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Introduction

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In an extremely hierarchical political system, which concentrates a great deal of power and authority in the top political office, the ideas, values, character, and style of the holder of that position acquire an especial significance. The Soviet system became strongly institutionalized, so that, particularly in the post-Stalin period, leaders too had to operate within a framework of constraints. Yet it is not for nothing that eras of Russian history are named after Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev, and Yeltsin. The fifteen months spent by Yury Andropov and the thirteen months of Konstantin Chernenko as leaders (general secretary) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the first half of the 1980s were too short—and, in the case of both of these men, too dogged by ill health—to merit such labeling. Nevertheless, the changes from Brezhnev to Andropov and then from Andropov to Chernenko were enough to produce a palpable difference of atmosphere that could be felt within Soviet society, as well as some difference of tone and style within the Soviet system.

Yet these were as nothing compared with the changes wrought by Lenin and Stalin or to be compared even with the boldness of Nikita Khrushchev in revealing and condemning at least some of the crimes of Stalin and thereby destroying the myth of the infallibility of the Communist Party. Khrushchev's aim, however, was to strengthen the authority of the party rather than to damage it, and he had some success in that endeavor—

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notwithstanding the unintended consequences of his attack on the “cult of personality.” Under Khrushchev, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was rebuilt as a complex of powerful political institutions rather than as just one of the instruments of rule available to a dictator. The leading Western scholarly specialist on the CPSU, Leonard Schapiro, in what is still the major book on that organization, aptly entitled one of the chapters “Stalin’s Victory over the Party.”¹ Khrushchev himself, however, even though he had indeed revitalized the Communist Party, bypassed his colleagues when he deemed it necessary and took enough unilateral decisions that adversely affected powerful interests within the Soviet system for them to coalesce against him in 1964.

Leonid Brezhnev was not a leader of comparable boldness to Khrushchev, but it was precisely because he personified the interests of the *nomenklatura*, the senior officeholders in different branches of the Soviet establishment, that he gave his name to an age. Whereas Stalin had been a danger to the life and limb of officials even more than to ordinary workers, and whereas Khrushchev had been a threat to their peace of mind and security of tenure, Brezhnev’s style, so far as intra-elite relations were concerned (the treatment of dissidents was an altogether different matter) was conciliatory and accommodating. This approach produced the nearest thing in the USSR to a golden age of the Soviet official—except, that is, for the younger and more ambitious among them, since Brezhnev’s “stability of cadres” meant that promotion was slow and the Politburo turned into a gerontocracy.

There were plenty of reasons why an innovative policy should be pursued when, following the Andropov and Chernenko interregnum, a vigorous leader just turned 54 years of age, Mikhail Gorbachev, succeeded Chernenko as the sixth and (as it transpired) last general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.² This is not the place to go into the numerous stimuli to change; they are touched upon in subsequent chapters of this book and have been widely and much more fully discussed elsewhere. But the buildup of problems does not in itself guarantee systemic change. There are enough regimes in the world that survive far longer than they deserve to, from a moral point of view, while remaining both politically oppressive and economically inefficient. Even for a *leader* to challenge the norms of a consolidated authoritarian state is unusual, for the risks of confronting established institutions within the system (not least that of the Soviet Union almost 70 years after the Bolshevik Revolution) are likely to be *far greater* than the risk of the system not surviving his time at the top of the

political hierarchy. Cautious tinkering, in the Brezhnev manner, was more likely to see the leader still in office, and receiving fulsome tributes, until his death at an advanced age.

What, moreover, the experience of Khrushchev had shown was that the general secretary was by no means invulnerable. He could continue to enjoy an authority superior to all others within the system as long as he did not threaten or undermine the positions of the Soviet elite (or elites).³ Gorbachev had gone well beyond Khrushchev's reforms in a great many respects. Moreover, he embodied and encouraged a different mentality from that of all previous Soviet leaders, ceasing to be any kind of Leninist even while he continued to accord Lenin as a politician more respect than was his due. Though an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary by temperament, Gorbachev launched both a conceptual revolution and an institutional reformation. They were transformative in ways both intended and unintended.

Freedom of speech and freedom from fear were enormous gains for Soviet and Russian society and for individual citizens, but given the accumulation of grievances, not least those of particular nationalities, the end to suppression of discordant voices provided the opportunity for separatist sentiment to gather support and for destabilizing forces to become stronger. The legitimation of a "pluralism of opinion" was reinforced by institutional changes that quite rapidly evolved into political pluralism. Similarly, Gorbachev's boldness in curtailing the power of the party apparatus, accelerated by the introduction of contested elections, undermined not only his own institutional base but also the structure that had played a huge part in holding together the multinational Soviet state. To allow federal forms to acquire federal substance—with the nominal authority of the component parts of the federation no longer filtered through, and constrained by, the single, centralized, ruling party—was to make the task of keeping all fifteen Soviet republics within the same political and legal space a Sisyphean challenge. In the end, the attempt to maintain this union on the basis of a looser federation or even confederation, and the effort to maintain by persuasion the territorial integrity of a state that had hitherto known only authoritarian or totalitarian rule, turned out to be a bridge too far even for such an exceptionally skilled bridge-builder as Gorbachev.

Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin, in their very different ways, took huge risks, although Gorbachev was also a master at "tranquilizing the hard-liners."⁴ As Andrey Grachev, Gorbachev's former presidential press spokesman and a shrewd political analyst, has remarked: "People seldom ask how many coups

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d'état Gorbachev managed to avoid in six and a half years of reform."⁵ It was crucially important that by the time the hard-liners awoke from their trance, they could no longer dispose of a leader as simply as they had removed Khrushchev. Both the system and the society had changed, and the conservative political forces that mounted the coup against Gorbachev with the aims of re-establishing the Soviet system he had been dismantling and of preserving the Soviet state they feared was disintegrating had been lulled into leaving things too late. Their actions in August 1991 merely speeded up the replacement of Gorbachev by Yeltsin and accelerated the breakup of the union.

Boris Yeltsin also, for better or worse (as is argued in the following chapter), played a huge part in breaking up the Soviet state. In the last years of the Soviet Union, he carved out for himself a position that hitherto had not existed in the USSR, that of Leader of the Opposition.⁶ Yeltsin's finest hour, by common consent, was when he led the opposition to the hard-line coup of August 1991 from his base in the Moscow White House (which two years later he was to give the orders to bombard when it was occupied by his political enemies). But the legacy of Yeltsin's years in power was a hybrid political and economic system, combining substantial elements of democracy, arbitrariness, and kleptocracy. He was certainly a leader who made a difference, although he too was subject to constraints, albeit different constraints from those with which Gorbachev had to contend.

Vladimir Putin's inheritance from Yeltsin was a very mixed one. The freedom of speech and the press of the Gorbachev era had been maintained, some elements of democracy that emerged in the perestroika period had been given constitutional underpinning, and several fundamental economic changes had occurred under Yeltsin's leadership, most notably a substantial (though incomplete) price liberalization and the privatization of most commerce and much industry. However, on many indices—such as negative growth, capital flight, lack of industrial investment, demoralization of the armed forces, growth of corruption, increased alcoholism, and decline of public services (including deteriorating health care and a lowering of life expectancy)—the Russia Putin inherited from Yeltsin was in substantially worse shape than the Soviet Union of the perestroika years or, for that matter, the Brezhnev era.

In spite of the enormous differences between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin is in still more respects the odd one out in this trio of leaders of the Russia transition. Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin initiated change

that broke radically with communist ideology and Soviet political practice, whereas Putin became a politician when the transition from communism had already taken place. Some observers see him as an agent of restoration of the old order, and he has made it clear that he shares with many Russians a nostalgia for the Soviet Union. This, however, Putin combines with the realism to accept that the former boundaries of a greater Russia in the form of the Soviet state cannot be restored. Furthermore, in principle at least, he supports party competition and pluralism in the mass media, even if some of the practice in these areas since he became president has caused serious worry to genuine democrats. In addition, while he has supported state ownership of the defense industry, he has categorically condemned proposals “to nationalize and confiscate property,” arguing that it would lead to “arbitrary rule.”⁷ While Putin does not share Yeltsin’s extreme distaste for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and has been ready, unlike Yeltsin, to do deals with it in the course of his relations with the State Duma, he has also appositely remarked:

Communists can either change their programmatic goals and become a major left-wing party of the European type, or they can take the other path and lose their social base through natural attrition. If they choose the latter, they will gradually exit the political stage.⁸

There is no doubt that Putin aims to restore Russian national pride, but restoration of communism is not on the political agenda. Equally, Putin aims to enhance the power of the central Russian state, but primarily so that its authority will be effective throughout the whole of its vast territory. While he clearly hankers after Russia’s becoming again a great power (as distinct, though, from a superpower), he seems temperamentally averse to adventurism which would, in any event, be difficult in Russia’s current straitened circumstances. Amidst the conflicting signals that have come from the Putin administration, perhaps the most important point to bear in mind is that Putin is an inexperienced leader who remains open to influence from both his domestic and foreign interlocutors. While he has described himself as “a pure and utterly successful product of Soviet patriotic education.”⁹ Putin has also discarded many of the beliefs he at one time took for granted.

It is too soon to determine whether Vladimir Putin will be a leader who makes a profound difference to the system and society he inherited. All the authors of the chapters that follow, though, are in agreement that both

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Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin were transformational leaders, however much their evaluation of the two men's achievements and failures may differ in other respects. In a well-known book entitled *Leadership* written almost a generation ago, James MacGregor Burns distinguished between transactional and transforming leaders. The transactional leader works within existing norms and is a wheeler-dealer for whom reciprocity and adaptability are the essence of his or her leadership style—to such an extent, says Burns, “that leaders become hardly distinguishable from followers.”¹⁰ While not all leaders can readily be slotted into a neat dichotomy between the transforming and the transactional, and even transformational leaders have to know when to adapt and compromise as well as when to take bold initiatives, it is not difficult to fit Leonid Brezhnev and Konstantin Chernenko into the category of transactional leaders. For Burns, the notion of *transforming* leadership, in contrast with the transactional, has a moral dimension. It occurs when “one or more persons *engage* with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.”¹¹

The authors of this book mean both more and, in some respects, less than Burns when they use the term “transformational” (rather than “transforming”) leader. They have in mind not just leaders who *transform policy* (as in the case of Burns's paradigmatic transforming leader, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt), but who are *systemic transformers*, whether we have in mind the political system, the economic system, or the international system. This is a much larger claim. However, while such leadership may, indeed, contain a moral dimension, system transformation does not necessarily go along with the elevation of followers and societies to a higher moral plane. Lenin was a transformational leader, par excellence, as was Stalin. Even though Stalin built on foundations laid by Lenin, he constructed a different system from the one Lenin had envisaged. The transformational character of their leadership can scarcely be doubted, but certainly none of the authors of this book and probably few of its readers would wish to commend the moral quality of their achievement.¹²

Another distinction to be found in the literature on leadership is that between leaders and managers.¹³ Leaders, if they are to be effective, have to convey meaning and purpose and be much more than mere supervisors. Leadership that goes well beyond the transactional involves initiating change, creating a new agenda, and generating enthusiasm for it—as distinct from being content with the managerial outcome of predictability and order.

Effective leadership also involves developing political networks and communicating with those whose cooperation is necessary if change is to be implemented.¹⁴ These are less demanding criteria than that of *systemic* change required by the transformational leader, and to varying degrees Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and even Putin meet them. The time dimension, though, has to be taken into account, for the content of the policies enunciated by Gorbachev and Yeltsin and the relative enthusiasm with which they were received varied over the years. It was especially during the first four of his six and a half years in power that Gorbachev was the initiator of change and only in his earliest years as Russian leader that Yeltsin was a real agenda-setter. Later in their political careers, both Gorbachev and Yeltsin found it harder to determine the political agenda and much more difficult to engender popular support for their policies. Sustaining coalitions or networks of influential insiders on whom they could rely also became increasingly problematical.

Nevertheless, of the three top leaders examined in this concise volume, two of them, Gorbachev and Yeltsin, in the terms expounded in subsequent chapters, are clearly *transformational* leaders.¹⁵ Whether Vladimir Putin will be much more than a transactional leader remains to be seen. Yet, the institutional resources at the disposal of the Russian president, together with the traditional tendency to defer to higher authority, mean that Putin has, at least, more scope than anyone else in contemporary Russia to influence the direction taken by a transition whose point of departure is known and already consigned to history but whose destination remains unknown. The categories of transactional, on the one hand, and transforming/transformational, on the other, do not in any case fully embrace the distinctive importance of leadership at a time of systemic transition. When the norms governing political behavior have, along with established institutions, been cast aside for whatever reason, the choices made by leaders assume far more than usual significance. Since they are liable to have a disproportionate influence over the process of institutional design and institution-building, they may be making choices that will determine the structures and constraints of the evolving system for years to come. This has surely been the case in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods of Russian politics.

Moreover, even when considering such transformational leaders as Gorbachev and Yeltsin, we need to distinguish which transformations we are talking about (a point I elaborate in chapter 2) and which criteria for evaluating these leaders we are applying (an issue elucidated by George

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Breslauer in chapter 3). In chapter 4, we move from a pairing of Gorbachev and Yeltsin to a comparison of Yeltsin and Putin. Lilia Shevtsova traces the evolution of presidential power in post-Soviet Russia and examines to what degree Putin is making a break with the norms and institutions he inherited from Yeltsin. In the penultimate contribution to the volume (chapter 5), Eugene Huskey focuses on Putin's first year in the presidency, while paying due attention to its antecedents, and extends the scope of our concern with leadership by analyzing not only Putin's institutional innovations affecting the center's relations with the regions but also leadership in the regions themselves. While there is no doubt that a reassertion of central state power has occurred under Putin, his regional reforms—like so many reforms in Russia over the past fifteen years—could have unintended as well as intended consequences. In her concluding chapter, Lilia Shevtsova reflects on the leadership of Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin and, although far from complacent about post-Soviet Russian political experience thus far, finds grounds for some guarded optimism about the future.

Notes

1. Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (London: Methuen, rev. and exp. ed., 1970), pp. 403–421.

2. Lenin was not general secretary of the party, but chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, i.e., head of the government. Although recognized as the country's leader, he was the exception to what became the Soviet rule. From Stalin's time until almost the end of the Soviet era—when an executive presidency was created in 1990—the general secretaryship was the key political position, the one that commanded most resources and whose holder exercised a superior power and authority to the heads of the Council of People's Commissars (later Council of Ministers), except for the years in which the general secretary himself took over the formal headship of the government, as both Stalin and Khrushchev did for a time.

3. Although it was, and remains, wrong to apply the adjective “pluralist” to the Soviet system and society any earlier than the late 1980s, it was a system in which there were different institutional interests. Among the major ones were the party apparatus (which had a superior authority to all the others), the ministerial bureaucracy, the military, and the KGB. Indeed, there was a diversity of interest even within these organizations, but they could come together to promote a common *nomenklatura* interest when they felt under threat, as they did (successfully) against Khrushchev in 1964 and (much less unitedly and less successfully) against Gorbachev in 1991.

4. Comparative study of transitions from authoritarianism suggests that this is a necessary phase in most democratization processes, not one specific to the Soviet Union. See Guillermo

O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 44.

5. Andrei Grachev, *Final Days: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), p. xi.

6. In pre-perestroika conditions it would have been impossible to play such a role, although in the Brezhnev era both Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Andrey Sakharov, notwithstanding their different political beliefs, stood out among the persecuted critics of the regime, their fame protecting them to some extent from the still worse treatment meted out to many of their fellow dissidents.

7. Vladimir Putin, *First Person* (London: Hutchison, 2000), p. 181.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 42.

10. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 258.

11. Ibid., p. 20.

12. Lenin and, more especially, Stalin do not, accordingly, fit into Burns's category of transforming leaders, although they were clearly transformational leaders in the sense in which that concept is used in this book and on the common sense criteria that they not only presided over but consciously willed and implemented enormous changes in the systems they headed and the societies they governed.

13. See Barbara Kellerman, *Reinventing Leadership: Making the Connection Between Politics and Business* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); and John Kotter, *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

14. See Kellerman, *ibid.*, p. 148; and Kotter, *ibid.*, p. 6.

15. In my own view, as chapter 2 makes clear, Gorbachev was a more comprehensively transformational leader than Yeltsin. See also Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), and Brown, "Mikhail Gorbachev: Systemic Transformer," in *Leaders of Transition*, ed. Martin Westlake (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 3–26.

