

Forum: Historical-North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Issue: Responding to the dissolution of the USSR (1991)

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IMPORTANT

The Historical North Atlantic Treaty Organization procedure is significantly different to the normal debate procedure. Firstly, it mimics Security Council procedure in that debate will progress clause by clause. Secondly, delegates are required to assume the roles of countries in the past and act based on their political climate at that time. And lastly, this committee will have a hybrid crisis-debate structure.

After the submission of resolutions following lobbying and merging, the committee will start debate on the first clause of the first resolution. Once this has elapsed the chairs will introduce a crisis directive regarding the current situation of the issue. The committee will then move into a press conference-style debate, in which the delegates of the countries involved in the crisis directive make a 3-minute speech regarding their stance on the issue. (The delegates involved will be informed of their involvement before the crisis and will have a chance to make their speech).

The involved delegates then form a panel and the rest of the committee are able to ask them POIs for 10 minutes. After the time for crisis has elapsed the goal of the committee is to make amendments to the remaining clauses of the resolution based on the events of the crisis. Note that any clauses that have already been debated and voted on cannot be amended. There will be 2-3 of these crises for each resolution, depending on time constraints.

This committee will be set in 1991, right after the signing of the Belavezha Accords and the formation of the Commonwealth of Individual States. The goal of the committee is to deal with the social, political and economic tensions that surrounded the region during this time. This may be done through dealing with reparations, a trade or military agreement and the roles of the various newly formed countries in the international community. Solutions should be creative, but reasonable and actionable for the situation.

Introduction:

The dissolution of the USSR occurred in 1991 during late December and marked the end of the Cold War. When it was a sovereign state, the Soviet Union was among the largest countries in the world and consisted of 15 socialist republics. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbchev became the new head of the communist party of the Soviet Union and proceeded to introduce policies that were aimed at democratising the USSR. These policies were called *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and were a series of extreme political and economic changes which he hoped would strengthen the communist system and the country's status.



^A map of the Soviet Union before its dissolution in 1991.

Ultimately, these policies were some of the causes of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Key events such as the Chernobyl nuclear disaster also led to the collapse of the USSR. In the end, the dissolution of the USSR was a result of these political and economic changes which caused nationalist movements and economic stagnation. This report will go into the details of the events leading up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and how delegates could go about responding to it.

Delegates will be debating this topic in committee in real time as if it is 1991 and the dissolution has recently occurred.

Definition of Key Terms:

- 1. Perestroika:** *Perestroika* means restructuring, and was the policy and reform introduced by president Gorbachev to revive the Soviet economy which was stagnant at that time.
- 2. Glasnost:** *Glasnost* means openness and transparency, which was the policy and reform introduced by Gorbachev to democratize the political system and give people more freedom and freedom of speech.
- 3. USSR:** USSR stands for the Union of Soviet Socialist republics. It was formed in 1922 and its dissolution occurred 69 years later in 1991. USSR was the official name of the Soviet Union and consisted of 15 countries which are what we know today as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.
- 4. Communism:** Communism is defined in the Oxford dictionary as a theory or system of social organization in which all property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs. It is also referred to as a political and economic ideology that opposes democracy
- 5. Democracy:** Democracy is defined in the Oxford dictionary as a system of government in which the people of a country can vote to elect their representatives. It is a system where people have freedom of speech and freedom to vote for their leaders and have a say in who they choose to represent them globally.
- 6. Hard-liner:** A hardliner is defined as a person who has very fixed beliefs and who is unlikely or unwilling to change them. They are usually a person from a political group who inflexibly follows a set of ideas or policies. The Soviet hardliners were the plotters who attempted the coup against Gorbachev.

Background Information

Mikhail Gorbachev becoming leader of the Soviet communist party

Gorbachev was elected as the leader after his predecessor passed away in 1985. Although the Soviet Union was one of the largest economies of that time, the country was experiencing declining living standards, an economic downturn and a shortage of goods. Due to these problems the USSR was facing, Gorbachev decided to push for democracy and introduce economic reforms. As a result, he introduced some new policies.

Glasnost

In 1986, Gorbachev introduced the policy of *glasnost*. The aim of this policy was to push for democracy and democratise the political system as well as urge for more transparency in the government. Furthermore, this policy was also aimed at giving people more freedom by encouraging debate on topics that were considered taboo at that time. This included some aspects of Soviet history and notable challenges the country was experiencing.

Perestroika

In 1987, Gorbachev introduced the policy of *perestroika*. Some of the key aims of this policy were to revive the then suffering economy of the Soviet Union and increase economic growth while increasing capital investment. Gorbachev's main goal of this policy was to economically bring the Soviet Union up to par with the West,

Effectiveness of these policies

Although Gorbachev introduced these policies, the economic and political situation was still deteriorating. This is because of the failure to implement these policies and actually put them into practice. His focus on increasing his authority was only effective on his ability to make decisions. He did not develop the power to implement the decisions he made. As a result, these policies were never properly implemented.

Chernobyl

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster happened on April 26th 1986 and is regarded as the biggest and worst nuclear disaster in history. On April 27th, 30,000 people were evacuated and to this day it remains one of the most radioactive places in the world. The significance of this incident was the attempted cover up of the disaster. Although the policy of *glasnost* was introduced, the Soviet Union had remained silent about the extent of the catastrophe. The

cover up was attempted by stating that a minor accident had occurred at Chernobyl. Later, the real and severe extent of damage of the disaster was revealed and raised multiple questions on the leadership of Gorbachev and the legitimacy of *glasnost*. This incident is said to be one of the catalysts which led to the collapse of the USSR.

Immediate impact of the dissolution

As a result of the dissolution, the Soviet Union was split into 15 different countries. They are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The economic systems and trade relations in Eastern Europe were put in a tailspin. In Russia, crime rates rose and there was increased corruption within the Russian government. As a result, the Russian mafia stepped in and filled the gaps in power. The mafia got hold of state owned assets and enterprises in Russia.

Current Situation

Impact of the *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies

The coup was the peak of the conflict between the old and new political, economic, and social orders. The new ones being the policies that Gorbachev introduced. The policies that Gorbachev introduced, although they were positive, had backfired. For example, *perestroika* was a reform that included laws that eased the restrictions of foreign trade and loosened control over many businesses. Instead, government spending and inflation skyrocketed. Food prices also increased as businesses in the agricultural sector were producing food for profit.

Gorbachev had also faced a lot of criticism and opposition. Although it was recognised that reforms were necessary, Soviet hardliners became wary of these changes as it weakened their power and moved away from communism. As a result of *glasnost*, the hardliners had taken advantage of press freedom and published attacks against Gorbachev. Eventually, these hardliners had attempted to stage the coup.

The 1991 Soviet coup

The 1991 Soviet coup was an attempt by communist hard-liners to seize control of the Soviet Union by holding Mikhail Gorbachev captive. Gorbachev was contacted by four

men. Valery Boldin (chief of staff), Oleg Balkanov (deputy chairman of the USSR defense council), Oleg Shenin (secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union), and Valentin Varennikov (chief of the ground forces of the Soviet Army). These men had come to demand that Gorbachev sign a document declaring a state of emergency and that his power would be transferred to the then vice-president Gennady Yanayev. However, Gorbachev had refused to sign this document and he and his family were placed under house arrest. The plotters of the coup were the members of the emergency committee and Soviet hardliners.

On August 19th, Radio Moscow said that Gorbachev could not attend to his duties as president due to his "ill-health". As a result, Yanayev had taken the powers of the presidency and formed an Emergency Committee. This committee issued a resolution that banned strikes, demonstrations, and imposed press censorship. The Cabinet Ministers had a meeting and since most of the ministers supported the coup, all newspapers except 9 were banned.

Impact of the coup

Because of the coup, the city's population had begun to dissuade military troops from following orders and protesters had gathered around the White House (Russian parliament building). Boris Yeltsin, who ended up being the first Russian president, expressed his disapproval of the coup and called for a general strike. He said that Russian officials were not to obey orders of the Emergency Committee.

A fight had broken out between military troops and demonstrators, which caused three protesters to be killed. There was an expected assault which was supposed to occur on the White House. When it did not materialize, it was evident that the coup's orders were not being followed. Eventually, the coup collapsed and the plotters were arrested. Gorbachev was reinstated as president. However, the coup had badly undermined Gorbachev's political standing and position. This caused the collapse of the Soviet Union to accelerate.

Why the coup failed

The coup failed because of multiple reasons. The plotters of the coup did not garner enough support among the wider political and military establishments, which led to the coup collapsing in 3 days. Furthermore, army and KGB officers declined to carry out orders to storm the White House and the plotters did not have a contingency plan in case Gorbachev did not cooperate. Boris Yeltsin was also able to gain support from the Moscow people and the Emergency Committee had not

realised that democratization caused public opinion to be more important. The coup had only managed to further destabilize the Soviet system.

Signing of the Belavezha accords

The signing of the Belavezha accords (the treaty also known as the Minsk agreement) concluded on the 8th of December 1991 and marked the end of the Soviet Union. Although a referendum was held in March 1991 and saw 76.4% of voters vote in favor of the maintenance of the USSR, the leaders of the Russian Federation and the Republics of Belarus and Ukraine met in secret and signed the treaty. The treaty stated that, "the USSR has ceased to exist as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality". Russia, Ukraine and Belarus proceeded to form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and was made for economic, political, social, and military cooperation. They also pledged for cooperation on the Chernobyl disaster. The treaty also declared Russia as the heir state of the Soviet Union, making them responsible for the USSR's debts and nuclear weapons. On the 21st of December 1991, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan joined the Accords and joined the CIS. Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia did not join the CIS.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) consisted of 15 republics, governed by the Communist Party. Individuality was discouraged in the republics and Russification was a common practice undertaken throughout the USSR. Its state run economy relied heavily on natural resources and industrialised later than a lot of other countries, in contrast to a large part of the international community which was focused on developing and upholding democracy. This strategy, which was propagated intensely by Stalin in the 1920s, led to a devastating famine in the 1930s and contributed to the social unrest in the region.

Internal backlash and instability

Due to the harsh living conditions caused by the economic hardships of the USSR, there was significant political unrest amongst the citizens of the country. In addition to multiple famines throughout the course of the USSR's history, labour

camps known as *gulags* were a common punishment for disobedience. Furthermore, due to the one-party nature of the government, minorities were heavily prosecuted, either forced to acclimate into a common Russian identity or be punished. The totalitarian nature of the USSR led to backlash not only within their borders, but also out of it.

As the century progressed, the USSR saw an eventual decline in economic and political strength following a series of failed reforms and new leaders. Failed revolutions within the different regions of the USSR, such as Hungary and Poland, persisted. Demonstrations were similarly held in Moscow itself in response to the suppression of these revolutions.

The Baltic States

The Baltic states were among the first countries to declare independence from the USSR. After continued political weakness and no economic improvements, in 1990 and 1991, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia declared their independence forcefully. While they faced pushback from the USSR, they were supported by the international community. They maintained that the USSR's control of the Baltic states was illegitimate.

Ukraine and Belarus

The Ukrainian SSR and the Byelorussian SSR were the 2 other larger republics of the USSR. Once their populations voted for independence, the dissolution of the USSR was imminent. Their presidents, along with the Russian president, signed the Belavezha Accords, which officially declared the USSR dissolved. However, while Belarus and Russia maintained strong ties, tensions between Ukraine and Russia continued in the form of military and border disputes.

Committee for State Security (KGB)

The Committee for State Security (KGB in Russian) was the USSR's secret police force that was responsible for other military organisations until the government, along with internal and foreign security. During the signing of the New Union Treaty, members of the KGB and other government officials attempted a coup to stop the signing, which ultimately failed.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was a military organisation formed in 1949. All countries that signed it committed to provide large amounts of military aid if other

NATO countries required it. Following the formation of NATO, The Cold War accelerated the tensions between the Eastern and Western Bloc in Europe, with the democratic USA also establishing itself as a foremost opposition towards the communist USSR. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, the USSR recognised NATO as a significant threat, as any attack on any NATO countries, many of which are European countries, would be met with the military of all other NATO countries, including the USA. This made Soviet expansion, which was rapid in the 1940s, difficult and limited the control the USSR had over Europe.

NATO, as a body committed to maintaining peace in the region, has assigned itself the responsibility of involving itself in conflicts across the region in support of one side or as a means of promoting peace talks. Following the dissolution of the USSR, NATO is expected to be a major party in establishing democracy and stability in the region.

General considerations for the 15 newly formed sovereign republics following the collapse of the USSR

There were many pertinent geopolitical and social issues that are expected to arise after the dissolution of the USSR within each of the 15 independent nations formed. The distribution of nuclear weapons was in particular a tense and extremely important topic, as the decision of which nation has possession of which nuclear weapons must be made. Furthermore, with the homogenous identity that many citizens rejected under Soviet rule, the question of the recognition of various ethnic minorities must be addressed, as well as their claim over various portions of land to prevent border disputes. Another issue is the establishment of democratic institutions in nations, as the centralised governments of Moscow has now been dissolved. This is a primary consideration of many nations, and the involvement of the international community is an important factor to take note of.

Possible Solutions

This section is slightly different due to the special procedure of the H-NATO committee. The goal of this committee is to reach a diplomatic resolution following the events detailed in this report. Delegates are to assume the stances of their countries *at the time of 1991*, as the Soviet Union announces its dissolution in real-time. The progression of this committee does not need to be historically accurate- the goal is not to do exactly what countries did before, but to be creative and develop alternative solutions. **However**, these solutions do need to be realistic and things that could have feasibly been done by the

countries involved. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, the topics that the chairs suggest for debate are:

- Solving emerging conflicts regarding ethnic minorities in the various newly formed republics
- Trade agreements between the newly formed republics and the international community
- The distribution of previously Soviet owned nuclear weapons
- The possibility of allowing some of the new republics to join NATO
- Creating and signing treaties that address territorial disputes within the new regions
- Addressing the possibility of reparations
- Discussing the establishment of new democratic governments in the newly independent countries
- Addressing the issue of global security post Cold War

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