

Explanations for the collapse of the soviet union politics essay



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The Soviet Union was one of the world's superpowers, which survived for seventy four years, enduring the wars, famines, including the millions of deaths, the mass purges and a social revolution. It was a first state, which launched the human to space and whose Soviets political ideas inspired most people around the world (Beissinger, 2001: 1). In this essay I will answer the question why the Soviet Union collapsed. Its unbelievable collapse did not happen by one day. It was a long process, which had economic, political, social and military causes. In the essay I will argue that the main causes were a stagnant economy and unsuccessful Gorbachev reforms which led to the food shortage and deficit of goods. The second cause was no political stability in leadership, political opposition and not effective central planning. The third cause was nationalism. Soviet Republics with own nations wanted independence. The fourth reason was military, as Afghanistan war and West competition which force USSR to have a lot of weapons production, spending a lot of budget. Finally, there were greater political and social freedom, people' discontent, especially elite and Baltic countries, which led to open criticism of Soviet regime. Elite and political leaders saw advantages from collapse of Soviet Union.

Basis of argument

My basic arguments based upon the different opinions and views of Soviet Union' collapse. Baylis believes that the main reasons of collapse are economic, political and nationalism. She explains how economic reasons were coming from political reasons. Tarasov has the different opinion. He argues that the main reason of collapse was ' nomenklatura', which wanted to have the big advantages from the collapse of Soviet Union, as

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privatization of the state' properties. According to explanation of economic and political causes by Beissinger and Strayer, in my essay I will argue that the the main reasons of the collapse were both economic, political, social causes and the Soviet elite influence.

Political causes

After Stalin death the control and governance of Soviet Union was weaken, which led to decompression of Soviet system. I will analyse different times by rulling of Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and how this time and these leaders influenced to the collapse of USSR.

Khrushchev- the era of Thaw

Khrushchev (ruled 1955-1964) was responsible for Destalinization and The Thaw. He made political reforms and put emphasis to social investment, as housing. He gave more freedom to artists. The totalitarian regime was weakening. The small freedom of speech and more or less the democratization appeared. He put the end of mass purges and the use of terror: more prisoners released from camps. Use of forced labour reduced. However, the control of the secret police exists. He put to an end of Stalinist personality cult. Khrushchev put the emphasis to agriculture. In 1959 it was forbidden for inhabitants to hold cattle. This policy has worsened the peasantry conditions of life. He divided the Party Committees in two levels: for industry and for agriculture. It led to the bad harvests (Hodakov, 2007).

This time, when Khrushchev ruled, influenced to Soviet collapse because he started the process which destroyed communist regime. The small freedom

of speech and small democratization gave to people a chance to tell their opinion about their discontent. He did not improve the life conditions of people and did not make a visible progress in economy, even had worsen it.

Brezhnev- the era of Stagnation

Brezhnev (1964-1982) was responsible for era of Stagnation. The first problem was a sharp reduction of economic growth. He did not continue with Khrushchev's reforms and used much of the budget on the armed force. Soviet Union lagged behind the West countries in development of the high technology (Baranez, 2006). At that time Soviet Union had problems as the lack of different goods and labour shortages. Because of deficit the line of people for soup was longer in the streets, and the list of goods was shorter (Strayer, 1998: 146). The Doctrine of Brezhnev, a foreign policy of the Soviet Union, was created when in 1968 Czechoslovakia threaten that Eastern Bloc would collapse and demanded the democratization. But Soviet Union intervened to Czechoslovakia and put the Prague Spring to the end (Baranez, 2006). The problem, which existed in Soviet Union, was Black market. It developed because any trade or business was forbidden. Also, the stagnation was influenced by Soviet-Afghan War. Afhanistan was supported by US and others Muslim countries. It turned to Anti-Soviet War and lasted for 9 years. About 15 thousands Soviet people were killed (Baranez, 2006). Another problem of that time was the rising of death rates (Baylis, 1997: 93).

His ruling influenced to the collapse of Soviet Union because of starting the Soviet-Afghan War. Secondly, the economy was stagnant. Thirdly, the reason which influenced was that the tensions and people discontent' were growing

because of deficit, war and the events in Czechoslovakia. Thus, Communism regime was losing legitimacy.

Gorbachev- the era of Perestroika and Glasnost

Gorbachev (1985-1991) was responsible for perestroika, glasnost and democratisation which led to the collapse of Soviet Union. When he went to power, Soviet Union was already in weak conditions because of absence of stable leadership and political stagnation (Suny, 1993: 127). Gorbachev wanted to improve economy by the new reforms and liberalization. He claimed, " Through perestroika and glasnost the ideas of socialism will gain fresh impetus" and it would be possible to do by returning of Lenin' ideas (Baylis, 1997: 92). He reduced the party control of governance. He wanted to make multi-candidate elections.

Perestroika is the political restructuring, which was responsible for creating of an executive presidency, Joint Ventures Law, allowing foreigners to own Soviet enterprises, the end of the ' leading role', the new legislature, allowing non-communists to be elected, Enterprise Law, allowing selling product on the open market. The second reform was Glasnost which let more freedom of speech. Press was not controlled very strongly. Gorbachev made political reforms to reduce party control and started political liberalization. He wanted to create a ' democratic' communism. But the freedom of expression gave a voice to those who was against Gorbachev. It was the great change of the system but it did not bring expected results. It would be better to say that Gorbachev was acknowledging the new civil society

distinct from the interests of the Communist regime. Perestroika was the final reason which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union (Baylis, 1997: 94).

To sum up, After Stalin death there was no political stability in leadership (Suny, 1993: 127). Political stagnation: no effective central planning, new reforms were not successful were reasons which led to economical problems. There were no clear ideological goals. Several Soviet Republics started to resist central government, because of liberalizing, political and social freedoms. Weakness in the center government enabled the local regional mafias, which wanted to increase their power in party-state apparatus (Suny, 1993: 127). So, political opposition appeared. All these reasons led to criticism of regime and weakening of central government.

Economic causes

By 1980 there was economic stagnation. Gorbachev' reforms had not improved the situation but even worsen it. Economy had structural weaknesses which relied on inflexible central planning, "rewarded gross output of goods rather than productivity", being the barriers in management. Also in agriculture central planning stifled productivity (Baylis, 1997: 95). From Brezhnev time, it was 15-25% military spending of GNP. Soviet Union had too much guns and not enough food. Deficit of goods was increasing. It was also influenced by the dramatic drop of the oil price in 1985 and in 1986. It was difficult to find necessary goods in the state shops. Also agriculture could not feed all urban population. Students were sent to work to collective farm, especially in harvest. Then they obtained more freedom of speech, they refused to provide the labor. 'Urban boycott' led to market decline in

agricultural output (Strayer, 1998: 133). A big change was the legalization of private farming in 1987. Gorbachev wanted move towards a free market. After the occurrence of Joint Ventures and Enterprise Laws the trade, which took place with the West, had controlled by the Ministry of Foreign Trade. The companies could deal with each other without the control of government. Because of unprofitable entrepreneurs, who needed state support, government spending increased. The effect of those reforms was catastrophic. Firstly, it cut down the old system but did not replace by the new economic mechanism. The second problem was inconsistent price levels, ' some reflecting the input of subsidies and some what consumers would pay' (Baylis, 1997: 95). Other mistake of Gorbachev was the new alcohol-campaign in 1985, which should, as he thought, to solve both economic and social problems, however, it did not. Government provided the curtailment of the alcoholic production on 10 % a year. By 1988 manufacture of some sorts of wines had to be stopped. These measures led to decreasing death rates, but the economic benefit was negative and was expressed in more than 20-milliard losses of the budget. Technologically Soviet Union was falling behind Western Countries and lost the arm race and international competition with the West. Soviet-Afghan War brought the economic problems and population' loss to Soviet Union. In 1988 war ended under Gorbachev and Soviet troops were withdrawn. Perestroika brought to Soviet Union declining production, inflation and shortages. Another problem was happened in Chernobyl. Not only Soviet people, but all world was shocked by the Chernobyl disaster, the worst nuclear disaster in the history. Government supported people, evacuating them. It was also blow in economy (Akkerman, 2006).

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To sum up, Afghanistan war, Chernobyl disaster, anti-alcohol campaign, competition with the West, the dramatic drop of oil' price, not fully operating market mechanism led to the economic problems. It began growing of goods deficit, shortage of food and a worsening of living standards. Soviet Union failed economically.

Social causes

People' discontent

Soviet community always had discontent of Soviet regime: purges, absence of speech' freedom, compulsory collectivisation. After Stalin death, especially after 1985 it appeared liberalization and freedom of speech. People, especially elite, were against of communism and now could criticize Moscow' regime freely. Formation of private farming, creation of co-operative societies, transformation of collective farms capable to adapt for market conditions led to discrediting tactic and strengthening of ambitions of political leaders and elite. People's discontent grew when economical situation worse: food shortage, deficit of good, delays with wages' payment or even no salary, unemployment growth, falling of standard' life, crisis phenomena in a science, culture and education. People's discontent, mistrust and criticism of government also appeared because of Afghanistan war and Chernobyl disaster, especially information concealment about it and others disasters. Soviet people were not informed about Chernobyl disaster; even then they were evacuated from the Chernobyl. The information was hidden. The Soviet newspapers and all information about Chernobyl disaster

were controlled. So, Soviet people could not trust their government (Akkerman, 2006).

According to Tarasov, the collapse of Soviet Union was influenced by 'nomenklatura', soviet elites. He does not believe in causes of USSR collapse such as perestroika and democratisation. He argues that 'nomenklatura' saw a lot of advantages from the collapse of Soviet Union such as privatisation of state' properties and they wanted to become bourgeoisie (Tarasov, 2003).

Nationalism

The one of reason of USSR collapse was nationalism. The ex-soviet countries, such as Baltic Republics, Ukraine, Georgia and others with own ethnic population had the enourmous will to develop their own culture and to have own governance. For example, Baltic Republics made a peaceful demonstration, calling Baltic Chain, people stood at the streets, joining their hands. This human chain was spanning over 600km. Republics demanded for sovereignty. Gorbachev was unsympathetic to their demands. But, when these Republics made secessionist movements, the violent attempts to suppress nationalism were undertaken. However, Gorbachev did not use the full force of Soviet military power. Last years of Soviet Union existence international conflicts inflamed (Baylis, 1997: 94-95).

Conclusion

V. Putin claimed: " the Collapse of the Soviet Union is the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the Century" (Gaidar, 2007: X). This 'empire'

exists during seventy four years and come to the end. I have argued that it collapsed because of economic, social and political causes. The first reason is that Soviet Union failed economically: economic stagnation, failed reforms, Afghanistan war, Chernobyl disaster, the dramatic drop of oil' price, 15-25% military spending of GNP, competition with West made economical situation worsen. It led to food shortage, deficit of goods and a worsening of living standards. Secondly, nationalism killed Soviet Union: Soviet Republics wanted to develop own culture and to have own governance. The third reason is political instability, political opposition and no effective central planning. The fourth reason is greater social and political freedom which allows people, especially elite to criticise government. Some Soviet Republics started to resist central control. Perestroika was the immediate cause which led the Soviet Union to the end.