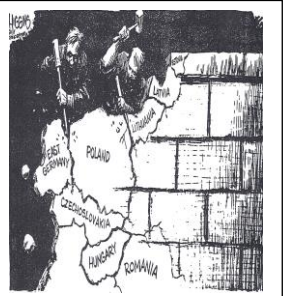
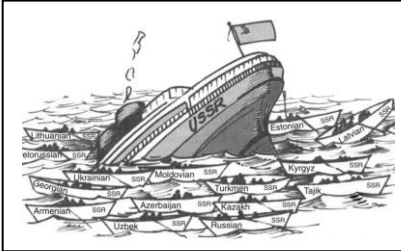
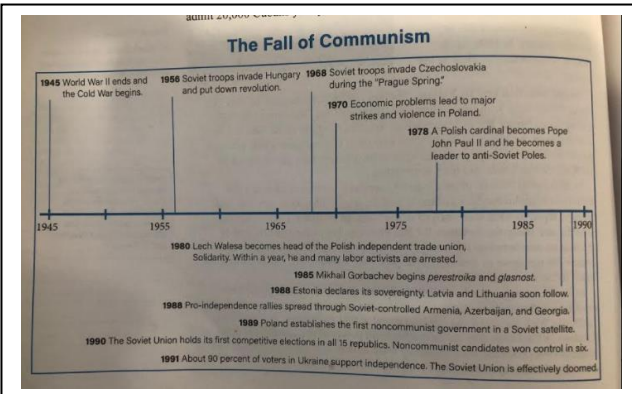
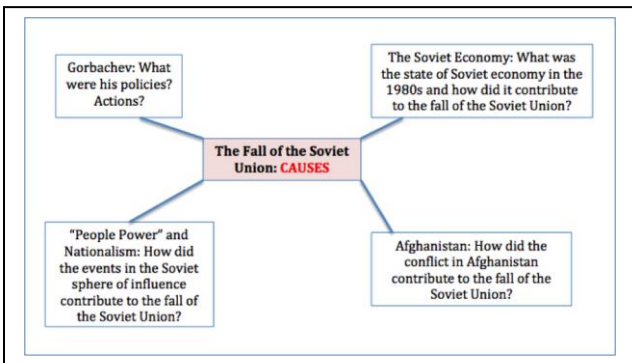


# Aim #19: How did the fall of the Soviet Union/Communism and end of the Cold War impact Europe?



## Mini Lecture

- After more than 40 years of tension between the Soviet Union and the U.S., the Cold War ended in the late 1980s. However, the end of the rivalry created new uncertainty worldwide.
- In 1985, **Mikhail Gorbachev** became the leader of the Soviet Union. Recognizing the country faced serious problems, he attempted reforms to strengthen the Communist government. The country was experiencing food & fuel shortages and a drained-stagnated economy.
- His first reform program was called **perestroika** (“restructuring”). The goal was to make the economy more efficient. It allowed citizens to start their own businesses and it reduced central government planning.
- The other program was called **glasnost** (“openness”). The goal was to increase individual freedom. It granted more freedom of speech, more tolerance of government criticism, and multi-party elections.
- Because of these programs, relations with the West improved. In 1987 & 1991, the Soviet Union & U.S. signed major nuclear arms reduction treaties.
- To end the economic drain, Gorbachev ended the Afghanistan War and stopped supporting Communist government & movements around the world.
- Some Communists opposed Gorbachev because they thought his reforms were undermining the Soviet system. In 1991, they attempted & failed to overthrow him. Gorbachev resigned from the Communist Party and the Party lost its control of government, economy, and military.
- In spite of Gorbachev’s efforts to keep the Soviet Union together, it broke apart. All 13 republics declared their independence. At the end of 1991, Gorbachev resigned as president. The Soviet Union no longer existed. The leaders of the newly independent republic struggled to develop new political & economic systems- the U.S. provided aid & advisors.
- National elections were held in Russia and **Boris Yeltsin** became president under a new constitution. He attempted to adopt some elements of capitalism and maintain good relations with the West.
- Until 1989, the Soviet Union closely supervised the governments of its Eastern European satellites. It militarily intervened to stop any challenge to the Communist government (for example, putting down prodemocracy movements in **Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Poland 1970s**).
- Poland was culturally united by their strong attachment to Catholicism. In 1980, **Lech Walesa** became the head of **Solidarity**, a trade union organization. Solidarity demanded trade unions free of communist control & a reexamination of Poland’s alliance with the Soviet Union.
- In 1981, Solidarity was outlawed, Walesa imprisoned, and military rule imposed until 1983. Rising prices and shortage of consumer goods led to protests where the Communist Party yielded to the people’s demands for free elections in 1989- Solidarity movement won & Walesa elected president. Solidarity formed the first non-Communist government in Soviet satellite.
- Gorbachev changed the way the Soviet Union dealt with its satellites. He abandoned the “**Brezhnev Doctrine**”, which called for Soviet intervention in satellites’ affairs to protect communism. Thus, when the people of Eastern Europe protested against communism in 1989, the Soviet did little in response.
- In addition to Poland, other Eastern European countries recognized that Soviet-led communism was failing-it could not provide goods, services, & freedom equal to what was enjoyed in the West. So, these countries’ (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, etc.) demands for free elections led to the peaceful end of Communist rule 1989-1991.
- In **East Germany**, too, the people demanded greater personal freedoms & economic opportunity. In 1989, they forced the East German government to open the (**Fall**) **Berlin Wall** & allow unrestricted travel. In 1990, free elections led to the fall of the Communist Party. In October 1990, East & West Germany were united. Germany has been a leading economic power in Europe since.
- Without Russian aid, the **Cuban** economy declined sharply. In 1994, President Fidel Castro introduced limited free-market reforms (similar to China)- people were allowed to form small private businesses, legally possess foreign currency, & establish their own agricultural cooperatives. Still, little improvements happened in Cuba’s economy.



## Review Questions:

1. What factors led to the Fall of the Soviet Union and Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe?
2. What role did Mikhail Gorbachev play in the Fall of the Soviet Union?

## Enduring Issue: Nationalism

## How did the events of the 1980s and 90s help to achieve, maintain, and/or threaten world peace?

**Directions:** Read about the following events of the End of the Cold War, respond to the questions about them.

### The Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s

The Soviet Union was at the height of its power by the early 1970s and its economy was its most robust. Internationally, communists were victorious in the Vietnam War and there was growing support for the ideology in South America. At the same time the economy in the United States slowed and trust in the government was at an all time low because of the Vietnam War. Up until the late 1970s, it appeared that the American policy of containment was no match for communist expansion.

By the early 1980s, the Soviet economy began to slow down before finally reaching economic stagnation [state of not growing or progressing]. Because so many Eastern European countries were satellite nations with economies intertwined with the Soviet Union, these countries suffered as well. Once a state with high wages and a high standard of living, poverty was now on the rise in the Soviet Union. By the 1980s, a large portion of the state's funds were spent on the military to support their involvement in Afghanistan and to fund the arms race with the United States. The Soviet-Afghan War resulted in heavy casualties and high costs. This led to a loss of faith in the Soviet Union. The United States, led by President Ronald Reagan continued to develop military technology like cruise missiles and a sophisticated defense system, but the Soviet Union struggled to keep up with the pace and costs of the arms race with the United States.

1. Why was the Soviet Union confident about its power and status up until the early 1970s?
2. How did the Soviet Union's status change in the 1980s?

### 1985: Mikhail Gorbachev Comes to Power in the Soviet Union

In 1985, **Mikhail Gorbachev** came to power in the Soviet Union and set out to bring the country out of crisis. His two most important reforms were called *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*

In the spirit of Glasnost and Perestroika, Gorbachev sought to avoid confrontation and established positive relationships with Western leaders, particularly American presidents. By 1987, annual summits led to results including arm control treaties.

**Glasnost**, openness, improved freedom of expression in following ways:

- freedom of press
- access to Western press
- the creation of political unions that opposed communism
- books that challenged Soviet history or Communist rule that were once banned were published
- dissidents were released from prison
- greater religious tolerance
- freedom to travel to Western countries

**Perestroika**, restructuring of the government and economy, led to changes in the following ways:

- farmers were allowed to sell goods on the free market
- appointed new members to the Secretariat and reduced the size of the bureaucracy
- supported limited private ownership



Reagan and Gorbachev in Red Square during the Moscow Summit. 5/31/88



Reagan and Gorbachev shaking hands at the US-Soviet summit in Washington, D.C. (1987)



Joint Statement of President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev at the Geneva Summit. 11/21/85.



President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev signing the INF Treaty in the East Room of the White House (1987). The treaty required the US and USSR to eliminate some of their nuclear missiles.

3. What were the goals of Gorbachev's policies of Perestroika and Glasnost?
4. What do these images reveal about the relationship between United States President Reagan and the Soviet Union's General Secretary Gorbachev?



## 1989: Fall of the Berlin Wall

Watch the [Berlin Wall video](#) (00:00-2:00).

One area of contention between the United States and the Soviet Union was the **Berlin Wall**. In 1961, the Communist government of East Germany built the barbed wire and concrete wall to separate capitalist and United States-aligned West Berlin from the communist Eastern Europe. Before the closing of the wall, there was a mass migration of East Germans who, unhappy with communism, fled to the West for employment opportunities. The wall separated families, prevented East Germans from employment opportunities, and sent a strong message that even if East Germans did not enjoy communism, they would not be allowed to leave. People who attempted to escape East Berlin were shot on site.

On June 12, 1987, United States President Ronald Reagan delivered the *Berlin Wall Speech* at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin. Watch the [speech here](#)

Two years following Reagan's speech and after several weeks of unrest, the **Berlin Wall** fell on November 9, 1989.

Mass demonstrations by protesters demanding the unification of Germany in the fall of 1989 pressured the Communist government to finally open the border. Protesters approached the Berlin Wall, a symbol of Cold War division, and started to dismantle it. On November 9, 1989 East and West Berliners celebrated reunification on the wall that once divided them.

Watch the ABC News [Berlin Wall video](#).



5. What was the purpose of the Berlin Wall?
6. How did some people try to escape?
7. What was done to those who tried to escape?
8. In Reagan's reflection about the changes Gorbachev implemented, he asks: "Are these the beginnings of profound changes in the Soviet state? Or are they token gestures, intended to raise false hopes in the West, or to strengthen the Soviet system without changing it?" Why do you think Reagan asks this question?
9. According to this speech excerpt, what does Reagan want Gorbachev to do? Why?
10. According to your prior reading and the video, why was the fall of the Berlin Wall a significant moment?
11. How did Germans respond to the fall of the Berlin Wall?

## 1989-1991: Soviet Republics Declare Independence, Ending the Soviet Union

Glasnost and Perestroika impacted Gorbachev's relationship with the Soviet Union's satellite states and Soviet republics. Until 1989, the Communist party in Moscow indirectly controlled all levels of government in the fifteen Soviet republics. In the spirit of Glasnost and Perestroika, the political climate began to change. In both Moscow and the United Nations in New York in 1988, Gorbachev announced that he would abandon the idea of limited sovereignty for the Soviet Union's republics in Eastern Europe. He declared that all countries had the right to decide what kind of political and economic system they wanted. In early 1990, Gorbachev legalized the formation of other political parties and removed the article of the Soviet constitution that guaranteed the supremacy of the Communist party. As a result, candidates from new parties challenged the Communist Party. As Gorbachev lessened the iron fist and tight control, republics began to take advantage of their new freedoms. The groups and states began to call for **sovereignty** [self-rule] and **secession** [independence] from the Soviet Union.



Map of the Union Republics from 1956-1991



13. What did Gorbachev declare that all countries had the right to do? Given the status of the Soviet republics, why was this declaration significant? How might the republics respond?
14. Based on your prior reading and the cartoon above, what is the "crack problem" Gorbachev faced in the late 1980s? Why did he face this problem?

In December 1989, the Communist Party of Lithuania declared itself independent and by the end of 1991, the remaining Soviet states declared themselves independent states as well.

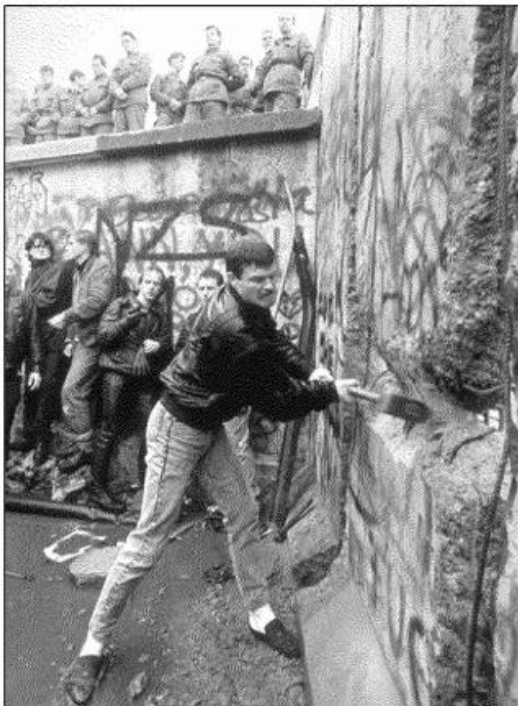
One of the largest Soviet republics, Ukraine, declared independence on August 24, 1991. On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev resigned and turned over responsibilities to the commander-in-chief Boris Yeltsin the first President of Russia. The **Warsaw Pact** was dissolved, and the Soviet Union officially ceased to exist.



Yeltsin stands on a tank to defy the August Coup in 1991.

15. According to the text and image, how did Gorbachev's Glasnost and Perestroika impact the sovereignty of Eastern European satellite states?
16. According to the text and image, how did Gorbachev's Glasnost and Perestroika impact the power and control of the Soviet Union?
17. How did Mikhail Gorbachev contribute to the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe?
18. What events marked the end of the Soviet Union?
19. How do you predict the collapse of the Soviet Union would impact other communist nations outside of Europe?
20. How do you predict the collapse of the Soviet Union would impact the United States?

**The Berlin Wall**



— Reuters/David Brauchli/Archive Photos  
Source: <http://imagesrvr.epnet.com/embimages/imh/archivephoto/full/g1952059.jpg>

Explain the historical circumstances that led to the historical development depicted in the image above.