

# THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SOVIET REGIME

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The Soviet system of rule has three distinct but interdependent components: the *party*, the *government*, and the *state*.

The 18-million member Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and its bureaucracy continues to be the dominant policy-making and oversight entity of the Soviet regime. The Politburo—usually 12 “voting” members—is the highest organ of the *party* and is believed to meet weekly. The Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU, working through Central Committee “commissions,” manages the day-to-day affairs of the party apparatus, including the oversight of the nation’s governmental ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Defense. *General Secretary of the CPSU Mikhail S. Gorbachev* directs the Secretariat. He is also the Chairman of the Defense Council (analogous to the National Security Council in the US) and therefore is the commander-in-chief of the Soviet Armed Forces. The 307-voting member Central Committee of the CPSU meets twice a year in plenary sessions—supposedly to review and supervise the activities of the Politburo and the Secretariat. Elected by the Party Congress (which meets only once every five years), the

Central Committee generally approves the plans and policies of the Politburo without dissent. Primarily a rubber stamp CPSU legislative body, the Central Committee can become influential during party crises, such as leadership successions or purges.

The day-to-day management of the *government* and the USSR’s vast centralized economy, however, is the function of a gigantic ministerial bureaucracy distinct from the CPSU. The departments or “ministries” of the Soviet government (collectively the USSR’s “executive branch”) are directed by the Council of Ministers, which is presently headed by its Chairman, *Premier Nikolai I. Ryzhkov*.

The third component of the Soviet regime, the *state*, is represented by the nation’s parliament, the Supreme Soviet. Traditionally a “rubber stamp” legislature, the affairs of this body is directed by a Presidium. *President Mikhail S. Gorbachev*, as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, is the USSR’s official Head of State. The newly formed Congress of Peoples’ Deputies—a recent by-product of the Gorbachev reforms—functions principally as an “electoral college” for a newly streamlined Supreme Soviet.

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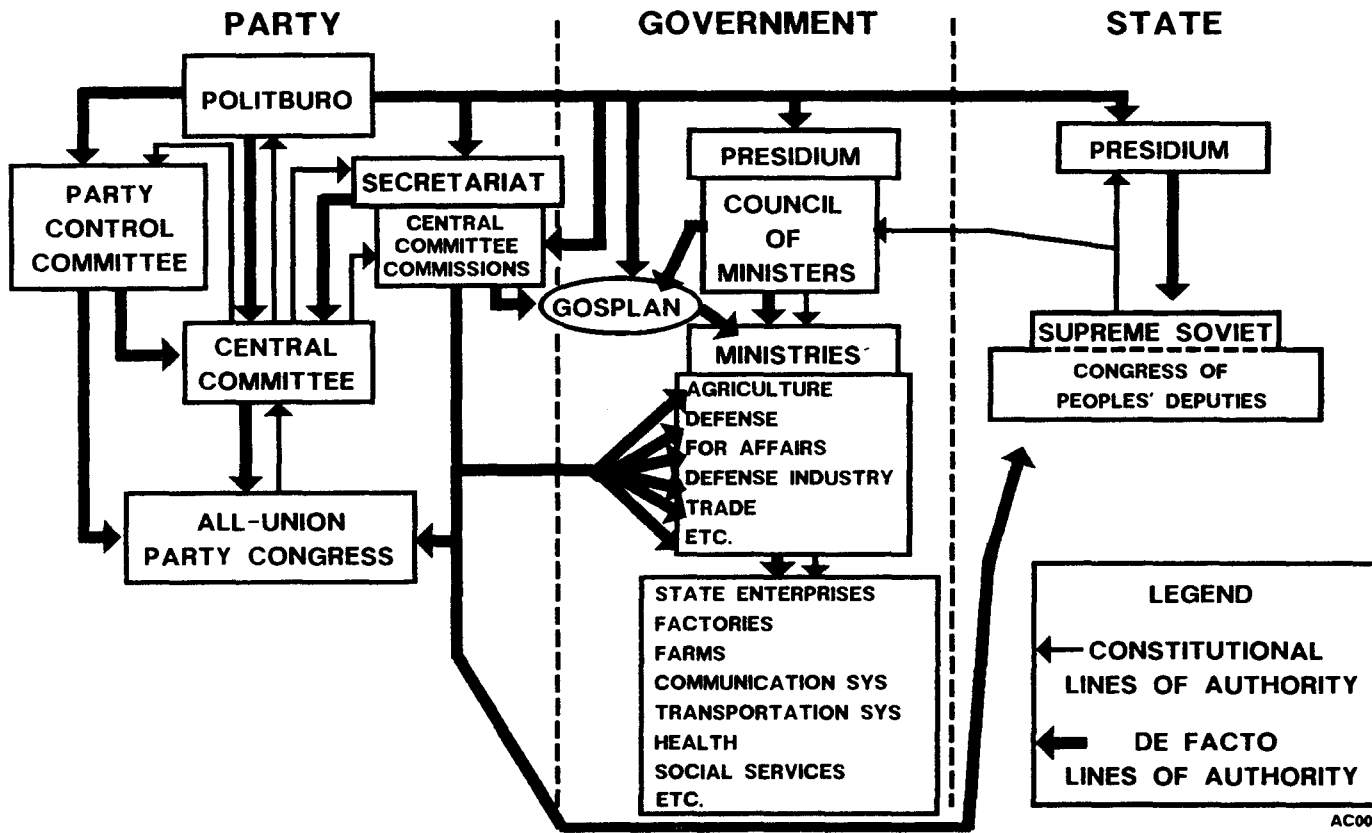


Figure 1