Definition: Soviet Union from The Macquarie Dictionary

1. (formerly) a federation of socialist republics in eastern Europe and western, central and northern Asia; formed from the territories of the Russian Empire following the Revolution of 1917; the Union formally established in 1922; after its dissolution in 1991, the republics formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

See Also: Russia Commonwealth of Independent States

Official name Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

Summary Article: Soviet Union
From Philip’s Encyclopedia

(Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, USSR) Former federal republic, successor to the Russian Empire and the world’s first communist state. The Soviet Union formed on December 30, 1922 and, when dissolved on December 31, 1991, was the largest country in the world. The Bolshevik regime, led by Lenin, came to power in the Russian Revolution (1917). Lenin’s government survived civil war (1918-22) and famine by instituting a centralized command economy. In 1921, the New Economic Policy (NEP) marked a return to a mixed economy. In 1922, the republics of Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia and Transcaucasia signed a treaty of union. In 1923, a new constitution was adopted establishing the supremacy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and the Supreme Soviet as the highest legislative body. Lenin died in January 1924, and a power struggle ensued between Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin. Stalin emerged the victor, and Trotsky was expelled in 1927. In 1928, the first five-year plan was introduced. It transformed Soviet agriculture and industry: collective and state farms were imposed, and industrialization was accelerated. The urban population rapidly doubled. The collectivization schemes led directly to the Ukraine famine (1932-34), which claimed more than seven million lives. State control infiltrated all areas of society, and was sometimes brutally imposed by the secret police. The systems of control led to the creation of a massive bureaucratic administration. The murder (1934) of Sergei Kirov led to the Stalinist purges, and a wave of terror in 1936-38. Supposed dissidents within the government, party and army were sentenced to death, or exiled to the Siberian gulags. The purges also targeted Soviet Jews and other ethnic groups. In 1936, Transcaucasia divided into the republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. In August 1939, Stalin concluded a non-aggression pact with Hitler. Germany and the USSR invaded Poland and divided up the country. In 1940, Soviet expansion incorporated the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into the Union. War with Finland led to the formation of the Karelo-Finnish republic. On June 22, 1941, Germany invaded Russia. The failure of the siege of Stalingrad (1943) led to the surrender of 330,000 Axis troops and was a decisive turning-point in World War 2. The Red Army’s counter-offensive liberated much of Europe. World War 2 devastated the Soviet Union, with an estimated 25 million Soviet lives lost. The Soviet Union and the USA emerged as the two post-war superpowers. Their antagonistic ideologies

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and ambitions led to the Cold War. Not only had Soviet territory increased, but its European sphere of influence extended into Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania. The importance of the military-industrial sector in Soviet politics was greatly enhanced. In 1948, the Soviet army attempted to blockade the western sectors of Berlin. In 1949, when NATO was formed, the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb. In March 1953, Stalin died and a collective leadership was installed. In 1955, the Warsaw Pact was established as the communist counterpart to NATO. In 1956, at the 20th CPSU Congress, Nikita Khrushchev made his famous secret speech denouncing Stalin as a dictator. In October 1956, Soviet troops crushed a Hungarian uprising against Moscow’s domination. In 1958, Khrushchev won the battle for succession. He began a policy of liberalization. Economic decentralization entailed a reduction in the bureaucracy. Huge areas of 'virgin land' were opened to grain cultivation in order to prevent further famine. Khrushchev forged new alliances with anti-colonial movements worldwide, and formulated a policy of peaceful coexistence with the West. The Cold War shifted into a technological battle to produce more powerful weapons of mass destruction, and a 'Space Race'. In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, the world's first artificial satellite, and in 1961 Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space. Also in 1961, the Berlin Wall was built to divide East Berlin from West. In 1962, the Cuban missile crisis shattered the Cold War stand-off, and nuclear war threatened. Khrushchev agreed to remove Soviet missiles and catastrophe was avoided. In October 1964, a conservative collective leadership, headed by Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksei Kosygin, removed Khrushchev from office and began reversing his reforms. Brezhnev ruled by consensus and brought close political associates such as Yuri Andropov (KGB chief) and Andrei Gromyko (foreign minister) into his politburo. He instituted cautious economic reforms and agricultural production increased dramatically. In foreign affairs, the 'Brezhnev doctrine' preserved the right of the Soviet Union to intervene in communist states to preserve international communism. The doctrine was invoked to stem the liberalization of Czechoslovakia, and on August 21, 1968, Warsaw Pact troops invaded to crush the Prague Spring. Internal dissent was not tolerated. Leading dissident scientists and intellectuals, such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov, were sent to prison or forced exile. Many Soviet Jews emigrated in the early 1970s. In 1969, an era of superpower détente began with a series of strategic arms limitation talks (SALT) resulting in the signing of SALT I by Brezhnev and Nixon in 1972. In 1975, the Helsinki Accords recognized the post-war European borders. In 1977, Brezhnev became president and a new constitution adopted. In 1979, SALT II was signed, but the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan ended the period of détente and the USA never ratified the treaty. In 1980, the USA led a boycott of the Moscow Olympics, and placed new, intermediate-range Pershing II missiles on European soil. The Soviet economy stagnated with the stabilization of world oil prices and its outdated manufacturing technology. After Brezhnev’s death (1982), Andropov became leader. He began a series of far-reaching economic reforms targeting centralization, corruption, inefficiency, and alcoholism. He promoted a series of advisers, including Mikhail Gorbachev, to implement the reforms but Andropov died after only 15 months in office. He was replaced by a hardline Brezhnevite, Konstantin Chernenko. Chernenko died 13 months later, and (in March 1985) Gorbachev became general secretary. Gorbachev began a process of economic restructuring (perestroika) and political openness (glasnost). Dissidents were released and restraints on emigration were lifted, but the Chernobyl disaster (1986) provided the first real test of glasnost. Gorbachev began a new détente initiative, focusing on nuclear disarmament. A series of meetings with Ronald Reagan led to the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which resolved to scrap intermediate-range nuclear missiles. The Soviet Union agreed to halt the war in Afghanistan, and all its troops withdrew by February 1989. Perestroika continued Andropov's reduction of bureaucracy, and allowed a more mixed economy. Restructuring was hampered, however, by

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opposition from conservatives and radicals led by Boris Yeltsin, who urged more far-reaching policy shifts. In 1988, Gorbachev convened a conference of the CPSU (the first since 1941) at which parliamentary elections were approved. In March 1989, the first pluralist elections since 1917 were held. Gorbachev was elected state president. A tide of reform swept over Eastern Europe; by the end of 1989 every communist leader in the Warsaw Pact had been overthrown. The constituent republics of the Soviet Union began to clamour for secession. In 1989, Gorbachev and Bush declared an end to the Cold War. The Baltic republics, Kazakhstan, and Georgia demanded independence. Armenia and Azerbaijan fought for control of Nagorno-Karabakh. In March 1990, the newly elected Soviet parliament authorized private ownership of the means of production: the central economic principle of Marxism had been removed. The CPSU fractured, and Boris Yeltsin resigned from the party. Amid the breakdown in federal government structures, the economy declined by 4%. In December 1990, Gorbachev gained emergency presidential powers and the conservatives demanded action to prevent the disintegration of the Union of Soviets. Soviet paratroopers fought to prevent secession in Latvia and Lithuania. Miners went on strike, calling for Gorbachev's resignation. Eduard Shevardnadze resigned and formed the Democratic Reform Movement. In June 1991, a new Union Treaty that devolved power to the republics and reconstituted the federal government was drafted. It was approved by nine republics, but Armenia, the Baltic states, Georgia and Moldova refused to cooperate. In the same month, Boris Yeltsin was elected president of the Russian Republic. In July 1991, Gorbachev attended the Group of Seven (G7) summit and signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), reducing the number of long-range missiles. On August 18, 1991, hardliners Vice President Yanayev and Defence Minister Dmitri Yazov mounted a coup against Gorbachev, who was kept under house arrest in the Crimea while the coup leaders assumed control of the media and sent tanks into Moscow to capture the Russian Parliament and Boris Yeltsin. The coup failed and Gorbachev was reinstated on August 22, 1991. The republics declared their independence from federal control. Yeltsin emerged as the new political power-broker. He banned the CPSU, took control of the Russian Army, and forced Gorbachev to suspend the Russian Communist Party. Gorbachev resigned as general secretary of the CPSU. In September 1991, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania gained independence. On December 8, 1991, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). By the end of December, the republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan had all joined the CIS. On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev resigned as president of the USSR, and a week later the Soviet Union officially dissolved.

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