

# Module 10: The Cold War

## Topic 3 Content: End of the Cold War

End of the Cold War



The Fall of the Soviet Union and the End of the Cold War

Reforming Communism   Cracks in the Wall   Collapse of Soviet Union   NATO

[Image of Berlin Wall courtesy Sue Ream. Image of Yeltsin courtesy [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru).]

# Reforming Communism

## Mikhail Gorbachev

End of the Cold War

Mikhail Gorbachev

1985 - Comes to power  
Most reforms fell under two policies:  
Glasnost - Greater freedom of speech and less censorship  
Perestroika

Mikhail Gorbachev

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In 1985, after nearly two decades of rule under Leonid Brezhnev, Mikhail Gorbachev became president of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev was much younger than many senior government officials and was the first leader born after the Russian Revolution. Gorbachev inherited a country with many problems, the most serious of which was the stagnant economy.

Gorbachev made a number of political and economic reforms which he hoped would revitalize the nation. Most of these reforms fell under two policies - glasnost and perestroika.

Glasnost literally means openness. Under this policy, Soviets had more freedom to discuss political and social issues, and there was less censorship of news and information by the government. Before glasnost, most of the political decisions were made by a small circle of powerful leaders. Gorbachev hoped that, by encouraging more free speech, the country could come up with better solutions to its problems. As part of glasnost, people could access previously restricted information about past Soviet governments. As a result, people came to understand the true extent of Stalin's crimes against the people as well as other dark episodes in the country's past.

## Perestroika and Boris Yeltsin

End of the Cold War

### Perestroika and Boris Yeltsin

**Perestroika**  
- Restructuring the economy  
- Reforming the political process

Economy didn't respond  
Opposition members elected  
Increased nationalism in republics

Boris Yeltsin opposing coup in 1991.

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Perestroika was Gorbachev's policy of restructuring the economy, to make it grow, and reforming the political process to make it more responsive to people's needs.

As part of the economic reforms, state-run businesses were responsible for covering their own costs. In return, these businesses had more freedom to determine how many goods they would produce. In addition, the government started to allow private ownership of certain types of businesses as well as foreign investment. Despite these changes, the Soviet economy did not grow much.

Politically, perestroika allowed people who were not members of the Communist party to run for some offices. Gorbachev wanted to have elections where many candidates from the Communist party would run against one another. He did not support multi-party elections. In 1989, national elections were held and a number of reformers who became vocal critics of the government were elected. One of these reformers, Boris Yeltsin, became the leader of the opposition who would take control of the government after the country's collapse in 1991.

The policy of perestroika also encouraged groups in different republics act more independently from the central government. As a result, nationalism in these territories started to increase and people sought more control over their lives.

*[Image of tank courtesy [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru).]*

## Arms Race

End of the Cold War

### Arms Race

- Military spending strained economy
- U.S. could absorb costs
- 1979-1988 - War in Afghanistan
- Limit nuclear arsenals



Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan

Arms Race

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The image is a screenshot of a presentation slide titled 'End of the Cold War' with a sub-section 'Arms Race'. On the left, there is a bulleted list of four points: 'Military spending strained economy', 'U.S. could absorb costs', '1979-1988 - War in Afghanistan', and 'Limit nuclear arsenals'. To the right of the list is a photograph of Soviet soldiers in military vehicles in a mountainous, arid landscape. Below the photo is the caption 'Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan'. At the bottom of the slide is a horizontal timeline with four colored segments: green for 'Reforming Communism', red for 'Cracks in the Wall', blue for 'Collapse of Soviet Union', and yellow for 'NATO'. A white box labeled 'Arms Race' is positioned above the timeline, with a white arrow pointing to the red segment.

By the time Gorbachev became president, decades of military spending had taken its toll on the Soviet Union. The arms race with United States in the name of deterrence required that the Soviets spend more and more of the country's budget on military hardware, while the economy stagnated. Although the military buildup strained the governments of both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., America was better able to absorb the costs because its economy continued to grow.

In 1979, Brezhnev led the country into war in Afghanistan in support of the Marxist government, which was fighting against Islamic insurgents. The war lasted nine years, extending into Gorbachev's presidency. The Soviets spent huge amounts of money in support of a war they eventually lost. As with most Cold War conflicts, the United States supported the other side in Afghanistan in their struggle against the Soviets.

The war in Afghanistan was just one more strain on the Soviet government's finances, which were already troubled as a result of the poor economic conditions. Realizing that the Soviets could not keep up the arms race with the United States, Gorbachev began negotiating with President Reagan to limit nuclear arsenals.

*[Image of tanks courtesy Mikhail Evstafiev.]*

## Cracks in the Wall

### Failure of Communism



As the economies of China and the Soviet Union stagnated, it became clear that communism was a failure as an economic system. China became an economic success as a result of economic reforms which introduced elements of free market economics. Gorbachev's reforms were not successful and the economy continued to languish.

Nowhere was the difference between capitalism and communism more obvious than in West and East Germany. West Germany's capitalist economy grew after World War II to become the one of the largest in Europe, while East Germany's communist economy lagged far behind. People in West Germany enjoyed a much higher standard of living, having greater choices among consumer goods that were readily available. Meanwhile, their counterparts in East Germany had a lower standard of living, had very few options for different goods, and often had to wait in lines to get those goods, since they were in limited supply.

Under communism, the government controls major industries. Although the communist governments proved that they were capable of producing military supplies, they were highly inefficient at producing regular consumer goods. Communist countries also lacked incentives for people to take risks and drive innovation. This ended up being a huge problem for economic growth. As a result, many of the economies in Eastern Europe were on the verge of collapse at the end of the 1980s.

## Resurgent Nationalism

End of the Cold War

### Resurgent Nationalism

Late 1980s - Eastern Bloc falls apart

**1989**

- Poland Solidarity wins
- Hungary reformers win
- Romania overthrows gov't
- Czechoslovakia forced leaders to resign

Resurgent Nationalism

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The end of the 1980s was a dramatic period in recent world history. After more than forty years of relative stability in which the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated international affairs, the Eastern Bloc quickly fell apart.

As part of his economic reforms, and partly because the country could no longer afford it, Gorbachev encouraged Eastern European communist leaders to look for ways to improve their economies, rather than to rely on aid from the Soviet Union.

In 1989, as aid diminished and political changes accelerated, the Iron Curtain started to lift and a number of communist regimes fell. In Poland, free elections were held, and the Communist Party was voted out of office in favor of members from the Solidarity Party. In Hungary, communist reformers took control and dissolved their own party. In Czechoslovakia, demonstrators demanded an end to the communist regime and forced their leaders to resign. Meanwhile in Romania, military leaders overthrew Romania's brutal dictator and established a new government.

## German Unification

The screenshot shows a window titled "End of the Cold War" with a sub-window "German Unification". The sub-window contains a bulleted list of events: "East Germans flee", "Government replaced", "Berlin Wall breached", and "Government collapses". Below the list, it states "October 1990" and "East and West Germany unite". To the right of the text is a large empty rectangular area with a magnifying glass icon in the bottom right corner. At the bottom of the window is a horizontal timeline with four colored arrows pointing right, labeled "Reforming Communism" (green), "Cracks in the Wall" (red), "Collapse of Soviet Union" (blue), and "NATO" (yellow). A label "German Unification" is positioned above the timeline, with a white box highlighting the "Cracks in the Wall" and "Collapse of Soviet Union" sections.

The events in Hungary had a dramatic impact in East Germany, where the government continued to resist the calls for reform. When Hungary removed the border fence separating it from Austria, many East Germans fled through the new border crossing into West Germany.

Late in 1989, demonstrators forced East Germany's leader to resign. He was replaced with a more moderate communist ruler. When some sections of the Berlin Wall were opened, thousands of East Germans crossed into West Berlin. As live TV cameras broadcast the images around the world, West and East Berliners climbed onto the wall celebrating their new freedoms.

Over a number of days, people started to destroy the wall and haul off pieces. Shortly thereafter, people were allowed to move freely between the two countries. East Germany's government soon resigned, setting the process of unification with West Germany in motion. In October 1990, Germany reunited as a capitalist country with Berlin as its capital.

*[Image courtesy Sue Ream.]*

# Collapse of Soviet Union

## Coup and Chaos

**End of the Cold War**

### Coup and Chaos

U.S.S.R. had 15 republics

**1991**

- Ukrainian, Georgian and Lithuanian republics resisted communist rule
- August - hard-line communists attempted a coup
- Boris Yeltsin became popular for resistance to coup

**Coup and Chaos**

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With the fall of its communist allies across Eastern Europe, it was only a matter of time before major changes came to the Soviet Union.

The U.S.S.R. was made up of different republics, many of which had been part of the Russian Empire. Although Russians were the largest ethnic group in the country, there were many others. By 1991, people in the Ukrainian, Georgian, and Lithuanian republics started to resist communist rule. Gorbachev's crackdown on the Lithuanian revolt lost him a lot of support, leaving the Soviet Union on the verge of collapse.

In August 1991, hard-line communists tried to take control of the country in a military coup. They wanted to end Gorbachev's reforms. The Russian people resisted the coup, however, and many members of the military refused to participate. The coup failed and Gorbachev remained in power.

Boris Yeltsin and the opposition figures in government became extremely popular for their resistance to the coup.

*[Map courtesy Saul Ip.]*



## Empire Collapses

End of the Cold War

### Empire Collapses

- Fall 1991 - all 15 republics declared independence
- Gorbachev resigned on Christmas Day 1991
- Boris Yeltsin became president of Russia, the largest republic
- The Cold War was over

Empire Collapses

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Even as his popularity continued to decline, Gorbachev remained dedicated to the Communist Party, in spite of the coup. The failure of the coup encouraged the people to oppose the government. In the fall of 1991, all fifteen republics of the Soviet Union declared independence. Gorbachev resigned on Christmas Day, and the central government dissolved itself the following day. The Soviet Union was no more.

Boris Yeltsin took over as the president of Russia, the largest republic. Russia assumed control of the nuclear weapons from the Soviet government. Instead of the Soviet Union, there were now fifteen independent countries like Russia, Lithuania, Belarus, and Latvia, each with their own government. The Cold War was officially over.

# NATO

## NATO Changes

End of the Cold War

### NATO changes

- Warsaw Pact dissolved
- Some former countries have joined NATO

NATO troops have fought in:

- Former Yugoslavia
- Afghanistan
- Libya (air support only)

NATO changes

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With the Soviet Union split into a number of independent republics and new non-communist governments in power throughout Eastern Europe, the Warsaw Pact dissolved. NATO remained the most important military alliance in Europe. Some of the countries which belonged to the Warsaw Pact wanted to join NATO. NATO has admitted some of these countries and has plans to admit some others.

NATO troops have seen action in a number of military operations as part of the organization's goal of maintaining peace in Europe and protecting member states from attack. Recent NATO operations include providing soldiers for the war in Afghanistan and maintaining a no-fly zone over Libya which helped bring about the downfall of Qaddafi's government.

*[Map courtesy Patrick Neil]*