

Analysis of the significance of Mikhail Gorbachev politics essay



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Mikhail Gorbachev, *The Patron of Change*. The Cold War was a period in history from roughly 1945 to 1988 when the world's two largest superpowers, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic ("Soviet Union") and the United States, were in continuous economic and political conflict. These polar entities struggled for dominance and control in the new atomic age. With no end in sight to this potentially catastrophic confrontation, it became essential for the leaders of both sides to reconcile their differences. For the Soviet Union, peace was increasingly important mainly because of the poor state of their economy. The leader responsible for bringing about the fall of the "iron curtain" and for helping to bring an end to communism in the Soviet Union was Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev's contributions to world peace have been widely recognized and his actions continue to serve as examples for world leaders today.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991, made several significant contributions to the world. He represented a new generation of Soviet leaders, different from his predecessors who used fear and intimidation to maintain a communist idealist Russian society.

Gorbachev was different because he recognized the flaws in the Soviet system of government and was willing to take steps to improve it. The opposing ideals between communism and capitalism created a split between the East and the West on the proper form of government which was to be established in the occupied territories in Europe following World War II. However, the balance of power and arms race between the two superpowers took a huge toll on the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's policies helped bring an end to the Cold War, led to the destruction of the wall separating East and

West Berlin, encouraged the rise of democracy in Europe, and ultimately led to a complete dismantling of the Soviet Union.[1]

Gorbachev was born into a peasant family in the village of Privolnoe, on March 2, 1931. As a teenager, he worked driving farm machinery at a local machine-tractor station. During his college years, Gorbachev was very interested in politics. He joined the national communist party of the Soviet Union and quickly moved up in the ranks. By 1962, he was the regional leader of Komsomol (Young Communist League). Gorbachev was a successful politician from early on in his career. He became exposed to influence and workings of the influence of the KGB, the Soviet Secret police, experience that served him well in his future political career. Gorbachev met his wife, Raisa Titorenko, while attending school at Moscow State University. [2]

As Prime Minister, Gorbachev tried to establish better relations with the United States. In November, 1985, he met with President Reagan in Geneva to talk about national and international issues. Gorbachev once said “ America must be the teacher of democracy, not the advertiser of the consumer society. It is unrealistic for the rest of the world to reach the American living standard.” The clearest signs of improvement between the United States and Soviet Union relations came in 1988 when Gorbachev made a positive impression with a crowd of spectators in New York City where he shook hands with people.[3]

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union was struggling to survive because of the problems associated with a planned economy, and because a

disproportionate amount the budget was being spent on the military towards an arms race with the United States. Gorbachev believed that the Soviet Union could not afford to spend so much on arms so he reduced the amount of money for war. This policy led to nuclear missile reduction treaties with the United States and effectively brought an end to the Cold War which had dominated international relations with the United States since 1945.

When Mikhail Gorbachev took office in 1985, he faced one terrible problem. The Soviet economy had been in a period of turmoil, and it was in desperate need of reform for two decades. Gorbachev once said “ The market came with the dawn of civilization and it is not an invention of capitalism. If it leads to improving the well-being of the people there is no contradiction with socialism.” Gorbachev decided to change the old system with a period of “ perestroika,” or restructuring in the hope of making it more efficient.[4]

From 1985 to 1986, Gorbachev continued an anti-alcohol program started by his predecessor, Andropov. His policies increased the price of vodka and changed the legal drinking age from 18 to 21, which had the effect of decreasing alcohol sales. It was his goal to discourage workers from drinking, and thus to improve the productivity of workers and increase industrial output. However, this campaign did not work out well in Russia.[5]

Gorbachev promoted great political changes. One of the most important measures came in 1989 when he set up elections where members of the Communist Party had to run against non-Communist Party members. Later that same year, he called to terminate special status of the Communist Party

guaranteed by the Soviet Constitution. Gorbachev also ended the Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan.

During this period, he began more drastic changes. One of these changes was the Law of State Enterprises, enacted in June 1987. This legislation gave businesses more independence from the government. Despite the increased independence, the state still exercised some control over their activities. This was quite a radical change and was seen as a move away from the old system of a centrally planned command economy, and many people did not agree with it. Workers were also encouraged to be more open, which was part of "Glasnost," and speak out against corruption or give suggestions. They were also encouraged to form small privately owned cooperatives such as grocery shops and hairdressing salons.[6]

In 1989, Gorbachev was nominated as Time Magazine's "Man of The Year." Gorbachev called what he was doing "permitting a revolution". Gorbachev became the patron of change. Gorbachev, and his reformist allies in Eastern Europe, managed to suppress at least one monster which was the state's capacity for cruelty and violence against its own citizens. The Chinese students carried portraits of the Soviet leader, and they were shouting, "In Russia they have Gorbachev; in China we have whom?" Gorbachev became a hero for what he would not do.[7]

There were several important events that occurred while Gorbachev ruled the Soviet Union. One hundred thousand Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan. The Soviet military intervention was costly for the Soviet Union, and to the Afghan people. Over 1.5 million Afghans were killed.[8]

Another important event was the Chernobyl disaster. According to Michael Gorbachev (Tuesday, April 16, 2006, The Daily Star) "the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl 20 years ago, even more than my launch of Perestroika, was perhaps the real cause of the Soviet Union five years later." The Chernobyl disaster occurred on April 26, 1986 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. Chernobyl is ranked one of the greatest industrial accidents of all time. Some have said that Gorbachev was too silent about the disaster and was not forthcoming.[9]

Also, "Perestroika" was Gorbachev's important reform. This consisted of economic reforms and policy changes. The "Law of Cooperatives" passed in 1988 allowed ownership of businesses by individuals.

Gorbachev has been a powerful and symbolic presence in the world's imagination since he first came to power in 1985. Gorbachev, and his program of Perestroika, was not popular in Russia. At the time, soap, sugar, tea, school notebooks, cigarettes, sausage and other meats, butter, fruits and vegetables, and matches were scarce.[10]

By the 1980s, it was obvious that communism in the Soviet Union was not really working out. Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985 and he introduced many reforms in an attempt to modernize the economy and make the Communist Party more democratic. These reforms ultimately led to the breakup of the Soviet Union and an end to the one-party Communist rule. In December 25, 1991, Gorbachev resigned as President at the point when the Soviet Union disintegrated.[11]

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