

In Russia: The rebirth of a nation

NEW YORK — We have witnessed one of the most momentous, important and encouraging events in world history.

Led by the brilliant and brave team of President Mikhail Gorbachev and Russian Republic President Boris Yeltsin, the Soviet Union has been peacefully transformed from what was for more than half a century an evil empire into a confederation of sovereign republics. It marks the birth of a new democratically-oriented nation.



W.R.
Hearst Jr.

Editor's Report

With masterfully strong and commanding leadership, the indomitable Gorbachev, playing one of the greatest and most dramatic roles of his turbulent political career, won overwhelming approval by the Congress of People's Deputies — the highest legislative body in the Soviet Union — for his and Yeltsin's revolutionary plan to create a Union of Sovereign States. It will be composed of a least 10 of the 15 republics.

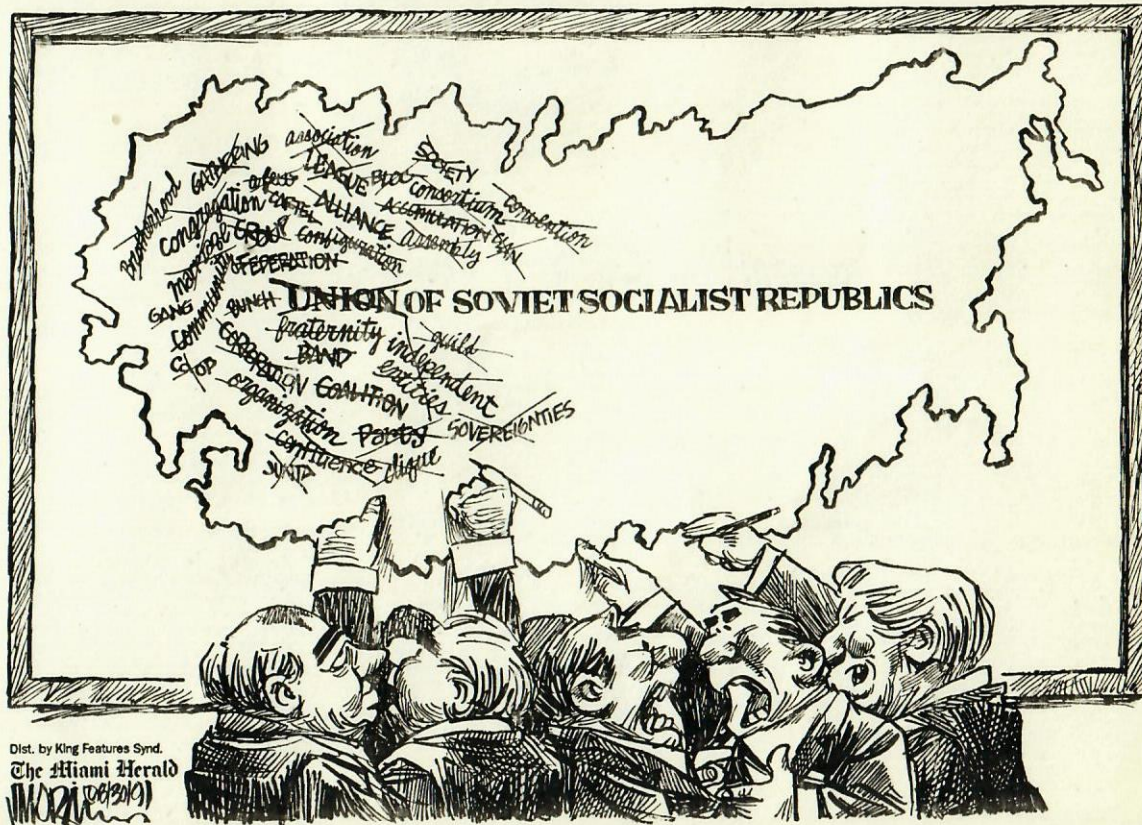
After cajoling and bullying the legislators during four hours of highly emotional debate Thursday, Gorbachev courageously took a fateful risk by delivering an ultimatum to the Congress, directed primarily at the communist hardliners. Threatening to suspend the session, he refused to accept proposals from the deputies and blocked use of their microphones. Demanding a vote, he shouted: "Either make a decision or not. That's all."

The resolution to end the 74 years of the Kremlin's monolithic communist domination of the Soviet Union was approved by 1,682 to 43. Some delegates believed that if Gorbachev knew he was going to lose, he would have suspended the voting and implemented the plan by presidential decree.

Gorbachev courageously took a fateful risk by delivering an ultimatum to the Congress

Gorbachev lost the first vote on the historic resolution Wednesday because he lacked a two-thirds majority. Suspending that session, he ordered a committee of delegates from the 15 republics to work through the night on a draft law for a confederated structure and establishment of a State Council in

Toward a Soviet Commonwealth



Dist. by King Features Synd.
The Miami Herald
10/21/91

Russian journalist sees a future of cooperation — and risks

By Vladimir Orlov

Mikhail Gorbachev had hoped he would return from his August vacation in the Crimea to sign a new Union Treaty redistributing power between his central government and the Soviet republics. That was his romantic dream. That was also in line with his assessment that the Union Treaty was his last chance to save the Soviet Empire — and, perhaps, his place as its "Last Emperor." Gorbachev returned from his Crimean vacation a little bit later than he had planned, due to

architect of reform was reforming before our eyes. Nevertheless, he remained cautious as ever. He was ready for resolute steps, but not for absolute frankness. On the whole, he acted as if the coup were not already behind us, as if it were still imminent. Even if caution was justified in the past, his lack of candor now prevents understanding between the president and the people. People want to ask him many questions. The sooner his answers come and the more frank they sound, the sooner he will feel at home under the conditions of the new freedom. In a nutshell, the center of political influence

Byelorussia is likely to follow a strategy similar to Kazakhstan's. Moldavia and Georgia will go all the way to independence. But after they feel the fresh air of freedom, they will run into a windstorm of social and national conflicts. Then they will look for allies in Russia, the Ukraine and other parts of the "former Soviet Empire." Armenia has just come to understand this. Armenia is hoping for Russian help in settling its longstanding territorial dispute with Azerbaijan (although I don't think Russia would play a military role in the Caucasus). An independent Azerbaijan, under the

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Mikhail Gorbachev

On Friday the triumphant Gorbachev, who had told the coup leaders to "go to hell" when they demanded that he return to Moscow from his Crimean captivity to support the military-KGB dictatorship, granted full independence to the Baltic states. He had promised he would do so the day after the new union plan was approved. It ended in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia more than 50 years of Soviet rule, which the United States never recognized.

During the tumultuous sessions in the Congress of People's Deputies, Boris Yeltsin, whose courage rallied Moscow's masses to block the coup's military forces from taking over the Russian Republic's parliament, sat mostly silent but strongly supportive of Gorbachev.

In fact, the one-time political maverick played a decisive role in Gorbachev's victory in the deputies congress. A few days before the voting, he said in a CNN-TV interview broadcast in Moscow and around the world that Gorbachev had returned "a different man" from the one who had unwisely appointed the men who led the coup. "Now," Yeltsin added, "I trust him. If he continues with the democratic movement, if he recognizes the independence of all other republics, his political life will be extended."

Pending presidential elections next year, Gorbachev will likely serve as president of the State Council. He plans to join with former Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in forming a new democratic party. Ironically, he will probably run against Yeltsin for the presidency of the Union of Sovereign States but without any authority over their autonomy. He may be the spokesman and chief negotiator for the new nation in foreign affairs.

Now it is more imperative than ever that America and the rest of the free world supply sufficient food to the needy people of the new nation this coming winter. Widespread starvation could precipitate a counter revolution and a military dictatorship that could lead to a new Cold War and danger of a nuclear conflict.

■ William Randolph Hearst Jr. is editor in chief of The Hearst Newspapers.

Focus

■ The Seattle Post-Intelligencer Focus section presents a perspective on the news and the newsmakers. It offers analysis and background, debate and opinion, and is written and edited by the P-I staff. For views of the P-I Editorial Board, see the next page.

structure and establishment of a State Council in Moscow. The council, led by the Soviet president and heads of the republics, and a central Inter-Republican Economic Committee will serve, in effect, as a federal authority to handle national defense, foreign affairs and interdependent economic relations. Also, 20 representatives from each republic will serve on a Council of the Republics.

He could see that Russia had started on the long road toward a truer independence and real leadership among the ex-socialist, ex-Soviet republics. He could see that during the three days of the Communist-military coup, the republics within the U.S.S.R. quickly concluded that they needed no "center," because that central government provided no assistance, no advice, but rather instability and danger.

He became clear to Gorbachev that the junta, with its vision of a strong, totally centralized state, was the state's worst nightmare. For months, maybe even years, the leaders of the republics will wake up at midnight with two chilling words echoing in their ears: "Soviet Union."

Analysis

The junta, and certainly Gorbachev, lost three Baltic republics with no chance of getting them back. Also slipping away were Moldavia, Georgia and the Ukraine, where the leaders were cunning enough not to stress their desire to separate from the other parts of the Empire for months. It was still possible to talk about a Union Treaty with Byelorussia, Armenia, Kazakhstan and the four Soviet socialist (and, frankly speaking, feudal) republics of Central Asia.

During those three days in August, Russian President Boris Yeltsin turned out to be the national Russian hero and the man who stopped the Communist coup, even though many still remember that he had been part of the Communist Party leadership for years. Did Yeltsin want to replace Gorbachev and become (unofficially, of course) the No. 1 president in the Council of Presidents of the former Soviet Union? Or did he hope to restructure the relationship between Russia, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Byelorussia and the others? This question can't be answered, because the triumph was a big surprise for Boris Nikolayevich and his team, and even they weren't prepared for the avalanche of change.

It is now clear that Gorbachev is playing his last game. No matter how it turns out, the end will be dramatic and sad for the ex-Emperor. People were somewhat chagrined when they saw and heard Mikhail Gorbachev after he was freed from his Crimean detention. He spoke as if he didn't belong in this country.

Today he cannot function as a genuinely free president. This is a new situation in the country. But today we can call the president to account, as a genuinely free people. This is also a new situation. At long last all the barriers to frank dialogue have been swept aside.

It took several days for Gorbachev to adjust to the new situation. He signed staggering decrees that he never would have signed a few days earlier. The

Vladimir Orlov writes about domestic politics for the weekly Moscow News. The publication, which was banned during last month's abortive coup, is one of the pioneers of "glasnost," the policy of greater openness in the Soviet Union.

feel at home under the conditions of the new freedom.

In a nutshell, the center of political influence is moving rapidly from the Kremlin to the Russian White House, and no one can stop it.

Gorbachev's power will not be dissolved as quickly as the power of the Communist Party. The party's power is now like a corpse: It smells and we must bury it as soon as possible. If not, the disease begins. If we wait even a few months, a new Communist Party will grow from its bones — with less potential and fewer ambitions, but with more sincerity.

Last week's fast pace of reforms resembles the Eastern European pattern of political development. But there is one crucial difference: the multinational character of the former U.S.S.R.

There are two ways to look at the death throes of the U.S.S.R. and its consequences. The first is a psychological and emotional view: "Oh my God, the state which has been built over generations is suffering from disintegration and we must find a way out to save its life, to expel its demons!"

The second way is to take a realistic view: to agree with the fact of the Soviet Union's last agony and make all the necessary preparations for its death.

My choice is the second way, and it seems that Gorbachev and Yeltsin have decided this is the only way to save the 300 million people stretching from Sakhalin in the east to Kaliningrad in the west. (The Baltic states are already completely independent and will take part only in economic conversations with the other republics.)

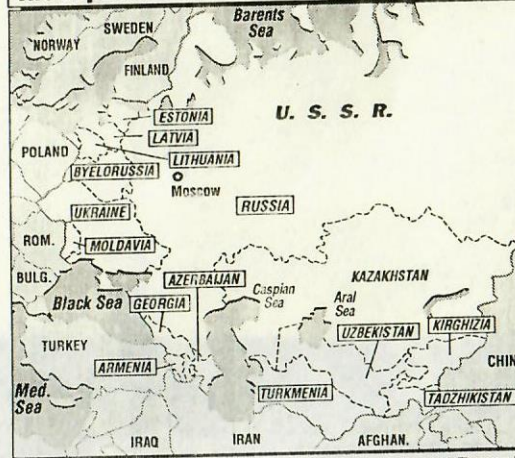
As Gorbachev, Yeltsin and others look beyond the Soviet Union, there are at least five difficult questions that must be resolved:

■ **What sort of state/union/confederation will exist instead of the U.S.S.R.?**

There are three republics that can survive without any kind of union: the Russian Federation, the Ukraine and Azerbaijan. The others, particularly the Asian Muslim republics, are not ready for a complete break. They need to be part of some federation or confederation.

The large and strategically important republic of Kazakhstan will try to play an independent role and at the same time strengthen its contacts with Russia. Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, is a very smart person with a brilliant future in the new order.

The republics that made up the Soviet Union



New York Times and P-I

role in the Caucasus).

■ Who will be the leader of the Commonwealth?

Consultative and legislative bodies would still be needed, as they exist in the European Community. Certainly there would be no Congress of People's Deputies, no Cabinet of Ministers. Gorbachev will probably continue as president until next summer. Yeltsin, I suppose, will have enough to keep him busy as the president of the Russian Federation.

■ What about the army?

According to the reform plans I have seen, in eight to 14 months there will be no more than 1 million military men in the army, and a national guard in each republic of the Commonwealth. This downsizing isn't going to be easy. The final decision will have to be taken during detailed conversations among the republics. Nuclear weapons would be under collective control or transferred to Russia. This plan has encountered no opposition in the Ukraine or Kazakhstan, the only republics outside Russia that have significant nuclear arsenals based on their territory.

■ Will a common economic space be created?

I think it will be. Soon every republic in the Commonwealth will have its own currency. "It's better than having a weak ruble for everybody," said Vasily Seliunin, a noted economist and political scientist. The republics might introduce their new currencies simultaneously. It is possible to develop trade links between republics through bilateral and multilateral agreements. But I'm concerned about the creation of a customs apparatus within the common economic space: It would be dangerous, and I'm not sure all the leaders understand it.

■ What will happen to the borders between republics?

This is one of the most difficult problems. In most of the republics, nationalism is very strong now. There is a real danger of sharp ethnic conflicts and territorial disputes. Even now, there are 75 border disputes within the former Soviet Union.

If we look at the experience of Latin America and Africa, the only way out is to say: "The borders we have now are the borders forever." But today very few republics are ready to agree with this principle.

Even if these five problems are resolved in the next few months, that would not eliminate the risk of a Communist-military renaissance in Russia. One of the most conservative Soviet legislators, Col. Viktor Alksnis, told me a few days ago: "I'm very glad that the so-called democrats have won. They took power, we went into opposition. It's easier to criticize than to rule."

"I know that Yeltsin can't solve Russia's economic problems in the coming winter," he said. "We give him half a year. And then . . . people will join us, not him."

Could we forget these words?