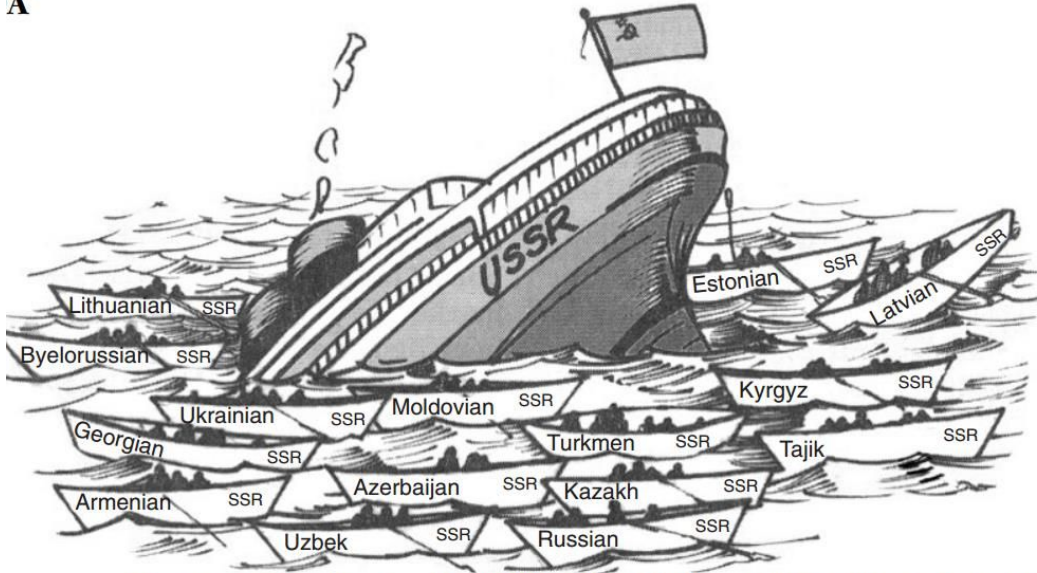


Why did the Soviet Union Fall?



Inquiry

A



Source: Sue Ann Kime and Paul Stich, *Global History*, N & N Publishing (adapted)

The Fall of the USSR:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zadkWw702_M

Write Your Hypothesis: Why did the Soviet Union Fall?

Experiences of the Communist Nations (part of Soviet bloc)

Document A: Vaclav Havel, president of Czechoslovakia, 1990 Speech

The state, which calls itself a state of workers, is humiliating and exploiting them instead. Our outdated economy wastes energy, which we have in short supply. The country, which could once be proud of the education of its people, is spending so little on education that today, in that respect, we rank 72nd in the world. We have spoiled our land, rivers, and forests, inherited from our ancestors, and we have, today, the worst environment in the whole of Europe. Adults die here earlier than in the majority of European countries....



Add/Revise Hypotheses

Why did the Soviet Union fall?

Standard of Living

Document B: Yuri Krotkov, “Worker’s Paradise Lost”

Our apartment contained eleven rooms. It had one kitchen, one telephone in the hall, a bath and toilet, which only the fastest were able to get to in the morning (many just stopped in the public restrooms on their way to work). There were 18 people in the apartment. There was not a single washing machine in the apartment; we had never even heard of a clothes-drier. But there were three TV sets and 2 radios. Furthermore, all eighteen people ate at home. They never went to even the cheapest cafeteria, much less a restaurant. It was the expense. My apartment was somewhat typical. But at the same time we were exceptional, in that each resident could say with satisfaction: “it’s crowded, but the people, thank the lord, are decent. They don’t spit in their neighbor’s soup, as they do in Apartment 5.



Standard of Living

Document C: The End of the Cold War, 1995

By 1989 a number of startling facts about life in the USSR had emerged. 28% of Soviets lived below the official poverty line which was the equivalent of just \$1920 a year. Industries poisoned the environment with widespread pollution. 30 million Soviets drank unsafe water. The average Russian earned 200 rubles (\$320). While rents and food prices were set officially low, other prices put many products far beyond the reach of the common person. A pair of blue jeans cost between 200 and 400 rubles, a used foreign car between 50,000 and 100,000 and a pair of shoes between 400 and 500 rubles. The average citizen in an Eastern bloc country could only dream of goods and services Westerners took for granted.

Add/Revise Hypotheses

Why did the Soviet Union Fall?

Changes Under Gorbachev

Document D: Mikhail S. Gorbachev, speech from the Socialist Idea and Revolutionary Perestroika

...At the present stage... the (*Communist*) Party will promote the development of opinions in society and the broadening of **glasnost** in the interests of democracy and the people.

Glasnost: the policy or practice of more open consultative government and wider dissemination of information, initiated by leader Mikhail Gorbachev from 1985.



Document E: Source: Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

Perestroika is an urgent necessity arising from the profound processes of development in our socialist society...The country began to lose momentum. Economic failures became more frequent. Difficulties began to accumulate and deteriorate, and unresolved problems to multiply. Elements of what we call stagnation and other phenomena alien to socialism began to appear in the life of society. A kind of "braking mechanism" affecting social and economic development formed. And all this happened at a time when scientific and technological revolution opened up new prospects for economic and social progress....An absurd situation was developing. The Soviet Union, the world's biggest producer of steel, raw materials, fuel and energy, has shortfalls in them due to wasteful or inefficient use. One of the biggest producers of grain for food, it nevertheless has to buy millions of tons of grain a year for fodder. We have the largest number of doctors and hospital beds per thousand of the population and, at the same time, there are glaring shortcomings in our health services. Our rockets can find Halley's comet and fly to Venus with amazing accuracy, but side by side with these scientific and technological triumphs is an obvious lack of efficiency in using scientific achievements for economic needs, and many Soviet household appliances are of poor quality.... A gradual erosion of the ideological and moral values of our people began. It was obvious to everyone that the growth rates were sharply dropping and that the entire mechanism of quality control was not working properly; there was a lack of receptivity to the advances in science and technology; the improvement in living standards was slowing down and there were difficulties in the supply of foodstuffs, housing, consumer goods and services. On the ideological plane as well, the braking mechanism brought about ever greater resistance to the attempts to constructively scrutinize the problems that were emerging and to the new ideas. Propaganda of success--real or imagined--was gaining the upper hand. Eulogizing and servility were encouraged; the needs and opinions of ordinary working people, of the public at large, were ignored....The need for change was brewing not only in the material sphere of life but also in public consciousness. People who had practical experience, a sense of justice and commitment to the ideals of Bolshevism criticized the established practice of doing things and noted with anxiety the symptoms of moral degradation and erosion of revolutionary ideals and socialist values....

Add/Revise Hypotheses

Why did the Soviet Union Fall?

Begin to consider which cause is primary, secondary, etc.

Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

Document F: CIA Report, February 1988: USSR: Domestic Fallout From the Afghan War

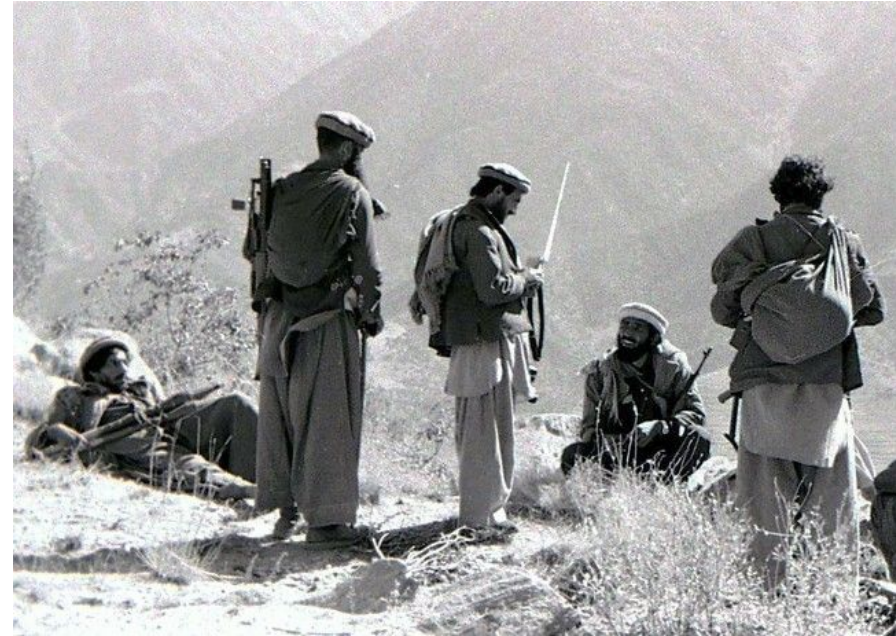
Military involvement in Afghanistan has lasted longer than any previous Soviet war and, we estimate, has cost the USSR more than 12,000 lives and 15 billion rubles, approximately 3% of the Soviet Defense budget.... The war has intensified some societal and health problems. Returning combat veterans have spread infectious diseases, especially hepatitis, and drug usage....most soldiers in Afghanistan experiment with various types of drugs and at least 10% returned addicted to hashish.



Afghanistan

Document G: The Afghan War and Breakdown of the Soviet Union by Rafael Reuvny and Aseem Prakash, Review of International Studies, 1999.

We view 1986 as the turning point in the Afghanistan war and, accordingly, as marking the second phase of Gorbachev's reform agenda. In 1986, the Mujaheddin (Afghan freedom fighters), now well armed with US-supplied surface-to-air missiles, rockets, mortars, and communication equipment, won many confrontations with the Soviet army. As successful ambushes of Soviet convoys became a daily phenomenon, the number of Soviet casualties mounted, the number of disabled soldiers seen in Soviet cities grew substantially, and the war veterans (Afgantsy) increasingly became part of the Soviet urban landscape. Since many Afgantsy belonged to the non-Russian nationalities (of the Soviet Union), opposition to the war from citizens in non-Russian Soviet republics increased. Since their presence often was not acknowledged by the authorities, who wished to play down Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, these Afgantsy became bitter and openly critical of the Soviet leaders.



Afghanistan

Document H: Radio Liberty Research, 'Pamiati A. Bennigsen, RS 58/88 (July 5, 1988)

During the Cold War, when Soviet satellite countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary had tried to break away from the Soviet Union, they had been brutally put down with Soviet tanks in the streets. Before Afghanistan, Soviet dissidents (people who opposed communism in the USSR) believed the communist government had the will and the ability to use the military to crush them. The Afghan war changed this perception. Since both the will and the ability of the leadership in Moscow were under a cloud, non-Russian movements became bold enough to publicly call for separation from Russia.

It would be demonstrated that Soviet might was not invincible and that resistance is possible. What are the Afghans for Central Asia? It is a small, wild and poor country. So then, if the Afghans could inflict a military and political defeat, then that makes anything possible. And everyone in Central Asia knows that. I think that in Soviet Russia they know it too.

Add/Revise Hypotheses

Why did the Soviet Union Fall?

Uprisings in Eastern bloc Nations (1980s)

The seeds of the revolution were present from the very beginning, and the [Hungarian Revolution of 1956](#) and the [Prague Spring](#) in Czechoslovakia were pre-cursors to the Revolutions of 1989, which were the final cataclysm that ended with the [collapse of the Soviet Union](#) itself just two years later.

The revolution began in [Poland](#) with the creation of [Solidarity](#), the worker's movement that challenged the Communist government (the supposed representatives of the "workers' paradise) for authority. This was the first movement in the Eastern bloc that had not been brutally suppressed. This de-legitimized the Communist claim as representatives of the people's will. It continued when the Hungarian authorities decided to no longer interdict those seeking to leave the state by crossing the boundary between Hungary and Austria. This led to a flood of refugees from Eastern Europe streaming into Hungary to escape to the West. The defining event was then the collapse of the [Berlin Wall](#) in East Germany. With the exception of Romania, the revolutions were largely peaceful as the governments put up only token resistance to the clear will of the people for the end of Communist rule and [democratic reform](#).

Document I: Yegor Gaidar, acting prime minister of Russia from June of 1992 to December of 1992

*During **Detent**, the leaders of the USSR had lifted some of the restrictions on trade with non-communists countries. Soviet oil was often in demand in nearby Europe since it was closer than Arabic oil.*

Soviet agriculture had stagnated in the 1980's but the demand for grain in the cities was increasing. It was necessary to buy grain in the international market. While the price of petroleum was high, it was feasible to finance the purchase of grain from within the Soviet Bloc nations. When the price of petroleum fell in the last 1980's the Soviet Union needed to borrow the funds from Western banks to purchase the needed grain. This severely restricted the international activities of the Soviet Union. It could not send in Soviet troops to put down the rebellions against communism in Eastern Europe because such an action would have resulted in a refusal of Western sources to lend the money needed.

Add/Revise Hypotheses

Why did the Soviet Union Fall?

Primary, secondary, tertiary, etc.

Is Reform of Communist System Possible?

Document J: Aleksander Yakoblev, a specialist in North American affairs

It seemed to us that all we had to do was to remove some prohibitions (*resistance to change*). Free everything up and it would start to work. There is a good engine there. It has got a bit old and rusty. It needs oil. Then just press the starter and it will set off down the track. And we went along under this illusion for two years.

But as soon as we began to make really radical (*extreme*) reforms (*in Communism*), we immediately came up against the resistance of the system. It began to resist. That is when we began to understand that if we wanted radical reform we would inevitably come up against the resistance of the system. And that is what happened. From that moment on people began to say that the system is un-reformable (*can't be fixed, must be thrown out*) and the (*Communist*) Party is un-reformable. There did remain some illusions, some hopes, that it could all be done without major conflicts.

Add/Revise Hypotheses

Why did the Soviet Union Fall?

US/USSR Relations: Nuclear Arms

K: The Reykjavik Summit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xb6C-1DG-cU> (

Document L: Letter of Transmittal from the White House to the U.S. Senate and photo: President Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev signing the INF Treaty in the East Room of the White House. 12/8/87.

To the Senate of the United States:

I am transmitting herewith, for the advice and consent of the Senate to ratification, the Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Treaty is an unprecedented (*never seen before*) arms control agreement in several respects. It marks the first time that the United States and the Soviet Union have agreed to eliminate (*get rid of*), throughout the world, an entire class of their missile systems. ...

The missile systems to be eliminated consist of all U.S. and Soviet ground-launched ballistic missiles. Elimination will take place at designated locations and will be subject to on-site inspection as an aid to verifying compliance.



Add/Revise Hypotheses

Why did the Soviet Union Fall?

Glasnost and The People's Voice

Document M: "The Collapse of Communism: The Winter of 1988-89"

"I hope this is for real," said Boris Mamecov, a court clerk, at his voting place in south Moscow. "We never had anything like it before: discussions, debates. Before people dropped a piece of paper in a slot. You couldn't describe it as a choice."

Document N: Pravda (newspaper) March 27, 1989

"Millions Vote for Perestroika—A Vote of Confidence for the Policy of Redeveloping Soviet Society."



Create Your Thesis (Claim)

Write your claim, argument/s, and at least 4 texts incorporated. Be ready to share aloud.

Why did the Soviet Union fall? List your arguments in order of importance (1st argument is primary cause, 2nd argument is secondary, etc.).