the manner of Perestroika, gradual reform, gradual democratisation under the Communist Party, gradual reform to a market economy. Challenged with a revolution in Czechoslovakia, the dictator Ceausescu put to death in Romania and Bulgaria's dismissal of Zhikov, Gorbachev and his advisors won the praise of a Western audience by utilising his flexibility, in particular by giving his blessing to Germany's entrance to NATO. He was met with harsh opposition from hardliners in the military area and the party itself. The gap between the ideal of Perestroika and actuality in Eastern Europe widened as the prospects for the floundering Soviet economy looked bleak.

Western approval did little to simulate enthusiasm on the domestic front. With ethnic violence flaring in the Moldavian Republic in late 1990 and about ten thousand anti-communists demonstrating in Red Square after the Revolution Day Parade, the red flag seemed to be turning a sickly colour. This very flag was burned in Leningrad while the army parade was forced off the streets of Kiev. Even with Boris Yeltsin and Gavril Popov breathing down his neck, Gorbachev seemed to be at a loss when it came to answering the concern of anti-communist protesters. He fell back on the proposed new Treaty of Union to pacify unrest. However it is doubtful that all fifteen republics will endorse this Treaty.

At the beginning of December 1990, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia appealed to the European Parliament to exert pressure on the U.S.S.R. as they feared that conflict was coming. Their appeal also extended to the Soviet Congress for independence and the immediate withdrawal of military force from the Baltic states. The end of 1990 saw Gorbachev still in conflict with the restive republics. As a power struggle was eroding at the body of the country, the heavy burden of constitutional crises loomed overhead. Once again Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian republic, was to the fore in opposing Gorbachev's even before his new powers had materialised. One of

Gorbachev's reformations was the establishment of the Congress of People's Deputies. As the new year began, this very Congress backed Gorbachev's treaty proposing a new looser federation and approved the procedure of reshaping the country's constitutional structure. However, in changing this structure, more powers will be bestowed on the President making the government answerable to him.

Edvard Shevardnadze met this proposal harshly by resigning from his post as foreign minister claiming that "dictatorship" was inevitable. Gorbachev insisted that these powers were necessary in order for stabilisation to occur within the year. Despite apparent success, Gorbachev still had to contend with the dominant republican old style communist forces in the body. Thus, Gorbachev possesses ever widening powers on paper but no real authority. With crisis after crisis, Gorbachev as a conjurer of initiatives seems more of a master of improvisation than a man with a set plan. It is indeed strange that his greatest collaborator since 1985, a name inextricably linked to Post Cold War co-operation should resign in a blatant rejection of 'dictatorship'. The impression of the 'new' U.S.S.R. as merely a masked communist state was apparently reinforced when Gorbachev nominated Gennady Yanayev, Polit Buro member and former trade union leader, as the new Vice-President. However, with his new powers, Gorbachev was vulnerable to disobedience and even bloodshed if economic and political paralysis did not take a turn for the better. The Baltics republics boycotted the session in an attempt to passively reject in their eyes a 'dictator's' presidency.

The second week into January 1991, the collapse of the Lithuanian government coupled with the resignation of Prime Minister Prunskiene portrayed the deepening crisis in the Baltic states. With the world bracing itself for war in the Gulf, the Baltic countries feared that hardliners in Moscow would take advantage of this distraction. They did not want another Prague of '68 situation where tanks were rolled in by Brezhnev to maintain socialism. As Paratroopers took up position in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, the situation seemed to mirror Hungary in 1956 when the Kremlin used British, French and American preoccupation in the Middle East as a smokescreen. By using the January the 15th deadline as the fall guy for a clampdown in the republics, fear was provoked at the idea of a reinstated military regime. With anti-perestroika hardliners gaining influence against independence movements both Yeltsin and Shevardnadze stressed the need for negotiations in order to counteract the potential violence of the deployment of the Kremlin's military power in the streets of the Baltic republics.

Hardliners in the military are restive with Gorbachev's stance of support for the UN against the Iraqi army. The Soviet military is concerned that their influence would be

eradicated in a region once a great bastion of Moscow's influence. In an attempt to ease the Soviet Dilemma after the deadline had expired, Gorbachev once again intensified diplomatic persuasions for withdrawal from Kuwait. His already weakened position was under siege clouding the fact of whether or not he exercised real control, or, if the military were pulling the strings in a desperate attempt to hold a paralysed and disheveled Leninist state together. This military infill in the power vacuum seems plausible on looking at the claims of an unspecified "dictatorship" and particularly the bloody intervention in Lithuania (despite Gorbachev's claims that the order was not given by him). Empathy for Saddam has persisted among hardliners and is in keeping with traditional mutual interest between the Kremlin and radical Arab states. These strains of tension tug at the power of Gorbachev in his firm line against Saddam at the UN.

In the wake of murderous clampdown in Vilnius in which at least fourteen civilians were killed Lithuanian, life retreated behind the barricades in a state of shock. The Baltic republic had been seen as fertile ground for the seeds of Perestroika but when the great divergence between the aims of Gorbachev and those of the Baltic republics were realised, confrontation was inevitable. It is no wonder if other Baltic states fear such brute force and fear that Gorbachev may have joined the ranks of military hardliners.

With the hardliners attempting to re-emerge as an influential force, the viable fear of military force as an instrument of public policy is emerging. Brute force in the Baltic states seems to run the risk of the West betraying all the victories of 1989, if the West continues that is to remain distracted because of the Gulf complications. With concessions to conservative forces multiplying in Moscow, is Gorbachev in control of the situation? Trying to contemplate an answer is terrifying. Will Gorbachev be a victim of tactics that have historically proven devastating to Soviet political careers - concessions followed by suppression and eventual humiliation? Despite Gorbachev's engineering of a new power structure outside the party, there is still the fear that only anarchy will rule. Indeed, we are indebted to Gorbachev's reforms, but, can we afford to worry about his personal fate when the real issue is the conservation of the transformations he has brought about?

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