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The Defense Council & Soviet Presidency

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The Defense Council, previously dominated by senior Politburo and military leaders, supervised Soviet defense decision making until Soviet President M.S. Gorbachev reduced its authority with the creation of the Soviet presidency in 1990. Significantly, he transferred national security authority from the Politburo and the party apparatus to the state apparatus under the USSR presidency. Gorbachev also modified the Defense Council as it became an appendage to the US SR presidency where it served as his advisory panel on the Soviet military's technical needs.

Formally attached to the office of the chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Defense Council's duties made it the supreme civilian organ which governed over Soviet military doctrinal and strategic issues, budgets, personnel issues, and weapons programs. Apparently, the Defense Council's role in these issues had been enhanced between 1985-1989. Gorbachev not only revealed the Defense Council's membership in July 1989 but also stated it had taken a much more active role in military decision making. He stated that the Defense Council, along with the support of Prime Minister and Defense Council Member N.I. Ryzhkov, nominated D.T. Yazov to replace then-Minister of Defense S.L. Sokolov after the May 1987 Rust affair. Also, in November 1989, Defense Council member LN. Zaikov described its work. He stated that the Defense Council decided arms control issues and unilateral troop reductions, including the July 1985 unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing, the 1988 withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, and the December 1988 unilateral reduction in the Soviet armed forces.
Gorbachev wanted to make the Defense Council responsive to the needs of a law-based state between 1988 and 1989. In December 1988, he forced through the Supreme Soviet amendments to the Soviet constitution which openly stated that the Defense Council's chairmanship would go to the Supreme Soviet chairman. Never had the chairmanship been mentioned in the Soviet Constitution. In addition, Gorbachev argued that Defense Council personnel should become subject to government approval. No longer would the Defense Council's authority be concentrated in the hands of a few Politburo members and the top military brass. Both moves intended to legitimize the Defense Council as a constitutionally based organization responsible for the nation's military security.

Gorbachev also sought to strengthen the Defense Council in 1989 through publicly announced personnel appointments. In November 1989, Gorbachev appointed Zaikov as Defense Council first deputy chief in a previously unknown position. His appointment should be viewed as a promotion since he not only served as second-in-command to Gorbachev (who served as Defense Council Chairman) but also because he retained his Secretariat and Politburo positions. These positions added to his authority within the Defense Council. Zaikov revealed at the July 1990 28th Party Congress that within the Politburo he chaired a previously unknown secret committee designed to supervise military technical affairs, while in the Secretariat he supervised the Central Committee's Defense Department and the State and Legal Department (after CPSU Secretary V.M. Chebrikov's retirement). Zaikov brought this expertise on defense and state security matters to the Defense Council.

### The Presidential Council

However, in 1990, the Presidential Council's establishment seemed to challenge the Defense Council's enhanced authority. According to Article 127 of the newly revised Soviet Constitution (as printed in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* March 27, 1990), the Presidential Council's job "is to elaborate measures to implement the basic thrusts of US SR domestic and foreign policy and ensure the country's security." In addition, all
references to the Defense Council in the Soviet Constitution (Article 113, point 3, and Article 121, point 5) were deleted. These events led to speculation in both the Soviet and Western press that the Defense Council had been abolished. Soviet officials hinted at the Presidential Council's enhanced role in national security affairs. Presidential Council member S.S. Shatalin stated in Literaturnaia Gazeta (No. 13, March 28, 1990) after his appointment that it would be "more correct to call the [Presidential Council] the Council for National Security and National Consensus." In addition, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet A.I. Lukyanov characterized the Presidential Council in a April 1990 TASS interview as a "national security council."

Moreover, Gorbachev seemed to have signaled the demise of the "old" Defense Council just before announcing the Presidential Council's creation. He stated on Soviet television in March 1990 that the "issues of leadership of the armed forces and issues of security and defense" are important components of presidential power and that "a significant number of figures who were connected with the work of the Defense Council will continue to participate and offer their assistance to the President" Gorbachev also appointed to the Presidential Council key personnel who were believed to have sat on the Defense Council (i.e. Bakatin, Kryuchkov, and Shevardnadze), giving rise to the speculation that the Presidential Council or a subcommittee within it would replace the Defense Council. However, it should be pointed out that the Presidential Council faces enormous problems because its diverse composition fails to possess the knowledge necessary to make important military-technical decisions.

Nevertheless, Gorbachev faced resistance to his plans from military leaders because they recognized the Presidential Council's lack of expertise on military-technical questions. Immediately following Gorbachev's announcement on the Presidential Council's national security role, Chief of the General Staff M.A. Moiseev criticized the Presidential Council's establishment in Krasnaia Zvezda (March 16, 1990) because it did not take into consideration the Defense Council's functions. He argued that at the very least the USSR president needed "a military aide with a small, well qualified apparatus" to replace the Defense Council.
Gorbachev clarified the status of the Defense Council in a reference to that body soon after its supposed demise. When asked at a televised question and answer session on April 11, 1990, about the posts he holds (CPSU General Secretary, President, Chairman of the CPSU's Buro for the RSFSR, and Chairman of the Defense Council), Gorbachev stated that he was still head of the Defense Council, but that this body had been abolished and replaced by a new Defense Council attached to the presidency. In addition, Gorbachev stated that the Defense Council and the Presidential Council would soon consider military reform proposals and address the problem of providing adequate housing for Soviet military personnel.

No official details on the council's membership—or its specific relationship with the Presidential Council—have yet emerged. The Defense Council met on September 1, 1990, but no mention was made of the individual participants. However, General Major G.V. Zhivitsa, in Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil (No. 11, 1990), revealed that the Defense Council's membership had been reduced. The Commanders-in-Chief of the five military services no longer belong to the Defense Council. Interestingly, Moscow Domestic Service of July 29, 1990 [FBIS-SOV July 30, 1990] identified Chief of the Soviet Naval Political Directorate V.I. Panin as a Defense Council member in July 1990. His identification is a mystery because superiors such as the CinCs are no longer members. Finally, Zaikov, who announced his retirement from the Politburo and the Central Committee in June 1990, seemed to have reemerged as a Defense Council member on October 16, 1990 when he signed A.A. Maksimov's obituary in Krasnaia Zvezda. This event should not come as a surprise. In Izvestiia of June 25, 1990, he hinted that he (and other party officials from the Politburo and the Central Committee apparatus) would find work in "industry and in other party posts" which suggested that Zaikov did not have retirement on his agenda.

Moreover, at the July 1990 28th Party Congress, Zaikov advocated that the Defense Council should exist under the Soviet presidency and openly supported Gorbachev's new thinking and security goals despite calls from conservative military leaders and
party officials who blamed Gorbachev for "losing Eastern Europe." Gorbachev possibly rewarded Zaikov for his support by keeping him on the new Defense Council.

**Defense Council Members**
**(October 1990)**

- **M.S. Gorbachev**: Soviet President
- **V.V. Bakatln**: Chairman, MVD
- **O.D. Baklanov**: CPSU Secretary responsible for conversion issues
- **I.S. Belousov**: Chairman, State Commission for Military-Industrial Matters
- **V.A. Kryuchkov**: Chairman, KGB
- **A.N. Lukyanov**: Chairman, USSR Supreme Soviet
- **Y.D. Maslyukov**: Chairman, GOSPLAN
- **M.A. Moiseev**: Chief of the General Staff
- **V.I. Panln**: Chief, Soviet Navy Political Directorate
- **N.I. Ryzhkov**: Prime Minister
- **E.A. Shevardnadze**: Foreign Minister
- **D.T. Yazov**: Minister of Defense
- **L.N. Zaikov**: First Deputy Chief, Defense Council

Indeed, the Defense Council still operates but the real question is where it stands within the presidential system. On November 17, 1990, Gorbachev announced his intention to scrap the Presidential Council and form a National Security Council. This move would apparently combine the Presidential Council's national security responsibilities with the Defense Council's military-technical expertise and would presumably also assign a National Security Advisor (Yakovlev? Zaikov? Akhromeev?). Zaikov supported the creation of a Soviet National Security Council as early as November 1989 and Gorbachev might have found it hard to reject both conservative and reformist demands not to delay the National Security Council's formation. Whether the Defense Council's
current membership remains intact in the new Soviet National Security Council should
become clear by the end of 1990.

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