

THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The Cold War was a decades-long period of tension and threat of war between the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and the United States and its allies. The end of the war did not happen overnight, but rather through a series of events that led to the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

The USSR's government was communist, and the economy was controlled by the government. The government developed "five-year plans" that controlled what and how much was produced. Citizens in the USSR did not have a say in the supply and demand for goods, which resulted in shortages of consumer goods, from food to vehicles. The USSR spent a large portion of its budget on military arms to keep in competition with the United States. This caused the USSR's economy to suffer, and ordinary citizens felt the strain. The USSR had also spent around \$50 billion US dollars to take over Afghanistan from 1979–1986, which they were not able to win. Soviet troops left Afghanistan in 1989.

Some of the nations that were a part of the USSR began to question if their country would be more successful out of the Soviet Union. For example, Poland began to protest the USSR in the early 1980s because of food shortages and high prices. An organization called Solidarity was formed in Poland. Although the group was banned and its leaders arrested, the United States secretly helped pay for the group to keep the movement alive. In 1989, Poland was allowed to have open elections, which led to an anti-communist government. Hungary also held elections in 1989, and the Communist party lost power in the government as a result. USSR citizens living in East Germany were able to head to western Europe through Hungary for the first time since the end of World War II. This made the Berlin Wall ineffective at keeping citizens in the USSR.

The last leader of the USSR was Mikhail Gorbachev. He knew that the Soviet Union was unable to economically compete with other countries, and he wanted to create changes to strengthen the Soviet Union. Gorbachev created two new policies, *perestroika* and *glasnost*, to accomplish this goal. These two policies would lead to the collapse of the USSR.

Perestroika means "reconstruction". Gorbachev wanted to modernize and rebuild the USSR by reducing the amount of money spent on military arms and instead focusing on growing businesses. Gorbachev's policy caused government spending to increase, which led to high amounts of inflation and increased costs of goods. Perestroika allowed a few people to gain lots of wealth, but most citizens were still poor. The USSR's economy after perestroika was worse than it had been before.

Glasnost means "openness." Under this policy, Gorbachev allowed the press to openly criticize the government for the first time since the USSR's creation in 1922. Citizens were able to read more about the problems the government was having with the economy, which led them to distrust the government more. All of these issues played a part in the collapse of the USSR, which ended the Cold War after 45 years.

Sources

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