



The Collapse of the Soviet Union

MAIN IDEA

REVOLUTION Democratic reforms brought important changes to the Soviet Union.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Russia continues to struggle to establish democracy.

TERMS & NAMES

- Politburo
- Mikhail Gorbachev
- glasnost
- perestroika
- Boris Yeltsin
- CIS
- “shock therapy”

SETTING THE STAGE After World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States engaged in a Cold War, which you read about in Chapter 17. Each tried to increase its worldwide influence. The Soviet Union extended its power over much of Eastern Europe. By the 1960s, it appeared that communism was permanently established in the region. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union’s Communist leadership kept tight control over the Soviet people. But big changes, including democratic reforms, were on the horizon.

TAKING NOTES

Following Chronological Order Use a time line to record significant events in the Soviet Union and Russia.

1985 2002

Gorbachev Moves Toward Democracy

Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev and the **Politburo**—the ruling committee of the Communist Party—crushed all political disagreement. Censors decided what writers could publish. The Communist Party also restricted freedom of speech and worship. After Brezhnev’s death in 1982, the aging leadership of the Soviet Union tried to hold on to power. However, each of Brezhnev’s two successors died after only about a year in office. Who would succeed them?

A Younger Leader To answer that question, the Politburo debated between two men. One was **Mikhail Gorbachev** (mih•KYL GAWR•buh•chawf). Gorbachev’s supporters praised his youth, energy, and political skills. With their backing, Gorbachev became the party’s new general secretary. In choosing him, Politburo members did not realize they were unleashing another Russian Revolution.

The Soviet people welcomed Gorbachev’s election. At 54, he was the youngest Soviet leader since Stalin. Gorbachev was only a child during Stalin’s ruthless purge of independent-minded party members. Unlike other Soviet leaders, Gorbachev decided to pursue new ideas.

Glasnost Promotes Openness Past Soviet leaders had created a totalitarian state. It rewarded silence and discouraged individuals from acting on their own. As a result, Soviet society rarely changed, and the Soviet economy stagnated. Gorbachev realized that economic and social reforms could not occur without a free flow of ideas and information. In 1985, he announced a policy known as **glasnost** (GLAHS•nuhst), or openness.

Glasnost brought remarkable changes. The government allowed churches to open. It released dissidents from prison and allowed the publication of books by previously banned authors. Reporters investigated problems and criticized officials.

> Analyzing Political Cartoons

Glasnost

Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika shook up the traditional way of doing things in the Soviet economy and in the society at large.

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Visual Sources

- 1. Making Inferences** One arrow points down the road toward stagnation. Where is the other arrow, pointing in the opposite direction, likely to lead?
- 2. Drawing Conclusions** Why might the Soviet Union look different to the figure in the cartoon?



Reforming the Economy and Politics

The new openness allowed Soviet citizens to complain about economic problems. Consumers protested that they had to stand in lines to buy food and other basics.

Economic Restructuring Gorbachev blamed these problems on the Soviet Union's inefficient system of central planning. Under central planning, party officials told farm and factory managers how much to produce. They also told them what wages to pay and what prices to charge. Because individuals could not increase their pay by producing more, they had little motive to improve efficiency. **A**

In 1985, Gorbachev introduced the idea of **perestroika** (PEHR•ih•STROY•kuh), or economic restructuring. In 1986, he made changes to revive the Soviet economy. Local managers gained greater authority over their farms and factories, and people were allowed to open small private businesses. Gorbachev's goal was not to throw out communism, but to make the economic system more efficient and productive.

Democratization Opens the Political System Gorbachev also knew that for the economy to improve, the Communist Party would have to loosen its grip on Soviet society and politics. In 1987, he unveiled a third new policy, called democratization. This would be a gradual opening of the political system.

The plan called for the election of a new legislative body. In the past, voters had merely approved candidates who were handpicked by the Communist Party. Now, voters could choose from a list of candidates for each office. The election produced many surprises. In several places, voters chose lesser-known candidates and reformers over powerful party bosses.

Foreign Policy Soviet foreign policy also changed. To compete militarily with the Soviet Union, President Ronald Reagan had begun the most expensive military buildup in peacetime history, costing more than \$2 trillion. Under pressure from U.S. military spending, Gorbachev realized that the Soviet economy could not afford the costly arms race. Arms control became one of Gorbachev's top priorities. In December 1987, he and Reagan signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. This treaty banned nuclear missiles with ranges of 300 to 3,400 miles.

MAIN IDEA

Making Inferences

A Why would it be inefficient for the central government to decide what should be produced all over the country?

The Soviet Union Faces Turmoil

Gorbachev's new thinking led him to support movements for change in both the economic and political systems within the Soviet Union. Powerful forces for democracy were building in the country, and Gorbachev decided not to oppose reform. Glasnost, perestroika, and democratization were all means to reform the system. However, the move to reform the Soviet Union ultimately led to its breakup.

Various nationalities in the Soviet Union began to call for their freedom. More than 100 ethnic groups lived in the Soviet Union. Russians were the largest, most powerful

group. However, non-Russians formed a majority in the 14 Soviet republics other than Russia.

Ethnic tensions brewed beneath the surface of Soviet society. As reforms loosened central controls, unrest spread across the country. Nationalist groups in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldavia (now Moldova) demanded self-rule. The Muslim peoples of Soviet Central Asia called for religious freedom.

Lithuania Defies Gorbachev The first challenge came from the Baltic nations of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. These republics had been independent states between the two world wars, until the Soviets annexed them in 1940. Fifty years later, in March 1990, Lithuania declared its independence. To try to force it back into the Soviet Union, Gorbachev ordered an economic blockade of the republic.

Although Gorbachev was reluctant to use stronger measures, he feared that Lithuania's example might encourage other republics to secede. In January 1991, Soviet troops attacked unarmed civilians in Lithuania's capital. The army killed 14 and wounded hundreds.

Yeltsin Denounces Gorbachev The assault in Lithuania and the lack of economic progress damaged Gorbachev's popularity. People looked for leadership to [Boris Yeltsin](#). He was a member of parliament and former mayor of Moscow. Yeltsin criticized the crackdown in Lithuania and the slow pace of reforms. In June 1991, voters chose Yeltsin to become the Russian Federation's first directly elected president.

In spite of their rivalry, Yeltsin and Gorbachev faced a common enemy in the old guard of Communist officials. Hard-liners—conservatives who opposed reform—were furious that Gorbachev had given up the Soviet Union's role as the dominant force in Eastern Europe. They also feared losing their power and privileges. These officials vowed to overthrow Gorbachev and undo his reforms.

HistoryMakers



Mikhail Gorbachev
1931–

Mikhail Gorbachev's background shaped the role he would play in history. Both of his grandfathers were arrested during Stalin's purges. Both were eventually freed. However, Gorbachev

never forgot his grandfathers' stories.

After working on a state farm, Gorbachev studied law in Moscow and joined the Communist Party. As an official in a farming region, Gorbachev learned much about the Soviet system and its problems.

He advanced quickly in the party. When he became general secretary in 1985, he was the youngest Politburo member and a man who wanted to bring change. He succeeded. Although he pursued reform to save the Soviet Union, ultimately he triggered its breakup.



Boris Yeltsin
1931–

Boris Yeltsin was raised in poverty. For 10 years, his family lived in a single room.

As a youth, Yeltsin earned good grades but behaved badly. Mikhail Gorbachev named him party boss and mayor of

Moscow in 1985. Yeltsin's outspokenness got him into trouble. At one meeting, he launched into a bitter speech criticizing conservatives for working against perestroika. Gorbachev fired him for the sake of party unity.

Yeltsin made a dramatic comeback and won a seat in parliament in 1989. Parliament elected him president of Russia in 1990, and voters reelected him in 1991. Due at least in part to his failing health (heart problems), Yeltsin resigned in 1999.



The Breakup of the Soviet Union, 1991



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

1. **Place** What are the 15 republics of the former Soviet Union?
2. **Region** Which republic received the largest percentage of the former Soviet Union's territory?

The August Coup On August 18, 1991, the hardliners detained Gorbachev at his vacation home on the Black Sea. They demanded his resignation as Soviet president. Early the next day, hundreds of tanks and armored vehicles rolled into Moscow. However, the Soviet people had lost their fear of the party. They were willing to defend their freedoms. Protesters gathered at the Russian parliament building, where Yeltsin had his office.

Around midday, Yeltsin emerged and climbed atop one of the tanks. As his supporters cheered, Yeltsin declared, "We proclaim all decisions and decrees of this committee to be illegal. . . . We appeal to the citizens of Russia to . . . demand a return of the country to normal constitutional developments."

On August 20, the hardliners ordered troops to attack the parliament building, but they refused. Their refusal turned the tide. On August 21, the military withdrew its forces from Moscow. That night, Gorbachev returned to Moscow. **B**

End of the Soviet Union The coup attempt sparked anger against the Communist Party. Gorbachev resigned as general secretary of the party. The Soviet parliament voted to stop all party activities. Having first seized power in 1917 in a coup that succeeded, the Communist Party now collapsed because of a coup that failed.

The coup also played a decisive role in accelerating the breakup of the Soviet Union. Estonia and Latvia quickly declared their independence. Other republics soon followed. Although Gorbachev pleaded for unity, no one was listening. By early December, all 15 republics had declared independence.

Yeltsin met with the leaders of other republics to chart a new course. They agreed to form the Commonwealth of Independent States, or **CIS**, a loose federation of former Soviet territories. Only the Baltic republics and Georgia declined to

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives

B Why do you think the Soviet troops refused the order to attack the parliament building?

join. The formation of the CIS meant the death of the Soviet Union. On Christmas Day 1991, Gorbachev announced his resignation as president of the Soviet Union, a country that ceased to exist.

Russia Under Boris Yeltsin

As president of the large Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin was now the most powerful figure in the CIS. He would face many problems, including an ailing economy, tough political opposition, and an unpopular war.

Yeltsin Faces Problems One of Yeltsin's goals was to reform the Russian economy. He adopted a bold plan known as **"shock therapy,"** an abrupt shift to free-market economics. Yeltsin lowered trade barriers, removed price controls, and ended subsidies to state-owned industries.

Initially, the plan produced more shock than therapy. Prices soared; from 1992 to 1994, the inflation rate averaged 800 percent. Many factories dependent on government money had to cut production or shut down entirely. This forced thousands of people out of work. By 1993, most Russians were suffering economic hardship:

PRIMARY SOURCE

A visitor to Moscow cannot escape the feeling of a society in collapse. Child beggars accost foreigners on the street. . . . Children ask why they should stay in school when educated professionals do not make enough money to survive. . . . A garment worker complains that now her wages do not cover even the food bills, while fear of growing crime makes her dread leaving home.

DAVID M. KOTZ, "The Cure That Could Kill"

Economic problems fueled a political crisis. In October 1993, legislators opposed to Yeltsin's policies shut themselves inside the parliament building. Yeltsin ordered troops to bombard the building, forcing hundreds of rebel legislators to surrender. Many were killed. Opponents accused Yeltsin of acting like a dictator. **C**

Chechnya Rebels Yeltsin's troubles included war in Chechnya (CHEHCH•nee•uh), a largely Muslim area in southwestern Russia. In 1991, Chechnya declared its independence, but Yeltsin denied the region's right to secede. In 1994, he ordered 40,000 Russian troops into the breakaway republic. Russian forces reduced the capital city of Grozny (GROHZ•nee) to rubble. News of the death and destruction sparked anger throughout Russia.

With an election coming, Yeltsin sought to end the war. In August 1996, the two sides signed a cease-fire. That year, Yeltsin won reelection. War soon broke out again between Russia and Chechnya, however. In 1999, as the fighting raged, Yeltsin resigned and named Vladimir Putin as acting president.

Vocabulary

subsidies: government funds given in support of industries

MAIN IDEA

Evaluating Decisions

C Compare Yeltsin's action here to his actions during the August Coup. Which were more supportive of democracy?

▼ A Russian soldier throws away a spent shell case near the Chechnyan capital of Grozny.



Russia Under Vladimir Putin

Putin forcefully dealt with the rebellion in Chechnya—a popular move that helped him win the presidential election in 2000. Nonetheless, violence in the region continues.

Putin Struggles with Chechnya Putin’s war in Chechnya helped draw terrorism into the Russian capital itself. In October 2002, Chechens seized a theater in Moscow, and more than 150 people died in the rescue attempt by Russian forces.

As the war in Chechnya dragged on, Russian popular support faded, and Putin moved to suppress his critics. The 2005 Chechen elections helped restore order, and as of 2007, the rebels had been largely quieted. But rebellion still simmers.

Economic, Political, and Social Problems Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has seen growth in homelessness, domestic violence, and unemployment, and a decrease in life expectancy. Some observers have wondered whether Russian democracy could survive. Putin’s presidency has not settled the question. Russia has been moving towards greater participation in world trade by modernizing banking, insurance, and tax codes. At the same time, attacks on democratic institutions such as a free press have not built the world’s confidence.

The histories of Russia and its European neighbors have always been intertwined. Unrest in the Soviet Union had an enormous impact on Central and Eastern Europe, as you will read in the next section.

History Makers



Vladimir Putin
1952–

Vladimir Putin worked for 15 years as an intelligence officer in the KGB (Committee for State Security). Six of those years were spent in East Germany. In 1990, at the age of 38, he retired from the KGB with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Putin became first deputy mayor of Leningrad. In 1996, he moved to Moscow, where he joined the presidential staff. Eventually, Boris Yeltsin appointed Putin prime minister. When Yeltsin resigned at the end of 1999, he appointed Putin acting president. In March 2000, Putin won election as president.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

RESEARCH LINKS For more on Vladimir Putin, go to classzone.com

SECTION

3

ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Politburo
- Mikhail Gorbachev
- glasnost
- perestroika
- Boris Yeltsin
- CIS
- “shock

therapy”

USING YOUR NOTES

2. In what year did the Soviet Union break apart?

1985 2002

MAIN IDEAS

3. What are some of the changes that Gorbachev made to the Soviet economy?
4. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, what problems did Yeltsin face as the president of the Russian Federation?
5. How did Putin deal with Chechnya?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **SYNTHESIZING** How did Gorbachev’s reforms help to move the Soviet Union toward democracy?
7. **ANALYZING ISSUES** What are some of the problems that faced President Vladimir Putin in Russia?
8. **COMPARING** In what ways were the policies of Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin similar?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **REVOLUTION** It has been said that Gorbachev’s reforms led to another Russian Revolution. In your opinion, what did this revolution overthrow? Support your opinion in a two-paragraph **essay**.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY INTERNET ACTIVITY

Use the Internet to research the situation in Chechnya today. Make a **poster** that includes a time line of the conflict, the leaders of the two sides, and war images.

INTERNET KEYWORD
Chechnya