



Strategic Shock: The Collapse of the Soviet Union: 1989

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Abstract

This study was written in support of the project; Future Security Environment Part 2: Future Shocks, launched by the Directorate of Future Security Analysis (DFSA) in December 2008. The project aimed at identifying and evaluating plausible Strategic Shocks in order to help inform and enable policymaking and capability development.

One aspect of the project involved illustrating the lessons learned and consequences of shocks that have occurred in the past. The present study, “Strategic Shock: The Collapse of the Soviet Union; 1989,” was chosen by members of the DFSA research team for its exemplification of a “geopolitical shock.”

The study contends that not only did the Soviet collapse generate considerable economic, political and social turmoil in former Soviet satellites, but throughout the international system as a whole. Old predictable rules gave way to uncertainty. Regional rivalries and ethnic and religious rivalries long suppressed by superpower influence and patronage re-emerged. Threats of state failure, regional conflict and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction multiplied. And key national and international institutions and organizations – long focused on the threat of the Soviet monolith -- were thrown into crises of identity and purpose. Beyond this, the disappearance of the longstanding threat led to the creation of a vacuum in careful thought and strategic vision on the part of governments. Without a central organizing principle and clearly defined foreign and defence policy goals, policy became excessively ad hoc and reactive.

Overall, the collapse illustrates the fact that effective security concepts and architectures must be developed to guard against the ad hoc responses that can plague organizations in the wake of such events.

Résumé

Cette étude a été réalisée à l'appui du projet Environnement de sécurité de l'avenir, partie 2 : Chocs du futur (ESA2), lancé par la Direction de l'analyse de la sécurité future (DASF) en décembre 2008. Le projet vise à recenser et à évaluer les probables chocs stratégiques afin de guider et de faciliter l'élaboration des politiques et le développement des capacités.

Un des éléments du projet consistait à illustrer les leçons apprises et les conséquences des chocs antérieurs. La présente étude, « Strategic Shock: The Collapse of the Soviet Union », a été retenue par les membres de l'équipe de recherche de la Direction de l'analyse de la sécurité future parce qu'elle illustre bien ce qu'est un « choc géopolitique ».

Les auteurs de l'étude soutiennent que l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique a non seulement provoqué de profonds bouleversements sociaux et économiques dans les anciens pays satellites soviétiques, mais a ébranlé l'ensemble du système international. Les anciennes règles prévisibles ont cédé le pas à l'incertitude. Les rivalités régionales ainsi qu'ethniques et religieuses longtemps étouffées par le poids des superpuissances et par le patronage ont refait surface. La défaillance des États, les conflits régionaux et la prolifération des armes de destruction massive sont autant de menaces qui se sont multipliées. Et les principales institutions et organisations nationales et internationales – qui ont pendant longtemps porté leur attention sur le bloc soviétique – ont été plongées dans des crises d'identité et d'objectifs. Par ailleurs, la disparition de cette menace de longue date a laissé un vide dans la vision stratégique et la réflexion approfondie des gouvernements. En l'absence d'un principe d'organisation central et d'objectifs clairement définis en matière de politique étrangère et de défense, la politique est devenue extrêmement réactive et impromptu.

En bref, l'effondrement illustre que des concepts et des architectures de sécurité doivent être développés afin de prévenir des réponses impromptues qui peuvent troubler une organisation face à de tels événements.

Executive summary

Strategic Shock: The Collapse of the Soviet Union: 1989

Nicole Alie, Peter Gizewski; DRDC CORA TM 2010-166; Defence R&D Canada – CORA; August 2010.

Background: This study was written in support of the project; Future Security Environment Part 2: Future Shocks, launched by the Directorate of Future Security Analysis (DFSA) in December 2008. The project aimed at identifying and evaluating plausible Strategic Shocks in order to help inform and enable policymaking and capability development.

One aspect of the project involved illustrating the lessons learned and consequences of shocks that have occurred in the past. To this end, a number of examples of historical shocks were investigated. These shocks were selected based on their suitability for reflecting a number of broad themes which materialized out of earlier work on the Future Security Environment; with categories ranging from geopolitical events, to shocks in science and technology, the environment, economics and in the military and security realms.

The present study, “The Collapse of the Soviet Union,” was chosen by members of the DFSA research team for its exemplification of a “geopolitical shock.” The study explores the trends that marked the period immediately preceding the shock, the events that characterized the shock itself, and finally the social, economic, and military impact of Soviet retrenchment.

Principal results: The study argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union and Soviet Communism marked nothing less than the complete transformation of the geopolitical system. Not only did this generate considerable economic political and social turmoil in former Soviet satellites, but throughout the international system as a whole. Old predictable rules gave way to uncertainty. Regional rivalries and ethnic and religious rivalries long suppressed by superpower influence and patronage remerged. Threats of state failure, regional conflict and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction multiplied. And key national and international institutions and organizations – long focused on the threat of the Soviet monolith -- were thrown into crises of identity and purpose.

The disappearance of the longstanding threat led to the creation of a vacuum in careful thought and strategic vision on the part of government. Without a central organizing principle and clearly defined foreign and defence policy goals, policy became excessively ad hoc and reactive. In Canada for instance, hard decisions on key foreign and defence priorities were avoided. A commitment-capability gap emerged. And the CF increasingly became vulnerable to becoming ill-equipped, overextended and overburdened in its wake.

Significance of results: Overall, the collapse illustrates the fact that effective security concepts and architectures must be developed to guard against the ad hoc responses that can plague organizations in the wake of such events. In the case of the economic, social, and political challenges created by the end of Soviet communism, the lack of policy theorizing both preceding and following the shock held as many implications for the international system as the shock itself.

Future work: The study represents one facet of a growing body of work aimed at providing force planners with insight into the origins of such events, their characteristics, and their potential impacts both for security policy generally and for defence policy and capability planning in particular. It will inform research underway under the guise of the recently created Future Security Analysis Team responsible for the continuation of work on FSE 2 initiated by DFSA.

Sommaire

Strategic Shock: The Collapse of the Soviet Union: 1989

Nicole Alie, Peter Gizewski; DRDC CORA TM 2010-166; Defence R&D Canada – CARO; Aout 2010.

Contexte: Cette étude a été réalisée dans le cadre du projet Environnement de sécurité de l'avenir, partie 2 : Chocs du futur (ESA2), lancé par la Direction de l'analyse de la sécurité future (DASF) en décembre 2008. Le projet vise à recenser et à évaluer les probables chocs stratégiques afin de guider et de faciliter l'élaboration des politiques et le développement des capacités.

Un des éléments du projet consistait à illustrer les leçons apprises et les conséquences des chocs antérieurs. À cette fin, un certain nombre d'exemples de chocs historiques ont été examinés. Ces chocs ont été retenus parce qu'ils rendaient bien compte de grands thèmes qui ont été mis en relief dans des travaux antérieurs sur l'environnement de sécurité de l'avenir ; ils allaient d'événements géopolitiques à des chocs dans les secteurs scientifique et technologique, environnemental et économique ainsi dans les domaines militaire et de la sécurité.

La présente étude, « Strategic Shock: The Collapse of the Soviet Union », a été retenue par les membres de l'équipe de recherche de la Direction de l'analyse de la sécurité future parce qu'elle illustre bien ce qu'est un « choc géopolitique ». Elle examine les tendances qui ont marqué la période immédiatement antérieure au choc, les événements qui ont caractérisé le choc lui-même, et enfin les répercussions militaires, économiques et sociales du repli soviétique.

Principaux résultats : Les auteurs de l'étude soutiennent que l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique non seulement a provoqué de profonds bouleversements sociaux et économiques dans les anciens pays satellites soviétiques, mais a aussi ébranlé l'ensemble du système international. Les anciennes règles prévisibles ont cédé le pas à l'incertitude. Les rivalités régionales ainsi qu'ethniques et religieuses longtemps étouffées par le poids des superpuissances et par le patronage ont refait surface. La défaillance des États, les conflits régionaux et la prolifération des armes de destruction massive sont autant de menaces qui se sont multipliées. Et les principales institutions et organisations internationales et nationales – qui ont pendant longtemps porté leur attention sur le bloc soviétique – ont été plongées dans des crises d'identité et de vocation.

Par ailleurs, la disparition de cette menace de longue date a laissé un vide dans la vision stratégique et la réflexion approfondie des gouvernements. En l'absence d'un principe d'organisation central et d'objectifs clairement définis en matière de politique étrangère et de défense, la politique est devenue extrêmement réactive et ponctuelle. Au Canada, par exemple, les gouvernements ont esquivé les décisions difficiles concernant les principales priorités en matière de défense et de politique étrangère. La capacité d'engagement est devenue insuffisante. Et partant, de plus en plus, les Forces canadiennes risquent de ne pas avoir le matériel nécessaire pour faire leur travail, d'en entreprendre trop pour leurs moyens et d'être surchargées.

Signification des résultats: De manière générale, l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique montre que des concepts et des architectures de sécurité efficaces doivent être élaborés afin de se prémunir contre les mesures ponctuelles qui peuvent être un fléau pour les organisations dans le

sillage de tels événements. Eu égard aux problèmes politiques, sociaux et économiques provoqués par la fin du communisme soviétique, l'absence de l'élaboration de politiques, avant et après le choc, a eu autant de répercussions sur le système international que le choc même.

Travaux à venir: L'étude n'est qu'une facette d'une documentation de plus en plus abondante qui vise à fournir aux responsables de la planification des forces des renseignements sur l'origine de tels événements, leurs caractéristiques et leurs effets possibles sur la politique sur la sécurité de façon générale et sur la politique sur la défense et la planification des capacités plus particulièrement. L'étude alimentera les travaux de recherche en cours sous la direction de la nouvelle équipe de l'analyse de la sécurité future qui est responsable de la poursuite des travaux relatifs au projet ESA2 lancé par la DASF.

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Preface

This Technical Memorandum was written in support of the project; Future Security Environment Part 2: Future Shocks, launched by the Directorate of Future Security Analysis (DFSA) in December 2008. The project aimed at identifying and evaluating plausible strategic shocks in order to help inform and enable policymaking and capability development. For the purposes of the investigation, the term “strategic shock” was defined as “an event that precipitates a discontinuity in trends and fundamentally challenges the basis of existing policies.”¹

One aspect of the project involved illustrating the lessons learned and consequences of shocks that have occurred in the past. Historical shocks were selected based on their suitability for reflecting a number of broad themes which materialized out of earlier work on the Future Security Environment; with categories ranging from geopolitical events, to shocks in science and technology, the environment, economics and in the military and security realms.

Authors were instructed to adopt a “big picture” approach to these investigations, focusing on strategic-level problems and outcomes in a concise format of ten to fifteen pages, sourced to an academic standard, and conforming to the following general outline:

Outline For Historical Case Study Papers²

Section	Description
Introduction	The introduction establishes the utility of the case under discussion.
Trend Analysis	If possible (dependent on subject), the convergence of factors leading to the shock is discussed.
Event Description	The shock itself is described in detail, including timelines.
Fallout and Effects	Each case study is structured to illustrate the fallout and effects of the shock along the same broad themes based on the chapter headings of the FSE1. This section includes a detailed examination of the first, second and third order effects. The primary goal is to demonstrate the complex relationship between these themes in the aftermath of a shock within each historical case study.
Relevance	If possible, outline the direct impact of the shock on the CF and/or Canada and its security posture.
Conclusion	The conclusion should provide broad based deductions on the implications of the event.

¹ See Neil Chuka, Rachel Lea Heide, Shaye K. Friesen and Charles R. Morrissey, Future Security Environment, Part 2: Preliminary Research and Methodology, DRDC CORA TM 2009-13, (Ottawa: Defence R&D Canada, Centre for Operational Research and Analysis, March 2009).

² Ibid., p. 23.

The present study, “Strategic Shock: The Collapse of the Soviet Union: 1989,” was chosen by the DFSA research team for its exemplification of a “geopolitical shock.” As such, it represents one facet of a growing body of work aimed at providing force planners with insight into the origins of such events, their characteristics, and their potential impacts both for security policy generally and for defence policy and capability planning in particular.

Background to the Soviet Case

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet state system, the security paradigm that had characterized the international system for more than four decades ended abruptly. Bipolarity, a key structural feature of the international system since the conclusion of WWII, was gone. So too was the ideological component that animated much of the US-Soviet cold war rivalry.

Although security scholars had long acknowledged a range of internal structural problems and external pressures plaguing the Soviet Union, the actual collapse of Soviet style communism in the late 1980's and early 1990's was by and large unanticipated in many important circles.³ The convergence of internal and external factors that prompted the downfall of the Soviet state system was unforeseen. Also unforeseen was the bevy of economic, social and political forces they would unleash.

The unexpected and accelerated rate of Soviet collapse following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, was such that many scholars cast their gazes backwards in an attempt to understand the roots of the collapse. Much of the theorizing generated during the transition period itself was not forward looking. Indeed, little effort was made to anticipate the potential impacts which ongoing changes in the Soviet system could ultimately produce. The result of this gap in theorizing saw many policy-makers ill prepared to face the myriad of policy challenges that emerged after the Soviet demise. In the absence of a definable enemy, military policy was forced to operate without an organizing principle and purpose. The massive political and economic upheaval left former Eastern Bloc states floundering under the process of reform while Western states drifted with a lack of direction in their respective foreign policies.

The effects of this shock are still being felt today. Indeed, given its unprecedented scope, speed and far reaching consequences, the impact of the collapse of the Soviet state system must be included in any discussion of shocks that have reshaped the international system. Accordingly, this study explores the trends that marked the period immediately preceding the shock, the events that characterized the shock itself, and finally the social, economic, and military impact of Soviet retrenchment. Through this process of examination, it will be evident that the collapse of Soviet Communism marked nothing less than the complete transformation of the geopolitical system.

³ This is most notably true of prominent economic scholars such as Samuelson, Galbraith and Thurow who in the years prior to eastern communism's collapse claimed that the Soviet economy was more productive and produced a higher standard of living than conservative market proponents were willing to admit. The true extent of Soviet internal strife was not known, though it was greatly speculated on. It is fair to say, that on the whole, the body of scholarship on the subject was divided and that few were anticipating communism's collapse on such a time scale.

Prelude to Collapse

The forces that led to the Soviet collapse were both systemic and proximate, and the occurrence of the collapse owed much to their interaction. Pressures in both the Soviet economic and political realms figured prominently at the systemic level. Indeed, both realms experienced enormous strain in the decade prior to the collapse.

The economy had been experiencing a period of stagnation between the years of 1981-1989. While not uncommon, such stagnation was exacerbated by high levels of defence expenditure. Defence spending was a major factor – and a major burden for policy-makers.⁴ In fact, some argue that by the early 1980s, domestic economic constraints ensured that continued Soviet expansionism was a non-issue and that retrenchment represented a natural option given the cost of maintaining the status quo⁵.

Others observe that the economy's weak fundamentals made eventual collapse and retrenchment inevitable. Absent private ownership, the Soviet administrative-command system ensured that determination of the true value of goods was impossible. True, markets and market forces were shunned in favour of a market structure dependent on administrative coercion. Yet when coercion was weakened by shifts in governmental policy, the economy had difficulty functioning.⁶ Such inherent weaknesses were compounded by external pressure arising from a decline in the global price of oil (Moscow's leading export), and the need to increase foreign borrowing.⁷

Politically, repression was the system's chief characteristic. Yet over time, it became less effective as a technique for managing dissent. Throughout the 1980s, deaths from political and ethnic violence within the Soviet empire increased, signalling precarious control and the necessity to place more focus on domestic governance.⁸ Yet by the time the need for such a shift in policy

⁴ Leon Aron. "The Mystery of Soviet Collapse." *Journal of Democracy* 17(2) April 2006, 23.

For further information on the subject of Soviet defence burden and its implications, see, John Mueller, "Containment and the Decline of the Soviet Empire." *Retreat From Doomsday*, (New York: Basic Books) 1989. Also see, Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark case for Ideas." in *International Security Vol.25(3)* Winter 2000-2001, 5-53. This subject is also addressed in Wohlforth's discussion of declining relative capabilities versus the need for Soviet internal market reform. See, William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War." in *International Security*, 19(3) Winter 1994-1995, 91-129.

⁵ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth. "Clarifying the End of the Cold War." in *Cold War History* 7(3) 448.

⁶ Paul. R. Gregory, "How the Soviet System Cracked." *Policy Review*. October-November 2008.
HYPERLINK "<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/30121584.html>"
<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/30121584.html>

⁷ Richard Pipes, "The Fall of the Soviet Union." in Lee Edwards ed., *The Collapse of Soviet Communism*. (Stanford: Hoover Standard Press) 2000, 39.

⁸ Brian Taylor, "The Soviet Military and the Disintegration of the U.S.S.R." *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 5(2) 2003, 17-66.

was recognized, poor governance in both Russia and the regions was rampant and government control throughout the Soviet empire became increasingly tenuous. When the failing economic structure and weakening government confronted the ever-increasing challenges of the 1980's, the system collapsed.

Meanwhile, the changing nature of the Soviet leadership offered an instrumental “proximate” source of instability. Mikhail Gorbachev’s ascent to the highest levels of Soviet politics generated many reforms to the U.S.S.R.’s domestic and foreign policy. Most notable were the ideas of ‘perestroika’, (i.e. reconstruction) and ‘glasnost’ (i.e. greater openness). Yet the Soviet leader’s promotion of a more “hands off” and less militaristic foreign policy approach was also significant. In particular, his belief in greater self determination for the Eastern Bloc, the premise that true security must be mutual (especially in a nuclear armed world), and that the US and Soviet Union must work to address security issues as partners rather than adversaries marked a significant break with the past – a break which increasingly favoured a shift towards the ever-greater pursuit of political and diplomatic as opposed to military solutions to regional and global security challenges.⁹

Yet change was not entirely top-down. Often domestic pressures both prompted these policies and were increasingly reinforced by them, creating a magnified feedback loop.¹⁰ As independence movements within the regions of the U.S.S.R. continued to develop, the Soviet leadership increasingly found itself hostage to the republics.¹¹

Military intervention in Afghanistan marked a second proximate factor leading to collapse. Moscow’s Afghanistan campaign undermined the legitimacy of the government, discredited the Red Army, created cleavages within military ranks, and encouraged dissent in the Soviet republics.¹² Moreover, it fed growing domestic dissatisfaction with aggressive foreign policy.¹³ The resulting changes in domestic attitude bolstered support for retrenchment within key policy circles. So too did the development of civil society in Eastern and Central Europe,¹⁴ Soviet

⁹ For a more through treatment of Gorbachev’s policy changes and their impact on the collapse of communism see, Archie Brown, “Perestroika and the End of the Cold War.” in *Cold War History* 7(1) February 2007, 1-17. Regarding the origins of Gorbachev’s thinking, see Deborah Welch Larson and Alexi Shevchenko, “Shortcut to Greatness: The New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy.” *International Organization*, 57, Winter 2003, 77-109 and Janice Gross Stein, “Political Learning by Doing: Gorbachev as Uncommitted Thinker and Motivated Learner.” *International Organization*, 48, 2, Spring 1994, 155-83.

¹⁰ Stathis Kalyvas, “The Decay and Breakdown of Communist One-Party Systems.” *Annual Review of Political Science*. 2(1) 1999, 328.

¹¹ Kalyvas, 329.

¹² Rafael Reuveny and Aseem Prakash, “The Afghanistan War and the Breakdown of the Soviet Union.” *Review of International Studies* (25), 1999, 693-708.

¹³ Anthony Arnold, The Fateful Pebble: Afghanistan’s Role in the Fall of the Soviet Union. (Novato, California), 1992.

¹⁴ Friedrich Kratochwil, “The Embarrassment of Changes: Neo-Realism as the Science of Realpolitik without Politics.” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 19 (1993), 1-18. See also Majorie Castle, Triggering Communism’s Collapse: Perceptions and Power in Poland, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield),

domestic competition between hard-liners and reform oriented politicians,¹⁵ and Soviet elite learning.¹⁶

Other proximate triggers came from abroad. For example, as US policy under the Reagan administration moved towards a hard-line military approach, Moscow faced the prospect of an expensive arms race,¹⁷ a course which if pursued could only further drain Soviet resources. To be sure, Moscow's longstanding policy of fighting conventional wars (with nuclear weapons held in reserve) was already becoming prohibitively expensive, and was placing inordinate pressure on an already stagnating Soviet economy, with the prospect of continued spending in sight.¹⁸ Yet in the face of Washington's hard line, maintaining the military status quo with the US became all the more difficult to sustain, particularly in light of the fact that such a course would conflict with hopes for improving living conditions for long suffering Soviet consumers. Beyond this, the Soviet system faced mounting problems in its relations with the near abroad. Difficulties in ensuring the region's stability accelerated Soviet breakdown, as efforts to address growing conflicts from satellite states demanding greater independence ensured Moscow's lack of attention to its worsening domestic situation.

2003.

¹⁵ Matthew Evangelista, "Internal and External Constraints on Soviet Grand Strategy," in Rosecrance and Stein, Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 154-78.

¹⁶ George W. Breslauer and Philip E. Tetlock, (eds.) Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy. (Boulder: Westview Press), 1991, See also, John Mueller, "The Impact of Ideas on Grand Strategy." in Rosecrance and Stein eds. Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy, 48-64.

¹⁷ Some credit the US arms build-up as *a key* factor leading to the Soviet collapse. See for instance, William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," Yet more recent work notes that a direct link between Soviet behaviour and the arms race is hard to establish. For a critical assessment see, Robert D. English, "Power, Ideas, and New Evidence on the Cold War's End: A Reply to Brooks and Wohlforth." in *International Security* 26(4), (Spring 2002), .70-92. More sustainable is the claim that while not the *chief* determinant of change, the high cost of the arms race probably *did* work to help reinforce and bolster existing Soviet predilections toward the necessity of defence policy reform. In short, by helping to underline the economic constraints the Kremlin faced, the US arms build-up at the very least served to reinforce the policy preferences and the influence of reformers seeking change. See Matthew Evangelista, "Internal and External Constraints on Soviet Grand Strategy."

¹⁸ Andrej Brzeski, "The End of Communist Economics," in Lee Edwards, ed. The Collapse of Soviet Communism. (Stanford: Hoover Standard Press), 2000, 119-39.

Collapse of the Soviet System

By autumn 1989, such forces had worked to prompt the first in a series of events leading to the disintegration of eastern communism. After fall 1988, and President Gorbachav's endorsement of the position that Soviet control in Eastern Europe was incompatible with communist internationalism,¹⁹ the disintegration of communism in Eastern Europe seemed inevitable. Free of the fear of Soviet intervention, Poland's solidarity movement was able to push Moscow to negotiate and eventually grant Poland free elections.²⁰ A comprehensive program dismantling the vestiges of communist rule followed. Governments elsewhere in the Eastern bloc began to act more freely, and travel in Eastern Europe became more pronounced. Prompted by the promise of West German credits, Hungary removed the barbed wire that lined its border with Austria by 1989. The resulting flows of people generated a mounting pressure for change within the East German regime.²¹ On November 9, a GDR official in a press conference mistakenly announced that travel from Eastern Germany was open. Crowds of East German citizens filled the streets and dismantled the Berlin wall.²²

The fall of the Berlin Wall proved in effect to be the precursor to the collapse of the Soviet state. A rapid succession of events in autumn 1989 signalled the de facto disintegration of the U.S.S.R.²³ The rapid changes that occurred within the states that comprised the Soviet bloc reverberated within the U.S.S.R.'s borders. Confidence in Marxist-Leninist ideology was eroded as communist governments fell, and elite attitudes increasingly morphed from simple acceptance of the necessity of reform into scepticism of the communist system.²⁴ Separatist groups in satellite states became a source for ideas and influence to parties still within the system itself.²⁵

Beyond this, Gorbachev's foreign policy made it increasingly difficult to use force on the domestic front. His reluctance to use force in the face of rebellion reduced morale within the military and left members of this and other state organizations uncertain about the direction of policy.²⁶ This in turn prompted divisions within the Soviet leadership, especially during the

¹⁹ Richard H. Hudelson, *The Rise and Fall of Soviet Communism*, (Boulder Co: Westview Press), 1993. This amounted to a reorientation of Soviet policies towards the Brezhnev doctrine. Henceforth, Moscow strove to respect the rights of other communist states to govern themselves free of Soviet interference.

²⁰ Richard, H. Hudelson, 139.

²¹ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2001, 89.

²² Kotkin, 89.

²³ Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of Eastern Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 2)." in *The Journal of Cold War Studies*. 6(4), Fall 2004, 3.

²⁴ Kramer, 4.

²⁵ Kramer, 3.

²⁶ Kramer, 38.

January crackdown and the March showdown (1991).²⁷ Changes in the satellite states meanwhile, created feedback loops whereby Soviet internal governance became increasingly fragmented and unstable. By August, communist hardliners – fearing that Gorbachev’s reform programmes had gone too far, launched a coup attempt. Its failure marked the final victory of the reformers and hastened both the demise of the Communist party and the dissolution of the state. By December 1991, the republics of the Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation met to determine a new type of relationship which saw the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).²⁸

²⁷ On March 11th 1990, Lithuania declared its independence from the U.S.S.R. The Kremlin responded to this challenge, with economic, military and political pressure. These pressure tactics culminated in an event known as the January crackdown. Almost a year later on January 13th 1991, Soviet armored vehicles moved against a Lithuanian crowd protecting the Vilnius television tower. Over six hundred Lithuanians were injured in the subsequent military action. The March Showdown took place in late March 1991. Boris Yeltsin, then chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR, was facing a no-confidence vote in the legislature, as there was great division between Soviet hard-liners and reform forces. Although Gorbachev had called for a ban on public demonstrations between March 26th and April 15, Yeltsin had called for a demonstration in the center of Moscow on March 28th. Thousands gathered and the government responded by sending fifty thousand Interior Ministry troops positioned with tear gas launchers around Red Square. The demonstration concluded without incident and demonstrated both the waning power of Gorbachev and his supporters and the strength of the Soviet opposition. For more on these events see David Remnick, Lenin’s Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire. (New York: Random House), 1994.

²⁸ John B Dunlop, “The August 1991 Coup and It’s Impact on Soviet Politics.” in *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5(4), 2003, 94-127.

Consequences of the Collapse on the International System

Fallout from the collapse was immediate and extensive. The end of the Soviet system delegitimized Marxist-Leninist ideology, shaking the socialist intelligentsia and those raised under communist rule.²⁹ Religion, now freed from communist oppression, remerged as a force of influence in Eastern states and especially Russia. Conflict between various religious groups competing for influence and political groups who sought to use religion as a political tool was renewed.³⁰ And the shock worked to distort and weaken the development of civil society in Eastern Europe.³¹ Indeed, the civil society that was fostered in Eastern Europe bore little resemblance to its Western counterparts.³² As Alexander Smolar claims, “A civil society whose essence was radical opposition to the communist state could not survive the disappearance of the state.”³³ In the absence of a uniting cause, the civil societal organizations that had developed in the wake of communism and which had aided in its dismantling fragmented.³⁴

The collapse also produced winners and losers on the economic front. While the actual amount saved by the Western “peace dividend” was at times less substantial than theorized,³⁵ Western states were able to reduce defence expenditures. Yet, the collapse brought forth other sources of financial strain as Western states (primarily the US) were pressed to provide aid to Russia and its former satellites. Moreover while such programs were large in scope and scale,³⁶ levels of assistance were nonetheless lower than Moscow hoped for. Aid recipients still faced severe economic hardships and depression as they underwent massive reconstruction. In the case of German unification for instance, “(t)he immediate effect ...on East Germany’s economy was

²⁹ Kramer, 3.

³⁰ Michael J Hogan, The End of the Cold War: It’s Meaning. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1992.

³¹ Perica, Vjekoslav, Balkan Idols, Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States. (New York: Oxford University Press), 2002.

³² Alexander Smolar, “From Opposition to Atomization” in *Journal of Democracy* 7(1) January 1996.24-38.

³³ Smolar, 29.

³⁴ What had been “moral civil societies” became political. The ranks of these organizations emptied out as their former champions left for government jobs or private industry. See Smolar or Vaclav Havel.

³⁵ This is especially true in the Canadian context where defence expenditure had been in decline and already composed a smaller percentage of GDP than in other Western states. See Joseph T. Jockel, The Canadian Forces: Hard Choices, Soft Power. (Toronto: The Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies), 1999.

³⁶ See Strobe Talbott, The Russia Hand. (New York: Random House), 2002.

nothing short of radical. GDP fell almost by 30 percent, and industrial production stood at less than 50 percent of the 1989 level. Unemployment ...exceed(ed) 30 percent of the labour force.”³⁷

In all cases, the radical transition from one market structure to another proved difficult. Never had economic planners been forced to restructure economies which were at their core hostile towards market forces.³⁸ In the short term, the result was economic turmoil. Downturns accelerated and new trends such as privatization and economic corruption emerged to challenge societies in transition.³⁹

Economic transition spawned second-order changes as well. German unification further spurred economic integration within Europe – a development which culminated in European Monetary Union (EMU) and a single EU currency. Eventually the Euro competed with the American dollar as the most widely held reserve currency in global financial markets. And the EU grew; with membership increasingly used as an incentive to ensure that former Soviet states stayed the course of political and economic reform.⁴⁰

Yet while the collapse of eastern communism fundamentally altered the social and economic spheres, the complete transformation of the geopolitical system represented the greatest change. As bipolarity weakened, states and institutions which formed in the wake of World War II and developed in the shadow of communism were increasingly forced to re-evaluate their national interests as well as their *raison d'être*. The shock itself occurred with such rapidity that international institutions struggled to respond and adjust to the new geopolitical reality.

Organizational purposes and mandates suddenly lacked the guidance provided by a coherent overarching principle. Many institutions were thrown into chaos as the struggle of redefinition turned their focus to self-evaluation. One such identity crisis involved the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Formed as a collective security alliance and a bulwark against Soviet expansionism, NATO now faced the challenge of redefining its purpose as the threat precipitating its creation disappeared. Scholars soon theorized that the end of bipolarity and the communist threat signalled the end of the alliance.⁴¹

³⁷ Rudiger Dornbusch and Holger C. Wolf, “East German Economic Reconstruction.” In Blanchard, Froot and Sachs eds. The Transition in Eastern Europe. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1994, 155. It also must be noted that German reunification posed a distinct challenge to the process of transition. With the problems associated with migration flows from one part of Germany to another, monetary reform within the European Union and the total collapse of production, Germany represented the extreme example of a transition economy

³⁸ Michael Bruno, “Stabilization and Reform in Eastern Europe.” In Blanchard, Froot and Sachs eds. The Transition in Eastern Europe. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1994, 20.

³⁹ Michelle Celarier, “Privatization: A Case Study in Corruption.” *Journal of International Affairs* (50) 1997.

⁴⁰ Desmond Dinan, Ever Closer Union. (London: Palgrave MacMillan), 2005.

⁴¹ Kenneth Waltz made this much quoted statement in a speech at the 1990 meeting of the American Political Science Association.

Attempts to surmount such difficulties involved moving the alliance toward taking on a more political role. Such efforts included the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and the Partnership for Peace Program in 1994. Increasingly, however NATO was forced to work with states outside its consultative structure. This watered down its effectiveness. For instance, during the Balkan crisis, the Contact group (consisting of many states that held NATO membership as well as Russia) was established in order to aid the process of finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Yet this proved to be both a blessing and a curse as Russia's interests diverged from many of the other members of the group.⁴²

Some in fact contend that in the wake of the communist shock, NATO was transformed without conscious thought from primarily a collective defence organization to a collective security body. The resulting mission creep risked undermining the effectiveness of the organization in executing its primary role.⁴³ Another consequence of the communist shock was NATO's subsequent expansion – a move that inadvertently created a divide between older and new member states⁴⁴ and a renewal of age-old concerns in Moscow over a prospective Western encirclement of Russia.

Institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were also forced to reform and adapt as they struggled to develop restructuring and lending programs that would benefit the many states thrown into economic crisis by the disintegration of communism. Some organizations, such as the Warsaw Pact, were destroyed and made completely irrelevant by the ensuing political and economic changes.⁴⁵

The immediate impact of communism's collapse was to change the pattern that had marked the U.S.S.R.'s relations with satellite states as well as the relations that these states had with Western countries, the US in particular. Eastern European countries looked to the West not only for financial assistance through institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, but also for security assistance through organizations such as NATO.

The dual challenge of assisting in their transition -- and at the same time -- managing the specific needs of Russia's transformation proved to be a delicate balancing act for the West. Russia's struggle for internal reform had to be balanced with its external reputation. Yet at times, that reputation seemed in jeopardy. NATO's strategy of enlargement, its actions against Serbia (Russia's ally) and perceptions that Western aid in assisting Russia's transformation was tepid at best all served to feed beliefs in Moscow that Russia's international importance was on the wane. Proclamations in the US to the effect that America had "won the cold war" only heightened

⁴² See Strobe Talbott, The Russia Hand. (New York: Random House), 2002.

⁴³ According to Celeste Wallander, NATO has managed to survive for two main reasons: firstly, many assets of the alliance were not tailored specifically to the Soviet threat but to the goal of decreasing mistrust in the international arena and spreading information, ensuring that its value lasted beyond the disappearance of the precipitating threat. And where asset specificity did exist in relation to the communist threat, NATO has attempted to change and restructure. Celeste A Wallander. "Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO After the Cold War." *International Organization*. 54(4), 2000. 705-735.

⁴⁴ John Hillen "Getting NATO Back to Basics." <http://www.heritage.org/research/europe/bg1067.cfm>

⁴⁵ Robert Keohane, Joseph S Nye, Stanley Hoffman, After the Cold War. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1993.

Moscow's sensitivities. Given internal difficulties, fears that such erosion of external influence would further weaken Moscow's domestic political position multiplied. Accordingly, political grandstanding and posturing was routinely used to maintain domestic support.⁴⁶ And policy soon followed. The Primakov doctrine, bearing the name of then Russian foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov was illustrative; calling *inter alia* for an end to policies of NATO enlargement and intervention in Kosovo as well as for the promotion of a Russia, China, India strategic triangle to counterbalance US global influence. These policies were reminiscent of the Soviet past -- causing stress for Russian allies and hindering Moscow's relations with other satellite states. Yet the formation of new bonds between former adversaries was essential. This demanded no less than a complete reorientation of strategic mindsets in both East and West. Indeed, it required an abandonment of the beliefs that had shaped perceptions of security threats for more than four decades.

Added to this challenge was a genuine fear that the end of the Cold War would see the rise of global instability. Notwithstanding its dangers, the East-West rivalry had, by the late 1980s, come to possess a logic and predictability that was generally understood. Although peace had proven elusive, the superpowers had achieved a degree of mutual understanding and stability in their relationship that kept dangers somewhat contained.⁴⁷ With the Soviet collapse however, established rules of the road were gone and new forces were unleashed which threatened chaos.⁴⁸

Concerns over the potential proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were especially salient. And the spread of nuclear arms and technology raised the greatest worry. In the wake of institutional weakness and collapse as well as an economy in turmoil, tight government control of Moscow's extensive nuclear establishment and arsenal was less assured -- raising possibilities of accident, theft, smuggling and the sale of nuclear knowledge, technology and weapons abroad. Accordingly, Western attention increasingly shifted from deterring a powerful and unified nuclear adversary to alleviating the potential nuclear dangers that a weakened state could also generate. In 1992 for instance, the US established the Cooperative Nuclear Threat Reduction Program (CTR) an initiative aimed at securing and dismantling weapons of mass destruction and their associated infrastructure in the former Soviet states.⁴⁹

Civil and intra-state conflict also increased. Many of these incidents predated the collapse of the Soviet state system. Yet in the absence of the stability provided by bipolarity, they increasingly

⁴⁶ See Strobe Talbott, The Russia Hand. (New York: Random House), 2002.

⁴⁷ For insightful treatments of the development of US-Soviet cooperation in nuclear and other areas, see, George W. Breslauer and Philip E. Tetlock, (eds.) Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy. (Boulder: Westview Press), 1991, and Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley and Alexander Dallin, (eds.), U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons. (New York: Oxford University Press), 1988.

⁴⁸ Writing in the wake of such developments, University of Chicago political scientist John Mearsheimer in fact observed that despite some of its by-products, "(w)e may...wake up one day lamenting the loss of the order that the Cold War gave to the anarchy of international relations." See John J. Mearsheimer, "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War." *The Atlantic*, Vol. 266, No. 2, (August 1990), 35.

⁴⁹ Based on a US law sponsored by Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar in 1992, the CTR provides funding and expertise for states in the former Soviet Union (including Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan) to decommission nuclear, biological, and chemical weapon stockpiles, as agreed by the Soviet Union under disarmament treaties such as SALT II. Under the scrutiny of American contractors, nuclear warheads are removed from their delivery vehicles, then decommissioned or stockpiled at designated sites in Russia.

flourished. The power vacuum created by the demise of the Soviet leviathan led some groups to seek power by the use of force. States long influenced by the superpower rivalry confronted a new era of uncertainty. And information failures, problems of credible commitment and security dilemmas emerged, making intra-state and particularly ethnic conflict more likely⁵⁰ Strife in countries such as Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda posed new dangers. They also offered new challenges for many states and militaries, including Canada and the Canadian Forces (CF) – as policy elites increasingly focused their attention on issues ranging from the security implications of regional instability to the protection of human rights and humanitarian intervention.

⁵⁰ David. A Lake and David Rothchild. “Containing Fear: The Origin and Management of Ethnic Conflict.” in Michael E Brown, Owen R Cote, Sean M Lynn-Jones and Steven E Miller eds. Theories of War and Peace. (Cambridge: MIT Press), 1998.

Impact on the Canadian Forces

Perhaps not surprisingly, the ramifications of the Soviet collapse for the Canadian Forces (CF) were considerable. Much like the militaries of other NATO nations, the CF now faced the challenge of reorienting a force structure that had been built on a Cold War security paradigm. The transitional period offered an opportunity for innovation. And there were competing visions of the direction that such force innovation should take. A Special Joint Committee on Canada's National Defence (SJC) was convened to consider proposals from a range of witnesses.⁵¹ Yet expectations of a post-Cold War "peace dividend," along with a downturn in the Canadian economy worked to ensure that any vision chosen would face budgetary constraints.⁵²

Ultimately, forces *were* scaled back considerably. Notably however, the government did not decrease the number of missions in which the military was required to participate.⁵³ On the one hand, official visions for post-Cold War foreign and defence policy were sufficiently broad, so as to ensure that the possibilities for use of the CF remained considerable.⁵⁴ On the other hand, government officials proved unwilling to translate the generalities of these policy statements in a manner that would lead Canada to forgo military missions based on resource constraints, preferring instead to follow a course of "doing more with less."

Such realities encouraged a general orientation that was excessively reactive and ad hoc in terms of committing the CF to operations. It also ensured the presence of a commitment-capability gap and a force whose capabilities were at times ill-suited to the operations which increasingly characterized the post Cold War security environment.⁵⁵ The cumulative result was an excessive strain on the CF and some decline in its morale and effectiveness.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Proposals ranged from calls for a force focusing primarily on limited engagements abroad (primarily under UN auspices) and sovereignty protection (Canada 21 Council), to a general purpose construct offering a slightly scaled down version of the force that already existed (Conference of Defence Associations), to various proposals calling for specific niche capabilities and Canada's withdrawal from a number of longstanding commitments (e.g. NATO, NORAD). See Canada 21 Council, Canada and Common Security in the Twenty-First Century. (Toronto: Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto), 1994, Conference of Defence Associations, Canadian Security and Policy for the 21st Century, (Ottawa: CDA) 1993, and Conference of Defence Associations, Canadian Security: A Force Structure Model for the 21st Century. (Ottawa) June 1994.

⁵² Joseph T. Jockel, The Canadian Forces: Hard Choices, Soft Power. (Toronto: The Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies), 1999.

⁵³ Jockel, 15.

⁵⁴ Hugh Segal, Geopolitical Integrity. (Montreal: The Institute for Research on Public Policy) 2005, 58. In this regard, the declared defence policy was "to build and maintain multipurpose, combat-capable sea, land and air forces that will protect Canadians and project their interests and values abroad" See, Canada, Department of National Defence, 1994 Defence White Paper. (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada), 1994.

⁵⁵ As Segal asserts, Canada's strategic lift capacity was reduced throughout the 1950's and 60's in a cost saving measure by the CF. The CF made the choice to not renew these capabilities and the outcome of this was challenges in operations such as Operation Deliverance (Somalia, 1993-1994). This is but one example of the deficiencies that the CF faced while attempting to launch operations with a force structure

Efforts to overcome such difficulties were eventually undertaken. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade center on 9/11, 2001 in particular generated a degree of popular support and political will sufficient to address some of the weaknesses which characterized the CF during the 1990s. Yet the early post cold war experience nonetheless demonstrated the degree to which policy could suffer in the wake of a shock. In the case of the Soviet collapse, the disappearance of a clear and longstanding security threat created a context in the which capacity for careful thought and strategic vision on the part of government was diminished. Without a central organizing principle and clearly defined foreign and defence policy goals, policy became excessively ad hoc and reactive. Hard decisions on key foreign and defence priorities were avoided. And the CF increasingly became vulnerable to becoming ill-equipped, overextended and overburdened.

that was still mired down in Cold War history, see Hugh Segal, Geopolitical Integrity. (Montreal: The Institute for Research on Public Policy) 2005, 50. Notable also is the fact that force development and capital acquisition processes within the Department of National Defence changed little following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, they remained heavily wedded to concepts steeped in Cold war logic (i.e. a focus on deterrence as opposed to war-fighting).

⁵⁶ In this regard, Bland and Maloney observe that when the forces were deployed to Somalia "...the force size was determined not by what commanders determined would be needed there, but by what officials considered the static budget would support. Overworked soldiers with failing equipment were assigned more missions in the Balkans, Africa, East Timor and in dozens of other places without any augmentation to the ... force level(s) that the government had established ... based on ... "do less" assumptions." See Douglas L. Bland and Sean M. Maloney, Campaigns for International Security. (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press), 2004, 134.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned

To be sure, it would have been difficult to anticipate the precise nature and trajectory of the collapse of the Soviet system. Equally clear however, is the fact that greater forethought was essential for developing coherent responses to the potential challenges which materialized after the systems demise.

In the case of the West's approach to the Soviet collapse, such responses were often weak and at times counterproductive – with action and rhetoric often feeding perceptions of humiliation and marginalization in Moscow. One result was growing Russian resentment. Yet another was increased support for an ever more bellicose Russian policy which reflected a view of the West as a competitor as opposed to partner. This made the goal of attaining mutual trust and cooperation all the more difficult. Clearly, such approaches should be jettisoned in favour of more sustained diplomatic engagement in future cases of state weakness and/or collapse.

To conclude, effective security concepts and architectures must be developed to guard against the ad hoc responses that can clearly plague organizations in the wake of such events. In the case of the economic, social, and political challenges created by the end of Soviet communism, the lack of policy theorizing and careful analysis both preceding and following the shock held as many implications for the international system as the shock itself.

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List of symbols/abbreviations/acronyms/initialisms

CF	Canadian Forces
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CTR	Cooperative Nuclear Threat Reduction Program
DFSA	Directorate of Future Security Analysis
EMU	European Monetary Union
EU	European Union
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SJC	Special Joint Committee on Canada's National Defence
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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This study was written in support of the project; Future Security Environment Part 2: Future Shocks, launched by the Directorate of Future Security Analysis (DFSA) in December 2008. The project aimed at identifying and evaluating plausible Strategic Shocks in order to help inform and enable policymaking and capability development.

One aspect of the project involved illustrating the lessons learned and consequences of shocks that have occurred in the past. The present study, "Strategic Shock: The Collapse of the Soviet Union; 1989," was chosen by members of the DFSA research team for its exemplification of a "geopolitical shock."

The study contends that not only did the Soviet collapse generate considerable economic, political and social turmoil in former Soviet satellites, but throughout the international system as a whole. Old predictable rules gave way to uncertainty. Regional rivalries and ethnic and religious rivalries long suppressed by superpower influence and patronage re-emerged. Threats of state failure, regional conflict and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction multiplied. And key national and international institutions and organizations – long focused on the threat of the Soviet monolith -- were thrown into crises of identity and purpose. Beyond this, the disappearance of the longstanding threat led to the creation of a vacuum in careful thought and strategic vision on the part of governments. Without a central organizing principle and clearly defined foreign and defence policy goals, policy became excessively ad hoc and reactive.

Overall, the collapse illustrates the fact that effective security concepts and architectures must be developed to guard against the ad hoc responses that can plague organizations in the wake of such events.

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Shocks; Futures; Future Security Environment; Soviet Union.



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