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CONTRASTS AND AFTERMATHS OF THE
COLLAPSE OF THE MILITARY EFFORTS TO
RULE IN POLAND AND THE USSR

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This paper will explore the similarities and differences of the Polish experience of military rule following martial law with the similar experience in the former USSR in 1991, and the subsequent breakdown of the Soviet state and empire.

1. Introduction

The first part of the paper compares certain trends of Poland in the 1980s and the former USSR in the late '80s and early '90s. Similarities and differences between the two cases will be explored, emphasizing the conditions of the state, the military role in both societies, and the issues of political transition. The first part of the paper was first written in the spring of 1991 emphasizing the evolution of the now former USSR toward a potential crisis of military rule, compared to the actual crisis which took place in Poland in the 1980s. The original theme of that comparison was the potential for political lessons for Moscow from the experience of Poland. The last part of the paper written in the Winter of 1992 continued the comparison up through the military coup and collapse of the USSR and its aftermath. The paper will explore the crisis in the former USSR in two directions. First, we will look at the results of the further deepening of the breakup of the state and empire, and a tracing of the major trends recently transpiring following the coup and breakup. Secondly, we will take a cold and clear look at the limits of knowledge in the social sciences about the
current transition and dissolving of the Soviet state.

Briefly the themes of comparison of the collapse of the military efforts to rule in Poland and the USSR are as follows. Poland before the 1989 revolution had evolved from a state of martial law to a military regime that was increasingly governed from the top by a small military circle. The Jaruzelski military regime and the communist party itself had virtually dug its own grave by eroding its own power base by a series of fatal blunders. Thus the main Polish experience in the 1980s was an extremely strong rejection by the society of the military regime. The social rejection of the regime was the main contributor to the total breakdown of both the state and the communist party system. The main feature and the main cause of the collapse of communist power was that the society had totally divorced itself from the state in the 1980s and thereby stripped it of the power to obtain cooperation on most of its many attempted reforms.

By comparison through the fall and spring of 1990 and into early 1991, the Soviet political system seemed to be approaching the edge of a cliff. A liberalizing experiment of vast proportions initiated by Gorbachev in 1986, intended initially to produce a decentralization of political power and limited pluralism, had misfired into several unexpected directions. The fall and the rise again of the Soviet military in the mid to late 1980s, the plans of Gorbachev to reform the economy and reduce the importance of the military sector, and the rise of national-separatism in the republics are the three keys to the understanding of the development of the military rule crisis.
There were certain transitional conditions from 1986 to 1989 which led to the edge of this cliff, and to the sudden increasing strength of the far right and elements of the military in the USSR in 1990-91. Gorbachev had found himself trapped by several barriers by 1990. First there was a disastrous economic decline in the country as a result of ill-planned partial reforms of the economy. Second there was a growing crisis of the federal state system that featured growing ethnic and republic separatist demands and civil strife, unleashed by glasnost. The reforms designed by Gorbachev to liberalize the political order, and to a lesser extent the economy, produced the intense pressures for the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the communist party itself, largely based on national-separatist tensions and aspirations for independence on the part of more than half of the republics. This in turn led to a regrowth of the far right inside the CPSU and the military-KGB complex, which yearned for a restoration of the old order, and saw its path along the route of a military coup.

In Poland things were different. Social resistance, noncompliance and alienation resulting from martial law had stymied quite significant liberalizing reforms in the economy and in politics in the mid-1980s, which in fact preceded Gorbachev's reforms by a full year. This political stalemate and failure of policy initiatives of the Jaruzelski regime meant that the communist party slowly lost power to an increasingly desperate military regime, until the fatal year of protest and revolution that started in Poland in the summer of 1988 with labor strikes and spread later throughout Eastern Europe in the following year.

Poland emerged from the crisis of military rule with a far-reaching and fairly well
thought-out economic reform plan designed to move the country into a mixed market. Politically Poland moved first into a form of technocratic rule, and then into a form of social democracy and a fractioning of political interests and parties in its most recent phases. In the end it seems that Poland may weather its transition both in politics and economics, which contrasts with the quickly dissolving Soviet empire. The outlines of this fate, and the trends and developments which portend the unfolding reality in the former USSR are only dimly perceived by the Western media, and can be only partially grasped by the social sciences, a point that we will elaborate in much greater detail later in the paper. Having sketched the brief outlines of this comparison, we will now return to the details of the evolution of the two cases.

2. **Poland’s Descent into and Rebirth from Military Rule**

Following the declaration and imposition of martial law in Poland in December of 1981, and the crushing and imprisonment of Solidarity activists, the nation and Polish society retreated into traditional Polish diversions and social behaviors which are traditional compensatory reactions to Poland’s long history of occupations. Thus Polish society in the years immediately following martial law exhibited a rise in the birth rate, a return to religious practices and life, an increase in alcoholism, a return to poetry and literature, and of course, the formation of an underground resistance of the remnants of Solidarity, marked by an underground press and lively discussion of how to recast a successful future resistance.

Blue collar strata became disenchanted both with the regime and with Solidarity, and also refused participation in the officially sponsored unions, and self-
management schemes prevalent in the mid 1980s. These well-known trends have been well-documented by a number of studies (see review in Hamilton, 1991).

In essence, Polish society reacted with revulsion against the illegitimate use of power, and retreated from political involvement, and all regime reforms. In counterreaction to this loss of control, the main response by Jaruzelski was a remarkable consolidation and centralization of military power and figures over communist party political machinery by 1986. The process began with a purge of the party itself as early as late 1982 (Trybuna Ludu, 13 Feb. 1983) and was pursued in several ways, such as redrafting a military reform law that empowered the National Defense Committee with civilian and former party powers to direct the economy and reforms, and a reshuffling of personal military associates into high party posts (Kuklinski, 1987; Trybuna Ludu, 26 July 1982; Zolnierz Wolnosci, 27 Feb. 1986).

Another accelerator of this increase of military rule was the national spectacle and tragedy of the murder of the priest Popieluszko by security officials, and the subsequent trial of the security apparatus and removal of the highest security officials by Jaruzelski. This was important not only for social reasons (to respond to society’s outrage) but it also marked what became an intense personalized assault by Jaruzelski on the secret police structures (New York Times, 25 May 1988; Poland’s Leaders CIA, 1987: 8).

By 1986 a true military regime ruled Poland, standing atop a nominal communist party structure that had been dramatically weakened over several years. The state was virtually governed by a narrow handful of close Jaruzelski military associates.
Throughout the 1980s government economic advisers and central planners had introduced two waves of partial economic reforms, the last of which by 1987-89 reached almost frantic levels of reform in dismantling the central economic planning apparatus, and introducing deregulation of export enterprises, and various reforms of state enterprises (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Situation Report, 16 Dec. 1988:9). These reform efforts were regarded as "too little too late" to stimulate modernization, productivity, export viability, and increased domestic production and consumption of consumer goods. The basic industrial core of the economy was increasingly obsolete, and environmentally damaging to an extreme degree. Also, throughout the mid to late 1980s, the regime sponsored a massive campaign for national reconciliation, liberalization and dialogue for national direction. This campaign included new self management laws, and a decensorship of the press which predated glasnost in the USSR. All of this too was essentially ignored by the society, the main result of which was an even deeper increasing desperation and isolation of the regime to influence the national direction of politics, economics and social trends.

Poland was also locked into a major "socio-political divorce" of the society and the regime, that spelled or created a major societal retreat into alternative modes of living and diversion (Hamilton, 1991). In the meantime Solidarity had redeveloped a far-flung empire which discussed fully various strategies of socio-economic-political reform. The full extent of Solidarity underground activities is still not yet fully brought to light.

In 1987, the military regime under Jaruzelski's strong personal control had failed
on a number of counts. It had failed to gain support or cooperation of the population in labor initiatives, political participation reforms, public elections etc. Second, it had failed to overcome societal skepticism and alienation. Third it had failed to squash the underground networks of Solidarity, and had been forced in fact to release Solidarity activists in 1984 as part of its doomed program of national reconciliation (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Report, 10 April, and 3 Aug. 1984). It had also failed to reform and revitalize the economy (Trybuna Ludu, 25 May 1987). All of this occurred despite major efforts, and an increasingly centralized Jaruzelski control over the political structures of the party, and constant appeals for national unity and survival.

By 1988 the last blows against the system were struck rather hard and fast. In the first place, by that year the Polish communist party's system of power in reality had already virtually eroded away. Second, by the spring and summer of that year, labor strikes were spreading and seemed unstoppable as shows of force by the leadership failed to stem the crowds (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Report, 26 Aug. 1988: 8). Initial proposals to rescue the regime from strikes by resuming negotiations between Solidarity and the government in August were at first probably a delay, divide and confusion strategy which this time would no longer work (Trybuna Ludu, 16 Sept. 1988). The key development besides the resignation of the economist Messner's government in October (Trybuna Ludu, 20 Sept. 1988) was that Jaruzelski himself had joined against the remaining communist party hard-liners and with "nationalists" in the party in a December central committee meeting. The upshot of this was that by January of 1989, the communist party state system was edging
toward a showdown with Solidarity in the negotiations. It now found itself isolated by Jaruzelski who had effectively "switched sides" to favor a national dialogue and reform that would accommodate political liberalization, if not a national rebirth of Poland. The political grave was effectively dug for the communists following the summer 1989 elections, when a handful of hard-line communists led by Rakowski attempted to stall the formation of a non-communist government coalition only to be outmaneuvered by pressure from both Jaruzelski and Gorbachev to accept the non-communist government. The Post-Communist Era had mostly clearly begun with these events, as similar events unfolded in turn in the Fall of 1989 in the rest of Eastern Europe.

The quickly unfolding economic reform of Poland, initiated by Deputy Prime Minister Leszek Balcerowicz in the Fall of 1989, effectively began the demolition of the centralized economy, and its evolutionary replacement by a mixed, and increasingly privatized economy. By 1991, Poland was well into the middle phases of its transition not only to a market, but also to a functioning although fractionated social democracy. The result of military rule was first social resistance, and then rebirth of a noncommunist Poland.

3. **The USSR's Descent into the August 1991 Attempted Military Coup**

In the Soviet Union, the events were in somewhat of a reverse order. As a result of political liberalization and economic tinkering beginning in early 1986, the end of the 1980s saw the USSR as basically a federalist state in disintegration. The disintegration was fueled mainly by nationalist revolts and ethnic conflicts based
mainly in the republics, first in the Baltics, and then spreading to Georgia, Moldavia, and ultimately the Ukraine and Muslim republics. It was not resistance to reforms, but the unforeseen pace of uncontrollable expressions of liberalization and separatism that spun the system apart. By 1990 the integrity of the state itself was greatly weakened, and the threat this posed to the security apparatus and military had pushed the system to the brink of a crisis with the potential of a military-style coup. There were certain transition conditions which led from the reforms to the attempted military coup of August 1991.

For one, the Soviet military system, especially the staff had been increasingly threatened over the last three years of the 1980s in a variety of ways. By the late fall of 1990, Gorbachev had looked at the re-emergence of hard-liners in the party and security-military apparatus as an uneasy ally against separatist forces threatening to tear the federation asunder. Back in 1986, the Soviet military seemed to be a virtually unshakable military-industrial complex. It was headed by a privileged and politically powerful general staff. It also held profound influence in foreign affairs and national security policy, as well as domestic economic planning and investment. It had huge claims on the national budget, perhaps as much as 25% of the GNP when counting off-budget expenses. By early 1986, the system was only a little less militarist and neo-Stalinist than it had been under Brezhnev.

After 1987, the Soviet military complex had suffered a multi-faceted challenge to its power in the political system, and its role in party rule. This challenge was under the influence, or the cover and penetration of a partial economic reform,
promoted by Gorbachev. He had initiated a "double whammy" assault on the military. One side of the assault involved reduction of the military budgets, economic conversion plans and directives to divert resources away from the military to social needs (Herspring, 1986, and 1987). A second side of the assault involved new foreign policy goals stressing reduction of tensions, reduction of arms, the INF, conventional forces reduction and START treaties (Pravda, 29 June 1988). This also included the later and bigger challenges of the reunification of Germany, and the dissolving of the Warsaw Pact.

Initially Gorbachev essentially proposed that a "swap" would be in the military and state's best interests. General reductions in commitment to the military would be "swapped" for a "package deal" that promised modernization (resulting from a revamping of the technological efficiency and innovativeness of the reformed economy) and a lessened threat from abroad due to significant arms treaties with NATO and a general lessening of tensions. A more "lean and mean" military would, it seemed, be in the best interests of all. Also, Gorbachev pursued his assault on the military through replacements on the general staff (Pravda, 23 Feb. 1987: 2), emphasis and reliance on the ministry of foreign affairs and civilian foreign policy institutes for foreign policy advice (Pravda, 8 Nov. 1985: 1-2; Pravda, 23 Feb. 1986: 2; Parrott in Colton and Gustafson, 1990: 80).

This was a direct challenge to the status of role of both the military and the security establishment's influence on foreign affairs.

All of this was a more or less acceptable scheme of developments to the
military hierarchy until the onset of four simultaneous major developments that apparently challenged or threatened core interests of the military and right wing hard-line elements. One was the threat of the erosion of basic interests and political power derived from the events just described, which eroded the military’s prestige, budget and foreign policy clout. A second were deep-seated anxieties over the anti-communist revolutions in 1989-90 in Eastern Europe, especially the encroaching collapse of the Warsaw Pact, and the nervousness produced in the Soviet military by German unification after September 1990. These events outraced the general staff’s traditional paradigm of what was security for the Soviet Union (and the same views predominated inside the KGB as well). Gorbachev’s direct involvement in East European revolutions, his willingness to consider German reunification issues, his tolerance of the growing Baltic independence movements, and his dealings with the West on arms reductions increasingly looked like one-sided unilateral concessions (especially the INF, and force reductions negotiations). All this compounded by late 1990 to present a threat to right wing interests and to sentiments in the military establishment (Parrott, in Colton and Gustafson, 1990: 79-81). There was perhaps not a severe split between the military and Gorbachev on these issues until late 1990. In 1989 and 1990 ethnic unrest and Baltic separatism reached a chaotic, fever pitch. Concerns about the viability and stability of the Soviet Army were heightened as the Red Army had been organized on the basis of conscripts from the republics, and questions existed about the loyalty of republic based forces, perhaps even including security forces.
By the fall of 1990 and into 1991, it was clear to many observers that the status and political power of the far right had been pressing Gorbachev to make compromises and concessions to their interests.

But what are the similarities and differences of the two cases: of the ascendency of military rule in Poland and attempted power grab in the former USSR? First we contrast the status of the state in the two nations.

In Poland, an increasingly centralized clique governed a military regime that sat atop an insipid and ineffective communist party in the 1980s. Poland eventually emerged as a social democracy with a privatizing mixed market economy following the overthrow of the military regime. The military and party rule had been effectively abolished by the societal resistance (and the potentialities of overthrow allowed for by Gorbachev). In contrast, in the USSR the state was suffering a different political fate at the turn of the decade. A quasi martial law regime was beginning to emerge, astride conditions of severe civil strife and national separatism. Efforts to unify the disintegrating state with a state or union treaty in July 1991 clearly triggered the coup attempt, a last ditch effort to retain central government power and restore control by the more hard-line communists and KGB leadership. In reality, this attempt to retain the center in conditions of the disintegration of the federalist state proved to be as effective as keeping a candle lit in a thunderstorm.

The military role is also in contrast in the two systems. In Poland in the 1980s, the military role in power, society and economy was constantly in decline. Particularly after the 1989 revolution there is no Polish military industrial complex in power. There
are only remnants of the defense enterprises; commitments to the Warsaw Pact had been dismantled, and the military related enterprises were under attack by the policies of the government that seek to decapitalize, or to privatize the economy and shutdown or convert obsolete enterprises. All of this is despite the fact that Soviet troops remained on Polish soil until the time of the August coup. The withdrawal of those troops is still uncertain, although speeded up withdrawals seem in the offing.

In the USSR just before the coup attempt, the status of the military in the society and economy was on a roller coaster. Reconversion of the military industries, and rebudgeting had seemed to stall in late 1990 and 1991, as the regime was coping with the Baltic separation crises. The military seemed to be a reluctant ally in the maintenance of Soviet federalism, as security establishment worries and excesses seemed to be the most likely explanation for massacres by KGB forces in the Baltics in the winter of 1991. By August, there were only small elements of the military that cooperated with the coup attempt, despite the direction of Marshall Yazov.

The political transition conditions are different in the two countries as well. Today in Poland, the social democracy is built upon a fractionalized party and interest system. The entire system is perhaps slanting towards a populist authoritarian era under Walesa's presidency. The political passage after the military coup through the collapse of the USSR is a much darker tunnel, involving many more uncertainties.

4. CIS Trends and Trajectories since the Coup and the Breakup of the USSR

We now consider what has happened in the USSR and what can and can't be easily known since the August 1991 coup attempt, and since the breakup of the
USSR into the new Commonwealth of Independent States from January of 1992.

What has happened to the USSR since the collapse of military rule is of a dramatically different order than events in Poland. We are witnessing a vast panorama of trends and surprising developments. The crumbling of the USSR resembles a roller coaster ride through the wildest of political scenarios. Selected examples will simply illustrate this roller coaster ride in the social, political and economic sectors.

In the political arena, the failure of the coup triggered an avalanche of pent-up political forces and developments. Any viable challenge by the old conservative communist political apparatus inside the union, and in virtually all the republics had been shattered by the rise of republic de facto sovereignties, the collapse of the USSR by January of 1992, and its replacement by the CIS. Many if not most of the coup leaders, and the elite KGB apparat are up for trial in the Russian republic. By October 1991, the dismantling of the political monopoly of the CPSU and its political control structures was almost complete. Even the dramatic efforts by Gorbachev to find a solution for political and economic union treaties was complicated by lack of attendance to meetings on the treaties, or to announced signings (the November 25 attempted signing of the drastically decentralized union treaty was disbanded on camera for lack of attendance, and the draft was sent to the republic legislatures for review). By late fall, the former empire was devolving into its various parts and republics. More than half the republics by October were increasing their sovereign control over their economies, refusing to abide by delivery agreements of trade and
resource shipments among republics, and laying claim to control of border police and even military forces. By November it had become less likely that even a minimal economic union treaty could initially be signed to replace the former Soviet Union, and to stabilize interrepublic trade and economic issues. By January, the old USSR was formally buried.

At the end of 1991, a chaotic struggle for political power, leadership and institutional structure was focused mainly inside the various republics and in local politics. In the social arena, ethnic violence and conflict arose to new heights, especially in the southern regions of the country as Soviet forces were withdrawn in December and January. The severe interrepublic tensions, particularly between Armenia and Azerbaijan and between the Ukraine and Russia, and severe intrarepublic tensions in the Caucasus, accelerated throughout January and February. Social conditions generally worsened in urban life as the winter approached. There is a tumultuous and wide-ranging search or yearning in the diverse CIS population for collective identity and meaning. One manifestation of this is a "rush to nationalism" and a mythologizing of ethnic-national history even where historical sovereignties, literature, identities and even borders cannot be easily reconstructed as having historical certainty or stability (Chechezh-Ingush in Georgia, for example). Another manifestation of this search and yearning is the widely noted resurgence of ethnic hostilities, and a lesser noticed but deep search for spirituality (especially in the Western-Christian zones of the old empire).

The unravelling of the economy and economic reforms in 1992 played out into
four general zones: the attempted initiatives of the new CIS agreements; the attempted initiatives, decrees and actions of the republic governments; the rise of a barter economy in rural areas, and increasingly in urban areas; and finally the emerging regime of immediate foreign aid, technical assistance, food assistance, and penetration of foreign capital. There is also the slowdown and virtual collapse of the centrally planned industrial, distribution, and consumer production sectors, accompanied by rampant stockpiling and hoarding. By the turn of the year, economic conversion of the Soviet military production facilities in Russia and Ukraine may finally be reaching a true startup phase, but production output was reported to be rapidly falling in both major republics (New York Times, 6 Feb. 1992). In mid-winter 1991-2 a crisis of supply and inflation worsened (Russian economic chief Gaidar reported a tripling of prices in January alone, seeing signs of an inflation slowdown by late February). This crisis grew under the stimulus of many new economic policies, initiated by both the old center and the Russian republic governments which include private property laws, republic seizure of central government assets, and free floating prices. All official economic initiatives have been roundly criticized by economists for being "half-baked", "foot-dragging", and "ill-planned". They all seem to fall short of the integrated plan of privatization followed in Poland.

Following the breakup of the USSR in January of 1992, two sets of contradictory forces propelled events inside the new Commonwealth. One set of internal forces had the main effect of producing a crisis of government incapacity and a political "downward spiral", especially in Russia toward a potential takeover by a
nationalist/military regime. This trend has vague parallels to the situation of stalemate in Poland in 1980, which ended in a military regime takeover. These internal forces involve mainly the conditions inside and divisive contentions between Ukraine and the Russian republic. Between the two major republics, the divisive issues included: economic trade and the closing of cross-border shipments of goods and services, ownership of capital resources and currency issues (Ukraine had a new de facto currency by January, based on food stamps, partly as a reaction to perceived Russian threat to flood CIS with the hyperinflated ruble). Other divisive issues compounded the split, including: Ukrainian-Russian disputes over control of the old Soviet military, Ukrainian attempts to raise up national forces, including appropriating parts of the Black Sea fleet, the divisive issue of Russian versus Ukraine control of the Crimean peninsula, and the form and powers of the CIS, in which the Ukraine was markedly reluctant to cooperate. Throughout the winter months of 1991-2, these issues continued to absorb the attention of the government and leadership of the two republics, with the effect of distracting both republics’ leadership from coping with unresolved problems inside their respective republics.

Inside the republics, a number of similar factors coincided to weaken the legitimacy, stability and capacity of both governments (particularly the Russian). The inherently flawed, reactive and poorly thought-out “Yeltsin economic reform”, the worsening (mainly urban) economic supply and inflation conditions (also severe in the Baltics), and especially the possible rise of a Russian nationalist/military coalition allegedly focused partly around or built by former air force general and Russian vice-
president Rutskoi. All these trends interacted to stifle and erode the Russian
government's capacity to pursue effective economic and bureaucratic reforms (the
government of the Ukraine was more stable, in part due to a better food supply
situation, and less internal division in the government). This internally driven crisis of
government capability especially in Russia was worsening in January and February of
1992 at the same moment that the Yeltsin and Kravchik governments were absorbed
in their heightened interrepublic disputes mentioned above. The combined effect of
the internal problems, and the absorption of leadership increasingly in interrepublican
disputes was to decrease the political stability and capacity for reform of both
governments, but particularly the Russian.

This trajectory of events toward a "downward spiral" was not unnoticed by the
German or other (particularly northern) European governments. Through the winter
of 1991-2, following the pattern of the previous year, there was a great and almost
exponential increase in German and combined European humanitarian aid and
"technical assistance" to governments and to the emerging private sectors inside the
CIS European republics. The purpose of this vast regime of burgeoning European aid
and technical assistance (amounting perhaps to as much as $20 billion or more
through 1992 alone) was not solely for humanitarian, nor simply for neo-colonial
purposes of future economic exploitation of markets (as much as this sidebenefit
might play out for European corporatist motives). This regime of aid was perhaps
primarily and deliberately intended to stabilize the emerging governments of the
European CIS states in the short run. In the longrun, the de facto "European Marshall
Plan" was meant to instill and stabilize the capacities of democratic governance, program administration, and economic reform strategy into the new CIS states. The goal of the de facto "new European Marshall Plan" was to counteract the "downward spiral" especially of the European zone of CIS states, and particularly of Russia. This was a powerful countervailing influence against the political-economic decay and collapse of the new governments.

Of course, these primarily European political-economic aid strategies could not directly alleviate the divisive internal issues of dispute such as ethnic violence in the southern and Asiatic republics, "refugee" ethnic groups and conflicts in the other republics, disputes about the new form of the CIS government, nor the growing disputes between Ukraine and Russia.

Through the winter, the unease of the former Soviet military establishment increased in Moscow, and made itself heard in volatile meetings between Yeltsin and the Soviet army officer corps and command at a meeting of the newly labelled "Congress of Civic and Patriotic Forces" on February 8. There Yeltsin was persuaded or forced to side with military leadership positions for a unified (Russian-led) military command, and for countering Ukrainian attempts to solidify their control over armed forces. Several hot disputes between Ukraine and Russia figured to be worsened by these "nationalist trends" especially the dispute over the Black Sea fleet division, Ukraine's claim to ports and to homefront sovereignty over armed forces, and disputes over the form of a CIS unified military command. To the CIS (Russian-Shaposhnikov) high command, all these disputes had coalesced to heighten their anxieties of
abandonment and uncertainty. These disputes also fed the emotions behind the February street protests of nationalists, old-line communists and militarists in Moscow, orchestrated in part by Rutskoi.

In France on February 6, Yeltsin issued public warnings about the possibility of a threat from the Russian nationalist right. Throughout February Yeltsin attempted to counter Rutskoi's brand of strident nationalist criticisms by stripping him of formal powers in the government and of chairmanship of 5 major government committees, and placing him nominally in charge of agriculture. This left Rutskoi with a choice of tactics: maneuver with old military contacts, publicly criticize the CIS and Yeltsin government, and try to capitalize on and seem to lead the unwieldy and somewhat disparate mid-winter street protests of nationalist and pro-communist groups.

By February 15, yet another breakdown of CIS negotiations occurred, particularly over the unyielding resistance of Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan resistance to merge forces into a unified CIS military or accept a unified military command structure (particularly Russia's insistence on unified frontier troops, and over the Ukrainian-Russian Black Sea fleet division). Voices in the Soviet military hierarchy were publicly expressing the chance of an eventual drift again toward a military takeover inside Russia by the Spring, if military issues and needs were not addressed by the Yeltsin government, and/or if the economic situation did not radically improve (New York Times, 15 Feb 1992, London Times 15 Feb. 1992, McNeil-Lehrer Newshour, Feb. 14 1992). These themes ominously coincided with the criticisms by Rutskoi and the warnings of Yeltsin, suggesting that a nationalist/militarist coalition
of forces might be coalescing to challenge the Yeltsin government. Coinciding with these veiled threats was the looming April IMF decision of whether or not to grant further Western credits and aid to the Yeltsin government. It is an open question whether a "nascent Russian nationalist/militarist coalition", based on a balance of factions in the old Soviet-Russian military command, is collectively "watching and waiting" for the IMF aid decision as a benchmark or turning point for a challenge to the Yeltsin government.

In any case, by mid-winter 1992 and into the spring, the countervailing trends of "downward spiral" versus external stabilization, and the growing inter-republican disputes over the military and the form of CIS governance place the government of Russia in particular on a knife-edge balance between stability and development on the one-hand versus a potential drift towards a nationalist/military regime on the other.

5. The Limits of Knowledge About the Commonwealth

In the short term, what we can know about macro trends and their impact on civil-military relations in the CIS or even about the survival of any meaningful CIS government is fairly limited. One of the reasons for the limits of knowledge is that in the former USSR, the dissemination of information is uneven, and ineffective, and certainly is not on a coast-to-coast and national-to-local basis. It is possible to make some estimate of what is not known or what is difficult to track in the short term. (It is at least as important in the social sciences to assess what can and cannot be known, as it is to speculate about what is known on the basis of thin information).

In the political arena we do not know (and it will be difficult to track in the short
term) the capability of the administration of republic bureaucracies. It is very difficult to estimate the enactment and oversight capacity of republic legislatures. We do not know whether any CIS agreements or reforms will have any impact on the formerly national economy or republic administrations. It will take many months to evaluate how successful the republic efforts to maintain sovereignty or national development will be.

In the social arena, it is difficult to track the events and trends of the black market and barter economy, and whether it will block the efforts of republic authority, foreign aid, or CIS efforts to reinvigorate the patchwork national economy, avoid a worsening of urban suffering, or reduce the potential for widening civil strife. It is difficult to track whether ethnic-national conflicts and interrepublic disputes will escalate beyond disputes into sporadic violence, or even armed conflicts.

There are however, a few trends which can be tracked or traced, although most of what the social sciences can monitor or analyze is roughly reduced to the realm of semi-sophisticated, and mostly urban-focused journalism. In the political arena, we can analyze and look at "talking heads" of state and republics, and introduce some political estimation of who has clout and who does not. It may be possible for us to ascertain the remaining direction of defense control and status of the military, as it is one of the few remaining central structures to which Western analysts, particularly the defense and intelligence apparatus are devoted to examining. It is possible to track the basic issues of interrepublic relations in the debate about the emerging CIS. It is possible to track the multilateral aspects of foreign, economic and political
relations of the emerging sovereign republics among themselves and with outside powers and world regions.

In the social arena we are limited by the limits of the mass media to analyzing primarily the urban-centered issues of contemporary life and civil strife. Much less is known, and will be known or recorded in coming months about developments and conditions in rural areas and in the southern and Asian republics.

In the economic arena it is possible to acquire a mainly urban-centered picture of economic life and problems, and reform attempts. It is possible to ascertain the direction and impact of foreign capital and penetration, immediate aid from Western countries, and from private sources. It is difficult to track what forms and impact republic reforms are taking, and what impact they will be having over the coming several years. We do not know what impact republic sovereignty will have on the military-to-economic conversion. We do not know which republic economic reform efforts will succeed or fail in the short run. Will economic reforms in any republic follow a coherent strategy similar to that which took place in Poland? Or is it more likely to follow an incoherent pattern of multilevel, republic-based reform packages? We do not even know the meaning or reliability of current economic statistics. It may be possible to track changes in the basic structure of economic institutions down perhaps to the republic level. Even so, it will be very difficult to track the implementation of economic reforms or problems that arise in the administration of economic and public policy reforms. In the short term about all that can be done is track the official status of decrees and reforms. The much vaunted "global
information system" (primarily of the business world in any case) is likely to provide us with only slightly more quantity and reliable information on "business" issues than for other issues of society and politics.

6. Lessons from the Vortex of Military Rule

The aftermath of the descent into and out of military rule in both countries is very different. In the case of Poland at critical moments Jaruzelski sided with the forces of political democracy and reform. This helped propel Poland to a reconciliation of the society, towards legitimate elections and to a transfer of power from the communists to a noncommunist order. It set the stage for the emergence of a fairly coherent transitional government which successfully introduced a far-reaching economic, and a somewhat less successful bureaucratic, policy and democratization reform. Poland is a homogenous society compared to the multinational nature of the Soviet Disunion, which made the transition a much easier political road for Poland.

In contrast in the USSR, Gorbachev unleashed, through his reforms, political forces that he did not anticipate would lead to a disintegration of the Union. Glasnost produced a regime of truth that involved airing the documentation in the Baltic states of the complicity of Stalin with Hitler in the aggression against and takeover of the Baltics in 1939. This dramatically accelerated the Baltic independence movements, starting in Lithuania in 1988 and spreading as a sort of domino effect to other republics, accelerating eventually to an unstoppable level.

In contrast to Jaruzelski, Gorbachev basically refused to side with the forces of independence, since independence in this case rightly meant the full dissolution of
the state, rather than national rebirth as it meant to Jaruzelski. Gorbachev attempted in 1990 to either straddle the issues and factions, or to manage the conflicts through incremental evolutionary means. Eventually he failed to maintain the integrity of his state and his gradualist reforms. As a result of the outrage of the attempted coup, the centrifugal forces for disintegration into republic sovereignties were astronomically increased, and the Soviet Disunion resulted in the Fall of 1991.

The economic reform, democratization, the process of building sovereignty and capable legislatures, (much less effective bureaucracies), and the settling of interrepublic issues in the former USSR are all in a transitory and chaotic stage (especially in comparison to the transition in Poland). In fact, the devolution of sovereignty, and the rise of intra and interrepublic conflicts actually further distracts leaders from the need to take decisive action on economics and deepens the intransigence of the problems of economic reform and recovery. In classic political development theory (Almond) the crises of building a nation, state, identity, legitimacy, production and distribution are all converging at once in the former USSR, not so much on the embryonic and uncertain CIS government, but on the new republic governments. If anything, most of the republics (perhaps not the Baltics and Russia) have less institutional capacity and experience in managing such development and crises than even the old center government had. The new republics have certainly less overall capacity to manage such crises than exists in Poland’s transitional new social democracy. The political road to anywhere is extremely rocky in the new Soviet Disunion. (The road in Poland has gotten a bit rockier as well, with a national
poll showing public support for the reforms dropping quickly from around 50% in November to 25% through the winter of 1991-2, over discontent with unemployment and social budget cuts. See New York Times, 6 Feb. 1992).

One interesting comparison can be made with the Polish situation of 1980 and the CIS and Russian/Ukrainian situation of 1992. In 1980-81 the external Polish "pressure" was the possible intrusion of Soviet force, which seemed to goad the Polish communists and military into devising a "martial law" plan to restore state communism to power, or in Jaruzelski's mind, to "save the Polish nation, if not communism". In 1992, the Russian nationalist "enemy" is similarly painted out to be the intrusive, corrupting, and exploitive West, allied with the fomenters of "ethnic nationalism". Most of the CIS/Russian military hierarchy does not see these issues through quite the same colored lenses as do more nationalist factions, nor does it sanction a "return to communism". Such a "coalition", if indeed it is one, is founded on quite disparate goals and objectives beyond the immediate common ground of discontent with the Yeltsin government. There is a mutual rhetoric among the partners that expresses a yearning to "restore the nation" (read Russian imperial or security priorities). But there the similarity of goals ends. The comparison of the international power situation surrounding the 1980 and 1992 cases is also very different. For one thing, the internal power of Yeltsin's government is well beyond the capacity Solidarity had to manage its fate in 1980. More important, the external reality of the independent power of Ukraine, and the independent status of other CIS states strongly checkmates or limits of the power of any future nationalist/military
regime in Russia almost strictly to Russian borders. (A possible exception: the competing Russian and Ukrainian claims over the Crimean peninsula have the seeds of a potential conflict between the two giant republics).

A last point to note is that Soviet style communism in both nations did not have the legitimacy or capacity to survive a descent into military rule, and military rule itself was incapable of political survival. Whether or not the Russian republic can now manage to avoid this descent is also an open question. The outcomes of the disastrous and ill-fated flirtations with military rule in Poland and the former USSR will spin-out many effects for the world system for decades to come.
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