

The end of the cold war and the emergence of the post-cold war world
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In the summer of 1991, just for a week's time, the existence of a Union, made up of fifteen Socialist Republics, remained only a fact in the history books. This dissolution, however, was not a singular event. The following report will attempt to examine the explicit and implicit causes of Soviet's Union break-up, as well as the confusion and disorder it caused, mainly by clarifying the issues surrounding it.

The critical discussion provided will also present a useful insight in the formation of the emerged new World after the Cold War, referred to by historians, as the ' Post-Cold War' world, chiefly taking into consideration Gorbachev's ' novoie myslenie' and the concepts of glasnost and perestroika, plus their fundamental impact on Eastern Europe and even on present-day Russian political system (Bisley, 2004, p. 75). By virtue of the long lasted era of stagnation and communist ideological values under Brezhnev's government, at the end of the 1980s, the Soviet state was evidently bleak.

Moreover, the ever increasing interference of the party, in practically every aspect of people's life, was becoming to a greater extent detrimental for the effectiveness of the state in the course of the years. As a result, by the time Gorbachev acquired the post of General Secretary in 1985, he had a great deal of distressing economical issues and disappointment with the regime to deal with. Although, he had the desire to make Soviet economy and state more efficient and productive, it proved to be the internal problems and Gorbachev's reforms that were baleful for Soviet Union's viability (Robinson, 1992, p. 25). By 1987, the government acknowledged the existence of major problems caused, not by some sort of financial obstacles, but linked to a <https://assignbuster.com/the-end-of-the-cold-war-and-the-emergence-of-the-post-cold-war-world-essay-sample/>

deeper ideological, cultural and social crisis (Battle, 1998, p. 370). It became evident that a radical change was required. Therefore, in the second half of 1980s Gorbachev began to talk about implementing a concept of 'new thinking' in Soviet's system (Bisley, 2004, p. 76). He was apparently not as afraid of innovative thinking and thinkers as his ancestors, as well.

Therefore, his idea of drastic reform also included a few new concepts, the most fundamental ones amongst them – for openness and restructuring, respectively 'Glasnost' and 'Perestroika'. Regarded as cornerstones for the Soviet's renovation at that time, they were chiefly concerned with giving way for transparency and renovation of the Soviet political and economic system. By their employment, the new government aimed at overthrowing the traditional restricts on the free flow of information and modernizing Soviet's command economy for people's sake.

In the course of the years, both ideas appeared not as successful as they were meant to be. It was these two particular concepts that were considered to have had the major repercussion to the nations in the Union and the ones that shed light on every failure of the system throughout the days of Brezhnev's leadership. Furthermore, Glasnost failed to arrive at its full implementation and encountered plenty of resistance (Baylis, 2005, p. 115).

As far as perestroika is concerned, its major intention was noble in target, that is, to revive the state and to cast out from the times of coercive collectivisation and Stalinist ideologies, yet it was not anti – socialist and this turned out to be its major flaw (Baylis, 2005, p. 114). It involuntarily drifted the Union towards the final dissolution. What's more, both concepts gave

rise to a general disillusionment with the regime, which ultimately ended up in steady criticism of Gorbachev's reforms, mainly because of the given ability to the people to publicly condemn the regime.

Not only did they let on many problems already existing within the Union, but they also brought about lots of disapproval for Gorbachev and the party leadership (Strayer, 1998, p. 100). Glasnost, in particular, encouraged the public to have a say in politics and make their voice heard, causing a great deal of unrest, initially within the Soviet Union and subsequently throughout the entire Eastern bloc (Sixsmith, November 2011, p. 5).

When it comes to Gorbachev's 'new thinking' with regards to Soviet's foreign policy, one should, take into consideration and carefully examine the causes, effects and the reasons behind the Soviet's withdrawal from Afghanistan. On April 28th 1978, the Marxist's in the country also known as the PDPA (Communist Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan) secured the country from Daud Khan's regime (Braithwaite, 2011, pp. 8-33). What's more, Nur Muhammad Taraki became leader after a bloody coup.

However, it was not until late December 1979, under Leonid Brezhnev's premiership and the consent of the politburo, that a soviet invasion was sent to secure Afghanistan. Unknown at the time, it was one of the many events that culminated the collapse of the communist ideology throughout the Soviet Union, on account of a huge defense budget and competition with the Western hemisphere. Already lumped with the responsibility, Gorbachev secured the leadership in 1985 with Soviet troops still in Afghanistan.

Already disillusioned, it was not until 1989 that Soviet troops were withdrawn. With Glasnost and Perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev faced criticism from the more hard line conservatives within the communist state. Historians often argue that Perestroika was the final nail in the coffin for the Soviet camp and for the Warsaw Pact satellite countries, as well. The increasing criticisms within Gorbachev's own party, led to him moving towards a pro-western relationship. At that time, in 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev met President Ronald Reagan in Washington to discuss a treaty of disarmament.

Hence, the year 1988 could be described as the 'winds of change' throughout the entire Communist camp. Satellite nations of the Soviet Union suddenly started to collapse one after the other. The catalyst of this 'domino effect' was Gorbachev's reforming policy, which caused the rejection of Communism in Eastern Europe. Brezhnev's years of inaction had already caused harm and have laid the spark of unrest. The memories of Khrushchev's oppression in Hungary in 1956 had a pivotal role in the minds of many in Eastern Europe.

With implementing Perestroika came the opportunism and Communist officials were swept aside. Nonetheless, Gorbachev looked on with enthusiasm, little knowing that socialism was seriously undermined with Perestroika within the next following months (Smith, 1998, pp. 141-146). The first seed of change was Poland. Lech Walesa led 'Solidarity', formed in 1980, but repressed up until April 1989. The nation enjoyed free elections in June with a coalition government led by Tadeusz Mazowiecki. In Hungary and Czechoslovakia, however, the political reformation was far quicker. Janos Kadar resigned power in 1988.

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Consequently, mass demonstrations in Czechoslovakia led to forced reforms and to the Gustav Huzak's resignation of power in December 1989. More violent means were enforced in Romania, with which Nicolae Ceausescu who was summarily executed with his wife in a hastily arranged court, construed as a farce. This was broadcasted live on TV throughout entire Romania. On September 10th 1989, further to the West, East Germans circumnavigated through Hungary, because they had opened their borders to the West with Austria. Allowing repressed East Germans to flood into Western Europe in a mass exodus. Maier, 1997, pp. 4-5). Hailed as a triumph from the West over Communism with symbolic images of East and West Germans tearing down the Berlin wall, President Bush proclaimed the end of the Cold War and the 'new world order', in reference to globalization.

The resignation of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991 led to the change from Communism to Capitalism, which brought with it some successes, but also some serious problems, as there was no transition period and the change from Communism to a federal system was sudden and rapid (Ross, 1999, p.). First of all, the economy of Russia suffered severely due to the sudden collapse of the 'planned economy', which had previously been controlled by Government institutions (Ross, 1999, p. 167). Second of all, the end of the Cold War led to a financial crisis which matched that of the 'Great depression', the inflation of the rouble meant that Russian currency was nearly worthless after the financial crisis of 1998, as inflation grew to 84% (Heywood, 2011, p. 467). This crisis shocked the Russian economy to the core.

It had been caused by drops in trade and exports, most notably, that of Crude oil and raw materials which negatively affected Russian foreign exchange reserves (Heywood, 2011, p467). As a result, it could be argued that the Russian economy may have become weaker as a result of the transition from Communism to Capitalism, because, as mentioned above, it led to the 1998 crisis and even earlier than this the rouble had devalued after the transition, due to hyperinflation. However, there were also some substantial triumphs and successes of the Post -Cold war economic policy, most notably under Boris Yeltsin from 1991 onwards (Gaddis, 2005, p254).

A prominent example is the success of the Post- Cold War Russian economy in the ‘ Liberalization of Prices’, where the Market, not Bureaucrats, set the prices of goods, thus allowing for more growth in the sectors which had the capability to expand and produce more. The demilitarization of the economy also allowed more growth elsewhere. Such a demilitarization was beneficial, since it also made Russia, as a whole, a ‘ safer place’, as it was less likely that Russia would use its military for conquest or intimidation, hence, making the region and possibly the world a safer place (Blasi, 1997, p. 9).

Possibly the greatest achievement of the Post-Cold-War Russian economy was the Privatization of business and institutions. Privatization took place on a large scale. In the first couple of years without socialism, for instance, over 15, 000 industrial farms and tens of thousands of businesses were privatized (Balsi, 1997, p10). Within the same time space, over half the Russian economic output was from the privatized businesses. This provides an argument that the newly privatized/demilitarized Russian economy was in

many respects on its way to become a major capitalist contender in the blooming Uni-Polar/ Post-Cold-War World.

Referring back to the very beginning of the report, the Soviet Union was a one-party state under Gorbachev, conducted by the Communist Party and enforced by the KGB (White, 2009, p. 370). Amongst Gorbachev's vows for 'redefinition' of the East-West relationship was his decision to no longer send tanks into Eastern Europe to support Communist Regimes, therefore he pulled back in Afghanistan chiefly to cut losses and subsequently had the endorsement of George Bush SR (White, 2009, p. 370). Rather than redefining the relationship, by doing so, he in reality ended the relationship perpetually.

The US' sphere of influence rose, whilst the domestic politics in Russia began to gradually change (Baylis, 2005, p73). It often argued that Russia, from that time on, changed into a 'dual-state', in that it is distinguished by two obliging political orders. The first is order, made up of parliament, political parties and representative movements which are regulated by electoral and 'associated' laws. The second, described as the constitutional state as it is most of the time, regulated by law and enclosing normative values of the democratic movement of the late Soviet period (Sakwa, 2010, p185).

Sakwa argues, that by virtue of this, it is incorrect to label modern day Russia, as purely an 'authoritarian regime', as it remains committed to constitutional democracy and it is moderated by those commitments.

However, it is a hybrid of authoritarianism and constitutional democracy (2010, p. 85). To demonstrate this and support his argument, Sawka uses

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the example of the development of the 'Nazi Germany dual-state' in the 1930s. He goes on to explain that the 'prerogative state' acted arbitrarily without any checks or balances, whilst the constitutional state remained intact (Sawka, 2010, p. 89). By contrasting contemporary Russia with Nazi Germany, he writes that the normative state in Russia tempers the arbitrariness of the 'prerogative state' in that it works in reverse, as well. The Nazis openly proclaimed that the primacy of the non-constitutional principles was the driving force of the state. Russia, on the other hand, pools its legitimacy from the constitutional order and, that is, one it proclaims to uphold (Sakwa, 2010, p. 190).

Hence, Sawka concludes that it would be more accurate to call Russia's equivalent of the 'prerogative state' and 'administrative regime', and the way this regime interacts with the constitutional state defines Russia's 'Duel- State' today (2010 p. 190). Having carefully studied the reasons encompassing the end of the Cold War and the simultaneous Soviet Union's collapse, one can straightforwardly conclude that the break-up wasn't an event that happened overnight, rather it stemmed from decades of abuse and dereliction of duties, by the central communist government.

Gorbachev's policies of Glasnost and Perestroika and his 'new thinking' in foreign policy were merely the last straw. They gave the subjugated people in the Eastern bloc 'weapons' to fight and ultimately escape from the totalitarian government. What's more, as could be easily observed, their implications are felt even in the contemporary affairs in Russia - twenty years later.