(CHAPTER 10)

GORBACHEV AND THE END OF SOVIET POWER, 1988–1991

In a word, the total dismantling of socialism as a world phenomenon has been proceeding. This is a reunification of mankind on the basis of common sense. And a common fellow from Stavropol [Gorbachev] set this process in motion.

—Chernyaev, in his diary, October 5, 1989

It took three decades to turn the Soviet Union into a superpower, the main challenger of the supremacy of the United States in the world. But it took only three years for the Communist giant to disintegrate. For people who had come of age during the Cold War, the event was sudden and breathtaking. Those inclined to see the Cold War in apocalyptic terms as the struggle between good and evil concluded that it was Ronald Reagan and his administration that overthrew the great Satan of Communism. But most scholars and analysts conclude that the Soviet superpower met its end at the hands of its own leadership under the influence of new ideas, policies, and circumstances.[1] Canadian political scientist Jacques Lévesque, who wrote *The Enigma of 1989*, concluded: "Rarely in history have we witnessed the policy of a great power continue, through so many difficulties and reversals, to be guided by such an idealistic view of the world, based on universal reconciliation, and in which the image of the enemy was constantly blurring, to the point of making it practically disappear."[2]

It is a perennial human illusion to attribute great events to great causes. During the past century, scholars have tended to attribute transitions from one historical period to another to grand, impersonal forces: shifts in the balance of power, contradictions among states, revolutions, the rise of new ideologies and social movements, and so on. In the current scholarly climate, it has also become fashionable to highlight the micro-levels of history—the role and beliefs of the "common people," incremental changes in social life, and power as a phenomenon of everyday life. Between these two trends, the view that history is shaped by "great men" seems utterly discredited. Today, many historians are loathe to

admit that the character of a personality in a position of power at a critical juncture can make a major difference in the course of history.

However, the figure of Mikhail Sergeievich Gorbachev proves this point. This energetic, handsome man with sparkling eyes and charming smile "did more than anyone else to end the Cold War between East and West," asserts British political scientist Archie Brown in his seminal study, *The Gorbachev Factor*.[3] It is worth quoting Anatoly Chernyaev, the most loyal and supportive of Gorbachev's assistants. Gorbachev, he claims, "was not 'a great man' as far as set of personal qualities was concerned." But he "fulfilled a great mission," and that is "more important for history."[4] A more critical Dmitry Volkogonov provides another, but also remarkable, estimate: Gorbachev "is a person of great mind, but with a weak character. Without this paradox of personality it is hard to understand him as a historical actor." Volkogonov admits that the "intellect, feelings, and will of Gorbachev" left a unique imprint on the Soviet collapse.[5]

The sources that aid in writing about Gorbachev are nearly all problematic. The same reservations apply to the retrospective observations of many of his critics. Some of them seem full of poison and viciousness, for example, the books of Valery Boldin (the person who was closest to Raisa Gorbachev) and of former prime minister Nikolai Ryzhkov. Still, such books—as well as the more measured writings of and interviews with KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov, Deputy General Secretary Yegor Ligachev, Vice President Gennady Yanaev, Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Kornienko, Gorbachev's personal bodyguard Vladimir Medvedev, and many others—do reward careful reading.[6]

The observations of Gorbachev's friends present another kind of bias. Anatoly Chernyaev, Georgy Shakhnazarov, Vadim Medvedev, Andrei Grachev, and other Gorbachev aides and colleagues admit that their former boss made many mistakes and had weak spots but continue to admire the man and the ideas behind his policies.[7] The only exception is Karen Brutents, who concluded in his sharply critical memoirs that "Gorbachev made the end of the Cold War possible" but also "became an involuntary, unconscious liquidator of the Soviet Union."[8]

A more revealing source on Gorbachev's personality are minutes taken by his assistants at the Politburo sessions and the records of Gorbachev's conversations with foreign leaders and public figures, in part published, in part available in the Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow. Finally, perhaps the most complicated source on Gorbachev's personality continues to be Gorbachev himself. It is not easy to glean evidence from Gorbachev's memoirs; they are so craftily opaque and carefully edited that only the best-trained reader can tease data from them. But, still, his memoirs and other recollections on his years in power do bear the strong imprint of his personality. Since he left the post of general secretary of the CPSU and presidency of the USSR, he has remained the same person, with unique behavior and a discourse that even today sets him apart from the rest of the Russian politicians.[9]

Both critics and admirers of Gorbachev inevitably come to a point at which they just scratch their heads and begin to talk about his personal "enigma." Dmitry Furman, a perceptive analyst of Russia and admirer of Gorbachev, concludes that "those six years of systematic dismantling" of the Cold War and Communism "were not an organic Soviet and Russian development. Rather, it was a contribution to history linked to Gorbachev's individuality."[10] Yegor Ligachev writes that politics "cannot explain the zigzags of the political course associated so closely with Gorbachev's name. There was an entire web of interrelated causes, including Gorbachev's personal qualities."[11]

To contend that Gorbachev was not a great statesman is not to denigrate or deny Gorbachev's historic contribution to the process of the peaceful end to the global bipolar confrontation. In fact, during the 1990s, Gorbachev had become so unpopular among his countrymen that a serious and unvarnished study of his personality and statesmanship can only contribute to dispelling the cloud of exaggerated rumors and mythical indictments that darken his reputation in Russia.

WOULD IT HAVE HAPPENED WITHOUT GORBACHEV?

The standard explanations for the end of the Cold War are important and necessary to describe, since they focus our attention on the crucial material, the political and intellectual settings in which Gorbachev's particular personality and leadership style wrought their powerful effect. According to the first standard explanation, advanced by scholars of international relations, by the mid-1980s the balance of power had shifted drastically in favor of the United States and the West. Relative decline offered the Soviets no alternative to a policy of imperial retrenchment and engagement with the powerful West. As soon as the Kremlin leaders perceived this power shift, they brought their behavior in line with reality.[12]

It is obvious, however, that reality, sobering as it was for the Kremlin, did not automatically dictate one set of perceptions (or "narrative" as a modern theorist would say). In the Kremlin, as everywhere else, the distance between reality and perceptions was great. And, most important, people in the Kremlin perceived more than one option by the mid-1980s.

The most dangerous option for the world and the Soviet Union itself was discussed by the aged Soviet leaders from 1981 to 1984 in response to their sense of threat from the military buildup and "aggressive" behavior of the Reagan administration. Yuri Andropov and Marshal Dmitry Ustinov contemplated emer-

gency measures to mobilize the Soviet society and state for the task of preserving "strategic parity" with the United States in the all-out arms race. Though it is not clear how far the Kremlin was prepared to go in this direction,[13] the basis of its response was mistrust, fear, and reliance on deterrence by force. Even Gorbachev, when he first came to power, was under the influence of Andropov's opinion that no compromise could be reached while Reagan remained in the White House.[14]

Another option was unilateral, calibrated reductions of Soviet armed forces, similar to what the Kremlin carried out in the first years after Stalin's death. It did not mean bailing out of the arms race with the United States, but rather gaining "a breathing spell" in order to alleviate the burden of the military-industrial expenditures on the Soviet economy. This option, in contrast to the first one, corresponded to the desire for gradual reform of the Soviet centralized system but implied gradualism and maintaining a firm control over society and economic life. Until 1989, a majority of analysts in Washington suspected and feared that this was exactly what Gorbachev intended to do.[15] Indeed, some elements of this option were present in Gorbachev's arguments before the Politburo from 1986 to 1987 and became public after 1988 in the doctrine of "strategic sufficiency."

A third option was an "amicable agreement" with the West on the basis of mutual reductions of arms. This option was proposed at the end of World War II, among others, by Maxim Litvinov and became prominent after Stalin. Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev called it "peaceful coexistence" and adhered to it despite all the failures and frustrations in Soviet-American relations. At the core of this option was a Realpolitik not dissimilar to the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of the early 1970s. It aimed to preserve essential elements of Soviet imperial influence in the world, including strategic "parity" with the United States, the retention of Soviet allies abroad, and ideological support for international Communist and "progressive" movements. According to Chernyaev, Gorbachev, in his first years in office, believed that peaceful coexistence was the option of "common sense" and that socialism and capitalism "could coexist without interfering with each other."[16]

The key and frequently unrecognized point here is that *Gorbachev never pursued any of these options systematically*. While some domestic critics and Western policy makers might have *thought* he was following "peaceful coexistence" or "breathing spell" strategies, in fact, as I show below, he was doing something quite different and arguably far less coherent and calculated. This is recognized, ex post facto, by Gorbachev's loyalists and particularly by his critics, who even now continue to speak about it as a missed opportunity to take "a Chinese road."[17]

Soviet domestic structural decay and crisis are a second standard explanation for the end of the Cold War. Deterioration of the Soviet economy, ecology, and quality of everyday life—so-called stagnation under Brezhnev—as well as deep and growing problems of a multinational state, contrasted dramatically with the spectacular upsurge of the United States and Western Europe in the 1980s. By 1985, the USSR was a superpower only in the military sense. Under Gorbachev's leadership, Soviet domestic economic and financial systems deteriorated further and much faster. Some on the U.S. side, among them Secretary of State George Shultz and top CIA watcher Robert Gates, realized it was very advantageous for U.S. interests that the deepening crisis push the Soviet leadership to move unilaterally to meet American demands and conditions for the end of the confrontation.[18]

Even before Gorbachev, under Andropov and Chernenko, the old leadership of the Soviet Union agreed that a policy of détente and taming the arms race was imperative for the country's economy. Gorbachev seemed to agree with this. He is on record saying to the Politburo that this race will be "beyond our capabilities, and we will lose it, because we are at the limit of our capabilities. Moreover, we can expect that Japan and the FRG could very soon join the American potential. . . . If the new round begins, the pressure on our economy will be unbelievable."[19]

The "domestic structural" explanation is persuasive, but a closer look reveals that it, too, is incomplete. The important point is that the grave economic, financial, and state crisis began only between 1986 and 1988, and it kept growing worse because of Gorbachev's choices and policies. Of these, two were the most consequential. First, instead of relying on the most pragmatic elements of the party and state officialdom in restructuring of the country, Gorbachev tried to build up new political forces and movements while gradually diminishing the power of the party and of centralized state structures. Second, instead of taking unpopular economic measures such as price reforms and reduction of state subsidies within the framework of the existing political system, he encouraged a very rapid dismantling of this system. These choices led to political chaos and economic catastrophe after 1988. Gorbachev's "remedies" were killing the sick patient.[20]

Even with the economy and finances in steep decline, the Soviet Union still could hide its weak condition behind a respectable Potemkin facade and negotiate with the United States from a position of relative parity. After 1988, this situation drastically changed: Gorbachev's decision to launch radical political and state reforms, coupled with the removal of the party apparatus from economic life, created a most severe crisis of the state and produced centrifugal political forces that spun out of control within Soviet society. All this was tantamount to revolution, was visible to the world, and engulfed the Soviet leadership.

These policies essentially destroyed the Soviet capacity to act like a superpower on the international arena. The Soviet Union was left in no position to bail out its allies or to present itself as an equal partner to the United States in negotiations.

There are other aspects that also contradict the notion that domestic structural crisis was a primary determining factor in Gorbachev's motivation to end the Cold War quickly, and on the best available terms. First, Soviet negotiating behavior began to change drastically beginning in early 1987, before the crisis became grave and visible. Second, the Soviet Union continued, with the complete approval of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, to pour billions of dollars into supplying military equipment to Cuba, Syria, Ethiopia, Vietnam, and other client countries during 1989, 1990, and even part of 1991, when Soviet coffers were already almost empty.[21] The American side tried to argue with Gorbachev to cut the pipelines to Castro, and radical Soviet reformers even proposed pursuing an alliance with Cuban anti-Castro émigrés in Miami. But Gorbachev never took these steps, although they would have earned the approval of many in the U.S. political establishment.

Many scholars and politicians convincingly contend that there was no way to reform the USSR without dismantling the old Soviet system. Still, it is possible to imagine a gradual transformation of the post-Stalinist Communist model into a post-Communist authoritarian model (as has been taking place in China). A leader supported by the pragmatic elements of the top party circles might have gradually privatized state property. The remarkable transformation of party secretaries and Communist ministers into bankers and rich oligarchs under Yeltsin prompted one observer to suggest that even under Gorbachev "the higher echelons of the party" would have been ready "to send to Hell at any moment the whole edifice of Marxism-Leninism, if such an act would only help them preserve their hierarchical positions and continue their careers."[22] Instead of co-opting the old bureaucratic elite, Gorbachev's chose a policy of leading Soviet society into "democracy" over the heads of the nomenklatura. This "populism" soon brought to the fore elements of the liberal and nationalist intelligentsia; however, almost immediately, the latter turned vehemently against the Soviet leader and began to support political separatism and incite social unrest. This, and the sabotage of the alienated party and state nomenklatura, left Gorbachev hanging without real political support. Denied political recognition and support at home, he increasingly looked for it abroad, from Western leaders.

A third standard explanation for the end of the Cold War is a shift of ideas within the Soviet leadership, both as a product of the longer-term erosion of Communist ideology and as a short-term by-product of glasnost of 1987–89. Some scholars focus on Gorbachev's "new thinking" as being a set of ideas that

replaced the old Soviet mentality, in particular the core ideological thesis about class struggle and the inevitability of the world's division into two camps. As Robert English demonstrates in his book, the roots of new ideas about the world can be traced within the Soviet political establishment and intelligentsia as far back as the 1940s and 1950s. Some scholars point out that Gorbachev absorbed "new thinking" from various international sources and from his liberal-minded advisers.[23]

Indeed, the role of ideas in the changing Soviet international behavior was great. But even at the time, there was something bizarre about this role. To put it simply, Gorbachev took ideas too seriously. They played an excessive role in his behavior. They took precedence not only over the immediate demands of the negotiating process but also over the protection of state interests. The real importance was not in the ideas themselves but in the historical personality that espoused them and made them his own.

Again, the key evidence against the ideological explanation is that there were other scenarios under which the rejection of Communist ideology would have proceeded differently. First, the ideological revision could have been carried out more slowly, under more control from above. Gorbachev and his assistants allowed the process of glasnost to go on until it became a whirlwind of revelations that discredited the entire foundation of Soviet foreign policy and the regime itself. The emerging attitude among the intelligentsia (later shared by Gorbachev himself) was that of radical ideological revisionism. Some Moscow-based revisionists began to hold the Soviet Union solely and exclusively responsible for the Cold War. They began to consider the policies of the West to be purely reactive and dictated by the need to fight Stalin's Communist aggression and totalitarian threat. A more conservative approach (as, for instance, is practiced in China today) would have held historic revisionism in check and diminished its radicalizing pressure on foreign policy.

The rejection of the old ideology could have led to a pragmatic and flexible attitude, to a version of Realpolitik based less on lofty principles and ideas than on a modest and clear formulation of state interests. When Margaret Thatcher said in 1984 that one could do business with Gorbachev, she was particularly impressed with his citation from Lord Palmerston, who advocated basing foreign policy on "permanent interests."[24] But the basis of Soviet foreign policy in 1988–91 has been far removed from Palmerston's dictum. It has been highly idealistic and imbued with a messianic spirit. In mid-1987, Gorbachev wrote a book called *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. It contained an image of international relations based on a just and democratic world order, in which the USSR would play a key role and the United Nations would reign supreme. Gor-

bachev replaced one messianic revolutionary-imperial idea that had guided Soviet foreign policy with another messianic idea—"that perestroika in the USSR was only a part of some kind of global perestroika, the birth of a new world order."[25]

New ideological motives need not have dictated a total rejection of the use of force and projection of power. For Gorbachev's predecessors and for most of his colleagues in the Politburo in 1985–88, the accumulation of strength, coercion, and the balance of power were even more important than Communist ideology. They cared about power and empire as much—if not more—as they did about the socialist perspective and proletarian internationalism. In his paradigm shift, Gorbachev rejected not only the Communist tenets of class struggle but also the entire post-Stalin logic of Soviet geopolitical interests, beginning with Central and Eastern Europe.

There is nothing intrinsic to the "new thinking" ideas themselves that necessitated Gorbachev's foreign policy and domestic choices. One could subscribe to the whole package of ideas and yet completely part ways with Gorbachev on the question of whether or when to start radical political reforms that inevitably led to the Soviet decline and disintegration. For most statesmen, ideas are tools, and to understand their impact on history one must examine how they are molded and manipulated by the human agents who espouse them. In Gorbachev's case, he clearly overreached when he attempted to mold Soviet and international realities according to his ideas of "new thinking."

There are few other examples in history of a leader in charge of a huge ailing state who willingly risked the geopolitical position of a great power and the very foundations of his political power for the sake of a moral global project. Even Lenin, Gorbachev's hero, compromised on "world revolution" in 1918 for the sake of staying in power. Gorbachev, however, did exactly the opposite. He made his priorities clear before his Politburo colleagues during the debate in March 1988 that resulted from the so-called Nina Andreeva letter.[26] He abandoned Andropov's course of conservative modernization and embarked on a more risky set of radical experiments in ideology and politics. This produced the growing polarization in his entourage. The majority in the Politburo, the Central Committee, and the state apparatus feared losing control over society and political life. They remembered the lessons of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization in 1956. Some began to grumble that Gorbachev wanted to destroy and give away everything that Stalin had built. The KGB chairman, Viktor Chebrikov, warned Gorbachev of a potentially disastrous meltdown of Soviet mentality under a barrage of revelations about the past. The spokesman of ideological conservatives, Yegor Ligachev, for the first time raised the specter of dissolution of the Communist bloc: "Arguably, we will muddle through, but there are socialist countries, the world Communist

movement. What to do about them? History has become politics and, when we deal with it, we should think not only about the past, but also about the future."[27]

Gorbachev ridiculed his skeptical colleagues as panic-mongers. And Shevardnadze declared that "primitivism and intellectual narrow-mindedness had prevented Khrushchev from implementing to the end the line of the 20th Party Congress." The so-called Communist and working-class movement was largely a fiction, so there was not much to lose. As to the socialist bloc, he continued, "take for instance Bulgaria, take the old leadership of Poland, and take the current situation in the German Democratic Republic, in Romania. Is it socialism?"[28]

By the spring of 1989, it became obvious even to Gorbachev's closest assistants that the radical reappraisal of Soviet ideology and history, initiated from above, had triggered a political deluge from below. Gorbachev was irreversibly losing control over foreign and domestic events. In May 1989, Anatoly Chernyaev wrote in his private journal with anguish: "Inside me depression and alarm are growing, the sense of crisis of the Gorbachev Idea. He is prepared to go far. But what does it mean? His favorite catchword is 'unpredictability.' But most likely we will come to a collapse of the state and something like chaos."[29]

FATEFUL PERSONALITY

The previous chapter compared Gorbachev and Nikita Khrushchev. But this comparison should go even deeper. Russian scholar Natalya Kozlova studied the mentality of the Russian peasantry in the USSR. She found how the quick and violent demise of the "peasant civilization" led to breath-taking social and physical mobility, as young peasants moved to big cities and began making careers for themselves. New recruits to urban civilization were burning with the desire to leap from the "idiocy of village life" to the highest social status they could reach. The first cohort of such people was shaped by the 1930s and World War II. It had immense vitality, was ruthless and pragmatic, and believed in material tangible benefits. The second cohort came in the 1950s at the time of peace, during the final stages of Soviet urbanization and mass education. This cohort had an optimistic worldview, but also a naive belief in the "ideas" of cultured discourse and ideology, in comparison to sophisticated, cynical, double-thinking urbanites.[30] The common roots and differences of Khrushchev and Gorbachev should be sought there.

Arguably the central and most consequential feature of Gorbachev's personality was his remarkable *self-confidence and optimism*. His ability to bounce back was extraordinary. As an individual, Gorbachev possessed a very healthy ego and stable values. The political and social environments he lived in (the region of

Kuban Cossacks in the south of Russia, Moscow State University, and the Politburo itself, where he was by far the youngest member) fostered his healthy self-esteem. In any case, he had an unflagging faith in his own capacities to succeed.

Flowing from this wellspring of essential optimism, admirers say, was Gorbachev's natural liberalism and democratic instincts. In Chernyaev's estimation, Gorbachev's "natural democratic instincts had not been completely spoiled by his long career in the party apparatus, although he acquired some 'pockmarks.'" He allegedly suffered a genuine shock from observing the norms and mores of the top political hierarchy when he moved to Moscow and joined the Politburo. His democratic impulse, concludes Chernyaev, remained instrumental to his actions, despite the many transgressions and dirty compromises he had been involved in.[31]

A second key attitude, in the opinion of Gorbachev's supporters, was his naïveté. One of his assistants, Georgy Shakhnazarov, recalled Gorbachev's "naive belief in his colleagues' common sense." In Dmitry Furman's opinion, Gorbachev believed that the truth he discovered was "self-evident and that people would grasp it. In the same way, Luther probably thought that his truths were so obvious, that he could easily convince the Pope of them." Gorbachev's perestroika was a "reformation," and he needed the qualities of a preacher as he sought to convert the pagans of Communism into a new, fairer, and better creed, to help them move from the captivity of authoritarian regimes, militarism, and pauperism.[32]

The life path of Gorbachev (as well as of his wife, Raisa) contributed to his staunch belief in the "reformation" of Communism. He graduated from Moscow State University and left for provincial Stavropol at the time of crisis for the Stalinist creed and the development of romantic hopes for a Communism with "a human face." He returned from the provinces to Moscow in the late 1970s, when these romantic hopes were dead among the educated elites and increasingly cynical party apparatchiks. Lenin remained Gorbachev's role model during his first years in power. In Lenin's personality (rather, in his idealized, censored image), Gorbachev saw the reflection of his own traits, in particular, feverish belief in the power of revolutionary ideas, "historic" optimism, and unflagging determination to muddle through social and political chaos. Even in early 1989, Gorbachev confessed to Chernyaev that he mentally "asks for Lenin's advice."[33]

Critics see Gorbachev's self-confidence and democratic instincts in a completely different light. Ligachev argues that Gorbachev "did not have in his character a room for understanding" how difficult the reforms would be.[34] Gorbachev's chief of chancellery, Valery Boldin observes a profound psychological gap between Gorbachev and the vast majority of the Soviet people. Gorbachev's security officer, Vladimir Medvedev, writes that "intellectual" Gorbachev, unlike patriarchal Brezhnev, felt uncomfortable with Soviet crowds and rather preferred talking to Westerners.[35]

Gorbachev's friends acknowledge how much Gorbachev's personality was at loggerheads with the mainstream of Russian and Soviet mentality. But they side with him, not with the people. Chernyaev, for instance, defines Soviet society as "a degraded population with give-me psychology." In the opinion of his friends, Gorbachev accomplished the Herculean feat of waking the society from the terrible stupor and slavery of Soviet totalitarianism. The rest, Chernyaev contends, was inevitable. Society turned out to be not worthy of the leader; the "new thinking" was ahead of its time. Given all this, Gorbachev could not really apply the brakes when Soviet society spun out of control, crushing everything in its way.[36]

Friends and foes alike highlight a key consequence of Gorbachev's essential optimism and naïveté: his "ad-hocism," his congenital lack of a long-range strategic plan, and his aversion to the practical details of governance. They all recognize that perestroika had no plan and that the "new thinking" was vague and could not be a practical guide for reforms. Gorbachev's favorite phrases, besides "unpredictability," were "let process develop" and "process of events is on the run" (*protsessi poshli*). In the judgment of Dmitry Furman, it was a continuation of his excessively positive view of people, particularly of Soviet people. "It always seemed to him that people could not help but be glad to organize their own life for themselves."[37] He had little doubt that it would be best to unleash social changes and then just wait while "processes" ran their course and provided the most sensible outcome.

Even his admirers admit that this feature of his psychology contributed to Gorbachev's chronic inability to chart a practical course for the state apparatus, to carry out a sustained and thought-through program of action, and to prevent psychological chaos and ideological breakdown in the society. Chernyaev's political memoirs reveal his frustration and nagging doubts about it. Gorbachev, he writes, failed to begin meaningful economic reforms when he still had the chance. He procrastinated endlessly on price reforms, letting the financial crisis grow to monstrous proportions. He let the Brezhnev-Andropov-Gromyko war in Afghanistan become "Gorbachev's war." And he let Boris Yeltsin take over the political initiative in 1990 and 1991 by breaking with the old discredited political order.[38] Still, his admirers stress that all this was not a crucial flaw. They argue that since nobody knew how to transform a totalitarian country, it could be done

only by trial and error. Also, they argue, had Gorbachev accurately foreseen his task in all its complexity and danger, he simply could never have undertaken it.[39] This assessment of Gorbachev's abilities is based on the assumption that nobody could have reformed the Soviet system and Soviet empire. They could only be destroyed completely.

Ten years after he lost power, Gorbachev himself, in a candid discussion, agreed that there was "a lot of naiveté and utopianism" in his actions. But he said that he had deliberately run the risk of political destabilization since 1988 because he wanted to "wake up" the Soviet people. Otherwise, he said, "we would have shared the fate of Khrushchev," that is, the party nomenklatura would have removed Gorbachev from power.[40]

The critics deny that there was ever a serious challenge to Gorbachev's authority from party officials in 1988.[41] William Odom concludes that Gorbachev was "an inveterate schemer, a loquacious obfuscator, unable to anticipate the likely consequences of policies." Ligachev writes that "being too late, reacting too slowly to events was one of the most characteristic traits of Gorbachev's policies."[42] In an interview, he added: "When some controversial things happened, Gorbachev often reacted with delay. My explanation is that he wanted others to analyze what affected the society, was painful to the society. He wanted a ripe fruit to fall onto his lap, the one he could pick up. But often it was necessary to row against the tide. There were many instances in history when the leader remained in the minority, but turned out to be right. Gorbachev, unfortunately, lacked this quality."[43] Kryuchkov talks and writes about Gorbachev's "impulsiveness that is linked to his personality, to the traits of his abnormal character."[44]

The critics are convinced that another type of leader, with a stronger and steadier hand, would have made a huge difference. This hypothetical "other" could have brought about détente with the West and gradually transformed the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. And, critics argue, this could have been done without destroying the foundations of state power and without creating overall political and social chaos.

The self-image of Gorbachev as a leader is extremely important for understanding the end of the Cold War. It is linked to his goals and ideals, but at the same time it reflects his personal, intimate psychological "core" that allowed him to stick to these ideals and goals. In late October 1988, Gorbachev was preparing to proclaim his new beliefs to the world at the General Assembly of the United Nations. He told his brain trust of Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Dobrynin, the new head of the International Department, Valentin Falin, and Chernyaev to prepare a speech that would respond to Churchill's famous speech at Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946. It "should be an anti-Fulton—Fulton in reverse," he said. "We should present our worldview and philosophy based on the results of the last three years. We should stress the demilitarization and humanization of our thinking."[45]

Gorbachev modeled himself after the idealized Lenin, as opposed to Stalin, both in the sense of direction he gave to the Soviet Union and in the world arena. As the creator of the Soviet state and empire, Stalin barely differentiated his personality from his creations. He took the slightest challenge to them as a personal assault, and, vice versa, regarded any slight to his prestige and authority (particularly from foreigners) as an intolerable insult to the prestige of the USSR as a great power. Gorbachev did not feel a personal association with the Soviet state and empire in the form and shape he inherited from his predecessors. Later, he claimed that he did everything "to preserve the Union." In reality, however, he sought to unleash a revolution according to the ideas that he adopted and developed.

Gorbachev inherited from Stalin and Stalin's successors the office of the general secretary. But he had other priorities besides power, prestige, stability, and state interests. His first priority, as mentioned earlier, was the construction of a global world order on the basis of cooperation and nonviolence. This places Gorbachev, at least in his image of himself, in the ranks of such figures of the twentieth century as Woodrow Wilson, Mahatma Gandhi, and other prophets of universal principles. Most tellingly, perhaps, those figures did not excel as state-builders or statesmen.

Both Stalin and Gorbachev had enormous influence on the fate of the Soviet Union, even though, of course, the contrast between the statesmanship of the two cannot be greater. Stalin was, in his crude and bloody way, an architect of the Soviet Union and its external empire; his policies turned the country into a superpower. His favorite modus operandi was carving up spheres of influence, making these spheres totally impervious to the influence of and penetration by other great powers and imposing complete control over them through a combination of threats of force and devious manipulation of politics, both inside the USSR and in the countries under Soviet domination. As for Gorbachev, he resolutely refused to treat even the countries where Soviet troops were stationed as a Soviet sphere of influence. In fact, he meticulously observed a hands-off attitude toward the internal affairs of Central European countries. When Henry Kissinger, while on a visit in Moscow in January 1989, cautiously broached to Gorbachev an idea for a joint USSR-U.S. management of transformation in Central Europe, Gorbachev, as a preacher of "new thinking," was dismissive and even contemptuous.[46]

Stalin indoctrinated the entire Soviet state and society with extreme xenophobia; he regarded Western cultural influences as a mortal threat to his regime. Stalin was intolerant of different opinions, once he made up his own mind on any issue. He saw the slightest deviation from his "line" as an intolerable sign of dissent, or as posing the danger of chaos, or as a symptom of loss of control. He displayed a strong attraction to worst-case scenarios and suspected all Western statesmen and politicians, even those who sought to appease the USSR, of the worst anti-Soviet schemes. In contrast, Gorbachev, did not have a trace of xenophobia or cultural hostility toward the West. He liked Westerners, respected Western statesmen of all creeds, and came to regard some of them as personal friends. He had a striking capacity for "best-case" thinking and began to act on assumptions of good faith, honesty, integrity, and fealty to agreements in international affairs.

In the opinion of his foreign admirers, Gorbachev was the first Soviet statesman who acted almost like a Western politician, a phenomenon that, given his background, they failed to comprehend at the time. To be sure, in his first years in power, he retained many standard Soviet political and ideological stereotypes of Western countries, particularly of the United States. But even as he treated Reagan and Kohl and their colleagues as adversaries, he was beginning to dismantle the iron curtain, first allowing free contact with foreigners for the select group of establishment intellectuals and officials, then opening the outside world for the rest of the society.

A typical example is the transformation of the idea of the "common European home." This idea, first used in 1985 and 1986 as a diplomatic tool to drive a wedge between the United States and other NATO countries, by 1989 was evoking public debates and becoming a synonym for a "return to Europe" and the rejection of Stalinist closed society. Gorbachev made this idea a cornerstone of his beliefs.[47] Sergei Tarasenko, a close assistant to Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, asserted that after mid-1988, "when we encountered domestic difficulties, we began to realize that we would be able to stay afloat for a while and even to preserve the status of great power only if we leaned on the United States. We felt that if we had stepped away from the U.S., we would have been pushed aside. We had to be as close as possible to the United States."[48]

As Gorbachev's admirers argue, this was not just a calculated policy. Dmitry Furman remarks that Gorbachev's Westernism was a dependency complex shared by other educated Russians. "For all Soviet people, including the higher echelons of the party," he writes, "the West has always been an object of longing. Trips to the West were the most important status symbol. There is nothing you can do about this; it is 'in the blood,' in the culture." Moreover, Gorbachev relished his huge personal success in the West, including in the United States. Gorbymania in the United States was the product of a natural mutual affinity between Gorbachev and Western public opinion.[49]

Chernyaev admires Gorbachev's ability to be on the same wavelength with Western leaders and people. He writes in his diary about Gorbachev's accomplishment in establishing a friendly relationship with West German chancellor Helmut Kohl. After all, he observed, the "new thinking" in foreign policy was not original or terribly new. What was new was that the leader of the Soviet system, himself conditioned by Soviet society, could so quickly break out of the Soviet mentality. When Chernyaev saw Gorbachev and Kohl conversing congenially, he "felt physically that we are entering a new world where class struggle, ideology, polarity and enmity are no longer determinate."[50]

Gorbachev's critics claim that Gorbachev's stunning personal success among West European and American audiences made his head swell. He began to put his friendly relations with foreign leaders ahead of state interests. Psychologically, they argue, Gorbachev turned to the West for recognition because his popularity at home began to sink precipitously as a result of the growing social and political chaos. As Valery Boldin sees it, "democratization began, but it suddenly took a wrong turn and not Gorbachev, but his arch-enemy Yeltsin became its leader. Then Gorbachev placed all his hopes on the West."[51] Also, the critics point out that Western advice played an ever-increasing and sinister role in diverting Gorbachev from the foreign and domestic policy course of 1985–87 toward a new course of radical political reforms.[52]

Soviet diplomats Anatoly Dobrynin and Georgy Kornienko are particularly blunt in stating that Gorbachev "frittered away the negotiating potential of the Soviet state" in exchange for ephemeral popularity and good relationships with Western statesmen. In Dobrynin's opinion, Western statesmen profited from Gorbachev's weaknesses. After 1988, Gorbachev was in a hurry to end the Cold War because he had a personal need to compensate for his declining prospects at home with breakthroughs in foreign policy. As a result, "Gorbachev's diplomacy often failed to win a better deal with the United States and its allies."[53] Kornienko believes that Gorbachev's excessive sensitivity to Western opinion and advice explained his hasty move to set up a new political system. Gorbachev the statesman was eager to replace the title of "chief of the Communist Party" with the internationally recognized title of "president of the Soviet Union."[54]

The records of Gorbachev's conversations with foreign leaders reveal beyond any doubt that after 1988, if not earlier, Westerners, from social democrats to anti-Communist conservatives, became perhaps the most crucial source of sup-

port for Gorbachev. In them he found the understanding and willingness to listen and, quite important, appreciation for the grandiose scope of his perestroika —the things he missed among his colleagues in the Politburo and even among his intellectual advisers.

This psychological dependence on the West is acknowledged by Gorbachev's admirers. Furman admits that "Gorbachev's attention was diverted to the West to the utmost degree. He clearly relaxed during his frequent trips, while in the country opposition and chaos grew." The same author rejects the notion that the West took advantage of Gorbachev and hastened the collapse of the USSR. But he deplores the fact that Gorbachev took so much of the Western advice uncritically. In his opinion, it would have been better for the country, and for the "correctly understood" interests of the West itself, "if Gorbachev had showed more indifference" toward the recommendations of American, German, and other European politicians.[55]

George Bush, Secretary of State James Baker, and the ambassador in Moscow, Jack Matlock, acknowledge that they had significant influence on Gorbachev but have denied that they had anything to do with his radical turn and the subsequent Soviet collapse. In his postmortem on the Soviet Union, Matlock wrote: "If it had been in the power of the United States and Western Europe to create a democratic union of the Soviet republics, they would have been delighted to do so."[56] It is obvious, however, that Gorbachev's passionate pro-Westernism contrasted with the reserved pragmatism of many of his counterparts. The American and Western policies toward the Soviet Union were based not on ideas, messianic projects, and personal affinity, but on geopolitical, economic, and military interests.

AVERSION TO THE USE OF FORCE

An additional feature of Gorbachev's personality that perplexed contemporaries and witnesses was his deep aversion to the use of force. To be sure, skepticism about military force was widely shared among "new thinkers."[57] It can also be regarded as a generational phenomenon that originated from the impact of World War II and was reinforced by the pacifist trends during the 1960s. Former Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko, for example, privately called Gorbachev and his advisers "the Martians," for their ignorance of the laws of power politics. "I wonder how puzzled must be the US and other NATO countries," he confessed to his son. "It is a mystery for them why Gorbachev and his friends in the Politburo cannot comprehend how to use force and pressure for defending their state interests."[58]

Gorbachev personified the reluctance to use force. Indeed, for him it was less

a lesson from experience than a fundamental part of his character. The principle of nonviolence was a sincere belief for Gorbachev—not merely the foundation of his domestic and foreign policies but one of his personal codes. His colleagues and assistants confirm that "the avoidance of bloodshed was a constant concern of Gorbachev" and that "for Gorbachev an unwillingness to shed blood was not only a criterion but the condition of his involvement in politics." Gorbachev, they observe, "by character was a man incapable not only of using dictatorial measures, but even of resorting to hard-line administrative means." The critics claim that Gorbachev "had no guts for blood," even when it was dictated by state interests.[59]

Gorbachev's renunciation of force was not an inevitable consequence of "new thinking" or liberal values. Liberals use force for liberal ends, and a substantial number of liberals and former dissidents would later come to believe that Gorbachev's absolutist rejection of force in the period from 1988 to 1991 was flawed and perhaps even immoral. Liberal philosopher Grigory Pomerants praised Gorbachev's decision to let go of Central Europe. But simultaneously, he said, Gorbachev "let go the forces of destruction"—forces of barbarism, ethnic genocide, and chaos—in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and other areas of the Soviet Union. "The first duty of the state was to contain chaos," Pomerants admonished. Another critic, liberal-nationalist politician Vladimir Lukin, noted: "Firmness was necessary in such a country as Russia, not to mention the Soviet Union."[60]

As the Cold War was ending in Europe, the first fissures appeared in the Soviet Union—not a mere coincidence. In both cases, Gorbachev's predilections and personality played a major and necessary role. On the ideological level, the Soviet leader never separated the two goals, ending the Cold War and achieving the successful transformation of the Soviet Union. One of the staples of this was the idea of nonviolence, a product of Gorbachev's personal aversion to using force. After the tragedy in Tbilisi in April 1989 (Russian troops, at the request of the Georgian Communist leadership, used spades and gas against the nationalist rally and killed twenty-one Georgian civilians), Gorbachev declared a ban on the use of force, even though nationalist forces began to break the country apart. He said to the Politburo: "We have accepted that even in foreign policy force is to no avail. So especially internally—we cannot resort and will not resort to force."[61] Remarkably, Gorbachev thus renounced the authority to maintain order, a cornerstone of state sovereignty and the duty of the state leader. With a few exceptions, Gorbachev adhered to this peculiar principle tenaciously until his last day in power.

Western politicians, particularly Bush and Baker, understood this feature of

Gorbachev's statesmanship and successfully used it. At Malta, for instance, Bush suggested to Gorbachev a gentleman's agreement on the Baltic republics, where popular movements were beginning to demand complete independence from the USSR. This was a violation of a long-standing taboo in U.S.-Soviet relations, interference in the internal affairs of another superpower. Bush, however, found the correct approach. "I would like to have a fullest understanding of your approach to the Baltics," he said. "There should be no setbacks here. Perhaps it would be better to discuss this issue in a confidential way, since I would very much like to perceive the core of your thinking on this extremely complicated issue." Since the issue of the Baltic republics was presented in the context of concern for Gorbachev's "new thinking," to prevent setbacks for the U.S.-Soviet partnership for the sake of a new global order, Gorbachev readily agreed. As a result, there was an understanding that the Americans would refrain from any attempts to help the Baltic independence movement, while in return Gorbachev refrained from using force in dealing with the Baltic problem.[62]

Gorbachev himself, years after he lost power, continues to be an adamant believer in the nonuse of force. He regrets the cases when force was used against nationalists inside the USSR. Referring to these and other crisis situations (Armenian pogroms by an Azeri mob in the Azeri industrial town of Sumgait in February 1988, interethnic clashes in Nagorny Karabakh, bloodshed in Tbilisi in April 1989, more bloodshed in Baku in January 1990, crackdowns in Vilnius and Riga in January 1991), Gorbachev said: "There were many attempts to baptize me with blood. But they failed."[63] Essentially, Gorbachev agrees with what Ligachev said about him: "As far as the use of violence required to save people was concerned, Gorbachev resorted to it only when the last citizen in the country became convinced there was no other choice. It was a trait of Gorbachev's character."[64] Every time limited military force was used against nationalist crowds, on ambiguous and probably oral orders from Moscow, Gorbachev immediately stepped aside and left the military in the lurch, exposed to the fury of the nationalist and liberal media. This pattern had the double effect of paralyzing the Soviet army and strengthening the forces of those who wanted to destroy the Soviet Union.[65]

Gorbachev's decision to renounce the use of force in foreign and domestic policies as a matter of high principle was remarkable and unique in world history. Canadian scholar Jacques Lévesque writes that "the way the USSR separated itself from its empire and its own peaceful end" are linked and "may seem to be its most beneficial contributions to history."[66] But Gorbachev's principled nonviolence, so much appreciated in the West, was not likely to evoke admiration inside Russia. For all of his other roles, for his fellow countrymen Gorbachev was, first and foremost, the czar, the guarantor of their stability and livelihood—and of the very existence of the state. The clear inability and even refusal of Gorbachev to perform this role contributed to the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and dislocation and misery for tens of millions of Russians and non-Russians.

GORBACHEV, THE PEACEFUL REVOLUTIONS OF 1989, AND GERMAN REUNIFICATION

The effect of this complex mix of character traits—optimism, naïveté, his tendency to act ad hoc, Westernism, and aversion to force—can be seen in the playing out of Soviet policies toward Eastern and Central Europe during the collapse of the Communist regimes and in Gorbachev's diplomacy leading up to German reunification. Critics and supporters point out that Gorbachev's foreign policy after 1987 was rarely discussed formally at the Politburo but instead only in a narrow circle of advisers. In conducting negotiations, Gorbachev relied on Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and also increasingly discussed issues "between four eyes," that is, directly with foreign leaders. The multi-institutional decision-making structures (the Defense Council, "the Big Five" commission that worked out proposals on arms reductions, the informal "alliance" of the KGB, and the Ministry of Defense) were often not in the loop. On Germany, one participant confirms, Gorbachev handled "all the negotiations virtually by himself or in tandem with Shevardnadze, sweeping aside professional diplomats and scarcely informing the Politburo."[67] In a word, although rejecting Stalin's legacy, Gorbachev used Stalin's power to monopolize vital policy decisions. Thus, Gorbachev's personal traits and his peculiarities as a statesman affected Soviet policy with remarkably few constraints.

In particular, Gorbachev's "anti-Stalin" personality had a lot to do with the peaceful (with the exception of Rumania and Yugoslavia) death of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe. The destabilization of Communist regimes there by the beginning of 1989, as the extensive research of Mark Kramer shows, was a direct consequence of the "spillover" effect of glasnost and reforms in the Soviet Union. As the regimes in Poland, Hungary, and then the GDR, Bulgaria, and Rumania, began to fall, the impact of these developments began to spill over into the Soviet Union, undermining Gorbachev's authority and weakening state and party controls.[68]

Why did Gorbachev and his advisers (but not all of the Politburo members and the military) decide to leave the Soviet Communist allies to their own devices, letting the developments in Central and Eastern Europe proceed without control from Moscow? The ideological factor of "new thinking" and Gorbachev's messianic goal of uniting North America, Europe, and the USSR were crucial. In late

January 1989, Gorbachev assigned the Politburo commission on foreign policy headed by Alexander Yakovlev to work with various agencies and think tanks on contingencies regarding future developments in Eastern and Central Europe. Yakovlev solicited a number of analytic papers from academic and state institutions. Most of them predicted an overall crisis in the alliance. There were frank conclusions that Soviet allies were already quietly rejecting socialism and were "in the powerful magnetic field of the West." One memorandum, written by Oleg Bogomolov and scholars from the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System, concluded that if the ruling parties did not make concessions to the opposition forces, they faced a "political eruption." Other analysts predicted "a most acute social-political conflict with an unfathomable outcome." All the papers opposed any form of Soviet intervention in the region. The typical conclusion was that any political-military intervention did not guarantee success but might instead trigger a chain reaction of violence and the implosion of the Soviet bloc. The commission, however, did not solicit the opinion of the General Staff. These memoranda preached to the converted. Gorbachev and his "new thinkers" (Yakovlev, Shevardnadze, Chernyaev, Shakhnazarov) all believed that the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 had been a terrible mistake, and they did not contemplate the use of Soviet troops under any circumstances.[69]

But all this does not fully explain the lack of Soviet *positive* involvement, that is, more vigorous attempts to coordinate actions with the reform-minded forces in the GDR, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, to provide them with material support and to refrain from unilateral measures that would accelerate the destabilization in the Warsaw Pact. Two domestic developments in the USSR help to explain Soviet passivity. The first was the preoccupation of Gorbachev and his entourage with the radical political and state reforms launched at the end of 1988. After this, the avalanche of domestic developments began to engulf the Gorbachev leadership. Gorbachev and his advisers, including those who were the "curators" and "watchers" of the situation in the Warsaw Pact, began to devote the lion's share of their time to writing memos and reports on preparations for the semi-free parliamentary elections in March 1989, on writing new legislation, and later on drafting Gorbachev's speeches and policies at the Congress of People's Deputies that opened in Moscow on May 25. The second development was a severe financial crisis. In January 1989, Gorbachev announced the reduction of Soviet forces in Central and Eastern Europe by 14 percent and cuts in the production of armaments by 19 percent. These measures reinforced his "anti-Fulton speech" at the United Nations on December 7, 1988. At the same time, they sprang from the leadership's desperate attempts to reduce state expenses. The Soviet leaders did not have the money to influence the events in Central and Eastern Europe and had

to watch as the governments of these countries turned to the West for credits and other forms of support.[70]

Still, it is stunning, in retrospect, to observe how casually Gorbachev allowed the Soviet external empire in Central Europe to break away. On March 3, 1989, the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Hungary, Miklos Nemeth, informed Gorbachev of the decision "to completely remove the electronic and technological protection from the Western and Southern borders of Hungary. We have outlived the need for it, and now it serves only for catching citizens of Romania and the GDR who try to illegally escape to the West through Hungary." He added cautiously: "Of course we will have to talk to comrades from the GDR." The only words on the record from Gorbachev were: "We have a strict regime on our borders, but we are also becoming more open."[71]

This doctrine of noninvolvement and the lack of a viable strategy marked Soviet diplomacy during the critical months of the summer and fall of 1989, when developments in Central and Eastern Europe took a revolutionary turn. The cable traffic and other communications between Moscow and Warsaw at a critical moment, when the Poles voted for Solidarity to be their government on June 4, 1989, and particularly during the next two months when the issue of Wojciech Jaruzelski's presidency was at stake, is not yet available. Myaczyslaw Rakowski, a leading reformer in the Polish Communist Party, recalls that Gorbachev only called him to find out "what is going on." But he meticulously refrained from any specific advice or anything that could be interpreted as interference in Polish events.[72] On September 11, when the reform-minded Communist government of Hungary opened the borders for East Germans who wanted to flee to the FRG, Moscow kept pointedly silent. The resulting refugee crisis, when tens of thousands of East Germans rushed to Prague and Budapest, destabilized the regimes in those countries. On September 27–28, Shevardnadze, presumably on Gorbachev's instructions, met with his counterparts James Baker and Hans-Dietrich Genscher at the UN General Assembly in New York to discuss the growing crisis of East German refugees in Prague and Budapest. The result was that East German refugees were allowed to stay temporarily within the compounds of West German embassies in those cities.[73]

Gorbachev later claimed that by 1989 he was ready to withdraw all Soviet military forces from Central Europe but that he wanted to do it very gradually, largely because of domestic constraints not geopolitical realities. In Chernyaev's restatement of this thesis, the fear was that "once we start to withdraw troops, the howling begins: 'What did we fight for, what did millions of our soldiers die for in World War II? Are we renouncing all that?' For Gorbachev at that time those issues were very sensitive."[74]

Gorbachev was especially concerned about the positions of the Bush administration and the West German government. There was no consensus in Washington on Reagan's "romance" with Gorbachev. Robert Gates, Richard Cheney, and Brent Scowcroft dismissed "new thinking" as theatrics at best or as deception at worst. Even Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, completed by February 1989, did not convince them. Pragmatist and "realist" Scowcroft interpreted it as "cutting losses" and concluded: "Instead of changing, Soviet priorities seemed only to narrow."[75]

However, by the summer of 1989, Bush and Secretary of State James Baker concluded that they had to deal with Gorbachev. They also realized that his personality was crucial. "Look, this guy is perestroika," Bush said to the skeptical experts. He dismissed the analysis of the CIA's Soviet desk that indicated that Gorbachev was losing control over events and could not be a stable long-term partner. In July, Bush went to Poland and Hungary, where he supported Communist reformers and discouraged anti-Communist nationalists from rocking the boat. This trip and Bush's personal communications to Gorbachev assuaged the Soviet leader's fears.[76] In September 1989, Shevardnadze struck up an extraordinary friendship with Secretary of State James Baker and openly shared with him the domestic problems facing the Soviet leadership.[77]

The position of West Germany and its plans regarding the GDR also concerned Gorbachev. Aside from a handful of "new thinkers," the Soviet foreign policy and military establishment still treated the FRG with suspicion. However, by the end of 1988, Gorbachev had established excellent personal relations with Chancellor Helmut Kohl, once a bitter critic of the Soviet leader. This sparked a very rapid shift of Soviet foreign policy on the German Question—one Western scholar described it as nothing less than "a reversal of alliances." Simultaneous with the warming of ties with the FRG, GDR-Soviet relations entered a period of "cold peace." Gorbachev and Shevardnadze denied the East German leaders the leverage over Soviet foreign policy they had used so many times in the past.[78]

When Gorbachev came to West Germany for a visit on June 11–15, 1989, enthusiastic crowds greeted him in the streets. The Gorbymania of West Germans contrasted with the increasingly morose attitude of Soviet citizens toward their leader. Gorbachev's Westernism was also reinforced during his talks with Kohl. The Soviet leader believed he achieved his goal—ensuring that the chancellor became a supporter of Gorbachev's perestroika and his idea of bringing the Soviet Union into a "common European home." In return, he took a very tolerant stand when Kohl suggested joint interference in the affairs of the GDR in order to remove Honecker and encourage changes. Chernyaev contends that the joint FRG-USSR declaration deliberately singled out, from the principles and norms of international rights to be observed, the "respect for the right of national self-determination." It was a hint that the Soviet Union would not oppose by force changes in East Germany. At the same time, Kohl assured Gorbachev that he and his government did not want any destabilization of the GDR.[79] This informal understanding was crucial for the subsequent peaceful reunification of Germany.

But Kohl could not possibly have been neutral to the opportunities that the changes in Central and Eastern Europe provided to West German policy. On August 25, 1989, Kohl reached an understanding with the reformist leadership of Hungary to open the Hungarian-Austrian border to defectors from the GDR. In return, Hungary received 1 billion D-marks to cover its budget deficit. The details of this understanding, fateful for the GDR, have become known only recently.[80] It is still not known what intelligence Moscow received of the deal. When the Hungarian leadership sent a note to Shevardnadze about their agreement with the FRG (the monetary side of the deal was not mentioned), Shevardnadze only answered: "This is an affair that concerns Hungary, the GDR and the FRG."[81] In October, Honecker told Gorbachev that Nemeth received from the SPD a loan of 550 million D-marks on the condition that the "Hungarians opened a border with Austria."[82]

Gorbachev's reaction remains unknown. He and other "new thinkers" had been treating Erich Honecker as a reactionary relic since early 1987 when he began to voice opposition to Gorbachev's policies.[83] Central Committee secretary Vadim Medvedev, in charge of relations with socialist countries and ideology, was in the GDR in September 1989 and came back "with grave thoughts." His conclusion was that "the first thing one should have done—was to take a decision on the change of leadership [referring to Honecker]."[84] At the same time, the KGB in the GDR reported to Moscow on the lineup in the GDR leadership and indicated (without giving an explicit political recommendation) that the situation urgently dictated Honecker's removal.[85]

On October 5, 1989, Chernyaev wrote in his diary: "Gorbachev is flying to the GDR to celebrate its fortieth anniversary. He is very reluctant to go there. Today he called and said: I will not say a word in support of Honecker. But I will support the Republic and the revolution."[86] In fact, the Soviet leader did not take a clear stand during his stay in the GDR. Rather, as his behavior showed, he adhered to his policy of noninterference. Meeting with the East German leadership, he used cryptic language, saying that history punished those who delayed change. Also, at a public meeting in Berlin, he quoted the Russian diplomat and poet Fedor Tyutchev that "love" may be a stronger unifier than "iron and blood." Was this quote aimed at the West German leadership, as a warning against schemes of forced annexation of the GDR? Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice read it this

way: It was "a strange way for the leader of the Soviet Union to warn the FRG to respect the 'postwar realities.' "[87]

Vitaly Vorotnikov recorded the first impressions of this visit that Gorbachev shared with the Politburo. Gorbachev told his colleagues that Honecker was out of touch with reality and that a storm was brewing in the GDR. At the same time, he did not propose any specific measures nor discuss any possible implications for the USSR.[88] On October 16, East German leaders Willi Stoph, Egon Krenz, and Erich Mielke sent a messenger to Moscow to seek Gorbachev's support for removal of Honecker. Mielke, the head of Stasi, believed it was already too late for a managed transition of power. Instead of addressing the full Politburo, Gorbachev convened a conference in his office, which included Yakovlev, Medvedev, Kryuchkov, Ryzhkov, Shevardnadze, and Vorotnikov. Gorbachev proposed contacting Kohl and Bush. He also proposed that Soviet forces in the GDR "should behave calmly, without demonstrating force." Once Honecker finally stepped down, the new GDR leader, Egon Krenz, met with Gorbachev on November 1 to discuss the GDR's future. Gorbachev was shocked to learn that the GDR owed the West $26.5 billion and had a $12.1 billion deficit for 1989. He admitted to Krenz and later to his Politburo colleagues that without assistance from West Germany the Soviets could not "save" the GDR. Gorbachev approved the proposal of Krenz to reduce social tension in East Germany by allowing some travel to the West. Gorbachev and Krenz did not discuss in detail plans for the gradual removal of the Berlin Wall.[89]

The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, caught everyone in Moscow by surprise. The East German leaders, acting under growing public pressure and without any advice from Moscow, decided to allow the controlled movement of population between East and West Berlin. But this bungled attempt to open the safety valves triggered the political meltdown of the GDR. The events in Berlin caught Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, and other Kremlin leaders by surprise. The Soviet ambassador to the GDR, Vyacheslav Kochemasov, tried in vain to reach Gorbachev and Shevardnadze on a secure phone. As a senior official at the embassy recalls it, "The entire leadership was busy and nobody could find time for the GDR."[90] Gorbachev did not create any crisis commission to deal with the German Question. There were no substantive discussions of the German issue. The representatives of the military, as well as experts on Germany, were cut off from the decision-making process. Meanwhile, as Lévesque correctly concludes, the fall of the Wall doomed Gorbachev's grand design for gradual European reconciliation. Instead of patiently waiting for the Soviets and the West to construct "the common European home," the GDR, along with all the countries of Central Europe, "hurled itself through the Berlin Wall" to join the West.[91]

What was the Soviet leadership thinking on this fateful day? The available fragmentary minutes and recollections show that during a briefing with select colleagues in the Walnut Room on the eve of the Politburo session on November 9, Gorbachev shared his concerns about the political situation in Bulgaria and the separatist trends in Lithuania. The agenda of the Politburo included discussion on the time and agenda of the Second Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR and possible changes in the Constitution. Another big issue was the situation in Byelorussia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. This was part of a frantic search for palliatives to block the Baltic drive for political independence. Gorbachev remained optimistic, despite all indications: "Experience shows that even most avowed nationalists will not go far." He believed that the Baltic satellites could be kept in the Soviet sphere through economic incentives. Vorotnikov interjected: "If all that we say to the Balts became publicly known, there would be an explosion in Russia."[92]

These episodes highlight the ad hoc nature of Gorbachev's decision making and the impact of his optimistic and at the same time temporizing personality on Soviet policies. Even Gorbachev's admirer, Georgy Shakhnazarov, later called him a modern Fabius the Qunctator, a reference to a Roman politician notorious for his procrastination.[93] At work here were also two conflicting impulses within Gorbachev. On the one hand, he could not recognize that his vision of reform for Communism was doomed in Central Europe and East Germany. Gorbachev continued to believe that "the socialist base" would be "preserved," and these illusions helped him to ignore a torrent of alarmist voices and watch with sympathy the spectacular process of the dissolution of Communist regimes, first in Poland and Hungary and then in the GDR and the rest of Central Europe.[94]

On the other hand, Gorbachev did not have nor did he even seek to obtain in writing any agreement with the West to preserve Soviet "interests" in the region, such as preventing NATO expansion to the East. Dobrynin later fumed: "Able but inexperienced, impatient to reach agreement, but excessively self-assured and flattered by the Western media, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were often outwitted and outplayed by their Western partners." Gorbachev in particular failed to state squarely and early enough Soviet terms for reunification (Germany's neutrality, demilitarization, compensation for withdrawal of Soviet troops). Instead, he temporized, played by ear, and yielded one position after another. Dobrynin returns to such features of Gorbachev as optimism, self-confidence, and the unbounded belief in "forces of history" as essentially good and reasonable. This, he argues, served him badly in international affairs, as he, in an increasingly desperate situation, held onto unwarranted expectations that he would, despite the odds, convince his Western counterparts as to the correctness of his initia-

tives. This "emotional makeup of a gambler," Dobrynin writes, was visible even in 1986 at the Reykjavik summit.[95]

The key lies in the interaction between Gorbachev's personality and his Western counterparts. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Bush administration quickly seized the initiative from the weakening hands of Gorbachev and played an active and stabilizing role in ending the Cold War in Europe. For Gorbachev, this was a very important development. Bush finally acted as he had promised to act when he was vice president, as an understanding and reassuring partner, following the model of Reagan's relationship with Gorbachev. On December 2 and 3, 1989, at the Malta summit, Bush and Gorbachev achieved what they had wanted to months before, a personal relationship of mutual trust and respect.[96]

It is remarkable, in retrospect, how much Bush, like Reagan before him, came to believe in Gorbachev as a person of common sense who would admit that the West had won the Cold War. In preparations for the summit, Bush told NATO secretary general Manfred Wörner on October 11 that the main thing was to persuade the Soviets to allow continued change in Central Europe and the GDR. When Wörner warned that Gorbachev would not let the GDR leave the Warsaw Pact, Bush wondered if he could persuade Gorbachev to let the Warsaw Pact go—to decide its military value was no longer essential. "That may seem naive," Bush said, "but who predicted the changes we are seeing today?"[97] One could hardly imagine any U.S. leader trying to persuade Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, or Andropov "to let go" of the Soviet sphere of influence in Europe.

Other members of the Bush team remained highly suspicious of Gorbachev's intentions. To them, it seemed so revolutionary and improbable that the Soviet leadership was renouncing its geopolitical ambitions that even a year after Malta they had lingering doubts and tried to convey them to the president. When Gorbachev joined the United States in a coalition against its longtime ally, Saddam Hussein, Bush, speaking to his advisers, vowed not to "overlook the Soviet desire for access to warm water ports."[98]

But there was a rare harmony between Bush and Gorbachev, as they talked at Malta in December 1989 one-to-one and almost effortlessly agreed on all the main issues at their first official summit. Bush startled Gorbachev by beginning the discussion with the issue of the "export of revolution" and the Soviet presence in Central America, instead of with Europe. The Americans were relieved when Gorbachev assured them that the Soviet Union "has no plans regarding spheres of influence in Latin America."[99] When the two leaders began to discuss the German Question, Gorbachev had an excellent opportunity to set the terms for the reunification of Germany and demand from Bush, in exchange for support for reunification, a firm commitment to the construction of "a common

European home" with the simultaneous dissolution of the two military-political blocs as part of a new security structure. Instead, he just came down hard on Kohl's "ten points" plan, seeing in it a move by the West German chancellor to swallow the GDR. In Gorbachev's words, this move "put in doubt whether the government of the FRG could be trusted. What would happen? Would a unified Germany be neutral, not belonging to military-political alliances, or a member of NATO? I think we should let everybody understand that it would be premature to discuss now one of the other scenarios." He then continued: "There are two German states, so history ordered. And let history now decide how the process should evolve and where it should lead to in the context of a new Europe and the new world."[100]

This was vintage Gorbachev, preferring to talk about principles on which a new global order and a "common European home" should be based rather than to haggle about the practicalities of a German settlement—again, a stark contrast with Stalin as statesman if one compares the record of the Malta summit with the records of Stalin's negotiations from 1939 to 1945. The Soviet dictator was a stubborn bulldog and sly fox simultaneously, fighting for every inch whenever Soviet state interests (in his view) were at stake and making "generous" concessions only when it suited his overall plan of negotiation. Stalin's foreign policy was imperialistic and very costly for his country, yet his negotiating techniques evoked grudging admiration from other imperialist masters, such as Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden. Gorbachev, by contrast, did not even try to elicit any specific agreements and promises from Bush. At that time, he obviously considered his "special relationship" with Bush as a priority. He was satisfied with Bush's assurances that he would not "dance on the Berlin Wall" and not "jumpstart" the process of German reunification.

Various officials in Moscow—including the ambassador to the FRG, Yuli Kvitsinsky, and Eduard Shevardnadze—had been warning since November 1989 that the GDR was about to disappear and suggested a preemptive strategy: to put pressure on Kohl for the idea of confederation of the two states. Alternatively, Anatoly Chernyaev proposed to work toward "a new Rapallo," that is, to reach an early agreement with Kohl about German reunification linking it to Germany's commitment to a new pan-European security structure.[101]

But Gorbachev revealed no inclination for preemptive actions and Realpolitik deals, no matter how serious were their chances for success. For two crucial months, Soviet foreign policy regarding German reunification was adrift. Only by the end of January 1990, in preparation for the meeting of foreign ministers of the four great powers and two German states in Canada, did Gorbachev hold a policy-making workshop with his closest advisers. They accepted a "four-plus-

two" formula for negotiations on German reunification. Gorbachev now finally admitted that the process would lead to reunification, but he still hoped against hope that the GDR could survive thanks to its own "perestroika." Gorbachev allegedly came to this conclusion due to false advice from some German experts who reflected the antireunification opinions of the West German social democrats. Although, in fairness, other experts had warned him very early on that the GDR would not sustain itself for long. Also the Soviet leader preferred to let the "two German states" take the lead in the settlement talks and later accepted with an easy heart the replacement of the "four-plus-two" formula with "two plus four."[102] Only in July 1990 did he take Chernyaev's advice and reach a unilateral settlement of the German Question with Kohl at Arkhyz, a resort in the North Caucasus. By that time, Gorbachev's negotiating hand was extremely weak; but even so, he never attempted to play his last card, that is, the presence of Soviet troops on German soil. No "new Rapallo" took place, and Gorbachev did not seek it, very much to the relief of the United States and other Western countries.

By contrast, there was a determined policy on the part of Kohl, supported by the Bush administration, to nudge history in the right direction at a rapid but coordinated pace. This coordinated policy, called by two young members of the Bush administration "a study in statecraft,"[103] helped produce the desired result: Germany became part of NATO, but the USSR did not get any firm commitments about the future structure of European security and Moscow's role in it.

GRAVE DIGGER OF SOVIET POWER

Gorbachev, in his determination to end the Cold War, had to wage two political campaigns: one aimed at the West and another at his own people. The main characteristics of his personality—tolerance for different opinions, idealism, a moralistic optimism, indecisiveness and procrastination, and a strong belief in common sense and the universalist interpretation of "all human values"—made him the darling of the West but the subject of near ostracism at home. For this reason, gradually the relationship between his foreign and domestic priorities was reversed. Initially, foreign policy was meant to overcome the international isolation of the USSR, to improve economic and trade relations with the West, and to wind down the arms race. But by 1987 and 1988, Gorbachev, increasingly alienated from the party nomenklatura and left without any real support in Soviet society, gave priority to the integration of the USSR into the world community. Accordingly, foreign policy became a determinant of domestic policy. His "new thinking" became a goal in itself, a substitute for a "normal" strategy of statesmanship. Gorbachev believed that his romantic schemes of common interests, nonuse of force, and the "common European home" amounted to a ticket for him and the USSR to join the community of "civilized nations."

Gorbachev's idealistic rush to bring the Soviet Union into the "common European home" made him the grave digger of Soviet power. After the Soviet "empire" in Central Europe had collapsed, the Soviet Union itself, "an affirmative action empire" of many old and new nationalities, became vulnerable.[104] The growing domestic anarchy, deepening economic crisis, rise of nationalist separatism, and imminent erosion of the existing state structures demanded action. Yet Gorbachev, as before, continued to rely on grassroots "processes" and believed that he would manage to forge a new democratic Soviet Union. His overconfidence again let him down, but this time the stake was not Soviet external power and influence in Central Europe but the fate of the Soviet Union itself. In 1987 and 1988, he adamantly refused to get rid of the recalcitrant Boris Yeltsin, who had already emerged as a major troublemaker and demagogic populist, by sending him as an ambassador to a small faraway country. "Do you take me for Brezhnev?" he indignantly retorted, when other "new thinkers" warned him that Yeltsin was ambitious and dangerous.[105] By 1991, Yeltsin had become the first popularly elected president of the Russian Federation and wanted to transform this republic from a nominal entity into the real base from which to challenge Gorbachev's power. Also, inexplicably for the "new thinkers," Gorbachev refused to run for popular elections as president of the Soviet Union, a fatal political mistake. He also kept the unreformed hard-liners Dmitry Yazov, Vladimir Kryuchkov, and Oleg Baklanov in charge of the army, the KGB, and the military-industrial complex.

On August 18, 1991, Gorbachev, his wife, Raisa, and his foreign policy assistant, Anatoly Chernyaev, were on vacation in the Crimea when the majority of Gorbachev's ministers took power into their hands. Their principal goal was to prevent the signing of a "Union treaty" between Gorbachev and the leaders of fifteen Soviet republics, a document that would have transformed the Soviet Union into a confederation. What ensued was a parody of the October 1964 coup that deposed Nikita Khrushchev. Tanks and troops flooded Moscow; Soviet citizens outside the capital and major cities hunkered down, waiting to see what would happen. But the ruling junta, all members of Gorbachev's government, seemed to lack the will to use violence and spill blood. They even failed to arrest Boris Yeltsin, the newly elected president of the Russian Federation. The coup leaders, led by KGB chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov (under the nominal leadership of Vice President Gennady Yanaev), later claimed that they wanted to convince Gorbachev to be on their side. Gorbachev, according to his own version, angrily refused and called them "criminals." For three days, the leader of a superpower

was the prisoner of the KGB in his Crimean residence, Foros—the architects of the coup claimed he was "sick." Gorbachev and his wife had to rely on the news they received from a shortwave radio procured by his loyal bodyguards. Raisa Gorbachev was on the verge of a breakdown, apparently believing that she and her husband could be assassinated at any minute. She insisted on producing a tape (as proof that they were alive), and one of the housemaids managed to take it out of their Crimean palace, which was guarded by the KGB, in her underwear.[106]

By August 1991, Gorbachev had squandered much of the Soviet global power and his personal political authority. His chronic inability to choose a consistent course of economic and financial reform destroyed Soviet finances, ran up foreign debts, and put the huge country with colossal resources on the brink of default. The peace dividend from the disarmament and the end of the Cold War did not materialize. The domestic trade and distribution system ceased to function. The Soviet Union had not experienced such a situation before, even during World War II. It was this grave crisis that gave mass following to the national-separatist movements, above all, the one in the Russian Federation. Boris Yeltsin profited from this enormously.[107] Gorbachev was seen as a pathetic and procrastinating figure, hated and despised by many of his fellow countrymen and by former Soviet allies around the world. Intellectual and artistic elites abandoned Gorbachev (although he and his wife had cultivated and helped them so much) and enthusiastically supported the anti-Communist course and rhetoric of Boris Yeltsin. Even his partners, the Western statesmen who had benefited from the direction of his policy, did not come through, denying him the large subsidies for the already bankrupt Soviet budget that he asked for. In July 1991, Gorbachev, on the brink financially and politically, asked his George H. W. Bush to mobilize some sort of a Marshall Plan to help convert the Soviet economy into a market economy. This would have meant a pledge of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of billions of dollars. However, the fiscally conservative American president reacted coldly to Gorbachev's frantic pleas. The American economy was in recession, and the U.S. budget had no money for the USSR. Matlock concludes that Bush, despite all his sympathy for Gorbachev the politician, "seemed to be looking for reasons not to assist the Soviet Union rather than ways to do so." The fact that his Western friends abandoned the Soviet leader may have encouraged the hard-liners in Gorbachev's entourage to go ahead with plans for the coup.[108]

The meltdown of Gorbachev's personal power paralleled the meltdown of the state authority and the disorganization of the army and bureaucracies, as well as the collapse of the Soviet mentality, which wary conservatives had long warned about. The democratic nationalist movements in the Baltic republics, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, undermined Soviet control there. And for the first time since 1956, a grassroots political movement swept through the capital and other major Russian cities. A sizable minority of the Russian people, perhaps up to 15 percent throughout the Soviet Union, with an even larger percentage of the population of Moscow and Leningrad, supported democratization. Still, the democratic movement in Russia did remain a minority, and Yeltsin, for all his popularity among the Russians, had few levers of power. It was a ridiculously inept coup that handed full power in the Russian Federation to Yeltsin and the minority of "democrats."

The resistance to the coup was the golden hour of the "men and women of the sixties." Together with younger people, students, businessmen, and intellectuals, they rushed to defend the Russian parliament, where Yeltsin stood in defiance of the Kremlin's hard-liners. The days of the August confrontation, capped by the day-and-night vigil around the parliament and the funerals of three young men who were accidentally run over by the armor sent into Moscow streets, produced the "second Russian revolution" and introduced the Russian national identity as a new political phenomenon. The international media, including CNN, beamed the image of a defiant Boris Yeltsin, standing on an armored troop carrier in front of the threatened Russian parliament, around the world. At the same time, the Soviet military, shattered and demoralized by the hasty withdrawal from Central Europe and by the storm of venomous criticism in the liberal media, felt extremely reluctant to use force and spill the blood of compatriots.[109] As the leaders dithered, the coup lost its momentum and collapsed like a house of cards. Pathetically, Kryuchkov, Yanaev, and other plotters flew to the Crimea, where they begged Gorbachev to pardon them and agreed to be arrested on the spot.

The fact that the active participants of this "revolution" never numbered more than 50,000 to 60,000 demonstrators does not diminish its significance. Most of the well-known figures from the Moscow cultural and intellectual elites opposed the coup and supported the "revolution." Soviet bureaucrats and the military abandoned Gorbachev in droves and went over to Yeltsin's camp. As the "new Russia," led by the impetuous Russian president, banned the Communist Party and separated itself from the Soviet Union, other non-Russian republics rushed toward independence as well. On December 8, in a state hunting lodge far from Moscow, Yeltsin and the Communist leaders of Ukraine and Belorussia decided to disband the Soviet Union.[110] One last time, Gorbachev refused to use force to remain in power, but by this time it was probably too late anyway. On December 25, 1991, the triumphant Yeltsin and his supporters forced Gorbachev out of his Kremlin office. A bit later, the Soviet flag went down the Kremlin mast one last time.

No doubt, the debates about Gorbachev's personality and his personal choices will continue for as long as Russia wavers between its need for a strong state, social stability, and prosperous economy, on the one hand, and the need to develop a dynamic, self-reliant civil society on the other. Perhaps a consensus on this question is impossible; in similar circumstances in the past the vision of liberal internationalists in Russia had differed sharply from the concerns of conservative advocates of the strong state, even the most "enlightened" ones. For instance, here is the opinion of one "enlightened" conservative, Russian count Sergei Trubetskoy, concerning Georgy Lvov, the first head of the Provisional Government after the abdication of Czar Nicholas II in February 1917. To a remarkable extent, it echoes the modern criticisms of Gorbachev. Trubetskoy wrote in exile from Paris in 1940:

> The populism [*narodnichestvo*] of Lvov was of a rather fatalistic nature. I am groping for proper words to characterize his belief in Russian people in general, in the common people in particular. He imagined them in false tones, as if through rosy glasses. "Do not worry," said Lvov to me on the eve of the first assault of the Bolsheviks in Petersburg in the summer of 1917. "We need not use force. Russian people do not like violence. . . . All will settle down by *itself*. All will turn out to be well. . . . People *themselves* will create from its wise instincts just and light forms of life." I was shocked by these words of the head of the government in those difficult minutes when he ought to take energetic actions. A true fighter in the matters of economy, in the affairs of the state he was some kind of a believer in non-violence under any circumstances.[111]

Another Russian émigré, Mikhail Geller, wrote a similar assessment of Gorbachev in a book on the history of Soviet society (edited by a former radical "democrat," Yuri Afanasyev): "Gorbachev continued to live in the world of illusions. He assuaged himself with chimerical schemes, in the belief that political zigzags would allow him to retain power, in fact, to aggrandize it." As to the decision to agree to reunification of Germany on Western terms: "The decision of Gorbachev was not an act of [a] statesman who carefully thought through the consequences of his step. Rather, it was an act of a gambler who believed that, if he sacrificed the GDR, he would get in return some aces that he would use at home. Gorbachev seemed to behave like a balloonist who, having discovered that his balloon was falling down, tosses overboard everything that one could find in the basket."[112]

Without Gorbachev (and Reagan and Bush as his partners), the end of the Cold War would not have come so quickly. Also without him, the rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union itself would not have occurred. At each stage of the Soviet endgame, Gorbachev made choices that destabilized the USSR and sapped its strength to act coherently as a superpower. And as this chapter has shown, those choices can be explained only by reference to Gorbachev's peculiar preferences and personality traits. A different person could have taken a very different course of action, and perhaps as a result the Soviet Union would not have collapsed as disastrously as it did, creating so many problems for the future. The peaceful and rapid end of the Cold War secured Gorbachev's place in international history. The unwitting destruction of the Soviet Union made him one of the most controversial figures in Russian history.