

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 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 the building of military arms, to keep in competition with the USA, but 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, a war they were not able to win, and Soviet troops left Afghanistan in 1989.

Some of the nations that were a part of the USSR began to question if their country wouldn't be more successful out of the Soviet Union. For example, Poland began to protest against the USSR in the early 1980's because of food shortages and high prices. An organization called Solidarity was formed and 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 result was the Communist party losing power in the government. 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 in keeping citizens in the USSR.

The last leader of the USSR was Mikhail Gorbachev. He knew that the Soviet Union was not competing with other countries economically and wanted to create changes that would 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 money spent on military arms to compete with the USA and instead focus on helping create businesses. Gorbachev's policy caused government spending to increase which led to high amounts of inflation, the rate at which the cost of goods increased. Perestroika also led to a few people gaining a lot of wealth, but most citizens were still poor. The USSR's economy was worse off after perestroika than it had been before. Glasnost means "openness", and Gorbachev allowed the press to openly criticize the government for the first time since the USSR's creation in 1922. This led to a high level of distrust from the citizens as they read about the problems the government was having in running the economy. All these issues played a part in the collapse of the USSR which ended the Cold War after forty-five years.

Sources

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