

Essential Question: How did the Soviet Union collapse and what were its effects?

Standard:

SS6H7c. Explain how the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the end of the Cold War and German reunification.

Economies of Eastern Europe

- After WWII, the economies of Eastern European countries struggled
- The Soviets tried to strengthen the economies by promoting industrialization
- The emphasis was on heavy industry, but the investments were badly managed and usually the plants were located in regions that lacked the raw materials.
- The communist belief was that farming must be done collectively and that planning has to be made by the government who owned the agricultural equipment too.
- **Due to the Communist policies, there were shortages of food, clothing, and other basic items**

Dissatisfaction with Communism

- Protests against Communist policies occurred in U.S.S.R. satellite countries such as Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania.
- **By the summer of 1990, all of the former Communist regimes of Eastern Europe were replaced by democratically elected governments.**

Impact of Mikhail Gorbachev

- He believed that the Soviet Union needed reform in order to revive both the Soviet economy and society.
- He implemented reforms in the Soviet Union such as the ability of citizens to freely voice their opinions
- He realized that the Soviet Union's economy was seriously suffering from the excessive spending on nuclear weapons and ended the Arms Race with the U.S.
- **Although he implemented economic, political, and social reforms, his policies did not revitalize the Soviet Union's economy. On the contrary, the economy took a severe downturn.**

Loosening Control

- During the “Iron Curtain” years, Soviet troops remained stationed throughout Eastern Europe as a reminder of Soviet dominance over other countries.
- The Soviet military often intervened when people in Eastern European countries protested communist rule.
- **With a struggling economy and the new Soviet leader Gorbachev, the Soviets stopped helping Eastern European governments put down domestic protests against communism.**

Fall of the Berlin Wall

- Communism was weakening, but the East German Communist leaders insisted that East Germany just needed a moderate change rather than a drastic revolution.
- On the evening of November 9, 1989, an announcement was made by an East German Communist Party official that citizens were free to cross the country's borders.
- The Berlin Wall was flooded with people from both sides. Some began chipping at the Berlin Wall with hammers and chisels. There were huge celebrations along the Berlin Wall, with people hugging, kissing, singing, cheering, and crying.
- **Without Soviet support, the East German government let go of their power. A new government was elected and the reunification of Germany was official.**



Fall of the Berlin Wall



Break-up of the Soviet Union

- The political system and economic system of the Soviet Union was authoritarian and highly centralized.
- After many years, changes were made. Economically, the planned, highly centralized command economy was replaced by the slow introduction of a market economy. The change was difficult to achieve though because of production and distribution problems.
- Politically, the constitution allowed for more freely-elected bodies. Many non-communists were elected.
- Nationalism and demands for independence were increasing in the individual republics.
- **The failing Soviet economy, the ability of citizens to criticize, and the new political freedoms all weakened the power of the Soviet Union.**

Break-up of the Soviet Union



Soviet Union before the Break-up

15 Independent Republics after the Break-up



By 1991...

- Eastern European countries previously under the Soviet Union's influence moved away from Communism to democratic forms of government and more open economies
- Germany was reunified
- The Soviet Union collapsed into 15 independent republics
- The Cold War was over

By 1991...

A weakening in the power and influence of the Soviet Union and its Communist policies had a direct influence on each of these events

What's the common factor that influenced all of these events?

**If people in our
country disagree with
government policies,
what can we do about
it?**

**How was protesting different for
people in Eastern European
countries?**

Why was the loosening of control by the Soviet Union so momentous?

What factors do you think caused the loosening?

**How might you feel if you
lived in East or West
Germany on November 9,
1989?**

**What did the tearing down
of the Berlin Wall signify?**

**Do you think people in the
Soviet Union would have
voiced their opinions
without Gorbachev's
reforms?**

Why or Why Not?