CHAPTER 5

# Domestic and foreign problems of the Brezhnev era

**This chapter analyses Leonid Brezhnev's rule of the USSR until his death in 1982. The extent to which this was an era of political, economic and social stagnation is fully explored. Soviet foreign policy in the 1970s is also discussed, in particular the reasons for the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and its consequences.**

**You need to consider the following questions throughout this chapter:**

- What were the key features of the USSR's politics, society and economy under Brezhnev?
- Was Brezhnev's leadership to blame for Soviet stagnation from 1964 to 1982?
- What challenges did Soviet foreign policy face in the Brezhnev era?
- To what extent were the USSR's aims achieved in Afghanistan?
- Why did the USSR invade Afghanistan?
- How serious were the socio-economic and political problems confronting the USSR by the time of Brezhnev's death?

## 1 Politics, economy and society under Brezhnev

*Key question: What were the key features of the USSR's politics, society and economy under Brezhnev?*

By 1964, Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), was viewed by senior party members as increasingly unable to exercise the necessary leadership and stability required for the USSR to uphold its world position.

Khrushchev was removed from party leadership following a plot by members of the **Presidium**, in which Leonid Brezhnev played a leading part. Brezhnev was installed as First Secretary and gradually consolidated his power until by the late 1970s, he had amassed as much political power as almost any of his predecessors. Brezhnev's era saw political, economic and social **stagnation** within the USSR and among its satellites in eastern Europe.

**KEY TERM**

**Presidium** Dominant, policy-making body within the CPSU formed by the Council of Ministers, renamed the Politburo in 1966.

**Stagnation** A state of inactivity or low economic growth.

**What was the significance of the changes made to the USSR's constitution in 1977?**

## Political stagnation

In 1977, a new constitution replaced the one created by Stalin in 1936. What justified this change was the argument that the USSR had reached an advanced stage in its socialist development towards full-scale communism, the ideal espoused by Karl Marx (see page 10). Brezhnev wanted stability and to avoid social discontent by creating satisfaction with the achievements of the USSR, such as public health and education and military parity with the West, and by underplaying the lack of material and technological development. No timeframe was given in the constitution about when or if the USSR might progress beyond this advanced stage, providing an excuse for preserving the political *status quo*.

**SOURCE A**

**Article 6 of the USSR constitution of 1977 from *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History: Volume 2, 1939–1991* by Edward Acton and Tom Stableford, published by the University of Exeter Press, Exeter, UK, 2007, page 324. Professor Acton of the University of East Anglia, UK, and Assistant Librarian Stableford at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, compiled documents from newly available archival material on the former USSR. Their purpose was to provide non-Russian speakers with documents from the Cold War USSR.**

*Article 6. The leading and guiding force of the Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organisations and public organisations, is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The CPSU exists for the people and serves the people.*

*The Communist Party, armed with Marxism-Leninism, determines the general perspectives of the development of society and the course of the home and foreign policy of the USSR, directs the great constructive work of the Soviet people, and imparts a planned, systematic and theoretically substantiated character to their struggle for the victory of communism.*

*All party organisations shall function within the framework of the Constitution of the USSR.*

? What does Source A say about the central political role of the CPSU?

The new constitution reaffirmed the one-party state nature of the USSR. Brezhnev believed that by stating this in more appealing terms, he could limit its criticism.

**SOURCE B**

**An extract from a report by Brezhnev to the Central Committee entitled 'On the Draft Constitution of the USSR', 24 May 1977 from *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev* edited by Robert Vincent Daniels, published by the University Press of New England, Lebanon, NH, USA, 1993, page 314. Daniels was Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Vermont, USA.**

*The draft gives significantly fuller formulation to the political rights and liberties of USSR citizens … Freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of mass*

? According to Source B, what freedoms are guaranteed to Soviet citizens?

*meetings, and of street processions and demonstrations, which are included in the Constitution now in effect, are re-stated in full … Needless to say, comrades, the draft Constitution proceeds from the premise that the rights and liberties of citizens cannot and must not be used against our social system or to the detriment of the Soviet people's interests. Therefore, the draft clearly states, for example, that the exercise by citizens of their rights and liberties must not injure the interests of society and the state … and that political liberties are granted in accordance with the working people's interests and for the purpose of strengthening the socialist system.*

**SOURCE C**

**A CPSU propaganda poster with the slogan 'the unity of the party and the people – unbreakable'. Brezhnev is shown in the foreground leading the people.**


What is the message of Source C and what is the significance of the image of Lenin?

**To what extent did the Soviet economy stagnate under Brezhnev?**

# The Soviet economy in the Brezhnev era

Once Brezhnev's power base was secure within the party, he aimed to improve the lives of the people of the USSR by trying to solve the problems of agriculture through increasing state subsidies. This, along with military expenditure, was the major focus of the economy during this period and other areas suffered.

## Agriculture

One of the major problems facing Soviet agriculture was that not enough food was being produced as the population grew and consumption of food rose. In the event of a poor harvest, as in 1972 and 1975, the USSR had to rely on grain imports from the USA, Argentina and Canada. The grain imports dealt a damaging blow to the economic credibility of the socialist system, as well as being expensive for a system already under severe financial pressure.

### *State subsidies of agriculture*

By 1973, the most important forms of agricultural production were the ***kolkhozy*** and ***sovkhozy***, massive collective agricultural enterprises which had to be subsidized heavily by the state. By 1980, subsidies had increased to 20.3 per cent of the state budget from 19.5 per cent in 1972. This placed a huge strain on other sectors of the economy that were starved of investment, such as consumer goods.

This diversion of the state's resources to agriculture had an impact on food production, as the table in Source D shows.

**KEY TERM**

***Kolkhozy*** Collective farms made up of different families who farmed on state land according to centrally planned production directives and quotas, although production surpluses could be sold on the open market.

***Sovkhozy*** Groups of collective farms converted into huge agricultural enterprises run on an industrial model.

? What does Source D indicate about agricultural production in the Brezhnev era?

**SOURCE D**

**Agricultural output from *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–1991* by Alec Nove, published by Penguin, London, 1992, page 379. Nove was Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Glasgow, UK. He was born in Russia as Alexander Novakovsky. He compiled this table from original Soviet yearly statistical handbooks.**

| | Annual averages | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Agricultural product (millions of tonnes)** | **1961–5** | **1966–70** | **1971–5** | **1976–80** |
| Grain harvest | 130.3 | 167.6 | 181.6 | 205.0 |
| Cotton | 4.9 | 6.1 | 7.7 | 8.9 |
| Sugar beet | 59.2 | 81.1 | 76.0 | 88.4 |
| Potatoes | 81.6 | 94.8 | 89.6 | 84 |
| Meat | 9.3 | 11.6 | 14.0 | 14.8 |
| Milk | 64.7 | 80.6 | 87.4 | 92.6 |

In the long run, it proved impossible to sustain low consumer prices for food and agricultural products through state subsidies. According to agricultural economist Karl-Eugen Wädekin, the problem was that massive subsidies during the Brezhnev era did not focus on the real problem of Soviet agriculture. This had to do the structure of the farming system with its large bureaucracy and awkward organization, as well as not allowing demand to decide on distribution, rather than the state.

## Industry

Soviet industry also stagnated during the Brezhnev era. Brezhnev showed no real interest in economic reform. Factory managers were discouraged from risk-taking by the requirements issued by the State Planning Committee, or **GOSPLAN**. Factory managers continued to produce no more than the quota assigned with little regard for costs or quality of production. Factories, mines and transport industries operated with antiquated machinery. By the 1970s, the industrial sector was slowing down, as Source E indicates.

**KEY TERM**

**GOSPLAN** A government committee set up in 1921 which was responsible for centralized economic planning.

**SOURCE E**

**'Basic indices of social and economic development in the USSR – average annual percentage rates of growth over Five-Year Plan periods, 1966–1985,' from *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History, Volume 2, 1939–1991* by Edward Acton and Tom Stableford, published by the University of Exeter Press, Exeter, UK, 2007, page 285. Professor Acton of the University of East Anglia, UK, and Assistant Librarian Stableford at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, compiled documents from newly available archival material on the former USSR. Their purpose was to provide non-Russian speakers with documents from the Cold War USSR. This table was compiled by Soviet economists in 1988.**

| | Average annual percentage growth per five-year period | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Index** | **1966–70** | **1971–5** | **1976–80** | **1981–5** |
| National income | 7.2 | 5.1 | 3.8 | 3.1 |
| Industrial production | 8.5 | 7.4 | 4.4 | 3.7 |
| Average annual agricultural production | 3.9 | 2.5 | 1.7 | 1.1 |
| Social sector labour productivity | 6.8 | 4.5 | 3.3 | 3.1 |

What evidence can you find in Source E that average annual percentage rates of growth in the USSR slowed down in the Brezhnev era? ?

There were other serious problems such as shortages of raw materials. If a factory produced its quota, but had materials remaining, these were hoarded for future use instead of being sent to other factories that needed them.

? Compare and contrast Sources E (page 99) and F. To what extent do these sources agree?

**SOURCE F**

**A table of industrial output from *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–1991* by Alec Nove, published by Penguin, London, UK, 1992, page 387. Nove was Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Glasgow, UK. He was born in Russia as Alexander Novakovsky. He compiled this table from original Soviet yearly statistical handbooks.**

| Output | 1980 | 1985 |
|---|---|---|
| Oil (millions of tonnes) | 603 | 595 |
| Coal (millions of tonnes) | 716 | 726 |
| Steel (millions of tonnes) | 103 | 108 |
| Tractors (thousands) | 555 | 585 |
| Cement (millions of tonnes) | 125 | 131 |
| Fabric (millions of square metres) | 10,746 | 12,052 |

**KEY TERM**

***Tolkachi*** Helpers or facilitators who had the contacts to procure commodities needed by industrial managers.

**Sovnarkhozes** New economic planning institutions, often translated as regional economic councils, set up by Khrushchev in 1957 that tried and failed to improve the Soviet economy by giving more autonomy to regions with regard to economic policy.

**GDP** Gross domestic product, or what a country makes in selling the goods and services it produces in a year.

**Akademgorodok** 'Academy Town' in Russian; also known as the Novosibirsk Scientific Centre, built to house scientists and innovators in a pleasant atmosphere to foster creativity.

## *Corruption*

The Brezhnev era also saw the rise of unofficial deal-makers called ***tolkachi***, known for their ability to obtain raw materials through personal connections in GOSPLAN, which led to corruption and criminal networks. An example of the extent of corruption was the establishment of fictitious factories that the state then supplied with raw materials. The state-owned raw materials would then be sold to state factories or to other participants in the black market. All this was possible since government officials could be bribed to grant licences to establish the factories in the first place and have them supplied by the government itself. Between 1980 and 1985, at least two million Soviet citizens were arrested on charges of embezzling state property.

## *Industrial successes*

There were some economic successes during the Brezhnev era:

- **Sovnarkhozes** were abolished in 1966 as they caused competition between regions within the USSR.
- There was a return to a Stalinist model of industrial development (see page 13) that used targets established by Five Year Plans and co-ordinated by GOSPLAN. The tenth Five Year Plan from 1976 to 1980 delivered some economic growth and **GDP** increased by 2.7 per cent annually in the late 1970s.
- An area of exceptional growth was in the sphere of military, aeronautical and space technology. There, Soviet industry managed to keep up with the West during the Brezhnev era as 220 million roubles were invested in **Akademgorodok**, which housed many of the USSR's most eminent nuclear scientists.

However, there were also a number of disastrous investments in prestige projects that had little or no positive economic impact. The most notorious example of this was the construction of the 3200-km (2000-mile) long Baikal–Amur railway which was completed only in 1989.

**Oil**

Oil production increased significantly during the Brezhnev era. Newly discovered oil deposits in Siberia produced 31 million tonnes of oil in 1970 but over 300 million tonnes annually 10 years later. In an era of high international oil prices, this significantly affected the Soviet economy. Increased oil production fostered a growing dependence on the export of oil and gas, rather than manufactured goods, as a source of hard currency that could be used to purchase imports such as grain. This postponed the need for painful but necessary economic reforms.

*Foreign relations*

As the Brezhnev era drew to a close, partnerships with foreign firms like Fiat, which built a factory in the USSR, became more commonplace. This had the side-effect of making contact between ordinary Soviet citizens and people from non-communist countries more frequent. They could compare experiences and, in this comparison, the standard of living in socialist countries did not fare well.

## Soviet society in the Brezhnev era

**How was quality of life affected by Soviet policies in the Brezhnev era?**

### Birth rate

In the Brezhnev era, a declining birth rate in some republics of the USSR, such as Ukraine, caused a fall in population. This was largely caused by the fact that the living space available to families in urban areas was cramped, amounting to just 13.4 square metres per person in 1980. In addition, women were under huge pressure to remain in the labour force, especially in rural areas. Women, faced with the double burden of being in the workforce and also bearing children, increasingly practised birth control and legal abortions. On the other hand, the fact that the birth rate rose in the central Asian republics of the USSR, such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, raised the possibility of Russians eventually becoming a minority within the USSR. This was an unwelcome prospect to most members of the Politburo, despite the rhetoric of socialist brotherhood and a multinational USSR.

### Life expectancy and infant mortality

Life expectancy remained at 68 years, unchanging in the Brezhnev years. This was at least partly due to rising levels of alcohol consumption. By 1982, the USSR had 28 million alcoholics, or 10 per cent of the population, as compared to four per cent of the US population at that time. Death by alcohol poisoning in the USSR in 1976 was the highest in the world: 25.7 per 100,000 people. By comparison, the USA had a rate of 2.94 the same year.

In addition, the routine dumping of industrial waste and pesticides into water supplies ruined the health of many Soviet citizens. These developments also had an impact on the infant mortality rate, which grew worse during the Brezhnev era and by 1981, Soviet infant mortality was triple that of West Germany.

## Education

Educational standards during the Brezhnev era were on the rise and, by 1979, approximately 10 per cent of the population entered university. This compares with only one per cent of the population doing so in 1939. The number of graduates produced by Soviet universities amounted to nearly one million in 1980, compared with only 343,000 in 1960.

## Standard of living

Living standards were also rising, albeit modestly, and the average Soviet household's standard of living approximately doubled between 1945 and 1970. One reason for this was the rise in wages that increased savings for the purchase of consumer goods. The difficulty was that consumer goods were in short supply.

The Soviet diet improved during this era and per capita consumption of meat rose by 40.5 per cent between 1965 and 1980. It became commonplace for Soviet workers to holiday on the Baltic or Black Sea coast at trade union-run holiday centres. By the time of Brezhnev's death, 86 per cent of Soviet families owned a television and a refrigerator, so some basic consumer goods were available. Despite this progress, the standard of living in the USSR lagged behind the West.

? According to Source G, what were conditions like in the USSR in the Brezhnev era?

**SOURCE G**

**Excerpt on the standard of living in the 1970s in the USSR from *A History of Twentieth-century Russia* by Robert Service, published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, USA, 1998, page 417. Professor Service teaches History at Oxford University, UK. He wrote this after being allowed access to newly opened Soviet archives in the 1990s.**

*The Politburo was given no credit for the material improvements secured in the 1970s, and the cheap provision of food, shelter, clothing, sanitation, health care and transport was taken for granted. Brezhnev's successes were noted more for their limitations than their progress beyond the performance before 1964. He earned neither affection nor respect … Consequently, Soviet citizens, while remaining resolutely slack at work, had to be indefatigable in obtaining alleviation of their living conditions … Each looked after himself or herself and relatives and close friends. On the inside, this collectivistic society fostered extreme individualism.*

## Culture within the USSR

As long as criticisms of the government were not overt, artists and writers had freedom to discuss alternative ways of life and to analyse what it was like to live in the USSR. Kyrgyz novelist Chingiz Aitmatov, for example, wrote about how both the ecology and culture of central Asia were being wrecked by the CPSU. Also, the guitar poet Vladimir Vysotski, a very popular singer, wrote songs about life in the USSR in the 1970s, although rock concerts were strictly controlled by the state. The arts were freed of constraints to deal with socialist and realistic themes, thereby widening avenues of creativity. One example is the emergence of sots art, a term meaning socialist pop art, as a parody of the forced socialist realism of the 1950s and 1960s.

## Emergence of dissidents

Nevertheless, the USSR was a totalitarian state and the **KGB** devoted most of its efforts to dealing with internal opposition rather than **counter-espionage**. It was forbidden to question the doctrine of Marxism–Leninism in print and the gulag, or corrective labour prison system, remained fully operational with approximately one million imprisoned during the Brezhnev era. Gulags achieved notoriety for those political prisoners imprisoned for criticizing the government, but the figures also included common criminals.

One prominent critic of the regime was the scientist Andrei Sakharov, who established a human rights committee in 1970 to defend freedom of opinion and self-expression. In 1980, he was confined to the city of Gorki, where non-Soviet citizens were not allowed. It is likely that he was not imprisoned because in 1975 Sakharov was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize; the Soviet government did not wish to draw further attention to its human rights record.

**KEY TERM**

**KGB** State Security Committee or Soviet secret police, founded in 1954, from the Russian *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti*.

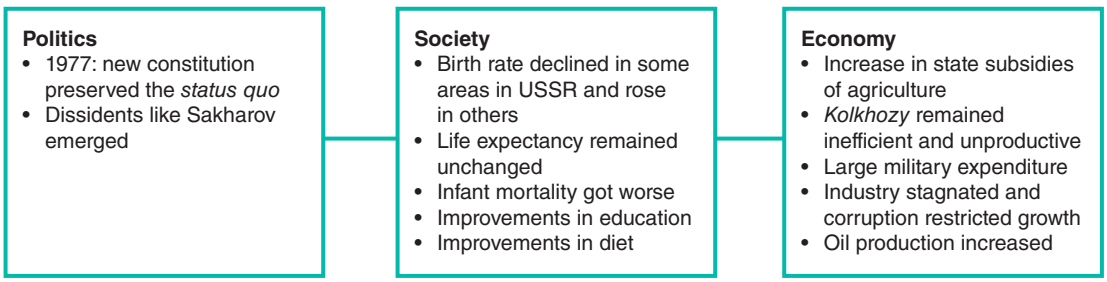
**Counter-espionage** Efforts to prevent spying.

**SOURCE H**

**An extract from an open letter dated 19 March 1970, to Soviet leaders by the dissidents, physicists Andrei Sakaharov and Valentin Turchin, and historian Roy Medvedev, from *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union 1917–1991* by Richard Sakwa, published by Routledge Sources in History, London, UK, 1999, page 364. Sakwa is Professor of Russian and European Politics at the University of Kent, UK. He compiled this book of primary sources for student use. The three dissidents wanted to work with their government on economic and political reforms for the USSR.**

*… The source of our difficulties does not lie in the socialist system, but on the contrary, it lies in those peculiarities and conditions of our life which run contrary to socialism and are hostile to it. The source lies in the antidemocratic traditions and norms of public life established in the Stalin era, which have not been decisively eliminated to this day …*

What can be learned from Source H about the views of Sakharov, Turchin and Medvedev?




**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

Politics, economy and society under Brezhnev

## 2 Key debate

*Key question: Was Brezhnev's leadership to blame for Soviet stagnation from 1964 to 1982?*

### Was Brezhnev merely a 'consensus politician'?

Brezhnev's rise to power was marked by what historian Robert Service calls the 'guiding aim … to avoid getting himself into trouble with higher authority'. Many other historians such as Martin McCauley have found it difficult to hide their low opinion of him. Robert Service describes Brezhnev as 'very limited intellectually'. He is especially dismissive of Brezhnev's grip on political affairs at the end of his life, describing him as 'a dreadfully ill old man', whose diary reveals little apart from an inability to spell and a liking for ice hockey. He was also vain, nepotistic and corrupt enough to profit from office by having a large fleet of foreign cars, as well as appointing his son and son-in-law deputy foreign minister and deputy interior minister, respectively. Historian Roy Medvedev described Brezhnev as 'cynical … vain [and] stupid'. In essence, Brezhnev favoured building consensuses, not questioning the fundamentals of the political system that he had inherited. This made him popular with powerful vested interests, such as the ***nomenklatura*** élite who had a clear stake in the *status quo*.

On the other hand, to simply dismiss Brezhnev as an uninspiring ***apparatchik*** is perhaps a little harsh. This interpretation also does little to explain how Brezhnev was able to remain at the very apex of Soviet politics for almost 20 years. He certainly had a talent for ensuring consensus within the Presidium and the Politburo, which was welcomed by many after the volatile Khrushchev. He was skilful at maintaining political contacts and

**KEY TERM**

***Nomenklatura*** The powerful class of officials and bureaucrats that emerged during the Brezhnev era.

***Apparatchik*** Usually used in a pejorative sense to describe faceless administrators and bureaucrats.

shrewdly built a political power base in the party by recruiting old colleagues from his days as a provincial party secretary in Ukraine. Even so, when Brezhnev died in 1982, fewer than half of the Politburo could legitimately be described as close political allies. The fact that Brezhnev was also the leading conspirator in the overthrow of Khrushchev suggests that he was much more than a mere political nonentity. His rivals consistently underestimated him so they failed to act to forestall his rise to supreme power. It should also be remembered that Brezhnev avoided the excesses of Stalinism and capable contemporaries were permitted long and influential careers. For instance, Andrei Gromyko remained the most influential voice in foreign affairs, having run this ministry since 1957, and he outlived Brezhnev.

## What was the cause of stagnation?

Ultimately, Brezhnev's caution and conservatism were both a root cause of the USSR's stagnation between 1964 and 1982, and his greatest political strengths, paving the way for a period of stability after the chaos of Stalinism and the **Great Patriotic War** and the hyperactive Khrushchev years. However, most historians argue that any positive aspects of Brezhnev's rule were outweighed by the negative. By 1982, what had started as Brezhnev's widely welcomed embrace of political stability had turned into a stultifying and damaging refusal to consider political reform.

**KEY TERM**

**Great Patriotic War** What the Second World War was known as in the USSR.

**SOURCE I**

**Excerpt on the death of Brezhnev from *A History of Twentieth-century Russia* by Robert Service, published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, USA, 1998, pages 426–7. Professor Service teaches History at Oxford University in the UK. He wrote this book after being allowed access to newly opened Soviet archives in the 1990s.**

*The Politburo instructed that he [Brezhnev] should be buried outside the Kremlin Wall on Red Square. Statesmen from all over the world attended. His wife and family were accompanied to the funeral by the central party leadership – and daughter Galina outraged spectators by refraining from wearing sombre garb. Brezhnev had been dressed in his Marshal's uniform with all his medals. But the careless way the coffin was dropped into his grave was taken as a sign that not all Politburo leaders wished to be seen to regret that at last he had left the political stage. In truth it was hard to feel very sorry for Brezhnev. When he had succeeded Khrushchev, he was still a vigorous politician who expected to make the party and the government work more effectively. He had not been inactive; he had not been entirely inflexible. But his General Secretaryship had turned into a ceremonial reign that had brought communism into its deepest contempt since 1917.*

With reference to origin and purpose, assess the value and limitation of Source I for reaching a final judgement about the political career of Leonid Brezhnev. ?

Other historians have pointed to Brezhnev's leadership style in trying to make sense of Soviet stagnation between 1964 and 1982.

? According to Source J, what were the reasons for political and economic stagnation in the Brezhnev era?

**SOURCE J**

**Excerpt on Brezhnev's long reign in *From Brezhnev to Gorbachev: Infighting in the Kremlin* by Baruch A. Hazan, published by Westview Press, Boulder, CO, USA, 1987, pages 9–10. Hazan teaches at the Institute of European Studies in Vienna, Austria.**

*The various stages of Brezhnev's long tenure (1964–1982) demonstrate the gradual development of the power struggle. During this period he expanded his power and then ingeniously protected it by sharing part of it with lower-level officials. Brezhnev was a pragmatic leader who quickly perceived the importance of institutionalized and regularized methods of government. A possible reason for Brezhnev's approach apart from his personal character, is that his crucial role in organizing Khrushchev's overthrow would naturally make him very wary upon taking office himself and anxious to prevent the same fate. Brezhnev protected his power by delegating some of the decision-making to lower officials in the party pyramid …*

*The outcomes of this policy were twofold. First, the system devised by Brezhnev guaranteed his own power and security by granting similar power and security to his supporters … This naturally led to the development of the Brezhnev personality cult, which in its latter stages reached preposterous proportions. Second, the CPSU apparatus and the local party and state officials who benefitted most from this situation became paragons of conservatism, acting only to preserve the established order … Thanks to the efforts of his Politburo faction and the support of the nomenklatura, Brezhnev was able to protect his power to the very end, although the conservatism thus generated developed into a debilitating stagnation in all areas of Soviet political and economic life.*

TOK Historians use evidence to make arguments. What gives evidence value and makes it convincing? Does national origin always affect historical writing? Why or why not? (History, Ethics, Language, Emotion, Reason.)

# 3 Soviet foreign relations under Brezhnev

*Key question: What challenges did Soviet foreign policy face in the Brezhnev era?*

In general, Brezhnev's foreign policy was relatively simple: maintain the international *status quo*, including retention of power in areas of the world under Soviet influence. The USSR, however, had strained relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC), Warsaw Pact nations were dominated and tensions with the USA and other countries varied, alternating between agreements and stress, especially over Afghanistan after 1979.

**What caused tensions between the USSR and PRC from 1964 to 1979?**

## Soviet relations with the PRC

Relations between the USSR and the PRC deteriorated after Stalin's death and a fierce rivalry emerged for the ideological leadership of communist states. Once the PRC became a nuclear power in 1964, the traditional

strategic rivalry in central Asia between these powers revived and intensified and relations between the USSR and China worsened as border conflicts escalated. By 1969, the Soviet Red Army had 25 divisions and 1200 aircraft stationed along its long border with the PRC and a major border clash between the two states along the Ussuri River almost erupted into a war. There was serious discussion at a high level in the Soviet government about whether to attack Chinese nuclear installations. In the end, a full-scale war between the two most powerful socialist states did not take place but a sense of simmering hostility defined Sino-Soviet relations in the 1970s.

Sino-Soviet relations were complicated by the fact that each power sponsored rival states in south-east Asia. The USSR established close ties with Vietnam and the PRC supported the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. The PRC's invasion of Vietnam in 1979 (see page 72), although short-lived, also raised tensions.

**SOURCE K**

**Excerpt from Brezhnev's speech given 2 March 1979 called 'For the Happiness of the Soviet People,' in *Peace Détente Cooperation* by Leonid I. Brezhnev, published by Consultants Bureau, New York, USA, 1981, pages 133–4. Brezhnev states in the book's foreword that the purpose of the book is to explain to US citizens the aims of Soviet foreign policy.**

*The position of the Chinese leaders is increasingly converging [coming together] with this policy of imperialism. By their unprecedently [unusual] brazen bandit-like attack on a small neighboring country – socialist Vietnam – the present Peking [Beijing] rulers revealed before the eyes of the whole world the perfidious [disloyal] and aggressive essence of the great power hegemony-seeking policy that they are pursuing. Everyone sees that it is precisely this policy that at the present time constitutes the gravest threat to world peace … The Soviet people, together with all peace-loving peoples of the world demand an immediate end to Chinese aggression against Vietnam and the withdrawal of all interventionist troops, down to the very last soldier, from the territory of Vietnam.*

According to Source K, why should the PRC remove its troops from Vietnam? ?

There was a gradual improvement in relations during the early 1980s, although the only visible sign of a thaw was the fact that the PRC sent its foreign minister, Huang Ha, to attend Brezhnev's funeral in 1982.

## Relations with Warsaw Pact countries

Brezhnev was determined to maintain Soviet hegemony in central and eastern Europe (see page 14). Some dissent from Soviet policy was permitted, but Brezhnev's foreign policy ultimately sought to maintain and strengthen Soviet control. This became known as the **Brezhnev Doctrine**, a policy that if socialism in Warsaw Pact nations was threatened, all the other members of the pact had to militarily intervene. Pact members included the USSR, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania.

**KEY TERM**

**Brezhnev Doctrine**
Brezhnev's assertion that if any Warsaw Pact member threatened socialism, it was the right and duty of the rest of the members to engage in military intervention.

**In what ways did the Brezhnev Doctrine affect the USSR's relations with eastern Europe?**

KEY TERM

**Socialism with a human face** A term used to describe the less repressive and more liberal political and social system developed by Alexander Dubček in Czechoslovakia.

**Prague Spring** Name given to the 1968 attempt by Czechoslovakia's Communist Party leader Alexander Dubček to liberalize socialism by allowing freedom of the press, expression and political reforms. The Warsaw Pact nations under the leadership of the USSR invaded the country and deposed Dubček.

**Solidarity Movement** Non-communist trade union movement in Poland that used civil resistance to demand economic, social and other changes.

**Coup** An abrupt seizure of power, or takeover of a country, by the military or another armed group.

## Czechoslovakia

When Brezhnev became concerned that the new leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubček, was implementing liberal ideas too quickly by abandoning censorship and trying to build '**socialism with a human face**', Brezhnev exerted a great deal of political pressure, meeting Dubček six times between January and August 1968, in order to persuade him to abandon this reform programme. In August 1968, having failed to coerce Dubček through diplomacy, Brezhnev ordered Warsaw Pact troops to occupy Czechoslovakia, ending the so-called the **Prague Spring**. Dubček was replaced by the more conservative and pragmatic Gustáv Husák, who remained in power until 1989.

## Romania

In the late 1960s, Romania was permitted to adopt a neutral stance in the Sino-USSR dispute and even to seek economic aid from the West. However, this can be explained in part by the fact that Romania possessed a relatively small population and did not occupy a strategically important location. Still, Romania voiced opposition to the Brezhnev Doctrine after 1968 at world conferences of communist parties.

## Hungary

In Hungary, some economic reforms were permitted within the socialist, planned economy system. These were implemented under party leader János Kádar by 1968. Kádar tried to convince neighbouring Czechoslovakia's Dubček to limit reforms in order to avoid conflict with the USSR, to no avail. Historian Robert Service relates that at a Moscow meeting with Brezhnev, Kádar warned Dubček: 'Don't you understand what kind of people you are dealing with?'

## Poland

In Poland, rising inflation and a scarcity of consumer goods despite price controls and a planned economy were creating serious worker opposition in 1970. Workers at the Gdańsk shipyards began to strike and demonstrate and many were killed when the military police were sent to control them. Repression worked for a while, but by 1976 the strikes continued and a strong union developed, led by worker Lech Wałęsa. Students and other workers unions joined in by 1980. It was known as the **Solidarity Movement** and soon became emblematic of the struggle against Soviet control and eventually against communist control in Poland.

Soviet intervention in Poland was prevented in 1981 when General Wojciech Jaruzelski's Military Council of National Salvation staged a successful **coup** against the ineffective government of Edward Gierek. This helped to contain the threat posed by Solidarity and, for the moment, maintain the unity of the Warsaw Pact, two of the fundamental aims of Soviet foreign policy in the early 1980s.

## Relations with the USA: the spirit of *détente*

**How did relations between the USA and USSR develop in the early 1970s?**

Starting in the early 1970s, Brezhnev's foreign policy proclaimed interest in developing a better relationship with the USA. He met with US presidents both in the USSR and in the USA. The increasingly warmer connection was branded *razryadka* in the USSR and ***détente*** in the West.

### *Ostpolitik*

One of the first examples of *détente* was in August 1970, when the USSR and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), or West Germany, signed the Moscow Treaty that confirmed the division of Germany into two states after the Second World War (see page 15). Germany also lost land held prior to 1939 to Poland and the USSR. This meant that the frontier between the GDR, or East Germany, and Poland was now formally recognized. Historian John Mason describes this treaty as a victory for Brezhnev because it won western acceptance for the Soviet position of keeping Germany weak and divided. It also opened an era of *détente* in Europe.

The negotiations and treaties also vindicated Willy Brandt, West German Chancellor from 1969, and his ***Ostpolitik*** policy, which he described as 'easing the relationship between the two parts of Germany out of its present rigid state'. The object of *Ostpolitik* was to take steps, however small, in the direction of German reunification. The Treaty of Moscow was followed in 1972 by a Basic Treaty between the FRG and the GDR which led to the exchange of permanent diplomatic missions between the two countries and to both countries joining the United Nations (UN). Harry Gelman, a former senior analyst of Soviet affairs in the **CIA**, contends that Brezhnev supported Brandt's *Ostpolitik* as a model for improving relations with the USA. Being involved in negotiations and treaties regarding East and West Germany afforded the USSR a chance to increase its influence in Europe, thereby reducing US influence.

### *Détente* in the 1970s

The next crucial stage in *détente* came when US President Richard Nixon was invited to the USSR in May 1972. Nixon believed that nuclear parity with the USSR was sufficient to secure the USA's strategic interests. At the 1972 meeting, both leaders promised not to pursue **proxy wars** in the **Third World**. Two further meetings took place between Brezhnev and Nixon: New York in 1973 and Moscow in 1974.

#### *The Middle East*

Despite Soviet military, financial and technical support, Soviet **client states** like Egypt were defeated in the Six Day War with Israel in 1967. The Soviet presence was increased in the Middle East after this, as Brezhnev boosted arms sales to Egypt and Syria and acquired naval rights in some ports. The USSR backed Egypt once again in the 1973 October War with Israel, a key US ally in the Middle East. However, the Soviets were betrayed when Egypt,

**KEY TERM**

***Détente*** A French word meaning relaxing or loosening; refers to the relaxing of tensions in the Cold War.

***Ostpolitik*** A German term meaning eastern policy; a West German effort to improve diplomatic relations with East Germany, eastern Europe and the USSR.

**CIA** Central Intelligence Agency, a US government espionage organization.

**Proxy wars** Name given to military conflicts during the Cold War in which the USA and the USSR participated only indirectly, avoiding direct confrontation.

**Third World** Cold War term for countries not in the First World (developed, capitalist countries) or the Second World (socialist and communist countries). The Third World included developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

**Client state** A country that depends on economic, military and/or political support from a more powerful one.

having been a client of the USSR, entered the US political orbit, signing the **Camp David Accords** in 1978 and an Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty in March 1979.

Despite tensions in the Middle East, relations improved between the USA and the USSR in the negotiations about nuclear weapons.

### *SALT*

In the spirit of conferences and negotiations during *détente*, the USSR and the USA signed the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I) in 1972. This ended construction of new **ICBM**s and **SLBM**s, maintaining the narrow Soviet lead in these types of nuclear weapon delivery systems.

No agreement was reached on the deployment of long-range bombers or of **MIRV**s. SALT I established an important diplomatic precedent: negotiations between the superpowers over their nuclear stockpiles could be both productive and worthwhile, but they could only advance so far. As Soviet foreign policy in the Brezhnev era proceeded in negotiations with the West, the USSR broadened its military capacity, both in nuclear and in conventional armaments. This added leverage to Soviet relations with both the communist and the capitalist world.

**KEY TERM**

**Camp David Accords** Series of agreements regarding borders and military considerations between Egypt and Israel that were signed at US Presidential retreat Camp David in 1978.

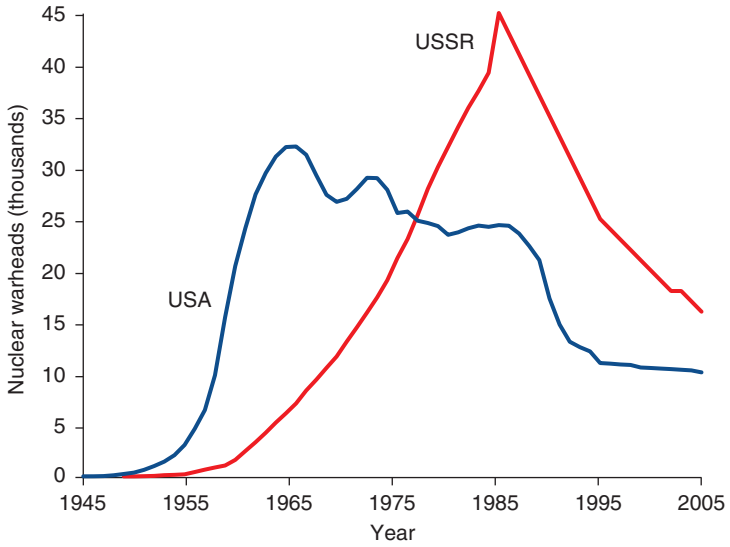
**ICBM** Intercontinental nuclear ballistic missile.

**SLBM** Ballistic missile launched from a submarine with a nuclear warhead.

**MIRV** Multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle: a nuclear missile equipped with multiple warheads, therefore capable of hitting more than one target.

**SOURCE L**

**Nuclear warhead stockpiles of the USA and the USSR 1945–2006 from 'Global nuclear stockpiles, 1945–2006' by Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* Vol. 62, No. 4, July/August 2006, pages 64–6. Kristensen is Director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists in the USA. Norris is a senior research associate with the Natural Resources Defense Council in Washington, DC, USA. The high for the USA is 32,040 in 1966; the high for the USSR is 45,000 in 1986.**




? What are the limitations of Source L?

### *The Helsinki Accords 1975*

The high point of the partial thaw in superpower relations was the **Helsinki Accords** in 1975. The Accords, signed by 33 European statesmen as well as the leaders of the USA and Canada, confirmed international borders as of 1945. This satisfied Soviet security concerns in Europe.

A clause regarding respect for human rights and a commitment to non-intervention in the affairs of other states was difficult to reconcile with the Brezhnev Doctrine. Economic assistance was also part of the document, so Brezhnev agreed to this human rights clause. It would be, after all, very difficult for the West to enforce, short of outright war. Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko was able to reassure Brezhnev that they could decide what to implement and what to ignore from the Accords.

The number of dissidents began to multiply throughout the Warsaw Pact nations and by 1976 a Public Group to Promote Observance of the Helsinki Accords was operating in Moscow. They operated as a watch group, monitoring and publishing reports on human rights violations, and others soon worked in Ukraine, Lithuania, Georgia and so on, creating increasing pressure on the Soviet government.

**KEY TERM**

**Helsinki Accords** An agreement between the Soviet bloc and the West for acceptance of existing boundaries and for economic, commercial and scientific collaboration. The final clause included respect for human rights.

## Relations with the USA: cracks in *détente*

**Why did tensions between the USSR and USA increase again from the mid-1970s?**

In the mid 1970s, cracks in diplomatic relations between the USA and USSR began to reappear, especially following the resignation of Nixon in 1974 after the **Watergate Scandal**. After Nixon's departure, the US Congress passed restrictions on presidential powers to act at home and abroad. At first there was some sense of political continuity as Henry Kissinger continued as Secretary of State, but gradually *détente* lost the political momentum that had sustained it in the first half of the decade. Significant sources of tension remained.

### East/West relations after 1975

According to historian John Dunbabin, SALT I only mildly curbed the nuclear arms race and had not responded to the build-up of **conventional arms**, especially Soviet tank forces, in eastern Europe. Soviet negotiators remained frustrated by the fact that British and French nuclear arsenals were not covered by the SALT talks. Sino-Soviet relations were not going well and in the SALT talks Brezhnev made every effort to downplay this split so that the USA could not gain leverage and get closer to the PRC.

On the US side, the new President Jimmy Carter in 1977 felt optimistic that *détente* could proceed and even asked the USSR to consider mutual reductions in conventional weapons. At the same time, he angered Brezhnev by establishing contact with Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov in an effort to promote human rights. Carter became frustrated at the cynical Soviet interpretation of the Helsinki Accords such as the treatment of Soviet Anatole Sharansky, a computer scientist who led the dissident movement,

**KEY TERM**

**Watergate Scandal** A general term used to portray an intricate web of political scandals by President Richard Nixon between 1972 and 1974, including the wire-tapping of the Democratic National Committee housed in the Watergate building in Washington, DC.

**Conventional arms** These include small arms and light weapons, sea and land mines, (non-nuclear) bombs, shells, rockets and missiles. They are not biological, chemical or nuclear, but are explosive.

and was held under house arrest and then sent to jail for 11 years until he was able to emigrate to Israel. Another example was Soviet intervention in Angola and Ethiopia, strongly censured by Carter, as well.

It could be argued that Carter's attitude to the USSR was somewhat contradictory. On the one hand his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, favoured a conciliatory approach to dealing with Brezhnev through negotiations in the SALT talks, while his National Security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a **hawk**, remained suspicious of Soviet intentions. In 1977, Brzezinski felt threatened by the Soviet stationing of **SS-20** mobile missile launchers, each with three nuclear warheads, in eastern Europe. This seemed to provide the USSR with the capability of waging a limited nuclear war in Europe and Brzezinski advised Carter to take a strong opposing stand. President Carter responded in June 1977 by approving the development of a cruise missile programme that provided for the development of new nuclear missiles. In addition, by 1979, the UK, West Germany, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands had all agreed to station 108 **Pershing II** nuclear missiles, heightening Soviet fears of a US **first strike**.

**KEY TERM**

**Hawk** Refers to a person likely to react strongly and even use military force in world conflicts.

**SS-20** Soviet intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

**Pershing II** US intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

**First strike** A term used to describe a pre-emptive nuclear attack by one superpower on another.

## Proxy wars

Proxy wars in Angola, Ethiopia and Cuba continued to damage chances of genuine reconciliation.

### *Angola*

The bitter civil war in Angola was a proxy war in which the USSR supported Agostinho Neto's left-wing Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). On the other hand, CIA support was directed towards Holden Roberto's National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and Jonas Savimbi's Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA). By the end of the decade the MPLA appeared to have triumphed, with the help of soldiers from Soviet client-state Cuba.

### *Ethiopia*

In its conflict with neighbouring Somalia, Ethiopia's communist regime, led by Colonel Mengistu, was backed by 16,000 Cuban troops and Soviet munitions. The clash was over the disputed Ogaden region, yet it reflected wider tensions between the USA and USSR. By March 1978, the Ethiopian army, backed by Soviet and Cuban military aid, had expelled the Somali troops from the Ogaden. Once again, a proxy war had served to sour superpower relations.

### *Cuba*

The status of Cuba also remained a source of dispute. In 1970, the USSR had begun constructing a port at Cienfuegos to maintain nuclear-powered submarines. From 1979, Brezhnev stationed aircraft and submarines there. Strong warnings from the USA caused the USSR to curtail its military presence, but Cuba remained the Soviet stronghold in the Americas.

## The failure of SALT II

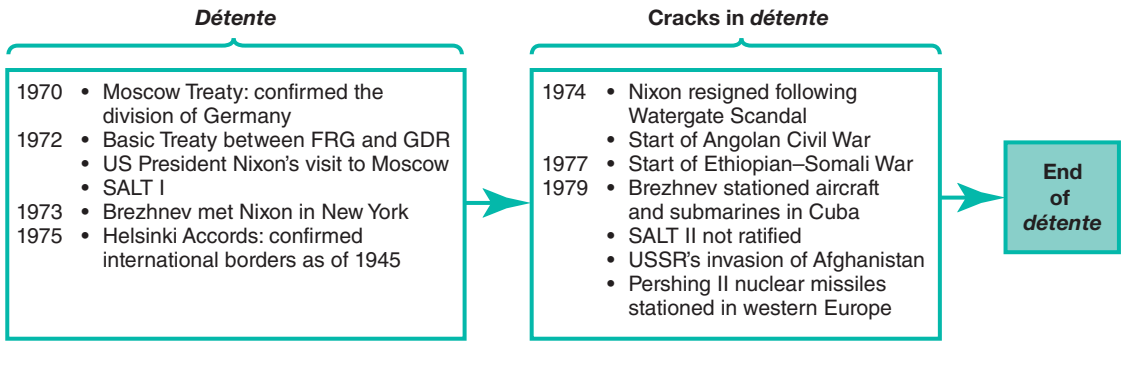
Negotiations between the USSR and the USA enabled the signing of the SALT II treaty in Vienna in June 1979. This treaty had taken many years, during which nuclear technology and missiles had advanced, especially in the USSR (see Source L, page 110). This formalized the agreement that was reached between Brezhnev and US President Ford in 1974, with both superpowers agreeing to reduce their nuclear weapons to 2250 by 1981. Nevertheless, meaningful efforts towards nuclear disarmament remained a distant dream. In 1977, US President Carter linked advances in negotiations to improvements in rights in the USSR, infuriating Brezhnev and stalling talks. In an atmosphere of growing distrust, Carter and an ageing Brezhnev signed SALT II but it failed to deal with the issue of new weapons like MIRVs and the Pershing II missiles in western Europe. Crucially, the US Senate refused to ratify SALT II, and one of the last political acts of Carter was to increase the US defence budget to a mammoth total of $165 billion in 1981. This was a sign that *détente* was at an end.

**SOURCE M**

**Excerpts from the treaty between the USA and the USSR on the limitation of strategic offensive arms, together with agreed statements and common understandings regarding the treaty (SALT II), from the website of the US Department of State at www.state.gov/www/global/arms/treaties/salt2-2.html. This is an official US government website and provides the full text of the treaty and its protocols.**

*Upon entry into force of this Treaty, each Party undertakes to limit ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, heavy bombers and ASBMs [anti-ship ballistic missiles] to an aggregate number not to exceed 2,400 … Each Party undertakes not to start construction of additional fixed ICBM launchers … each Party undertakes to limit launchers of ICBMs and SLBMs equipped with MIRVs … to an aggregate number not to exceed 1,200.*

What can be inferred about the aims of Brezhnev's foreign policy from Source M? ?




**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

Soviet foreign relations under Brezhnev

# 4 The invasion of Afghanistan

*Key question: To what extent were the USSR's aims achieved in Afghanistan?*

Since the 1950s, the USSR had sent military advisers to Afghanistan and trained Afghan Army officers in the Soviet Union. Following an uprising against the ruling party in March 1979, the USSR invaded the country later that year, unleashing enormous consequences for itself and the rest of the world.

**Why did the Soviets invade Afghanistan in 1979?**

## Reasons for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

In 1973, the King of Afghanistan, Mohammed Zahir Shah, was overthrown by his cousin Mohammed Daoud Khan. Daoud formed a republic to be ruled by his National Revolutionary Party. He appointed himself as both President and Prime Minister. In a spirit of Afghan nationalism, Daoud dismissed Soviet advisers and technicians and banned communists from his government. Instead, he sought foreign aid from Middle Eastern states, made a new constitution in 1977 and became increasingly autocratic.

### The April Revolution and its aftermath

In April 1978, after a communist leader was murdered, Daoud was killed in a coup known as the April Revolution. This was led by Soviet-trained Afghan army officers with links to the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a pro-Soviet group.

The new government was led by President Nur Mohammed Taraki and it was much more pro-Soviet in its outlook. Taraki was a member of the **Khalq**, a faction of the main Afghan Marxist Party, the PDPA. This faction was strongest in the rural parts of the country and, in contrast to the rival **Parcham** faction, which it energetically persecuted while in power, it believed that there could be no compromises when it came to the implementation of Marxist ideas. The USSR was the first to recognize the new government and sign a treaty of co-operation and assistance.

As President and Prime Minister, the radical Taraki took steps to implement land and social reforms, such as encouraging women to join literacy classes, and all Afghans to abandon the habit of deference to ***mullahs*** and landowners. Taraki, taking the hard-line Marxist view of religion, began a strong anti-Islamic campaign, which included arresting religious leaders and burning the Qu'ran in public. He also persecuted the Kabul Jewish community. When 130 men from a **Shi'ite** clan were massacred, rebellion grew.

**KEY TERM**

**Khalq** A faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan strongly influenced by Stalinist ideas.

**Parcham** A moderate faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.

***Mullah*** A religiously educated leader of a mosque or an Islamic cleric.

**Shi'ite** A Muslim who follows the Shia version of Islam.


A map of Afghanistan and neighbouring states in 1979. The mountainous geography of the country meant that transportation was difficult. The Salang Pass was the main route north to the USSR. The Khyber Pass was the route to the south and to Pakistan and the coastal port of Karachi.

An armed uprising against the Taraki regime began in Herat, near the border with Iran, in March 1979. This was spearheaded by ***mujaheddin***, who were especially angry at girls being educated. During these disturbances in Herat, several Soviet officials and their families were killed. This led to Taraki issuing an urgent appeal to the USSR for troops and aircraft to help him to crush the uprising. The country was hurtling towards a civil war.

**KEY TERM**

***Mujaheddin*** Islamic warriors, usually guerrilla fighters.

## The initial Soviet response

The Soviet Politburo was initially reluctant to respond, having witnessed the USA's humiliation in Vietnam, and understood the limited nature of support for the PDPA. There was the issue of the burden on an ailing economy, as well as the reaction of Third World nations, notably India. Brezhnev allowed his colleagues input into deciding the Soviet response to the PDPA's plea for assistance.

Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko was aware that military intervention in Afghanistan by the USSR would weaken *détente*. Yuri Andropov, Chairman of the Committee for State Security, was equally pessimistic and questioned whether Afghanistan was ready for a full socialist revolution. At this stage, all that the USSR was prepared to offer in terms of military aid to the PDPA was 500 military advisers to help train the Afghan government's armed forces which were struggling to cope as military resistance to the PDPA spread to other parts of the country.

? Assess the origin, purpose, value and limitations of Source N in determining why the USSR did not intervene in Afghanistan in March 1979.

**SOURCE N**

**Excerpt from statements by Andropov and Gromyko at the Politburo meeting on 17–18 March 1979 in *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev* by William Tompson, published by Pearson/Longman Education, London, UK, 2003, page 132. Tompson teaches in the Politics Department at Birkbeck College, University of London, UK.**

*Andropov – 'we know Lenin's teaching about a revolutionary situation. Whatever type of situation we are talking about in Afghanistan, it is not that type of situation …'*

*Gromyko – 'I fully support Comrade Andropov's proposal to exclude a measure such as the introduction of our troops into Afghanistan. The [Afghan] Army there is unreliable. Thus, our army if it enters Afghanistan will be the aggressor. Against whom will it fight? Against the [Afghan] people first of all and it will have to shoot at them. Comrade Andropov correctly noted that indeed the situation in Afghanistan is not ripe for a [socialist] revolution. And all that we have done in recent years with such effort in terms of a* détente *in international tensions, arms reductions and much more – all that would be thrown back. Of course, this will be a nice gift for China. All the non-aligned countries will be against us … '*

## The overthrow of Taraki

Taraki was overthrown and murdered in September 1979 by Foreign Minister Hafizulla Amin, a rival from within his own government and another leader from the Khalq faction of the PDPA. Amin was assisted by his son-in-law, Colonel Yakub, the Army Chief of Staff.

? What does Source O suggest about Soviet attempts to control Amin?

**SOURCE O**

**An excerpt from a coded telegram to Soviet representatives in Kabul on 15 September 1979 by Gromyko, from *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History, Volume 2, 1939–1991* by Edward Acton and Tom Stableford, published by the University of Exeter Press, Exeter, UK, 2007, page 245. Professor Acton of the University of East Anglia, UK, and Assistant Librarian Stableford at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, compiled documents from newly available archival material on the former USSR. Their purpose was to provide non-Russian speakers with documents from the Cold War USSR.**

*It is considered expedient in view of the real situation which is developing in Afghanistan, not to refuse to deal with Amin and his government. At the same time it is essential to restrain Amin by all means possible from taking repressive measures against Taraki's supporters … Moreover, it is vital to use contacts with Amin to ascertain further his political colours and intentions. It is also considered expedient for our military advisers in the Afghan forces and for our advisers on state security and internal affairs to stay put … They must of course not take part in repressive measures against persons out of favour with Amin, if units and subunits containing our advisers are drawn into such actions.*

From Brezhnev's point of view, Amin now began to show signs of trying to end Soviet influence. The KGB reported the growing influence of the CIA in Kabul, as well as developing diplomatic contacts between Amin and Pakistan, an ally of the USA. According to British diplomat Rodric Braithwaite, on 27 September, Amin told Bruce Amstutz, the US ***charge d'affaires*** in Kabul, that he hoped for improved relations with the USA. From a Soviet point of view, this opened the frightening prospect of Afghanistan becoming a pro-western state in which nuclear missiles targeted at Soviet territory might be stationed. In addition, the recent radical Islamic revolution in Iran posed a possible danger to the USSR if Islamic fundamentalism spread to the USSR's republics in central Asia. The Soviets decided to topple Amin.

**KEY TERM**

***Charge d'affaires*** An interim diplomat who substitutes for a missing ambassador or minister.

**NATO** North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a military alliance of the USA, Canada, and much of western Europe.

## The reasons for Soviet intervention

Ever since the nineteenth century, influence in Afghanistan had been regarded as a vital means of projecting Russian and later Soviet power into central Asia. Within the Politburo, Andropov now believed that firm action was needed not only to preserve Soviet influence in the region, but also to stop the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Andropov was also well aware that two of the major ethnic groups in Afghanistan, the Uzbeks and Tajiks, were also significant national minorities within the USSR, making the internal politics of Afghanistan of direct relevance to the Soviet state.

Many figures in the Politburo, Andropov included, could see the potential political and military dangers of sending Red Army troops into Afghanistan and knew that any invasion would sour relations with the USA. However, without Soviet military support against the *mujaheddin*, it appeared likely that the PDPA regime would collapse. Amin only controlled 20 per cent of the country and his policy of ruthless repression alienated what little support he still had. What really tipped the balance within the Politburo in favour of intervention was Amin himself. His motives were not trusted. He was also perceived as being unable or unwilling to construct a stable, broad-based regime and the KGB in particular had much closer ties to members of the Parcham faction of the Afghan communists.

## The Politburo meeting, December 1979

The crucial Politburo meeting that made the decision to send Red Army troops to Kabul took place on 12 December 1979, which was the same day that **NATO** announced the introduction of Pershing II nuclear missiles into western Europe. This was taken as further proof that *détente* was dead and with the SALT II treaty not ratified by the US Congress (see page 113), it was felt that in terms of superpower relations, the USSR had little more to lose. It was also hoped that President Carter's reluctance to arm Somalia during its conflict with Ethiopia (see page 112) was a sign of the likelihood of a weak diplomatic response to an invasion of Afghanistan from the USA. Andropov seems to have accepted that no viable alternative existed if Soviet credibility,

as well as strategic and political interests, were to be upheld. He was particularly concerned about the alleged links between Amin and the CIA and the danger of Afghanistan becoming a pro-western client state. Gromyko summed up the mood of the meeting when he stated in his memoirs that they were all upset by the murder of Taraki, especially Brezhnev. The Politburo decided to introduce a limited contingent of Soviet forces into Afghanistan.

**To what extent was Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan successful?**

## Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan

On 25 December 1979, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan. This took place with the knowledge and backing of Amin, who believed that the influx of Red Army troops would support his regime.

### The overthrow of Amin

On 27 December 1979, the presidential palace in Kabul was stormed by Red Army and KGB special forces, killing Amin and his son. A new pro-Soviet leader, Babrak Karmal, the leader of the Parcham faction of the PDPA, was now installed in Kabul. One of his first actions was to authorize a purge against the remnants of the Khalq faction.

**SOURCE P**

**Excerpt from Andrei Sakharov's open letter to Brezhnev regarding the invasion of Afghanistan, 1980, from *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History, Volume 2* by Edward Acton and Tom Stableford, published by the University of Exeter Press, Exeter, UK, 2007, page 365–7. Professor Acton of the University of East Anglia, UK, and Assistant Librarian Stableford at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, compiled documents from newly available archival material on the former USSR. Their purpose was to provide non-Russian speakers with documents from the Cold War USSR.**

*I am writing to you on a matter of extreme importance – Afghanistan … Military actions in Afghanistan have been going on for seven months now. Thousands of Soviet people and tens of thousands of Afghans have been maimed or killed; the latter are not only partisans* [mujaheddin] *but mainly civilians … Reports about the bombing of villages aiding and abetting the partisans and the mining of mountain roads, thereby threatening hunger to whole regions, are particularly ominous … Nor is there any doubt that events in Afghanistan have changed the political world. They have struck a blow against* détente *and have created a direct threat to peace, not only in this region but everywhere … Soviet actions have contributed to (and how could it be otherwise!) increased defence budgets and the adoption of new weapons programmes by all the major powers, which will have repercussions for years to come and increase the danger from the arms race. At the UN General Assembly, Soviet actions have been condemned by 104 states, including many which hitherto unequivocally supported any actions by the USSR.*

? What, according Source P, was the impact of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan?

## Guerrilla warfare and its impact

This Soviet-backed coup had little effect on the wider insurrection of the *mujaheddin*, which developed under the guidance of skilful and charismatic commanders like Ahmad Shah Massoud, who successfully used **guerrilla warfare** tactics.

**KEY TERM**

**Guerrilla warfare** Use of the military technique of ambush and the avoidance of open battle, usually in order to avoid defeat against a technologically more sophisticated opponent.

By the end of 1980, 125,000 Red Army troops were involved in a country whose language, culture and history they did not really understand, fighting a guerrilla war for which they had not been trained, and receiving little support from the Afghan government forces that consisted of reluctant conscripts. The mechanized nature of the Red Army forces, well suited to mobile, armoured conventional warfare against an equally mobile and armoured army, was actually a disadvantage in Afghanistan as it confined Soviet troops to the country's basic road network. Here, they became easy targets for *mujaheddin* ambushes. Facing a non-uniformed enemy, numbering up to 250,000, often indistinguishable from the civilian population, increased the likelihood of atrocities against civilians.

**SOURCE Q**

**Leonid Brezhnev greets Babrak Karmal in Moscow in 1981.**

How does Source Q portray the relations between Brezhnev and Karmal? ?

By the end of 1982, nearly 5000 Soviet troops had died in Afghanistan. Increasingly, the Red Army made use of its special forces, the Spetznaz, to conduct aggressive raids and reprisals. Soviet citizens were ambivalent about the conflict. Some, such as Andrei Sakharov and his wife, publicly opposed the invasion. However, many veterans returned home to find that their families knew little about the nature of the fighting, beyond propaganda platitudes about international socialist solidarity.

? What do Sources R and S reveal about the military and logistical difficulties facing the Red Army in Afghanistan?

**SOURCE R**

**A Soviet supply column in the Salang Pass in Afghanistan in 1988.**

**SOURCE S**

***Mujaheddin* fighters in the hills of Afghanistan in 1988.**

The increasingly brutal nature of the fighting forced many Afghan civilians to flee the country. Over three million Afghans moved to refugee camps in Pakistan, which became recruiting centres for the *mujaheddin*. A turning point in the conflict came in 1986 when the *mujaheddin* began receiving US supplies of highly portable Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. This made Soviet helicopters, a crucial part of Red Army operations in such a mountainous country, vulnerable to ground fire. Soviet aircraft were also now forced to bomb targets from higher altitudes, lessening their accuracy and increasing the likelihood of civilian casualties, making already poor relations with the civilian population even worse.

Morale among the Soviet forces declined as the war continued. Ordinary soldiers were poorly paid, which acted as a catalyst for corruption. There was a case of members of the Soviet military mission in Kabul selling weapons directly to the *mujaheddin* and laundering the proceeds abroad.

## The response of the USA and its allies

US President Carter was deeply angered by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He denounced the invasion in 1980 as the most severe danger to peace since the Second World War. The USA suspended grain sales to the USSR and a US boycott was announced of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. Carter also announced the Carter Doctrine, which stated that any attempt by an 'outside force' to imposed its authority on the Persian Gulf region, which held vast oil reserves, would be perceived as a challenge to vital US strategic interests and be repelled by any means necessary, including military force. Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, also saw an opportunity to tie down the Red Army in a costly guerrilla war. Sending US troops to Afghanistan was strategically impractical and would have risked the outbreak of a larger war between the USA and the USSR. Instead, large shipments of US weapons and munitions were sent to Pakistan, whose military dictator, General Zia ul-Haq, agreed to act as a conduit for weapons ultimately intended for the *mujaheddin*. Support for the *mujaheddin* was increased when Ronald Reagan became the US president in 1981. As the decade went on, Saudi Arabia funded the *mujaheddin*. By the time the Red Army withdrew in 1988, over $9 billion had been funnelled to the *mujahheddin* via Pakistan.

## The withdrawal of the Red Army

As early as 1980, the USSR was keen to find a face-saving exit strategy, which would leave a pro-Soviet regime in control. Discussions between the Soviet ambassador to Pakistan and General Zia ul-Haq and talks between Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan were brokered by the UN. What emerged from these talks was that key figures in the Politburo such as Andropov were more than willing to agree to the Red Army's withdrawal provided that Pakistan's aid to the *mujaheddin* ceased. US President Reagan agreed, and in 1985 he wrote to the new Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev that

he understood Soviet security concerns and would work to address them as the Red Army withdrew from Afghanistan.

### *The Geneva Agreement*

Gorbachev informed President Karmal that Red Army troops would be withdrawn in 1985. From 1986, he continued to look for a way to end Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, with little success since the Soviets continued to have security concerns. In 1987, Gorbachev told Reagan that it was no longer necessary for Afghanistan to be a socialist state but that it needed to have a government friendly to the USSR. Talks in Geneva continued until 14 April 1988 when a UN-supported peace agreement was signed. The USSR agreed to withdraw its forces over a 10-month period but remained committed to maintaining its political and economic support for the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. Afghanistan and Pakistan also agreed not to interfere in each other's internal affairs. Crucially, none of the *mujaheddin* factions signed the **Geneva Agreement**, thus guaranteeing a continued internal struggle against the Soviet-supported government led by Mohamed Najibullah after 1986.

**What was the lasting impact of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan?**

## The impact of the war

By the time the last Red Army troops returned home in 1989, many were embittered and traumatized by their experiences; 15,000 Soviet military personnel had lost their lives in the conflict.

The impact on Afghanistan was far reaching: up to two million killed and five million refugees out of a total pre-war population of 15.5 million. In addition, there were two million internal refugees displaced from their villages by war.

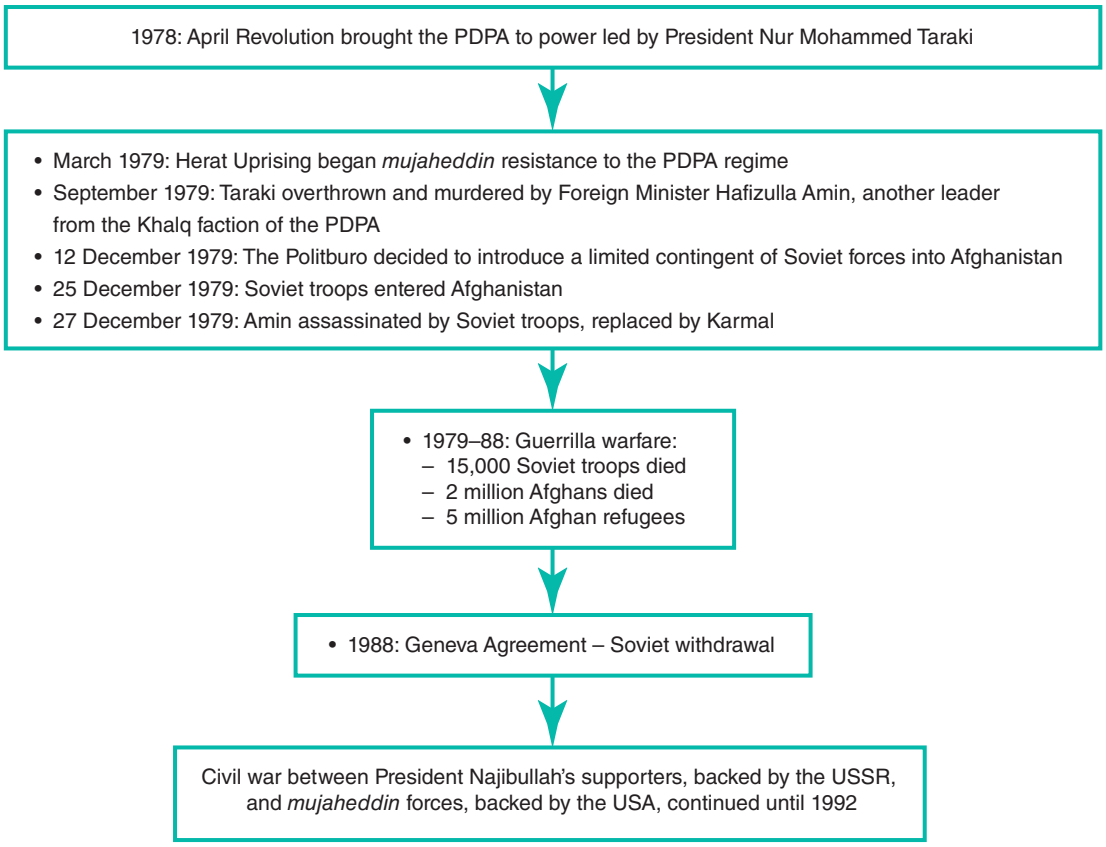
After Soviet troops had withdrawn, the vicious civil war between President Najibullah's supporters, backed by the USSR, and *mujaheddin* forces, backed by the USA, continued. The USA started to rein in the guerrillas that it had once encouraged, but it was too little too late; efforts to buy back the Stinger missile launchers for $100,000 each were unsuccessful.

The overall impact of the conflict on Afghanistan was to create a large body of well-armed fighters, motivated by conservative religious and cultural beliefs and strong enough to impose their own form of government. Within the *mujaheddin* movement there were at least seven major factions, with some being relatively moderate. Nevertheless, when President Najibullah was finally toppled in 1992, it did serve to pave the way for the establishment of the **Taliban** regime, which ran the country until the US-led offensive against Kabul in 2001.

**KEY TERM**

**Geneva Agreement** Signed in April 1988 in Geneva by Afghanistan and Pakistan to agree on non-interference and non-intervention, return of refugees and Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, with international guarantees by the USA and the USSR.

**Taliban** Ultra-conservative Islamic militants who took over a large part of Afghanistan in 1995, and in 1996 overran the capital of Kabul and declared an Islamic state.




**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

The invasion of Afghanistan and its consequences

# 5 Key debate

*Key question:* *Why did the USSR invade Afghanistan?*

Historians continue to debate the reasons for the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan in 1979.

## Was the war provoked by the USA?

One of the most controversial explanations is that it was deliberately provoked by hawks in the USA such as National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinksi and the CIA. This is the thesis of Nigel Hamilton, Professor of Biography at De Montfort University in the UK. He argues that Brzezinski's formative years, during which he saw his Polish homeland under German

and then Soviet occupation, made him inherently suspicious of totalitarian states and dubious about the benefits of *détente*. For Brzezinski, whose world-view was dominated by the need to confront and defeat Soviet communism, the USSR's success in proxy wars in Africa demanded a response. In an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1998, Brzezinski explained that on 3 July 1979, over five months before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, US President Carter signed a directive authorizing $500,000 worth of aid to the *mujaheddin*. This became known as Operation Cyclone and was allegedly a plot to destabilize the PDPA regime in Afghanistan, thus forcing the Red Army to intervene in order to prop it up; it was then intended to involve Soviet forces in a Vietnam-style military quagmire.

This interpretation relies on the testimony of a Cold War hawk, perhaps anxious to highlight his own role, and that of the CIA, in the eventual collapse of the USSR. Also, the level of funding provided to the CIA in order to support the *mujaheddin* was minimal and before December 1979 only three Soviet citizens had been killed by the *mujaheddin* in the Herat insurgency (see page 115). Furthermore, until early December the Politburo remained deeply reluctant to even consider military intervention, repeatedly ignoring requests from the Afghan government for military support.

Ultimately, Operation Cyclone may have played a role in pushing the Politburo to commit troops, most likely by reinforcing pre-existing Soviet fears of growing US influence in the region, which then led to the fateful decision to unseat President Amin. However, it is probable that Soviet intervention would still have occurred, even without the actions of Brzezinski and the CIA. Historian and former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger takes a wider view of Soviet reasons to act, within the Cold War context of the early 1980s (see Source T).

? According to Source T, what were the goals of the USSR in Afghanistan?

**SOURCE T**

**Excerpt from 'Reflections on a partnership: British and American attitudes to postwar foreign policy' by Henry A. Kissinger, *International Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 4, Autumn 1982, published by Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, UK, page 585. Kissinger was a History Professor at Harvard University, USA, and the US Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977.**

*… today's [crisis], I am afraid, is more genuinely, objectively, serious than ever. It comes after decades of a relentless Soviet military buildup, when the West, for a decade, is edging in some areas toward a dangerous dependency on economic ties with the East; while in Poland the Soviet Union enforces the unity of its empire, its clients press on to undermine the security interests of the West from South-east Asia to the Middle East to Africa to Central America. Not all our difficulties are caused by the Soviet Union, but the Soviet Union has shown little restraint in exploiting them, and their solution – whatever their cause – has been impeded by the lack of a unified Western response.*

*The USSR's geo-political ambition to secure a warm water port in the Persian Gulf and therefore direct access to the Middle East's oil supplies was seen at the time, in the western media, as one of the main factors driving the Soviet invasion*

*of Afghanistan. President Carter described it as 'a stepping stone to their [the Soviets'] possible control over much of the world's oil supplies.' However, no Machiavellian master plan to this end existed, unless one takes into account vague strategic aspirations allegedly expressed by Defence Minister Ustinov, according to the testimony of Alexander Maiorov, the chief Soviet military adviser in Afghanistan in 1980–1. In the main, the inner core of the Politburo consisting of Brezhnev himself, Andropov and Gromyko, were concerned with preserving existing Soviet influence in Afghanistan, rather than expanding it southwards.*

## A pragmatic response to events?

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is perhaps better understood as a pragmatic and reluctant response to events on the ground in Afghanistan. This is certainly the view of former British Ambassador Rodric Braithwaite who depicts Soviet politicians as 'driven step by step, mostly against their will'. The Politburo was affected by the perception of growing US influence in the region that threatened Afghanistan's traditional status as a friendly buffer state. Developments such as US financial grants to the Daoud regime and the openness of President Amin to western diplomatic overtures must be seen in this wider historical context, and seemed in Soviet eyes to threaten its relationship with Afghanistan.

It would be wrong to over-state the direct impact of the US government in shaping the Politburo's thinking. After all, US President Carter's decision to

**SOURCE U**

**Excerpt from 'Decision-making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan from intervention to withdrawal' by Artemy Kalinovsky in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Fall 2009, Vol. 11, Issue 4, pages 49–50. Kalinovsky teaches Eastern European Studies at the Universiteit van Amsterdam, The Netherlands.**

*The decision to invade was an example of how Andropov, Gromyko, and Ustinov dominated Soviet foreign policymaking. By this point Brezhnev … had become more amenable to the idea of intervention … The failure of the U.S. Congress to consent to ratification of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II) in the summer of 1979, heralding a turn away from* détente *on the part of the United States, was one reason. The anticipated decision to deploy Pershing II intermediate-range missiles in Europe (a decision formally approved on the same day that the Soviet authorities decided to invade Afghanistan) was another. The murder of … Taraki by his rival … Amin, despite Brezhnev's pledge of support, helped convince Brezhnev that Amin had to be removed from power. Growing suspicion that Amin might be considering a turn toward the United States contributed to this belief. When Andropov and Ustinov pressed for intervention in December, they cited the above arguments, pointing out that a Western-oriented Afghanistan could become a base for short-range nuclear missiles targeted at the USSR. Brezhnev no longer objected to intervention.*

According to Source U, why did the USSR invade Afghanistan? ?

**TOK**

Historians continue to debate Soviet reasons for the war in Afghanistan. To what extent are some questions about history unanswerable? (History, Language, and Reason.)

install Pershing II nuclear missiles in Europe, on the same day as the decisive Politburo meeting, which has been seen as one of the key 'sparks' pushing the USSR into a disastrous invasion, was actually nothing of the sort. Braithwaite makes a compelling case from an insider's perspective that 'given the complex and confused way in which decisions are taken by most governments, it is unlikely that the news would have affected the Politburo, even had it reached them in time'.

It seems that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is an event that lacks a neat and straightforward explanation. Certainly no strategic master plan for Soviet domination of the region existed and instead the Politburo acted because the perceived alternatives – such as the *mujaheddin* dislodging the PDPA, Afghanistan becoming a US client state or President Amin becoming a close ally of Pakistan – seemed too awful to contemplate, given the Politburo's ideological and world outlook. As Braithwaite succinctly states, 'the Russians [*sic*.] slithered towards a military intervention because they could not think of a better alternative'.

# 6 The USSR in 1982

***Key question:*** *How serious were the socio-economic and political problems confronting the USSR by the time of Brezhnev's death?*

As with any long-term leader, Brezhnev's personality made an impact on USSR. He strove to reach consensus in decision-making and avoided direct conflict with colleagues or countries whenever possible. By 1982, his health was failing. By the time Brezhnev died on 10 November 1982, there was serious social and economic malaise in the USSR. World opinion of the USSR and the Soviet–Afghan War was low.

**What inequalities existed in Soviet society?**

## Social tensions

Soviet society was far from being a Marxist utopia for most of the USSR's citizens at the time of Brezhnev's death:

- There was anti-Jewish prejudice.
- Urban workers received more consumer goods and services than collective farm workers.
- Emigration out of the USSR was hindered.

Senior members of the *nomenklatura* élite received privileges such as access to special shops in which prices were heavily subsidized. Brezhnev promoted the 'stability of cadres' which meant that high-level government officials retained their positions for great lengths of time especially after term-limits for offices were ended. The *nomenklatura* remained a self-perpetuating élite.

Officials used their influence to ensure that their children attended the best schools and universities. Nepotism and corruption prevented a truly socialist way of life.

The best that can be said of Soviet society at the time of Brezhnev's death is that its brand of socialism ensured that workers and their families received sufficient welfare benefits to secure an adequate standard of living. However, modest rises in living standards that had taken place in 1945 were threatened by inflation. Khrushchev's hope that Soviet living standards would overtake those of western capitalist countries proved to be wildly optimistic.

## Economy

**Why was the USSR on the brink of an economic crisis?**

The Soviets found it increasingly difficult to sustain the expenditure necessary to maintain superpower status. Costly conflicts in Angola and Afghanistan (see page 112) provided evidence of the 'burden of empire' hypothesis. This means that the USSR started to stagger under the economic weight of maintaining strategic and military parity with the USA. By the time of Brezhnev's death, the defence budget may have consumed as much as 30 per cent of gross national product, making it even less likely that there would ever be adequate investment in other sectors of the economy. It should also be remembered that for ideological and foreign policy reasons, the USSR subsidized communist governments in eastern Europe and Cuba. The annual discount on Soviet oil for Warsaw Pact members alone amounted to $3 billion.

This meant that under Brezhnev there had been relatively little investment in new industries such as information technology and in 1982 the USSR possessed only one per cent of the amount of computers that existed in the USA.

## Politics

**How stable was the Soviet political system?**

On the surface, the Soviet political system appeared relatively stable at the time of Brezhnev's death. However, the senior echelons of the party had become a **gerontocracy**, resistant to change and innovation. By 1980, the average age of Politburo members was 69 years. Many key figures had been politically active since the 1930s. Of the members of the CPSU in 1981, 75 per cent had joined the party before 1950 and most had joined the party in the era of Stalin.

This élite appeared increasingly removed from the concerns and aspirations of ordinary Soviet citizens by the time of Brezhnev's death. Within this élite, relatively few seemed able or willing to challenge the prevailing economic and political *status quo*. When the Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Kirillin made a speech in 1979 stating that the USSR was on the verge of a financial crisis and that the West was establishing an unbeatable technological lead, he was dismissed and his speech was banned from circulation.

**KEY TERM**

**Gerontocracy** A state whose political élite is almost exclusively comprised of a narrow circle of elderly men.

## Nationalism within the Soviet republics

Brezhnev appeared to have little or no sympathy with the concerns of the non-Russian inhabitants of Soviet republics. Many felt that the USSR served the needs of Russians first while non-Russians were disregarded. By 1981, 10 out of the 14 members of the Politburo were Russian. Protests in Soviet republics, with nationalist overtones, such as that in Armenia in 1965, were invariably crushed by force. This provoked violence; the Moscow Metro was bombed by Armenian nationalists in 1977. Riots erupted in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1969, and several Russian officials were killed.

In 1972, a student set himself on fire in Kaunas, Lithuania, demanding freedom from the USSR. His death set off anti-government riots in the city. Discontent in the Baltic states of the USSR was due to the legacy of Soviet actions during the Second World War, when Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia had been annexed. In addition, the Baltic states' geographical proximity to democratic states, such as Sweden and Finland, meant that it was more feasible for citizens in this part of the USSR to familiarize themselves with events there. For instance, many people in Estonia were able to watch Finnish television stations.

Despite signs of acute political tension, nothing had been done by 1982 to address the political aspirations of non-Russians or the associated problem of how Russian minorities in various republics should be treated. Central Asian republics with large Muslim populations were restless as a result of the Soviet–Afghan war and the revolution in Iran in 1979 which led to the creation of a religious state. According to historian Robert Service, under Brezhnev the problems of a multinational and multicultural state were concealed rather than faced and resolved. Furthermore, regional party bosses such as Sharif Rashidov in Uzbekistan started to cement their hold on power by tacitly encouraging nationalist sentiment. It all added to an increasingly tense political scene and rising ethnic tensions lacked an easy solution.


**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

The USSR in 1982

# Chapter summary

**Domestic and foreign problems of the Brezhnev era**

Leonid Brezhnev came to power in 1964 following the overthrow of Nikita Khrushchev. As First Secretary of the CPSU, he gradually emerged as the dominant force in Soviet politics. In 1977, a new constitution further cemented Brezhnev's political position and that of the CPSU.

There is some evidence that the standard of living for ordinary Soviet citizens improved during the Brezhnev era and by the time of his death, 86 per cent of Soviet citizens possessed a television or a refrigerator. However, a static level of life expectancy and rising infant mortality suggest that there were deep-seated social problems. Rising oil exports failed to mask the growing economic problems facing the Soviet state. Despite huge state subsidies, the *kolkhozy* were inefficient and unproductive and the USSR became increasingly reliant on food imports from the West. Soviet industry was also beset by problems, such as widespread corruption and an obsession with quantitative targets to the exclusion of other economic goals. The work of GOSPLAN did little or nothing to ameliorate these problems.

One significant reaction to the socio-economic and political stagnation of the Brezhnev era was the emergence of a dissident movement. Individuals like Andrei Sakharov became more vocal in their criticisms of the regime, especially in the aftermath of the Helsinki Accords. By the time Brezhnev died in 1982, the USSR was in a state of crisis. The economy was failing to bear the burden of the USSR's imperial commitments and the Politburo was increasingly a gerontocracy and out of touch with the aspirations and needs of ordinary citizens.

Soviet foreign policy up to the late 1970s was characterized by poor relations with China. Brezhnev was also determined to maintain the Soviet grip on eastern Europe, as shown by the Red Army's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 in response to Dubček's Prague Spring. Crucially, the US Presidents Nixon and Ford worked towards *détente* with the Brezhnev regime, creating the SALT I treaty that placed limits on nuclear arsenals and the Helsinki Accords, which acted as a catalyst for the development of human rights movements in the Eastern Bloc.

With proxy wars continuing in the Third World, especially in Africa, and with US Pershing missiles and Soviet SS-20 missiles reigniting the arms race, the period of *détente* came to an end. Crucial to this shift away from *détente* was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, driven by Soviet concerns about the growth of US and conservative Islamic influence in the region. This military intervention was a disaster for the USSR, leading to the Red Army being embroiled in a bloody guerrilla war that cost the lives of over 15,000 Soviet soldiers and up to two million Afghans. The Soviet military intervention was brought to an end by the 1988 Geneva Agreement, which, by withdrawing Soviet troops, paved the way for the collapse of President Najibullah's PDPA client regime.

Inside the USSR there were serious challenges as well. The make-up of the Politburo and other top governing bodies included increasingly elderly members, creating a gerontocracy. This hindered the development of a dynamic system for dealing with political, social and economic issues that required urgent attention. One very volatile issue was nationalism in some of the Soviet republics. Mounting anti-Russian resentment flared up in the Baltic republics and spread to central Asia. The seemingly monolithic USSR was about to crack.

# Examination advice

## Paper 1 Question 3: OPVL

Question 3 on the IB History Diploma examination requires to you to discuss the origin and purpose of two sources and then to use that information to determine each source's potential value and limitations (OPVL). The question always asks you to refer to the origin and purpose of two named sources to assess their value and limitations for historians. Unlike Questions 1 and 2, some knowledge of the topic, value of types of sources, or authors can be useful, although this is not required. Question 3 is worth 6 marks out of the 25 total for Paper 1. This means it is worth 24 per cent of your overall mark. Answering Question 3 should take approximately 10 minutes of your examination time.

### How to answer

Read Question 3 carefully. You will notice that it is asking you to discuss the origins and purpose of two different sources and then to determine the value and limitations for these two sources for historians. This question is not like Question 2; you must treat each source separately. The first source mentioned in the question should be the one you start with and it should be in its own paragraph, with the second source treated in the second paragraph. At no point should you compare or contrast the sources or discuss them in the same paragraph.

Structure will help you in answering the question. Incorporate the words origin, purpose, value and limitation into your answer. 'The origin of Source B is … ', 'the purpose of Source B is … ', 'the value of this source is … ' and 'a limitation of this source may be … '. This keeps you focused on the task, making sure you covered all the required elements, but also helps the examiner understand your answers by providing a framework that they can follow. It is important to remember that you are to use the origins and purpose to determine the value and limitations. The actual text of the source is not to be used as it is just an excerpt from a much larger work.

#### *Origin*

The origin of a source is the author, the type of publication, the year it was published and sometimes the country it originates from. If there is biographical information included as part of the source's introduction, this also may be used in addressing the source's origin.

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of a source is usually indicated by the source's title, the type of source, the writer or speaker, if it is a speech, or the location of the source, such as in a newspaper, an academic book or a journal article. Purposes can range from speeches that try to convince certain groups or nations that what

the speaker is saying is the truth or should be heeded, to explaining the history of a certain time period.

- If a journal article's title is 'Decision-making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan from intervention to withdrawal' the purpose of this particular source is likely to explain the decision-making process of the Soviet War in Afghanistan.
- If the author of this source is Russian, it may be that the purpose is to explain Soviet policy in Afghanistan, to convince the reader that the Soviet government's policies in Afghanistan were the best it could manage in a tough situation, and so forth.
- If the source's author is a US academic, then the purpose could very well be to convince the reader that this proxy war worsened the Cold War or perhaps something else.

Since this is a hypothesis on your part, be sure to include the words 'perhaps' or 'possibly'. In order to determine the purpose or purposes of a source, be sure to read the title, the date of publication, the name of the author, and any biographical information given.

### *Value*

The value of a source flows naturally from the origins and purpose.

Perhaps a book exists that is entitled *The Soviet War in Afghanistan* and was written by an Afghan leader during the 1980s. The value will be that this leader probably witnessed or participated in certain events, perhaps experienced the effects of Soviet troops in the region, and may have even met prominent Soviet officials. This would give the author first-hand knowledge of the Soviet War in Afghanistan.

If the author lived 20 years after the war ended, a value could be that the writer has access to Soviet and Afghan sources, may be less connected and therefore less emotional about the subject and therefore more objective, or perhaps is able to better determine the long-term impact of the war on international relations during the Cold War.

Your answer will have to be determined by the origin and purpose of the source you are asked to discuss. Do not state that primary sources have more value than secondary sources; this is not necessarily true.

### *Limitation*

The limitation of a source is determined in much the same way that you determined the source's value. If the writer of *The Soviet War in Afghanistan* is Russian, the writer is likely to have more access to Soviet sources than Afghan ones. This would be a limitation in that the author is *possibly* unable to present a truly balanced view. Other than the author's nationality, there may be other ways to determine possible limitations:

- The title of the source may be of a limited nature or too broad for the topic.

- The date of publication may be limiting if it is too close to or far from the historical events.
- A source that is political in nature may be trying to advocate a certain view or policy instead of being objective.

Do not state that sources are limited because they are secondary sources; this may not be true and often is not.

### *Visual images*

Visual sources will have information explaining to you their origin. Remember that photographs can capture a single moment in time so that they can show exactly what happened, but they can also be staged to send a particular message. A photograph of smiling *mujaheddin* in the hills of Afghanistan captures a moment when they were either genuinely happy or told to smile, perhaps not knowing even what they were smiling about. Cartoons, posters and even photographs often have a political message. The purpose of any of these could potentially be to convince the viewer of a certain point of view. Another purpose could be to make fun of a particular idea or person for some other reason. Apply analytical skills from Chapters 2 and 3 if appropriate.

## Example

This question uses Sources O and U, found on pages 116 and 125.

> **With reference to their origins and purpose, discuss the value and limitations of Sources O and U for historians studying the reasons for Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.**

There is no need to brainstorm or outline for this question, so go to your examination paper and start writing. A sample answer is given below.

The title of each source and its author are clearly stated, as is the year of publication.

The terms origin, purpose, value and limitation are used throughout both paragraphs.

*The origin of Source O is a coded telegram to Soviet representatives in Kabul on 15 September 1979 by Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko, found in* ***The Soviet Union: A Documentary History, Volume 2****. It is included by British academic historians who have compiled new archival material on the former USSR.*

*The purpose of the telegram is to give official instructions to the Soviet representative in Kabul regarding how to deal with the Afghan political situation, as well as the military one.*

*A value of this source is that it is a primary source written by Gromyko, an official member of the Soviet government in 1979 on the eve of the Soviet war in Afghanistan. It is valuable as an official government document which was written just at the time prior to Soviet military intervention, so it provides a unique view of Soviet reasons for military intervention in Afghanistan. The author,*

Gromyko, was Minister of Foreign Affairs, so he was privy to government decisions at the highest spheres in the USSR and had ample power to affect decisions abroad. It is also coded, to prevent reading by non-official eyes, so it is less likely to have been manipulated or changed.

A limitation of Source O could be that, as it is official Soviet policy, it views the Soviet military intervention strictly from the Soviet viewpoint, discounting the Afghan perceptions at the time. A historian would need to look at alternative views. Another limitation may be that since the telegram was giving specific instructions to the Soviet representatives in Kabul in dealing with Amin, it does not fully address all the reasons for the Soviet War in Afghanistan.

The origin of Source U is an excerpt from the article 'Decision-making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan From Intervention to Withdrawal' by Artemy Kalinovsky in **Journal of Cold War Studies**, fall 2009. Kalinovsky teaches Eastern European Studies at the Universiteit van Amsterdam, The Netherlands. He is an academic and Russian, so has probably had access to Russian-language sources to write his article.

The purpose of Professor Kalinovsky in writing this article is to discuss decision-making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan from Intervention to Withdrawal and to publish his findings in a respected academic journal, the **Journal of Cold War Studies.**

A value of Source U is that Kalinovsky is an established professor of Eastern European Studies at the Universiteit van Amsterdam, The Netherlands. He is an academic and Russian, so has probably had access to Russian-language sources to write his article, indicating that he is an expert in his field. Another value of Source U may be that since it was written 20 years after the end of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, Kalinovsky has had access to newly opened Soviet archives since the early 1990s and the work of other researchers, and can assess the reasons for Soviet military intervention within the larger context of the end of the Cold War.

A limitation of Source U **may be** that since the author is Russian, he may be primarily interested in the Soviet perspective or just official internal Soviet reasons for the decision to invade Afghanistan. It is possible that a larger context of the Cold War may not be present in the article.

Each source is discussed in its own paragraph and nowhere is there comparison or contrasting of the two sources.

More than one value or limitation was found for each of the sources based on the origin and purpose.

Terms such as 'may be' are appropriately used since the value and limitations are based on hypotheses.

The answer indicates that the demands of the question were understood. Both sources assessed. There is clear discussion of the origins, purpose, value and limitations of both sources, often with multiple examples.

# Examination practice

**Question 1:** 5 minute
**Question 2:** 10 minutes
**Question 3:** 10 minutes
**Question 4:** 35 minutes

Below are some exam-style questions for you to practise. Paper 1 exams are one hour long, not including five minutes of reading time at the exam's start when only reading is permitted. You may wish to only practise specific questions, and if this is the case, allow the following amounts of time per question:

These questions relate to the domestic policies of Leonid Brezhnev. The sources used are found within this chapter on the following pages:

- Source A (page 96)
- Source B (page 96)
- Source D (page 98)
- Source E (page 99)
- Source G (page 102)
- Source J (page 106).

**1 a)** How did Soviet citizens feel about Brezhnev, according to Source G? *(3 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 37.)

**2 b)** What can be inferred from Source D about Brezhnev's focus on agriculture? *(2 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 63.)

**3** Compare and contrast the views expressed in Sources A and B about the Soviet constitution. *(6 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 91.)

**4** With reference to their origin and purpose, discuss the value and limitations of Source E and Source J for historians studying Brezhnev's domestic policies. *(6 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 130.)

**5** Using these sources (Sources A, B, G, E and J) and your own knowledge, analyse the extent to which the Brezhnev era can be seen as a period of failure and stagnation. *(8 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 160.)

# Activities

**1** Write an obituary for Leonid Brezhnev summing up his impact. If you are working in pairs one of you could write the piece from a western perspective, such as the *New York Times*, and another could write the kind of obituary that might have appeared in the *Pravda*. How and why might these obituaries differ?

**2** What's in a name? In conjunction with what you have learned about Language in TOK and what you know about Cold War terminology, visit the site of Nations Online at http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/third_world_countries.htm and explain why the term Third World was coined. Why is it a misnomer?

**3** Listen to the music of Vladimir Vysotski on YouTube and find the lyrics of his songs. To what extent do you think he posed a threat to the Soviet government?

CHAPTER 6

# Gorbachev's reforms and the consequences for the Soviet state

**Mikhail Gorbachev faced a huge array of social, political and economic challenges when he became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985. This chapter analyses his attempts to deal with the domestic problems bequeathed to him by his predecessors, in particular looking at the aims of his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. It examines the following key questions that you need to consider:**

- What was the purpose of Gorbachev's domestic reforms?
- What was the impact of *perestroika* and *glasnost* on the Soviet state?
- To what extent did Gorbachev precipitate the USSR's downfall?

## 1 Gorbachev's domestic reforms

*Key question: What was the purpose of Gorbachev's domestic reforms?*

Brezhnev was succeeded as General Secretary in 1982 by Yuri Andropov. Andropov's health declined steadily and he delegated much of his work to Konstantin Chernenko. On 9 February 1984, Andropov died. Chernenko succeeded him but died in March 1985. Mikhail Gorbachev was the unanimous choice within the Politburo to become the next General Secretary. He was the youngest member of the Politburo, at 54 years of age, ending the period of gerontocracy.

Gorbachev, a strong believer in the strength of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and communism as a way of governing the USSR, recognized that reform was needed for economic and political development. He believed that his reforms would succeed; he was mistaken.

**KEY TERM**

***Perestroika*** Russian for 'reconstruction' or 'restructuring'. Gorbachev's policy of economic and political reform within the socialist system, to improve the standard of living and society in the USSR.

### *Perestroika*

***Perestroika*** was the economic and political 'restructuring' embarked on by Gorbachev from 1985. It was a deliberately vague term, so as to avoid any connotations of reform or political change that might alarm the *nomenklatura*. The policy was intended to strengthen the USSR by revitalizing the stagnant Soviet economy and reversing the disastrous trends of the Brezhnev era.

**How successful was Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika*?**

Gorbachev was not the only advocate of *perestroika.* Its architect, according to historian Martin McCauley, was one of Gorbachev's close advisers, Alexander Yakovlev. He wanted to close the technological gap with the USA and quickly; he advocated rapid action to do so. Gorbachev and Yakovlev hoped to maintain the best features of socialism, while making the system more productive and efficient through a small dose of free-market economics.

## The aims of *perestroika*

Gorbachev embarked on his ambitious reform programme with a set of vague aspirations, such as to reduce the amount of central planning and to allow managers greater autonomy. He made his proposal known to the CPSU Central Committee in April 1985.

**SOURCE A**

**Excerpt from Mikhail Gorbachev's report to a CPSU Central Committee plenary meeting, 23 April 1985 from *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History, Volume 2, 1939–1991* by Edward Acton and Tom Stableford, published by the University of Exeter Press, Exeter, UK, 2007, page 385. Professor Acton of the University of East Anglia, UK, and Assistant Librarian Stableford at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, compiled documents from newly available archival material on the former USSR. Their purpose was to provide non-Russian speakers with documents from the Cold War USSR. This excerpt is from the political journal of the Central Committee of the CPSU, *Kommunist*.**

*We must follow this Leninist tradition unswervingly, enriching and developing our Party policy and our general line for social improvement under advanced socialism.*

*The main question is how, and with what, the country can speed up its economic development. When looking into this problem in the Politburo, we unanimously came to the conclusion that real possibilities for this do exist. The task of speeding up growth rates substantially is definitely feasible, if at the centre of all our work we put economic intensification, the acceleration of scientific and technological progress, the restructuring of management, planning, and structural and investment policy, tightening up organization and discipline all round and fundamentally improving the way we do things.*

? According to Source A, how could the Soviet economy be improved?

Gorbachev convinced enough key members of the Politburo to forge ahead with *perestroika*.

## Economic restructuring in the industrial sector

Gorbachev's first significant piece of economic legislation was the Law on Individual Labour Activity in November 1986, which legalized certain kinds of small business, such as taxi services and private tuition. Gorbachev then passed the Law on State Enterprise in January 1988. This gave greater autonomy for state-operated businesses and factories:

**SOURCE B**

**Gorbachev (centre right, wearing a hat), with his wife Raisa (to the right of Gorbachev), conversing with car factory workers in Tolyatti on 8 April 1986.**

What is the message conveyed by Source B about the Gorbachevs? ?

- Managers were elected by ordinary workers.
- Managers were given control over what they produced, budgets, prices and wages.
- Businesses were required to be self-financing and to make a profit, as government orders and contracts would no longer absorb the entire productive capacity of industry.

A major change also occurred in how the USSR conducted its foreign trade, which had previously been under the sole jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Trade. This changed in 1987 and other ministries and enterprises were henceforth allowed to engage in foreign trade directly.

Another major law liberalizing the economy was the Law on Co-operatives in January 1988. This legalized co-operatives and enterprises of the type that had long flourished in the **second economy**, allowing them to set prices and export goods. They could employ workers who were not part of the co-operative; in practice this made them hard to distinguish from private companies in capitalist countries. By 1990, this sector of the economy, outside the direct control of the state, employed 6.2 million people, mainly in the service and retail sectors. State ownership of enterprises, however, remained predominant.

**KEY TERM**

**Second economy** An underground economy of small-scale capitalists and merchants that existed within the USSR.

Taken together, these reforms and laws amounted to the greatest change to the Soviet economy since the introduction of the NEP in 1921 (see page 12), which, indeed, Gorbachev often invoked as inspiration and justification for allowing some market additions to improve socialist economic practice.

? According to Source C, what is Gorbachev's attitude to Marxism–Leninism?

**SOURCE C**

**Excerpt from a speech by Gorbachev to the Central Committee plenum on 18 February 1988 from *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union 1917–1991* by Richard Sakwa, published by Routledge, London, UK, 1999, page 439. Sakwa is Professor of Russian and European Politics at the University of Kent, UK.**

*Over 70 years our party and people have been inspired by the ideas of socialism and have been building it. But because of external and internal causes we have been unable fully to realise the Leninist principles of the new social system. This was seriously hampered by the cult of personality; the system of management by command and administration that formed in the '30s, bureaucratic, dogmatic and voluntarist aberration and arbitrariness; and the late '70s early '80s lack of initiative, and hindrances, that have led to stagnation … No, we do not retreat even a step from socialism, from Marxism-Leninism, from everything that has been gained and created by the people. But we decisively reject a dogmatic bureaucratic and voluntarist legacy, as it has nothing in common either with Marxism-Leninism or with genuine socialism.*

### *The human factor*

Other important reforms related to what Gorbachev called the human factor. Quality control inspectors monitored products and services for safety and other factors. Corruption was targeted and a new government agency was established to root it out, along with new punishments and public humiliation.

There was an anti-alcohol campaign from 1985 to 1988. This was designed to restrict the sale of liquor and raise prices to pay for the health costs and address the negative impact on labour productivity caused by alcohol abuse. It has been estimated that alcohol consumption reduced labour productivity by about 10 per cent in the early 1970s, but four times as much in the 1980s. This campaign led to reductions in alcohol consumption and had some health benefits, but led to tax yields from liquor falling, which in 1985 had provided 14 per cent of government revenues.

? According to Source D, why was Gorbachev's alcohol policy not particularly successful?

**SOURCE D**

**Excerpt from 'The success of a failure: Gorbachev's alcohol policy, 1985–88' by Daniel Tarschys, from *Europe–Asia Studies*, January 1993, Vol. 45, Issue 1. Tarschys teaches Political Science at the University of Stockholm, Sweden.**

*Thus, in spite of the widespread contempt for Gorbachev's alcohol policy, it seems undeniable that it did yield some substantial results. Then why did it collapse? Bestuzhev-Lada, a sociologist who participated in the analytical work preparing the new line [the new anti-alcohol campaign], argues that the recommendations got lost in the bureaucratic labyrinths of the administrative-command system. Perhaps so. But it can also be contended that the policy was a product of late centralism, launched in the last years of the empire when civic and regional resistance to the established authority structure had already begun to undermine*

*the legitimacy of leadership. With the whole fabric of Soviet society loosening up and with citizens beginning to assert their own integrity and individual autonomy, mobilising the old command system against such a deeply rooted habit as the taste for vodka stood little chance of succeeding.*

## Economic restructuring in agriculture

In the agricultural sector, Gorbachev had all aspects of production centralized under Gosagroprom, the State Committee for the Agro-Industrial Complex, supposedly to streamline planning. As during the times of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the committee was plagued by inefficient layers of bureaucracy in a complicated system of collective farming. In 1989, Gorbachev dissolved Gosagroprom, creating a small food commission instead and allowing a mix of market and socialist agribusiness.

Other economic mistakes of the past were also continued, such as the massive introduction of expensive mechanical cotton-harvesters in the central Asian Soviet Republics. Since labour was plentiful and wages were low, *kolkhoz* managers accepted them, but did not use them, preferring manual harvesting, which also gathered more cotton.

Gorbachev did try to reform the system of collective farming. The programme called for peasants to lease land from the *kolkhoz* that they could then farm as they desired. Farm managers discouraged peasants from accepting this offer as it threatened their positions. Since these managers controlled farm equipment and supplies, their efforts were largely successful and the USSR continued to import grain and food.

**SOURCE E**

**Excerpt from 'Can Gorbachev feed Russia?' by Mark Kramer in the *New York Times Magazine*, 9 April 1989, page 2. Kramer was a writer in residence at Smith College in Massachusetts, USA, who was invited to tour Soviet state farms. The *New York Times Magazine* is a division of The New York Times which has been published since 1851 in New York, USA, and has one of the largest circulations of any newspaper in the world for over 100 years.**

*I had accepted a rare invitation to make a post-*perestroika *tour of Soviet farms … Harvesting damages more than 80 percent of potatoes,* **Isvestia** *tattled – a high figure by Western standards. An additional 50 percent, spoils in storage. A farm-equipment procurer discovered new irrigation pumps rusting out-of-doors in an obscure storage yard, proclaimed* Pravda. *Another* Pravda *journalist found tubercular cattle kept in Kazakhstani herds …*

*'Agriculture is the most painful spot in the Soviet system,' Mikhail Gorbachev said last month in a nationally televised speech to the plenary session of the Central Committee. Here was the chief of all bureaucrats, speaking as candidly as anyone ever has about the failure of the Soviet Union's 50,000 state and collective farms, its rudimentary food processing, transport, storage and sales systems.*

According to Source E, what problems did Soviet agriculture face? ?

**KEY TERM**

**Isvestia** A leading, official newspaper in the USSR.

## The impact of economic restructuring

The reforms associated with *perestroika* were ambitious. However, they did not amount to a successful economic revolution and the system as a whole remained plagued by shortages, corruption and other long-standing problems dating back to the Brezhnev era. Most factories continued to function in an inefficient and unproductive way. Industrial production actually fell by six per cent in 1987. Living standards did not rise as Gorbachev had promised and by the end of the decade, the USSR's **credit rating** had plunged as foreign companies were no longer confident that contracts would be honoured or even who would actually pay them. Defence spending, not addressed by *perestroika*, continued to consume 40 per cent of the government's budget.

**KEY TERM**

**Credit rating** A judgement on the ability of a nation to pay back loans.

**SOURCE F**

**Table of industrial output from *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–1991* by Alec Nove, published by Penguin, London, UK, 1992, page 400. Nove was Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Glasgow, UK. He was born in Russia as Alexander Novakovsky. He compiled this table from official Soviet sources.**

| Industrial output | 1985 | 1988 | 1990 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Electricity (billions of kilowatt-hours) | 1545 | 1705 | 1728 |
| Oil (millions of tons) | 595 | 624 | 570 |
| Gas (billions of cubic metres) | 643 | 770 | 815 |
| Coal (millions of tons) | 726 | 772 | 709 |
| Rolled steel (millions of tons) | 108 | 116 | 112 |
| Chemical fibres (thousands of tons) | 1394 | 1535 | 1500 |

? What are the origin, purpose, value and limitations of Source F for a historian studying the economic impact of *perestroika*?

### *Discontent*

Gorbachev's economic reforms gave enterprises the freedom to set prices, but this created an inflationary spiral which affected consumers. Workers who had benefited from low prices for basic commodities and patronage networks during the Brezhnev era now felt more insecure about obtaining goods needed to live. This caused more discontent, leading to an increasing number of strikes. In 1989 alone, 7.3 million working days were lost to strike action, such as that of Siberian miners who resented rationing, queues and being denied basic consumer items such as soap.

The demands of strikers were not always purely economic; many wanted greater political freedom and to establish independent trade unions. There was also deep resentment of official corruption. This was certainly the case with coalminers in the Kuz and Don Basin regions who started a strike in July 1989. Their efforts were co-ordinated by independent strike committees that threatened to develop a Soviet version of Solidarity (see page 192). The number of protests and demonstrations increased and in the summer of

1989, up to 350,000 people protested, complaining about the growing economic and political crisis. By October 1989, strikes had been legalized and the government gave in to the strikers' demands.

**SOURCE G**

**Excerpt from *A History of Twentieth-century Russia* by Robert Service published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, USA, 1998, page 472. Professor Service teaches History at Oxford University in the UK. He wrote this book after being allowed access to newly opened Soviet archives.**

*A further strike occurred in November in the mines around Norilsk in the Siberian far north. All these strikes were settled in favour of the strikers, who demanded higher wages and improved living conditions; and in contrast with Soviet political practice since the Civil War [1918–21] no repressive sanctions were applied against the strike leaders …*

*But the Soviet authorities weathered the storm. The strikers lived in far-flung areas, and [Soviet Premier] Ryzhkov and his fellow ministers managed to isolate them from the rest of society by quickly offering them higher wages. Yet the government was faced by a society embittered against it.*

According to Source G, how did the Soviet government handle the strikes? ?

## Political restructuring

The difficulty with enacting major economic reform was that it also meant major political reform, which would be politically dangerous and difficult. Gorbachev realized that if his economic reforms were to succeed, he would need to break the power of conservatives in the *nomenklatura*. Gorbachev began to promote reform-minded politicians that would support his policies:

- Thirty-nine government ministers were discharged within a year of Gorbachev becoming General Secretary.
- A new generation of provincial party leaders were appointed who supported him.
- Politburo members who opposed reform were replaced.
- Andrei Gromyko, who had nominated Gorbachev to the position of General Secretary, was elevated to the ceremonial role of President of the Supreme Soviet Presidium.

### *The Politburo*

Controlling the Politburo was a key task for Gorbachev. With the old guard having largely been swept out of the way, Yegor Ligachev, organization and agriculture specialist, and Nikolai Ryzhkov, an industrial specialist, became key members of the Politburo, as they had supported Gorbachev for General Secretary. Ligachev was given the crucial role of running the Secretariat, a group which in the Brezhnev era had emerged as a key decision-making body at the apex of the CPSU. Rzyhkov became Prime Minister, or Premier. In addition, Eduard Shevardnadze, the reformist leader of the Georgian Communist Party, was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The

cumulative effect was to reduce the average age of the Politburo from 69 at the end of 1980 to 64 by the end of 1985. Gorbachev also called for more political participation of young people and women at the local level of the party and increased ethnic diversity at the highest levels of the CPSU. He applauded the election of the first woman to the Politburo: Galina Semyonova.

These new appointments did not always support Gorbachev wholeheartedly, a reflection of his political miscalculation. In 1987, for example, Ligachev opposed the creation of a commission to investigate the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinist repression. He also took the lead in attacking one of leading reformers in the Politburo, the Moscow Communist Party Secretary Boris Yeltsin, who had been one of Gorbachev's new appointments. When put in charge of agriculture, Ligachev refused to increase the size of private plots. Ryzhkov, for his part, was very cautious and at a Politburo meeting in February 1987, he insisted that Gorbachev's reforms should not go beyond the framework of socialism.

Gorbachev still lacked reliable allies in the Politburo who shared his aims. Sometimes these allies attracted too much attention, like Boris Yeltsin, who dismissed Moscow party personnel and replaced them with inexperienced cadres, mixed with workers in factories and took a public bus instead of party limousines on occasion. Yeltsin came into conflict with Gorbachev when he proposed removing privileges accorded to the office of the General Secretary. This, and Yeltsin's mounting political enmity with Ligachev, resulted in Yeltsin's removal from the Politburo in 1987. This has been described by the former US Ambassador Jack Matlock as Gorbachev's first major political mistake. Gorbachev chose to maintain the support of Yegor Ligachev, who became increasingly wary of Gorbachev's reforms.

**SOURCE H**

**Excerpt from a speech given by Yegor Ligachev at Gorki on 5 August 1988 quoted in *The USSR 1945–1990* by John Laver, published by Hodder Arnold, London, UK, 1991.**

*Our Party is a ruling party. And, although increasing the sovereignty of the Soviets, the Party is not going to renounce its leading role … Notions that the economy in our socialist society can develop exclusively on the basis of market laws are unfounded … The market is not a panacea for all ills … Copying the western model of a market based on private ownership is fundamentally unacceptable to a socialist system of economic management founded on social ownership.*

? According to Source H, why is capitalism not to be adopted by the USSR?

In 1987, Gorbachev ousted the Azeri politician Geidar Aliev, charging him with corruption and nepotism; Aliev opposed Gorbachev's reforms. Once Aliev was removed from the Politburo, all its members were ethnic Russians, with the exception of Georgian Eduard Shevardnadze. In a purported Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that included many non-Russian nationalities

and ethnic groups, this state of affairs rankled non-Russians. This would have serious repercussions on the fragile unity of the USSR, as will be explored later in this chapter.

### *The Congress of People's Deputies*

The idea of creating the Congress of People's Deputies evolved in 1987, at a CPSU Central Committee plenum. Gorbachev announced that members of local Soviets would be directly elected and that there would be a choice of candidates for the first time. The process of change was slow at first; in the elections to local Soviets in June 1987, there was only one name on the ballot paper in 96 per cent of districts.

The crucial political shift came in 1988, at the nineteenth party conference. Here, despite the opposition of Ligachev, Gorbachev announced that the first multi-candidate elections since 1917 for a new Congress of People's Deputies would take place in 1989. It was intended that this Congress would then select 450 of their members to constitute the Supreme Soviet. The Supreme Soviet would then be responsible for checking and scrutinizing the actions of the government, have the power to veto policies or legislation, and have the ability to confirm or reject ministerial appointments.

#### The 1989 election

The elections in 1989 certainly had the appearance of a democratic process. Even so, 33 per cent of the seats in the Congress were reserved for members nominated by communist organizations like **Komsomol**. When the first elections took place, the majority of those elected were conservative, anti-reform *nomenklatura*. Diversity of opinion was tolerated, but only within the overall framework of socialism. In addition, Gorbachev was elected unopposed as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, a post which he held until his elevation to the new post of President of the USSR in 1990.

#### Emerging factions

Even though the vast majority of those elected to the Congress of People's Deputies professed to be Marxists, they were not a unified body. Instead, deputies immediately began to group together in different ideological factions. For instance, the Soyuz (Union) Group wanted to call a halt to further reform and viewed Gorbachev's policies as a major threat to the USSR. On the other hand, the **Inter-Regional Group**, to whom dissident Andrei Sakharov (see page 103) belonged, wanted the pace of reform to quicken. Another stated aim of this group was a full transition from totalitarianism to democracy. In parts of the USSR, like the Baltic republics of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, more independent-minded, non-communist candidates were elected to the Congress of People's Deputies. The unity of the CPSU was beginning to fracture.

Across the USSR as a whole, 38 province-level party secretaries were defeated. In Moscow, Boris Yeltsin won 90 per cent of the vote. This enabled him to defeat the *nomenklatura* candidate and become Mayor of Moscow.

**KEY TERM**

**Komsomol** CPSU youth organization which at its peak in the 1970s had tens of millions of members.

**Inter-Regional Group** Opposition party emerging from the Congress of People's Deputies.

Yeltsin had become a well-known and popular Soviet politician even outside Moscow.

? According to Source I, what are Yeltsin's political qualities?

**SOURCE I**

**Excerpt from 'Boris Yeltsin: ups and downs in the eyes of the world' by Marina Darmaros from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2 February 2011. Darmaros is a Brazilian journalist and sub-editor of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, a Russian government daily newspaper founded in 1990.**

*Yeltsin's popularity increased as he responded to the frustration over plans Gorbachev proposed but wasn't able to accomplish. 'People in the then Soviet Union used to say: "We open the fridge and don't see* perestroika *inside it," because the goods started to be scarce and the crisis was becoming deeper and deeper, creating opportunities for an audacious, ambitious and daring alternative, such as Yeltsin was at that time,' said Aarao. [Daniel Aarao, a Professor of History at Fluminense Federal University in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.]*

? According to Source J, what was the role of Gorbachev in creating the Congress of People's Deputies?

**SOURCE J**

**A cartoon by Nicholas Garland that appeared in a British newspaper, *The Independent*, 26 May 1989. Garland is a British cartoonist who has worked for many major British publications. *The Independent* is a daily British newspaper in publication since 1986.**


### Impact of reforms

The proceedings and debates of the Congress of the People's Deputies were televised, giving many Soviet citizens their first taste of genuine political debate. While many citizens were excited by the prospect of a genuine voice in the political process, many members of the *nomenklatura* became increasingly disillusioned, as their political and social privileges were eroded

and others were held responsible for corruption and so forth. The end result was that in 1989 alone, 136,000 party members chose to leave the CPSU. Gorbachev's political reforms began to break the stranglehold of the CPSU on the political life of the USSR.

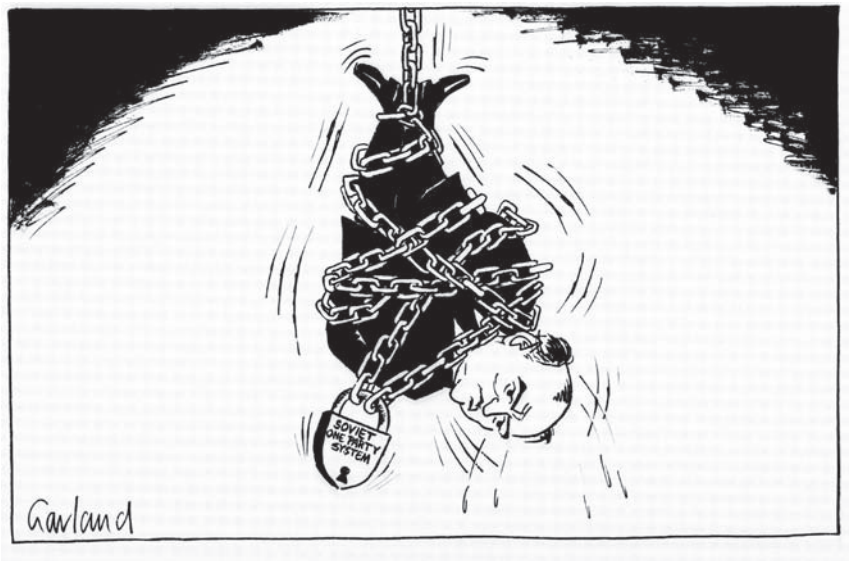
### *The presidency*

In February 1990, in a further round of constitutional reform, the Supreme Soviet endorsed Gorbachev's plan to create a new post of President of the USSR. Rather than gaining an electoral mandate, the President would be named by the Congress of People's Deputies and serve for five years; Gorbachev now became President of the USSR. His expanded authority included command of the armed forces and the ability to dismiss ministers; Gorbachev retained his post as General Secretary of the CPSU.

Gorbachev appointed Gennadi Ianev, a conservative communist and former head of KGB, as Vice-President, probably to maintain the support of anti-reform members in the CPSU. However, this new concentration of power alienated key reformers like Yakovlev and Shevardnadze, who felt that the USSR was in danger of becoming a dictatorship. Shevardnadze resigned in protest in December 1990.

**SOURCE K**

**A cartoon by Nicholas Garland that appeared in a British newspaper, *The Independent*, 9 January 1990. Garland is a British cartoonist who has worked for many major British publications. *The Independent* is a daily British newspaper in publication since 1986.**




According to Source K, what was Gorbachev attempting to do to the Soviet political system? ?

**How successful was Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*?**

# *Glasnost*

## The aims of *Glasnost*

Gorbachev believed that only by giving ordinary citizens greater freedom of information could his reforms acquire the support needed to bring about the change required to make the country work efficiently. Gorbachev called this policy ***glasnost***, which is commonly translated from the Russian as a policy of 'frankness' or 'openness'. Gorbachev also intended the policy to permit a thorough analysis of what he believed to be the catastrophic impact of Stalin's rule, which would in turn lead to discussion on solutions for Soviet issues.

**KEY TERM**

***Glasnost*** Russian for 'openness'. Gorbachev's policy of government transparency, where citizens were encouraged to point out ineffectiveness in industry and the economy, in order to work toward solutions and improvements.

**SOURCE L**

**Excerpt from 'Reform in the political system: limits and possibilities' by Wolfgang Leonhard from *From Brezhnev to Gorbachev: Domestic Affairs and Soviet Foreign Policy* edited by Hans-Joachim Veen, published by Berg Publishers, Leamington Spa, UK, and Hamburg, Germany, 1984, page 346. Leonhard is a German historian who lived in the USSR and participated in the formation of East Germany.**

*Political reform of the [Soviet] system depends not only on the extent of contradictions within it and the presence of social and political forces which support the liberalisation and 'opening' of Soviet society … In this respect the coincidence of 'pressure from below' and serious disagreements in the leadership has proved to be an important precondition … The history of Soviet Communism has shown repeatedly that relaxation of control, concessions to the population, reforms and liberalisation are as a rule granted only as a result of economic necessities and in the face of growing political dissatisfaction among the masses (pressure from below).*

? According to Source L, what was the importance of 'pressure from below'?

What *glasnost* did not involve was allowing Soviet citizens absolute freedom of action. After all, Gorbachev came to power determined not to dismantle the existing Soviet political system, but to preserve many elements of it. Therefore, it was inevitable that there would be limitations to how much *glasnost* there could actually be in practice. In April of 1986, Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy was tested.

## *Glasnost* in action

One of the first examples of *glasnost* in action was Gorbachev's willingness to meet ordinary workers and discuss government reforms with them, albeit in carefully managed encounters. He was also much more willing to meet western journalists than his predecessors and he gave what was, by the standards of his predecessors, a very frank interview to US magazine *Time* in 1985. More significantly, the aftermath of the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in the Ukraine in April 1986 showed how *glasnost* was beginning to impact Soviet politics. It was no longer possible to keep national problems hidden.

### *Chernobyl*

The Chernobyl catastrophe was caused when a reactor exploded at a nuclear power station, releasing large amounts of radiation into the atmosphere. The official response was initially a mixture of inertia and ineptitude, such as not evacuating local inhabitants until after they had been exposed to radiation for 72 hours. After an initial cover-up and denial more typical of the Brezhnev era, Gorbachev sent an investigative team to the region led by Premier Ryzhkov.

Gorbachev then acknowledged what had happened. In many ways, he had no choice as radioactive clouds now drifted over central and western Europe and radiation detectors at a nuclear power station in Sweden, over 1000 kilometres away, were activated.

**SOURCE M**

**A statement from the Council of Ministers of the USSR published in *Pravda*, 2 May 1986 from *The Collapse of the Soviet Union* by David Marples, published by Pearson Education, Harlow, UK, 2004, page 117. Marples is a Professor of History at the University of Alberta, Canada. This statement was published in *Pravda* one week after the explosion. *Pravda* was the main government-sponsored newspaper of the USSR from 1921 to 1991.**

*Throughout the day on 30 April at the Chernobyl atomic power station, work has continued to realize complex technical measures. Radioactivity on the territory of the station and in the immediate vicinity has been reduced by 1.5–2 times. Work is being introduced to decontaminate polluted areas adjacent to the territory of the atomic power station. Aid to the injured is continuing, including the 18 people who are in a serious condition. There are no foreign citizens among the injured.*

With reference to its origin and purpose, assess the value and limitations of Source M for historians studying the impact of *glasnost* up to May 1986. ?

The disaster, more than anything else, opened the possibility of much greater freedom of expression, although it should be noted that it took until 1989 for authorities to releaze accurate maps to the media, revealing the full geographical extent of the areas affected by radiation from Chernobyl. However, events at Chernobyl did mark a shift in the political culture of the USSR. Subsequent disasters were not hidden, but fully disclosed to the outside world.

### *The relaxation of censorship*

From June 1986 onwards, censorship rules were relaxed. Works of literature such as Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* were published in the USSR for the first time. Furthermore, the jamming of BBC radio broadcasts was ended in 1987, giving ordinary Soviet citizens greater freedom to access western media outlets. Independent media began to develop, spearheaded by weekly newspapers such as *Moscow News*. For Gorbachev, this was a crucial development as it placed pressure on CPSU members who opposed reforms.

### Dissidents

Treatment of dissidents by the government changed as well. Gorbachev personally telephoned Andrei Sakharov (see page 103) in 1986 to invite him back to Moscow as a tangible demonstration of *glasnost*. No doubt this helped Gorbachev to legitimize his reforms, but Sakharov and other dissidents took him at his word. Sakharov joined the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 and supported a multi-party system in the USSR.

### The Orthodox Church

The relaxation of censorship also benefited the Russian Orthodox Church. Although the Russian Orthodox Church had been marginalized and made illegal in the atheist, communist state, it had managed to survive by keeping a low profile, maintaining three seminaries and a few convents and monasteries. In 1988, Gorbachev met publicly with the **Patriarch** to co-opt another segment of Soviet society to support his reforms. Nevertheless, the Church continued to be regulated by the Council for Religious Affairs and monitored by the KGB. The thaw, however, did lead to a revival of religion and Soviet citizens began to attend services, marry in churches and baptize their children. Religious texts could now be sold and purchased openly.

**KEY TERM**

**Patriarch** The head of the Russian Orthodox Church.

**Nicolai Bukharin** A prominent Politburo member in the 1920s who supported Lenin's NEP and was executed in 1938 during one of Stalin's purges.

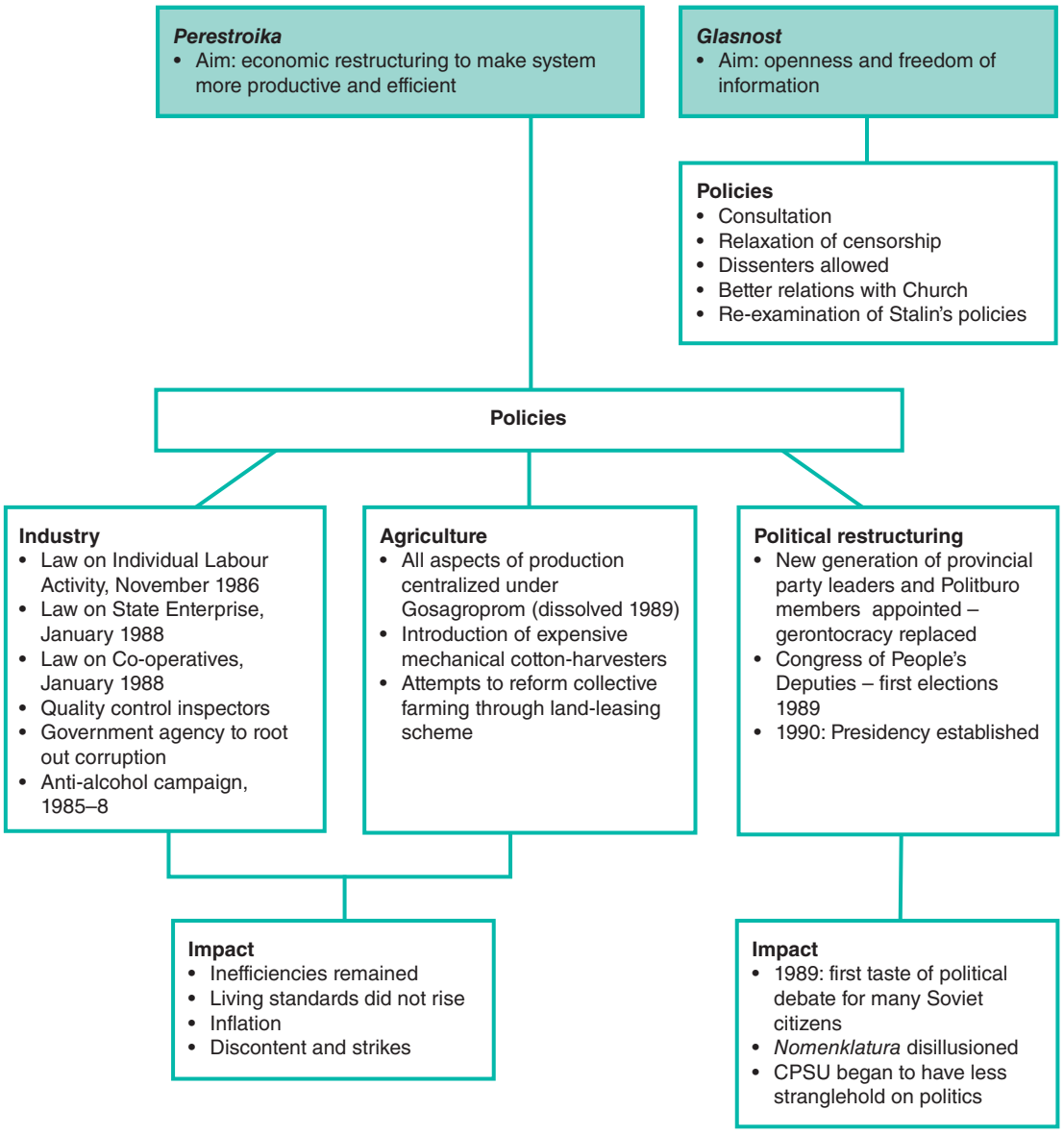
### *Re-examination of Stalin*

Gorbachev used this new, more open political culture to re-examine Stalinist policies. Stalinist crimes such as the massacre of Polish officers in 1940 at Katyn were admitted for the first time and victims of Stalinist purges, such as **Nicolai Bukharin**, were officially rehabilitated. Gorbachev had his aide, Yakovlev, publish articles about Bukharin as a positive Soviet leader and as a victim of Stalin's excesses. The message of *glasnost* and being held accountable was not lost on party members.

**SOURCE N**

**Soviet youth in Leningrad (St Petersburg) in 1987.**

? What image of Soviet society is conveyed by the photograph in Source N?




**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

Gorbachev's domestic reforms

# 2 The consequences of *perestroika* and *glasnost* for the USSR

***Key question:*** *What was the impact of* perestroika *and* glasnost *on the Soviet state?*

*Perestroika* and *glasnost* produced results different from those that were intended. There was an increase in nationalism and tension within the country's political and economic systems as well.

**Why did Gorbachev's policies lead to demands for secession in many Soviet republics?**

## Nationalism

Political reforms initiated by Gorbachev, long-standing historical grievances and greater freedom of expression as a result of *glasnost,* all acted as catalysts for the development of separatist political movements in many republics of the USSR.

**KEY TERM**

**SSR** An acronym for Soviet Socialist Republic, of which there were 15 within the USSR.

### Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic

The first major sign of tension was in Kazakh **SSR** in December 1986, when the party's First Secretary, Dinmukhamed Konayev, a Kazakh, was removed. He was replaced by an ethnic Russian, Gennady Kolbin, leading to demonstrations in the capital, Alma-Ata (now Almaty). The demonstration

The republics of the USSR

was ended with armed force, killing some people and injuring over 1200 others.

## Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic

In 1989, demonstrations by Georgian nationalists were suppressed by state security forces, killing at least 19 people. Hundreds more were injured. Many in Georgia, including many communists, began to believe it would be better to be independent than remain part of the USSR.

**SOURCE O**

**Excerpt from *The Gorbachev Factor* by Archie Brown, published by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1996, page 265. Brown is Professor Emeritus of Politics at Oxford University, UK, and an expert in Russian and Eurasian Studies.**

*The massacre of the young demonstrators outraged public opinion in Georgia and gave an enormous stimulus to the movement for complete independence from the Soviet Union.*

*… The events of Tbilisi of April 1989 thus demonstrated that the harsh use of force could, in the new climate of raised expectations and aroused civic courage, produce the opposite effect from that intended by the Soviet authorities. They also were to become a prime example of misinformation, whether deliberate or through ignorance, on the part of Gorbachev's enemies at home and abroad who held him responsible for the massacre in the Georgian capital. In fact [according to the journalist Roxburgh], Gorbachev 'had categorically stated that the situation in Tbilisi must be resolved by political means and through dialogue'.*

What does Source O reveal about the consequences of the Tbilisi massacre? ?

## Others

Smaller ethnic groups, such as **Crimean Tatars** and **Chechens**, began to push for more freedom, including the end to policies which required them to speak Russian to advance in government positions and in education. There was also violence between groups over territory, as demonstrated in clashes in 1988 between Azeris and Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region that led to at least 30 deaths. Tensions and occasional violence erupted between Ossetians, Georgians, Ingush, Abkhazians and others in the Caucasus Mountains region over disputed territory and perceived past injustices.

## The Baltic republics

The strongest nationalist movements were to emerge in the Baltic republics of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. Here, there were long-standing nationalist grievances concerning the incorporation of these republics into the USSR by Stalin against their will in 1940, after a brief period of independence after the First World War. By the late 1980s, groups such as the **Sąjūdis** movement in Lithuania began to move beyond their initial stance of pressing for faster implementation of *perestroika* and started to question whether the incorporation of the republics into the USSR was legal to begin with, given that Stalin had later repudiated the **Nazi–Soviet Pact**.

**KEY TERM**

**Crimean Tatars** Turkish-speaking Muslim peoples of the Crimea, located on the north coast of the Black Sea.

**Chechens** Chechen-speaking Muslim peoples indigenous to the Northern Caucasus, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.

**Sąjūdis** Political reform movement in favour of sovereignty and independence for Lithuania formed in 1988.

**Nazi–Soviet Pact** Non-aggression pact signed between Germany and the USSR in August 1939 that included a secret protocol assigning the independent states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the Soviet sphere of influence.

The political situation was made even more combustible by the fact that all non-Russian republics of the USSR, including the Baltic republics, contained Russian minorities. These were often members of the *nomenklatura* or the military, who fiercely opposed attempts to alter the political *status quo*. Overall, up to 70 million Soviet citizens lived in republics in which they had not been born. In particular, ethnic Russians made up 34 per cent of the population of Latvia and 30 per cent of the population of Estonia.

### *The secession of the Baltic republics*

In 1988, the Estonian government announced its right to veto all legislation passed by the Soviet government and to seize all Soviet property in the republic. Lithuania and Latvia soon followed suit.

In Moscow, the Inter-Regional Group that had formed in the Congress of People's Deputies encouraged nationalist movements and its Baltic representatives in seeking redress for the Nazi–Soviet Pact. Gorbachev approved an investigation into the terms of the Nazi–Soviet Pact.

In 1989, mass demonstrations took place and in August, one million demonstrators formed a 600-kilometre long human chain stretching from Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, through Riga, capital of Latvia, and then to Tallinn, capital of Estonia. The purpose of this demonstration was to symbolically denounce the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi–Soviet Pact. The investigative commission admitted for the first time that the secret protocols existed and criticized the pact.

By this stage, nationalists were led by large movements, such as the Sąjūdis in Lithuania that had 180,000 members. In October, in another symbolic act, a faction of the Lithuanian Communist Party formally declared that it was breaking away from the rest of the CPSU. With Lithuanian communists and the Sąjūdis both now supporting full independence, the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet pushed for independence. In March 1990, Lithuania declared its secession from the USSR, which was technically legal under the terms of the 1977 constitution. Latvia and Estonia soon followed suit and announced a transition period towards full independence. The USSR reacted by imposing an economic blockade on the newly independent states along with minor military operations that eventually were called off. Having failed to contain nationalism in the Baltic republics, the political and constitutional unity of the USSR now appeared to be increasingly fragile. Republics in other parts of the USSR also began to assert their right to political sovereignty.

**What economic problems did the USSR have by 1989 and how were they addressed?**

## Crisis in the economy

By 1989, Gorbachev and his advisers were unsure how to revitalize the ailing Soviet economy, while retaining key features of the centralized economy. Plans were put forward by academics and reformers to introduce much greater free-market reforms, including changing prices, control of monopolies, the formation of a central bank and laws governing foreign investment.

**SOURCE P**

**A table of the economic development of the USSR: the official data and G.I. Khanin's assessment from *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History, Volume 2, 1939–1991* by Edward Acton and Tom Stableford, published by the University of Exeter Press, Exeter, UK, 2007, page 389. Professor Acton of the University of East Anglia, UK, and Assistant Librarian Stableford at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, compiled documents from newly available archival material on the former USSR. Their purpose was to provide non-Russian speakers with documents from the Cold War USSR. This table is from the political journal of the Central Committee of the CPSU, *Kommunist*, official sources and *Dinamika*, an economic journal edited by Girsh I. Khanin, a Soviet economist.**

| | | Average annual rates 1971–90 (%) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Average annual indices | Source | 1971–5 | 1976–80 | 1981–5 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 |
| National income growth rates | State Statistical Committee | 5.7 | 4.2 | 3.5 | 2.3 | 1.6 | 4.4 | 2.5 | –4.0 |
| | G.I. Khanin | 3.2 | 1.0 | 0.6 | 1.3 | 0.7 | 0.3 | –4.3 | –9.0 |
| Labour productivity growth rates | State Statistical Committee | 4.6 | 3.4 | 3.0 | 2.1 | 1.6 | 4.8 | 2.2 | –3.0 |
| | G.I. Khanin | 1.9 | 0.2 | 0 | 1.2 | 0.8 | 1.3 | –3.95 | –8.0 |

What does Source P suggest about the trend of Soviet growth and labour productivity rates from 1971 to 1990? ?

In 1990, Gorbachev, despite the opposition of conservative ministers and members of the Supreme Soviet, instituted a dramatic shift to a full market economy with the 500 Day Programme. It involved selling off state enterprises to investors and dissolving collective farms. Control over economic policy was also to be devolved to the republics of the USSR. It was envisaged that there would be a fully functioning market economy within 500 days of the implementation of these reforms so that the state would no longer control prices. The radicalism of the plan may reflect Gorbachev's sense of political desperation by this stage and the depth of the economic crisis faced by the USSR.

Given the dire situation of the economy, Gorbachev proceeded with his economic reforms. However, he now lacked the political support to make such a radical plan work and the Soviet population, 25 per cent of whom were living in poverty, were unwilling to give the plan the time that it needed to improve citizens' standard of living. In addition, the USSR lacked a capitalist culture needed to make such reforms work quickly.

Ultimately, the economic crisis created a sense of political crisis. By 1990, it was clear that the general population was turning against Gorbachev and thousands marched through Moscow on May Day demanding his replacement.

**Why was there a coup against Gorbachev in 1991?**

## Political crisis

By mid-1990, the Berlin Wall had been breached, the Soviet control of eastern Europe was ending (see Chapter 7) and several republics within the USSR were on the verge of outright independence. These events were seen by many conservative members of the *nomenklatura* as almost akin to a political betrayal on the part of Gorbachev.

In 1990, Gorbachev amended **Article 6** of the Soviet constitution and ended the political monopoly of the CPSU. This was hailed by reformers as a liberalizing measure, ushering in genuine democracy for the first time. However, for reactionaries, it was regarded as yet another betrayal of the old Soviet order. With other political parties, such as Boris Yeltsin's **Democratic Russia**, now permitted and winning widespread support, the political dominance of the CPSU was under great threat. The final trigger for a coup against Gorbachev was a new constitutional treaty in August 1991, which gave the various Soviet republics more autonomy. A group of conspirators began to emerge.

**KEY TERM**

**Article 6** The 1977 Soviet constitution article that guaranteed the monopoly of the CPSU as the only ruling party in the USSR.

**Democratic Russia** A pro-Yeltsin political coalition that began to challenge the political monopoly of the CPSU from 1990 onwards.

### The events of the 1991 coup

On 18 August 1991, a self-styled State Committee for the Emergency Situation led by the Vice-President Gennadii Ianev, the Interior Minister Boris Pugo, and the head of the KGB Vladimir Kruichkov, announced that Gorbachev was ill; he was actually under house arrest in his villa on the Black Sea. A state of emergency was declared and Red Army units were brought in to Moscow to seize control of key buildings such as the Russian Supreme Soviet building, known as the White House.

Thousands of civilians surrounded the White House building, led by Boris Yeltsin, to prevent the coup's success. Army units refused to attack the White House as it would mean major civilian casualties and the coup collapsed. Gorbachev returned to Moscow on 22 August, but his political authority had suffered a near fatal blow.

**How did the USSR finally come to an end in 1991?**

## The collapse of the USSR

In the aftermath of the coup, Gorbachev was a weakened figure. In a speech to the Russian Supreme Soviet on 23 August, his attempts to defend the CPSU met with hostility. In a very public humiliation, Yeltsin insisted that Gorbachev read aloud the minutes of the USSR Cabinet of Ministers that revealed that most of its members had supported the coup. Gorbachev's hopes of reviving his constitutional treaty and his hopes that his plan for a loose Union of Sovereign States would resolve the crisis of nationalism and independence of member republics were doomed to failure. Gorbachev also found that the republics were increasingly unenthusiastic about sharing any political power at all with the central government. The Baltic republics and Ukraine wanted full independence and when US President George Bush, as

well as Yeltsin, in his new capacity as President of the Russian Soviet Federative Social Republic (RSFSR), recognized them as sovereign states, only the ruthless application of force could have kept these republics within the USSR.

As the Baltic states declared complete independence in September, Gorbachev officially recognized them. Ukraine followed after a referendum demonstrated that 90 per cent of the population wanted independence. In the RSFSR, the largest part of the USSR, Yeltsin was now more powerful than Gorbachev, as were Leonid Kravchuk in Ukraine and Stanislav Shushkevich in Belarus. Following a meeting of the three leaders, a joint statement, known as the Minsk Declaration, was issued in December 1991 stating that the USSR ceased to exist. In its place, a loose grouping of republics known as the **Commonwealth of Independent States** (CIS) was created, destroying what remained of Gorbachev's political power and any lingering hopes that he had of a constitutional treaty to preserve the USSR. On 25 December 1991, all the republics, except Georgia, joined the CIS. Gorbachev announced his resignation from the defunct post of President of the USSR.

**KEY TERM**

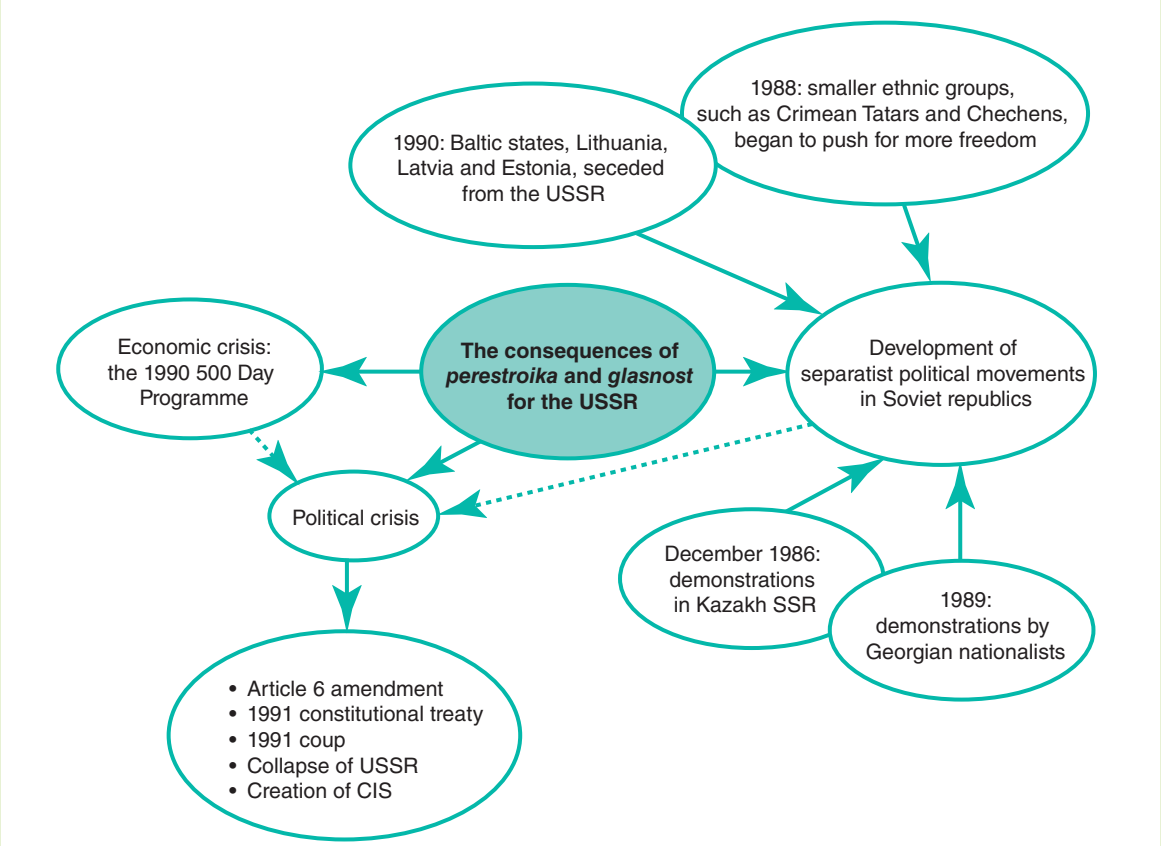
**Commonwealth of Independent States**
A loose association of Soviet republics formed in December 1991 as a successor to the USSR. It differed from the USSR by asserting that all member states were fully sovereign and independent.

**SOURCE Q**

**Excerpt from *Memoirs* by Mikhail Gorbachev, published by Doubleday, New York, USA, 1995, pages xxiv–xxv.**

*One of the most powerful states in the world, the Soviet Union, collapsed before our very eyes. The people seemed almost to welcome the event! The Supreme Soviets of the Republics rejected the Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States, drafted by the USSR State Council under the guidance of the country's President … The intelligentsia remained silent. The media were thrown into disarray. My appeals to the deputies of the Supreme Soviet and to the people, my warning that the disintegration of the Soviet Union was fraught with dire consequences, went unheeded – society was bewildered and unable to appraise the crisis. Destructive forces in the country exploited the confusion, usurping the people's right to decide their own future. It was what I had feared most of all … Time is a merciless judge … I am still firmly convinced that the reforms conceived and initiated in 1985 were generated by historic necessity. Once the period of trials and tribulations is over, our countrymen will learn to make proper use of the main achievements of* perestroika *– liberty, democracy and civil rights.*

According to Source Q, what was the result of the dissolution of the USSR? ?




**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

The consequences of *perestroika* and *glasnost* for the USSR

## 3 Key debate

***Key question:*** *To what extent did Gorbachev precipitate the USSR's downfall?*

### Gorbachev's weaknesses

For historians such as John Darwin, Gorbachev's policies were instrumental in the decline and fall of the USSR. He argues that *glasnost* and *perestroika* had the effect of weakening the grip of the party bureaucracy on the economy and that this destabilized the political system. The process of decline and fall was therefore more rapid in the case of USSR than in any major empire of the past 500 years. Certainly, it was the case that very few

analysts at the time predicted that a gifted politician such as Gorbachev would be the last leader of the USSR.

## Character flaws

Historian Martin McCauley presents an interpretation of Gorbachev's political skills. He was described as being unable to delegate effectively. Historian David R. Marples supports this view, explaining how Gorbachev failed to build a working relationship with Boris Yeltsin, whose charismatic populism could have been an important political tool for Gorbachev, had they remained allies. Gorbachev was also something of a political risk taker, which led him to attempt too much political and economic change on too broad a front.

**SOURCE R**

**Excerpt from *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* by Eric Hobsbawm, published by Michael Joseph, London, 1994, pages 490–1. Hobsbawm was a well-known British Marxist historian.**

*The failure of* perestroika *and the consequent rejection of Gorbachev by the citizenry were increasingly obvious, though not appreciated in the West, where his popularity remained justifiably high … He was and will go down in history as a tragic figure, a communist 'Tsar-Liberator' … who destroyed what he wanted to reform and was destroyed in the process. Charming, sincere, intelligent and genuinely moved by the ideals of a communism which he saw corrupted since the rise of Stalin, Gorbachev was, paradoxically, too much of an organization man for the hurly-burly of democratic politics he created; too much of a committee man for decisive action; too remote from the experiences of urban and industrial Russia which he had never managed, to have the old party boss's sense of grass-root realities. His trouble was not so much that he had no effective strategy for reforming the economy – nobody had even after his fall – as that he was remote from the everyday experience of his country.*

According to Source R, what were Gorbachev's major failings as leader of the USSR? ?

## Failure to control the RSFSR

Gorbachev had difficulties in controlling the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), especially after Yeltsin became Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet. Some authors have remarked on the strength and dominance of this one republic.

**SOURCE S**

**Excerpt from *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union* by Ofira Seliktar, published by M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, USA, 2004, page 173. Seliktar is an Israeli Political Scientist who teaches at Gratz College, PA, USA.**

*While the dramatic events in the republics were front page, the real … change … was taking place in Russia. As already noted,* glasnost *initiated the first comprehensive discussion on the costs and benefits of maintaining an internal*

According to Source S, why did some in Russia argue that it should be an independent state? ?

*empire. A growing number of academics and journalists argued that Russia, which held 92 per cent of oil reserves, 85 per cent of coal reserves, and was the only producer of diamonds, platinum and other rare metals, had no need for the republics. Indeed, as a group of scholars pointed out, the Union … took away from Russia its vast resources.*

### Economic failings

One of the strongest charges made against Gorbachev was that he missed opportunities to provide the economic cures for the Soviet economy as a whole. This point was made by a future Prime Minister of Russia, Yegor Gaidar, who stated in a *Pravda* article that *perestroika* was doomed to failure from the moment in 1985 that Gorbachev allowed a 10 billion rouble gap in public finances to open – an economic consequence of falling tax revenues as a result of the anti-alcohol campaign (see page 138). Historian Robert Service argues that key aspects of *perestroika* simply did not work and therefore Gorbachev's promises of economic rejuvenation were not realized. Martin McCauley's biography of Gorbachev supports this analysis. He argues that Gorbachev had little understanding of market economics and that *perestroika* simply made pre-existing systemic problems worse. A further charge against Gorbachev is that he did not prioritize the economic aspects of *perestroika* until it was too late and therefore an opportunity for an orderly transition to capitalism, as happened in the People's Republic of China, was missed.

## Gorbachev's strengths

On the other hand, to argue that Gorbachev was totally culpable for the downfall of the USSR runs the risk of ignoring the great political skill that he displayed in maintaining some semblance of political stability in the late 1980s. Both Robert Service and Martin McCauley persuasively argue that without Gorbachev's reformist policies, which made a sustained military crackdown against nationalism in the republics unthinkable, the USSR may have been plunged into a civil war. David R. Marples corroborates this point, arguing that faced with multiple crises between 1985 and 1991, Gorbachev acted with admirable self-control, preventing the fractious politics of the USSR from descending into conflict. Therefore, it could be argued that *glasnost* might not have succeeded in keeping the USSR together, but it ensured an orderly transition of power, even if not planned. Furthermore, it could be argued that by 1985, saving the USSR was a virtually impossible task, even for a leader of Gorbachev's ability.

**SOURCE T**

**Excerpt from *The Gorbachev Factor* by Archie Brown, published by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1996, pages 317–18. Brown is Professor Emeritus of Politics at Oxford University, UK, and an expert in Russian and Eurasian studies.**

*Taking all his mistakes and some undoubted failures into account – along, however, with the almost insuperable obstacles he had to overcome – Gorbachev had strong claims to be regarded as one of the greatest reformers in Russian history … He went along with, encouraged and (in important respects) initiated fundamental rethinking about politics – radically new thinking in the Soviet context about the political and economic system he inherited and about better alternatives. He presided over and facilitated the introduction of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of association, religious freedom and freedom of movement and left Russia a freer* country *than it had been in its long history.*

According to Source T, what were the most important aspects of Gorbachev's legacy? ?

Russian historians have also contributed to the debate – see Source U.

**SOURCE U**

**Excerpt from *Post-Soviet Russia: A Journey Through the Yeltsin Era* by Roy Medvedev, published by Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 2000, pages 3 and 46. Medvedev, a Russian dissident historian during the Brezhnev era, was elected to the Congress of People's Deputies in the Gorbachev era.**

*Not until the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev did the Soviet Union make a decisive turn toward democratization. The totalitarian political censorship of the press was eliminated in 1987 with the advent of* glasnost, *and in 1989 a new electoral system brought with it a general parliament (the Congress of People's Deputies) and a multiparty system …*

*The failure of Gorbachev's reforms from 1985 to 1990 caused great discontent and disillusion among the people. The reformers themselves were dismayed. Some of them were inclined to abandon the framework of socialism, within which the reforms had remained. Valentin Pavlov, who replaced Nikolai Rhyzkov as premier, admitted later that by 1990 he was firmly convinced that only a bourgeois-democratic revolution could save Russia.*

According to Source U, what was the effect of the failure of Gorbachev's reforms? ?

## Conclusion

There is still a lively historiographical debate about the extent to which Gorbachev's policies directly caused the final collapse of the USSR or merely failed to turn the USSR away from the path of decline it had started on well before 1985. Ultimately, most historians agree with Hobsbawm that it was the scale of the domestic problems facing Gorbachev, and his failure to reconcile *glasnost* with the nationalism in the various republics that eventually led to the collapse of central authority and, with it, the state: an outcome which Gorbachev had certainly not sought or intended in 1985.

**TOK**

Scholars have approached the study of history by focusing on the deeds of 'great men'. How valid is this approach and does it work for the study of the USSR from 1985? (History, Perception, and Reason.)

## Chapter summary

**Gorbachev's reforms and the consequences for the Soviet state**

Gorbachev faced a huge array of social, political and economic challenges when he became the General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985. The USSR was in a state of undoubted crisis. Cautiously at first, and then more rapidly following the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, Gorbachev embarked on a programme of radical reform. His initial intention was not to undermine the Marxist–Leninist system. However, the *perestroika* reforms liberalized the economy and destroyed the power of the gerontocracy that had dominated Soviet politics. It paved the way for political reform and multi-candidate elections to the Congress of People's Deputies, which eventually undermined the very system that Gorbachev tried to save.

With censorship ending, thanks to Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, dissidents, such as Sakharov, were able to speak out much more freely. A new political culture was created in which it became legitimate to challenge the authority of the CPSU. Boris Yeltsin embraced this new political culture and was elected Chairman of the RSFSR. He was much more willing than Gorbachev to contemplate the dissolution of the USSR, while Gorbachev remained convinced that a new constitutional treaty could save it.

The gravity of the economic crisis by 1990, and the failure of the 500 Day Programme, coupled with the emergence of vigorous nationalist movements in the Baltic republics in particular, doomed Gorbachev's hopes of preserving the USSR. By 1991, Gorbachev's policies had so alienated the *nomenklatura* that a coup was launched against him by CPSU hard-liners. This was defeated thanks to the ambivalence of the armed forces and the active opposition of Yeltsin and others in Moscow. From this point onwards, Gorbachev's political power was fatally weakened and he now lacked the authority to hold the USSR together. Republics, such as Ukraine, were now determined to push for full independence. Seeing support for his proposals ebb away in many of the republics, including Russia, Gorbachev accepted the inevitable and the USSR came to an end in December 1991.

## Examination advice

### Paper 1 Question 4: how to integrate sources and write a good essay

Question 4 is always an essay question. It requires you to write what you know while integrating the sources provided. The sources are there to support your own knowledge. Therefore, it is important that you prepare yourselves for this type of question by knowing and understanding the history of communism in crisis between 1976 and 1989 that we have presented in this book.

Question 4 is always worth 8 marks. This means it is worth about one-third of the overall mark possible. We suggest that you spend 30–35 minutes answering this question, using the first five to eight minutes of this time to summarize the sources and outline your response.

## How to answer

### *Summarize the sources and outline your essay*

It is best to first list and summarize your sources to focus your thoughts. This should be done in about five minutes and should be in the form of short bullet points. Once you have summarized the sources, briefly outline your essay's structure. This outline should include some sort of introduction to your essay and a concluding answer to the question. Write your outline down on your examination paper, but put a single line through these pre-writing notes once your essay is finished.

### *Writing the essay*

When you write your essay make sure you follow your outline and use *all* the sources. This should take the remainder of your time, which should be at least 25 minutes.

You need to start with a good introduction to focus your essay and which defines anything that might be open to interpretation. Your introduction should conclude with a definite answer to the question that you will proceed to support in the coming paragraphs. The introduction should serve to focus your essay. Usually, you can introduce one or more of your sources into the introduction to support what you are going to cover.

All sources must be used at least once, but use them multiple times if they will help your essay. Remember the sources should support your essay.

If you write something that you want the examiner to ignore, draw a single line through this and move on. Finally, do not just list the five sources and a couple of bullet points under each in a sort of preamble to a real essay. This is sketchy and will not be credited fully. Sources should be integrated and quoted to support your essay.

Your concluding paragraph should clearly answer the essay question, summarizing your main arguments.

### *Example*

This question uses Sources A, B, D, E and H, found in this chapter:

**Using these sources and your own knowledge, explain the challenges to reform that Gorbachev faced. (8 marks)**

**Source A:** see page 136
**Source B:** see page 137
**Source D:** see page 138
**Source E:** see page 139
**Source H:** see page 142

First, very briefly summarize the sources just for your own information in five minutes or less.

**Source A:** Gorbachev tries to convince the CPSU Central Committee reassuring them that he follows Lenin's path and socialism will be upheld.
**Source B:** Photo of Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev, friendly, energetic.
**Source D:** Dealing with bureaucracy in promoting anti-alcohol campaign.
**Source E:** Failings in agriculture and food production and being able to report it and make speeches about it openly.
**Source H:** Influential Politburo member Ligachev's scathing criticism of applying market economy reforms.

Second, briefly outline in bullet points the main parts of your essay in five minutes or less.

**Introduction**

- Challenges Gorbachev faced were from centralized socialist bureaucracy:
  - insistence on following socialism as a system
  - reforms urgently needed in consumer products and food
  - deep-seated reaction against reform in the Politburo.

**Paragraph 2:** Insistence on following socialism as a system.

- Gorbachev convinced that socialism and the CPSU was the government for the USSR:
  - but realized reform urgent.
- Convincing the politburo of reforms:
  - laws, anti-alcohol campaign
  - reiterating commitment to communism.

**Paragraph 3:** Reforms urgently needed in consumer products and food.

- Agriculture problems:
  - production, distribution.
- Management:
  - corruption in collectivized system
  - maintaining positions of power.
- Failures in agriculture:
  - food production
  - waste from central planning: Gosagroprom.

**Paragraph 4:** Deep-seated reaction against reform in the Politburo.
- Ligachev.
- Ryzhkov.
- Seeking reform-minded allies:
  - Yeltsin.

**Conclusion:** Centralized socialist bureaucracy had great impact, great importance for Gorbachev as a challenge to his reforms, but also:
- Gorbachev's insistence on following socialism as a system.
- Consumer products and food shortages.

Third, write an answer to the question.

When Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1985, he faced many political and economic problems. He realized reforms were needed in order to surmount them, but Gorbachev faced serious challenges from the centralized socialist bureaucracy and the deep-seated reaction against reform in the Politburo. He set about meeting these challenges by insisting on following socialism as a system, yet pushing through the reforms that were urgently needed. Gorbachev's greatest challenge was striking a balance between pushing reform and convincing the centralized bureaucracy to follow through with them.

The introduction clearly indicates that the centralized socialist bureaucracy posed great challenges for Gorbachev and proposes areas that will be explored in the essay.

Gorbachev believed in the strength of the CPSU and communism as a way of governing the USSR, but recognized that reform was needed for economic and political development. In Source A he soothes the Central Committee of the CPSU by saying that he will 'follow this Leninist tradition unswervingly, enriching and developing our Party policy and our general line for social improvement under advanced socialism'. He also used vague terminology in Source A, to tone down the reforms: 'tightening up organization and discipline all around and fundamentally improving the way we do things'. His outgoing, energetic personality helped, as shown in Source B, where he and his wife Raisa enthusiastically talk to workers. Soon Gorbachev convinced enough key members of the Politburo to support him. One such reform was the Law on Co-operatives in January 1988. This legalized co-operatives and some private enterprises. However, state ownership

All five sources are utilized in the essay and explicitly mentioned. Some sources are quoted, which demonstrates the importance of particular sources in making a historical argument.

remained predominant. Another campaign was against alcohol, but in Source D we see that it failed because 'the recommendations got lost in the bureaucratic labyrinths of the administrative-command system'.

The essay makes three strong arguments in three tightly focused paragraphs. Each paragraph focuses on a different topic relating to the challenges faced by Gorbachev.

In the agricultural sector, Gorbachev realized great reforms were needed to face the challenges of consumer and food shortages. To improve the latter, he had production centralized under Gosagroprom, the State Committee for the Agro-Industrial Complex, supposedly to streamline planning. Source E shows that the problems in the agricultural sector were not solved, but they were certainly reported more in the press, such as when a '**Pravda** journalist found tubercular cattle kept in Kazakhstani herds'. Gorbachev was aware of the problems of central planning, as Source E reports: 'the chief of all bureaucrats, speaking ... about the failure of the Soviet Union's 50,000 state and collective farms, its rudimentary food processing'. In 1989, Gorbachev dissolved Gosagroprom, and allowed a mix of market and socialist agribusiness. Gorbachev did try and reform the system of collective farming so that peasants could lease land from the **kolkhoz**, or collective, to farm. But farm managers discouraged peasants from accepting this offer as it threatened their positions. Managers controlled farm equipment and supplies and sometimes allowed farm equipment to go to waste, like 'new irrigation pumps rusting out-of-doors in an obscure storage yard', as described in Source E.

To enact major economic reform meant major political reform was necessary and the Politburo, as the strongest ruling entity of the CPSU, needed to be convinced by Gorbachev, or changed. Gorbachev realized that if his economic reforms were to succeed, he would need to break the power of conservatives in the party. He promoted reform-minded politicians who would support his policies, discharging 39 government ministers in his first year in power. Politburo members who opposed reform were replaced. Yegor Ligachev, organization and agriculture specialist, and Nikolai Ryzhkov, an industrial specialist, became key members of the Politburo, as they had supported Gorbachev for General Secretary. He supported active reformers like Boris Yeltsin. Gorbachev also encouraged political participation by young people and women at the local level of the party and increased ethnic diversity at the highest levels of the CPSU. However, he was

not always supported by the new appointments. Source H shows that Ligachev strongly opposed Gorbachev's economic reforms by stating that a 'model of a market based on private ownership is fundamentally unacceptable to a socialist system'. Ryzhkov also supported this view and insisted that Gorbachev's reforms should not go beyond the framework of socialism. In Source H, Ligachev also insisted that 'the Party is not going to renounce its leading role'. His support of Yeltsin also turned sour when Yeltsin proposed removing General Secretary privileges. This, and Yeltsin's mounting political enmity with Ligachev, resulted in Yeltsin's removal from the Politburo in 1987. This has been called one of Gorbachev's major political mistakes.

Gorbachev faced serious challenges to reform when he became General Secretary in the USSR. The centralized socialist bureaucracy had great importance in challenging his reforms, by its reluctance to give up the power to control the economic and political aspects of running the USSR. This can be seen in the Politburo's adherence to party predominance. In addition, Gorbachev's insistence on following socialism as a system prevented him from going beyond vague terms and campaigns that did not go far enough to solve Soviet problems, like the enterprise laws and anti-alcohol campaign. Food shortages continued and Gosagroprom had to be dissolved after it failed. Ultimately, the centralized socialist bureaucracy was more than Gorbachev could face and he resigned in 1991. The USSR came to an end.

The conclusion clearly indicates that the centralized socialist bureaucracy had great importance in challenging Gorbachev's reforms.

This essay utilizes all the sources in an explicit and appropriate manner. The essay also goes beyond the sources to indicate that the student also used their own knowledge and that this knowledge was correct. The response to the question is complex, but balanced in that it demonstrates that Gorbachev faced great challenges.

# Examination practice

Below are some exam-style questions for you to practise. Paper 1 exams are one hour long, not including five minutes of reading time at the exam's start when only reading is permitted. You may wish to only practise specific questions, and if this is the case, allow the following amounts of time per question:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Question 1:** | 5 minutes |
| **Question 2:** | 10 minutes |
| **Question 3:** | 10 minutes |
| **Question 4:** | 35 minutes |

These questions relate to Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* and their impact on the USSR. The sources used are found within this chapter on the following pages:

- Source B (page 137)
- Source C (page 138)
- Source H (page 142)
- Source M (page 147)
- Source Q (page 155)
- Source R (page 157)

**1 a)** What, according to Source B, were the qualities which marked Gorbachev out as an effective leader? *(3 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 41.)

**b)** What can be inferred from Source C about the aims of Gorbachev in implementing *glasnost* and *perestroika*? *(2 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 37.)

**2** Compare and contrast the views expressed in Sources H and Q about the impact of Gorbachev's reforms. *(6 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 91.)

**3** With reference to their origin and purpose, discuss the value and limitations of Source M and Source R for historians studying the impact of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. *(6 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 130.)

**4** Using these sources (Sources C, H, Q, M, R) and your own knowledge, analyse the positive and negative consequences of the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* on the USSR. *(8 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 160.)

# Activities

**1** 'Hot seating' is where a member of the class adopts the persona of a historical personality and answers questions posed by other students. Research the career of Gorbachev between 1985 and 1991 and write a list of questions to ask Gorbachev at the following stages of his career: 1985, 1989 and 1991. In your questioning, try to ascertain how and why Gorbachev took the decisions that he did. Alternatively, you could take on the role of Gorbachev and give historically valid answers to the questions posed. One member of the class can take on the role of 'historian' and deliver a final judgement on the accuracy of the answers.

**2** To what extent can Gorbachev's political career be regarded as a study in political failure? Debate this question in class. If working on your own, write two paragraphs: one supporting the statement and the other challenging it. Do you find that any events or pieces of evidence can be interpreted in more than one way?

**3** Look back through this chapter and select the source that you think comes closest to providing a definitive judgement of Gorbachev. Explain why you agree with the author's judgement, making use of your own knowledge, to substantiate your points.

CHAPTER 7

# The collapse of Soviet influence in eastern Europe

**This chapter analyses the reasons for the collapse of Soviet influence in eastern Europe in the late 1980s, and looks in depth at the events in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. It also examines the impact of events in eastern Europe on superpower relations and the end of the Cold War. You need to consider the following questions throughout this chapter:**

- Why and to what extent did Gorbachev transform Soviet relations with the USA from 1985 onwards?
- What were the causes and consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall?
- What were the causes and consequences of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia?
- What were the causes and consequences of the collapse of communism in Poland?
- Why did communist rule in eastern Europe collapse at the end of the 1980s?

## 1 Soviet foreign policy and superpower relations 1985–9

*Key question: Why and to what extent did Gorbachev transform Soviet relations with the USA from 1985 onwards?*

Gorbachev was willing to engage in diplomacy with the USA in a manner that few of his predecessors would have been willing to contemplate. Between 1985 and 1991, he held nine summit talks with US Presidents Reagan and Bush. Gorbachev believed that confrontation between capitalism and communism was not inevitable and that the two systems could benefit each other. He was also genuinely interested in limiting nuclear weapons; in 1987 he addressed a forum in Moscow entitled 'For a Nuclear Free World, for the Survival of Mankind' to this end.

This was a marked change since in the early 1980s, when both the USA and USSR spent enormous and growing sums on military expenses. The US Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) or **Star Wars**, as it came to be known, also raised the prospect of an even more expensive nuclear arms race. This encouraged Gorbachev to be even more determined to reduce military expense as a way to fund his domestic reforms.

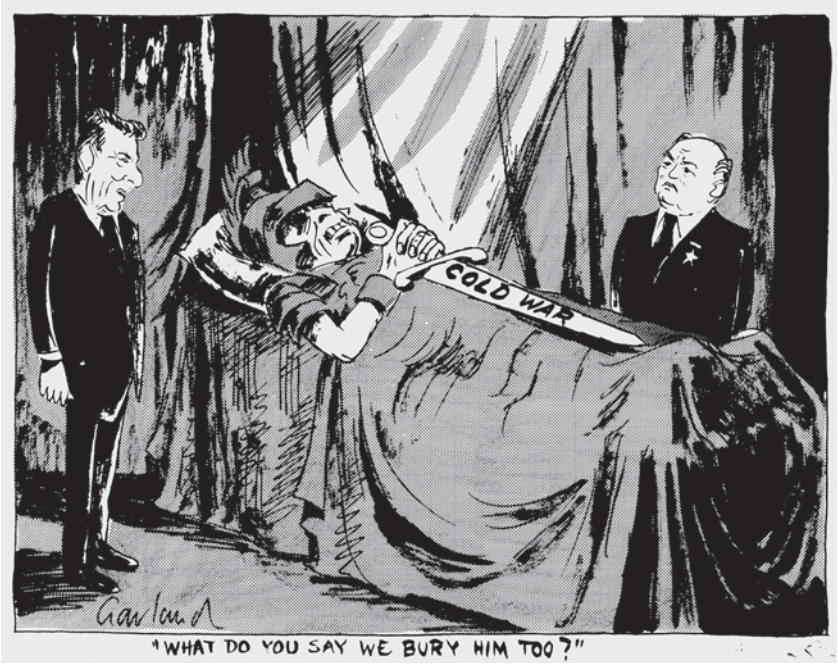
**KEY TERM**

**Star Wars** Colloquial term used to refer to President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative, designed to set up a missile defence shield to protect against Soviet nuclear attack.

? What is the message conveyed by Source A?

**SOURCE A**

**A cartoon by Nicholas Garland which appeared in a British newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, 14 March 1985. It shows US President Reagan on the left of the bed and Gorbachev on the right. Garland is a British cartoonist who has worked for many major British publications. The *Daily Telegraph* is a daily British newspaper in publication since 1855, known for its conservative perspective.**




**How far was Gorbachev's foreign policy a break with the past?**

## Gorbachev's foreign policy

Gorbachev replaced long-time Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko with Eduard Shevardnadze, signalling that Gorbachev's policies would differ from those of previous Soviet leaders. It was assumed that Shevardnadze's appointment indicated that a new era of negotiations was at hand and he was soon appreciated and trusted by the two US Secretaries of State with whom he dealt, George Shultz and James Baker. Another important supporter of diplomatic engagement with the USA was Alexander Yakovlev, former Soviet ambassador to Canada and member of the Politburo responsible for international affairs; he was also one of Gorbachev's closest advisers. A new era of foreign policy was in the making.

A strong motivation for reducing or ending the arms race with the USA was to cut military expenditure in the USSR. Gorbachev urgently needed to allocate those resources to revitalize an ailing economy and improve the standard of living of Soviet citizens. In order to do this, the USSR had to reduce its arms and increase trade with the West.

**SOURCE B**

**Excerpt from *Memoirs* by Mikhail Gorbachev, published by Doubleday, New York, USA, 1995, page 171. In this extract, Gorbachev, as former Head of State, describes his rationale for a new foreign policy on becoming General Secretary.**

*On taking office as general secretary in 1985 I was immediately faced with an avalanche of problems. It was vital to change our relationship with the West, particularly the United States, and to bring the costly and dangerous arms race to an end. We needed to withdraw from the damaging and costly war in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union faced tremendous internal problems. The process of reform required new leadership and courage. Long-term problems needed to be addressed as soon as possible … A programme that would stop the country's slide toward crisis and prepare to meet the challenge of the future was urgently needed.*

According to Source B, what was Gorbachev's motivation for new foreign policies in the USSR? ?

## Germany and eastern Europe

At first, Gorbachev showed little sign of reducing Soviet global influence in general and in eastern Europe in particular. However, within two years he began to subtly signal that he was willing to contemplate changes to the European political order that had prevailed since 1945. For instance, when West German President Richard von Weizsäcker visited Moscow in July 1987, Gorbachev did not dismiss the prospect of **German reunification** categorically, as Gromyko had earlier, allowing that history would decide Germany's future.

**KEY TERM**

**German reunification**
The idea of reuniting East and West Germany into a single state.

In addition, Gorbachev seems to have decided at a fairly early stage that he would not be prepared to uphold the Brezhnev Doctrine (see page 107) in Warsaw Pact countries.

**SOURCE C**

**Excerpt from *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union* by Ofira Seliktar, published by M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, USA, 2004, pages 133–4. Seliktar is an Israeli political scientist. She teaches at Gratz College, PA, USA.**

*Perhaps the most painful area of revision was Soviet relations with its external empire in Eastern Europe. Following the decision to refrain from intervention in Poland [in 1981], the debate about the future of Moscow's East European satellites had intensified among the top leadership. During his first speech as general secretary, Gorbachev departed from the customary emphasis on 'socialist internationalism,' a code word for a homogeneous commitment to a Soviet-style economy on the part of the satellites. To Gorbachev, already concerned about the price of bailing out the inefficient East European economies, the potential cost of repressing the spreading unrest was too high to contemplate.*

According to Source C, why did Gorbachev revise Soviet policy regarding eastern Europe? ?

This decision was formally communicated to the leaders of Warsaw Pact countries at a COMECON summit in 1986, although it was not yet made

**KEY TERM**

**Sinatra Doctrine**
A reference to the song *My Way*, made popular by US singer Frank Sinatra in 1969. It meant that eastern European countries would be allowed more autonomy from the USSR as of 1986.

public. Eventually, this determination not to intervene in the internal politics of the Warsaw Pact came to be known as the **Sinatra Doctrine** – in essence, eastern European countries in the Warsaw Pact were to be allowed to do things *their way*. Gorbachev hoped that reforms to the communist system, similar to his own programme of *perestroika*, might be implemented by enthusiastic satellite states anxious to emulate the USSR. He also mistakenly assumed that reform movements in these states would not topple governments.

**SOURCE D**

**Excerpt from 'Continuity and change in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev' by Achin Vanaik from *Economic and Political Weekly*, published by Sameeksha Trust, Mumbai, India, Vol. 23, No. 11, 12 March 1988, pages 551–2. Vanaik teaches political science at the University of Delhi, Delhi, India. *Economic and Political Weekly* is a journal published in India since 1949 that features scholarly papers in the social sciences, with critical analysis.**

*The Soviet weak spot, however, is eastern Europe. Here again, it is Soviet security that is the key consideration. Gorbachev would not be opposed to east European versions of glasnost and perestroika. Indeed, to the discomfort of the conservative sections of the ruling bureaucracy in these countries he would encourage such developments. In this he is unlike his predecessors, and this can only be a positive and welcome development, with respect to the fact that greater pressures for political democratisation will be unleashed. But like his predecessors, Gorbachev will be opposed to any demands following in the wake of* détente *or* glasnost–perestroika *for withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact or which challenge the primacy, i.e., 'leading role' of the ruling Communist Parties.*

? According to Source D, what will be the effect of Gorbachev's policies in eastern Europe?

Gorbachev's foreign policy changes in eastern Europe would have an important effect on world events, superpower relations and the Cold War.

**How far was Gorbachev responsible for the thaw in superpower relations between 1985 and 1989?**

## Superpower relations

Gorbachev's attitude and personality became a great boon to superpower relations. In the hostile diplomatic environment of the mid-1980s, his open disposition contrasted with previous Soviet leadership, although he did not immediately depart from the military policies of his predecessors. At the end of 1985, the superpower leaders met and continued to do so several times in the next five years.

### The Geneva Summit 1985

Reagan and Gorbachev met for the first time at Geneva in November 1985. Gorbachev had prepared carefully, having created a negotiating position in consultation with the Politburo, the KGB, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Department of the Central Committee. He entered the talks with the key aim of getting an agreement that neither superpower would launch a nuclear first strike, but Reagan saw this as removing a powerful deterrent in the event of a Soviet invasion of western Europe.

Reagan went into the summit determined to make no concessions whatsoever on SDI. Gorbachev regarded this stance as provocative, since he believed that it ran the risk of creating a new arms race in space. Gorbachev was surprisingly honest with Reagan, telling him that the USSR was in no economic position to sustain a new arms race. By the end of the summit, a real rapport had developed between the two leaders, as well as a strong commitment to ease tensions and begin nuclear disarmament in earnest. The CPSU approved.

**SOURCE E**

**Excerpt from a report of the Central Committee Politburo from Moscow TASS in English, 25 November 1985, *Daily Report* (USSR), 26 November 1985 from *From Brezhnev to Gorbachev: Infighting in the Kremlin* by Baruch A. Hazan, published by Westview Press, Boulder, CO, USA, 1987, page 192. Hazan is a Bulgarian historian who teaches at the Institute of European Studies in Vienna, Austria.**

*The results of the talks in Geneva can have a positive effect on changing the political and psychological climate in present-day international relations and their improvement, and lessen the risk of outbreak of nuclear war. The meeting has marked the beginning of a dialogue with a view to achieve changes for the better in Soviet–American relations and in the whole world. … The Political Bureau of the CPSU Central Committee fully approved the work done by Mikhail Gorbachev.*

According to Source E, what would be effects of the Geneva Summit? ?

The Cold War was a long way from being over at this stage. Soviet troops had yet to be withdrawn from Afghanistan (see page 121) and Soviet influence in eastern Europe remained very much intact. The USA continued to maintain and support NATO and supported anti-communist organizations around the world, including *mujaheddin* rebels in Afghanistan.

## The Reykjavik Summit 1986

At the beginning of 1986, Gorbachev proposed that all nuclear weapons be eradicated by the year 2000. In April 1986, the Chernobyl disaster occurred (see page 147) and Gorbachev became more committed to ending any danger of nuclear war. He entered the Reykjavik Summit in October 1986, determined to have Reagan renounce SDI and nuclear weapons altogether. It was agreed in principle that all intermediate-range missiles would be withdrawn from Europe and that there would be a 50 per cent reduction in intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) numbers. In addition, an agreement to phase out nuclear weapons entirely was briefly considered by both sides.

The main difficulty was that Reagan was determined to keep SDI. On the other hand, Gorbachev favoured making all other agreements conditional on keeping to the terms of the 1972 **ABM Treaty**, which Gorbachev interpreted as meaning that SDI would remain a purely theoretical project. The end result was that, once again, no major diplomatic breakthrough occurred, but

**KEY TERM**

**ABM Treaty** An anti-ballistic missile treaty preventing the development of anti-missile defence systems, signed by the USA and the USSR in 1972.

**KEY TERM**

**Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty** A treaty that eliminated Soviet and US nuclear missiles with a range of between 500 and 5000 km.

**German question** During the Cold War, this term referred to issues emanating from the sovereignty and potential reunification of East and West Germany.

important groundwork had been done that would bear fruit in 1987, in the form of the **Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty** (INF Treaty) (see page 173).

**SOURCE F**

**Joined by their interpreter (centre), President Ronald Reagan (left) and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (right) face each other uneasily at the end of their 1986 summit meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland.**

? What information is conveyed by Source F?

After the summit, strategic and ideological tensions between the USA and USSR remained. This was illustrated by Reagan's visit to Berlin in June 1987.

Far from praising Gorbachev for his reforms, Reagan dramatically called on Gorbachev to end the physical divide between West Berlin and East Berlin: the Berlin Wall. Coming eight months after meeting at Reykjavik, this seemed like an open challenge. Gorbachev, however, had already repudiated the Brezhnev Doctrine and relations between the two countries were moving in a more positive direction despite the rhetoric.

**SOURCE G**

**Excerpt from US President Reagan's address at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, Germany, 12 June 1987 from the US National Archives and Records Administration at www.archives.gov.**

*Behind me stands a wall that encircles the free sectors of this city, part of a vast system of barriers that divides the entire continent of Europe … Standing before the Brandenburg Gate, every man is a German, separated from his fellow men. Every man is a Berliner, forced to look upon a scar … As long as this gate is closed, as long as this scar of a wall is permitted to stand, it is not the* ***German question*** *alone that remains open, but the question of freedom for all mankind …*

*General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate.*

*Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate!*

*Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!*

? According to Source G, what will bring peace?

## The Washington Summit 1987

At the Washington Summit in December 1987, both Reagan and Gorbachev agreed to phase out all intermediate-range nuclear missiles. This was the key term of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty which was signed on the first day of the summit. As in previous summits, Reagan refused to abandon his commitment to SDI. However, Gorbachev shifted his approach and did not make nuclear disarmament in Europe conditional on the abandonment of SDI. Gorbachev was willing to make this diplomatic concession as he had been informed by leading Soviet scientists that SDI had only a small chance of ever operating. Against the fading background of SDI, the summit meetings between Gorbachev and Reagan became increasingly productive.

## The Moscow Summit 1988

From 29 May to 2 June 1988, Reagan visited Moscow. The major political item on the agenda was the ratification of the INF Treaty on 1 June 1988. Relations now so cordial that Reagan sent Gorbachev a note in which he wrote 'To Mikhail from Ron'. At the summit, the two leaders paved the way for the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (**START**) to be signed two years later. They also discussed human rights and regional issues.

## The end of the Cold War

By 1988, it was clear that the Cold War was coming to an end. At home, Gorbachev embarked on an ambitious programme of political liberalization (see page 141), while abroad, troops were being withdrawn from Afghanistan (see page 122). In an address to the UN General Assembly, Gorbachev rejected class struggle and the superiority of socialism as ideological precepts of Soviet foreign policy. Instead, he stated that all peoples should have the right to choose their own form of government and that universal human values should encompass both the capitalist and socialist blocs. In the same speech he also announced a reduction of half a million Red Army troops, prompting the resignation of head of the military, Marshal Sergey Akhromeev. This failed to deter Gorbachev, and in 1989 he went further by removing 500 **tactical nuclear weapons** from eastern Europe.

Such actions and rhetoric signalled to eastern Europe that Gorbachev was a unique Soviet leader and that the Brezhnev Doctrine was finished. Indeed, Gorbachev supported reform movements in Warsaw Pact countries like Hungary, the first state within the Soviet political orbit to move towards multi-party elections and political liberalization under Prime Minister Miklós Németh.

The symbolic end of the Cold War arrived with the demolition of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, encouraging the reunification of a divided Germany. In December 1989, at the Malta Summit with US President Bush, Gorbachev agreed to begin withdrawing Soviet troops from eastern Europe. This marked

**KEY TERM**

**START** Strategic arms reduction treaty between the USA and USSR limiting the amount of nuclear weapons that both superpowers could deploy.

**Tactical nuclear weapon** Small nuclear device intended for use on the battlefield.

? What political message is conveyed by Source H?

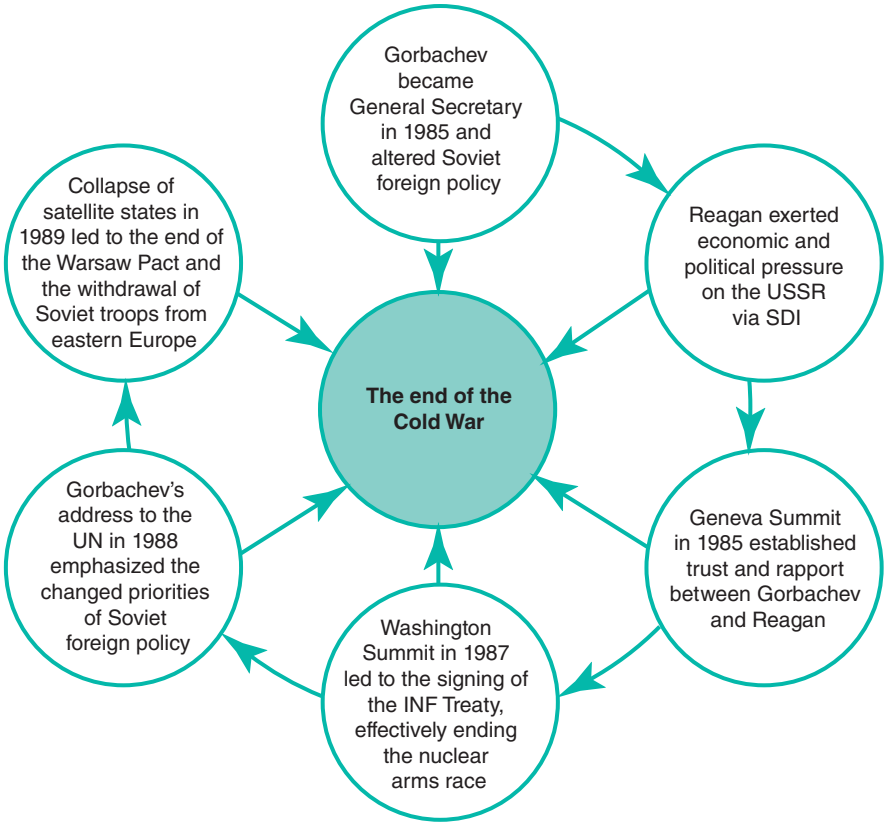
**SOURCE H**

**Gorbachev and Reagan in Red Square during the 1988 Moscow Summit.**

the end of Soviet military dominance in the Warsaw Pact and is taken by many historians to mark the real end of the Cold War.

Soon, communist governments in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania collapsed, with Poland following suit. Finally, in 1992, Albania ended 47 years of communist rule following elections. The following sections examine the different experiences of three of these Warsaw Pact members in their transition from Soviet satellite states, namely:

- East Germany
- Czechoslovakia
- Poland.




**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

Soviet foreign policy and superpower relations 1985–9

## 2 The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the East German state

*Key question: What were the causes and consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall?*

On 9 November 1989, the East German government gave permission to open gates in the Berlin Wall that had separated East and West Berlin since 1961. Crowds surged through the gates, climbed on the wall and began tearing it down. This event has become a symbol for the end of the Cold War and this section examines the events leading up to it and its consequences.

**What was the nature of the communist regime in East Germany in the 1980s?**

# Causes of the collapse of the Berlin Wall

As we have seen in Chapter 1 (page 15), in 1949, the Soviet occupation zone of Germany was formally reconstituted as the German Democratic Republic (GDR), although it was also known as East Germany. It developed as a Stalinist state, dominated by the **SED** until 1989. The 1968 constitution formalized the SED's leading role, although other minor non-communist parties such as the DBD, a farmers' party, were tolerated and even had small numbers of seats assigned to them in the East German parliament.

East Germany was governed until 1971 by SED leader Walter Ulbricht, who admired Stalin. Under his leadership, agriculture was collectivized and there was an emphasis on central planning and the development of heavy industry. Ulbricht was finally replaced as leader of East Germany and First Secretary of the SED in 1971, by Erich Honecker. Besides attempting to stabilize East Germany economically, Honecker also eventually accepted diplomatic contact with West Germany. In 1972, he agreed to the **Basic Treaty** with West Germany (see page 109). This improved relations between East and West during the 1970s, but Honecker did little to alter the political and social *status quo* in the GDR. He remained convinced that only the SED should govern East Germany.

## East Germany under Honecker

By the mid-1980s, Honecker was much less willing than Gorbachev to contemplate significant political changes. He hoped that the relatively high standard of living in East Germany, compared to other Warsaw Pact countries, and the prestige his regime derived from its success in international sporting events, including the Olympic Games, would act as stabilizing influences. In essence, he was a strict communist, unwilling to consider a programme akin to *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the USSR.

This gradually alienated East German citizens, even the 20 per cent of the population who were members of the SED. The **Lutheran Church,** one of the very few non-communist organizations to occupy a prominent place in East German society, provided moral and institutional support to nearly 200 dissident groups that developed during the 1980s. Many focused on environmental problems or the issue of nuclear disarmament. One of the most prominent dissident groups was **New Forum**, led by Bärbel Bohley and Jutta Seidel, which claimed, in 1989, that the SED had lost touch with ordinary citizens.

The elderly Honecker and his regime declared New Forum illegal, but to no avail. The wide base of the movement, which included young and old, Christians and atheists, as well as workers, artists and students, gave it the impetus to survive.

**KEY TERM**

**SED** Socialist Unity Party of Germany. The Marxist–Leninist party in East Germany established in 1946 by the merger between the Socialist Party (SPD) and the Communist Party (KPD).

**Basic Treaty** Treaty between the FRG and the GDR in 1972 that led to the exchange of permanent diplomatic missions between the two countries and to both joining the UN.

**Lutheran Church** The main Protestant Church in East Germany.

**New Forum** Pro-democracy movement founded in East Germany in September 1989 which led to public demonstrations that accelerated the end of barriers between East and West Berlin and the end of communist government in East Germany.

**SOURCE I**

**Obituary for Bärbel Bohley in 'East German opposition leader remembered: autumn of 1989 unimaginable without Bärbel Bohley' by Daryl Lindsay in *Der Spiegel*, 13 September 2010, Hamburg, Germany, published by Spiegel Online International, www.spiegel.de/international. Lindsay is a US journalist for *Der Spiegel*, the largest news magazine in Germany and Europe.**

*The woman known as the 'mother of peaceful revolution' who embodied the political awakening that happened in the final days of East Germany, has passed away. Bärbel Bohley died at 65 on Saturday. She will be remembered as an opposition leader who helped to topple the communist regime.*

*Bärbel Bohley's place in the fall of communism is secure. An important player in East Germany's pro-democracy movement, she helped found the New Forum in Berlin, a mass protest movement that was the most prominent opposition group in the days leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall on Nov. 9, 1989. She rose to become an important symbolic figure in that movement.*

According to Source I, how did Bohley affect the politics of the GDR? ?

**SOURCE J**

**Excerpt from a table of basic economic data on eastern Europe, the USSR and selected western countries from 'Symposium on economic transition in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe' by Peter Murrell in *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol. 5, No. 4, Autumn, 1991, published by the American Economic Association (AEA), Nashville, Tennessee, USA, page 6. Murrell is Professor of Economics at the University of Maryland, USA. The AEA formed in 1885 with the purpose of publishing academic articles on economics and promoting discussion of economics.**

| Country | Current inflation | Per capita GDP as % of USA | Cars per 1000 pop. | Telephones per 1000 pop. | Meat consumed (annual kg per capita) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bulgaria | 50 | 25 | 127 | 248 | 60 |
| Czechoslovakia | 10 | 17 | 186 | 246 | 76 |
| East Germany | 2 | 36 | 214 | 233 | 90 |
| Hungary | 29 | 13 | 156 | 152 | 78 |
| Poland | 690 | 9 | 112 | 122 | 64 |
| Romania | 25 | 16 | NA | 111 | 60 |
| USSR | 4 | 25 | 46 | 124 | 55 |
| | | | | | |
| West Germany | 2.7 | 99 | 459 | 650 | 83 |
| USA | 5.3 | 100 | 565 | 789 | 67 |
| Note: Compiled in 1991. Data for East Germany are for 1989. | | | | | |

According to Source J, how did East Germany compare economically to other Warsaw Pact states? ?

### *The economy*

Honecker was convinced that no reforms were necessary in the GDR because the country was the most prosperous Warsaw Pact state. East German agriculture was much more fully mechanized than in neighbouring Poland and the GDR was virtually self-sufficient in food.

The situation was not as idyllic as Honecker imagined. The GDR remained reliant on the USSR for oil imports. The standard of living in East Germany lagged far behind that of West Germany and a wide assortment of consumer goods could only be purchased using **hard currency** in so-called **Intershops**. Part of the higher standard of living in the GDR is also explained by the hidden subsidies provided by West Germany and its citizens, such as remittances to relatives in East Germany. East Germany's economy was also burdened by $26.5 billion of foreign debt.

### *Censorship*

Most East Germans were fully aware of life in the West through watching West German television. Within East Germany, censorship was imposed and intellectuals critical of the regime were punished. Restrictions on freedom of thought and action were enforced by the state security agency, the ***Stasi***. Up to 25 per cent of the population co-operated with the *Stasi*, informing on others.

**KEY TERM**

**Hard currency** A strong currency unlikely to lose its value; traded on global markets.

**Intershops** Special stores in select East German cities that sold products from the West for hard currency.

***Stasi*** Abbreviation from the German for Ministry for State Security. Through collaborators, informers and full-time *Stasi* secret police officials, the government controlled civil unrest and anti-communist activities.

**Why did the Berlin Wall come down in 1989?**

## The fall of the Berlin Wall

Despite the relatively prosperous economic development of East Germany, its citizens were aware that life in the West was easier. Above all, they were conscious that their country lacked the basic freedoms and civil rights of western democracies. Many East Germans responded to conditions by trying to move to West Germany. In September 1989, Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh (see page 173) ordered that the barbed wire fence between Hungary and neutral Austria, which he regarded as an expensive irrelevance, be dismantled.

### Refugee crisis

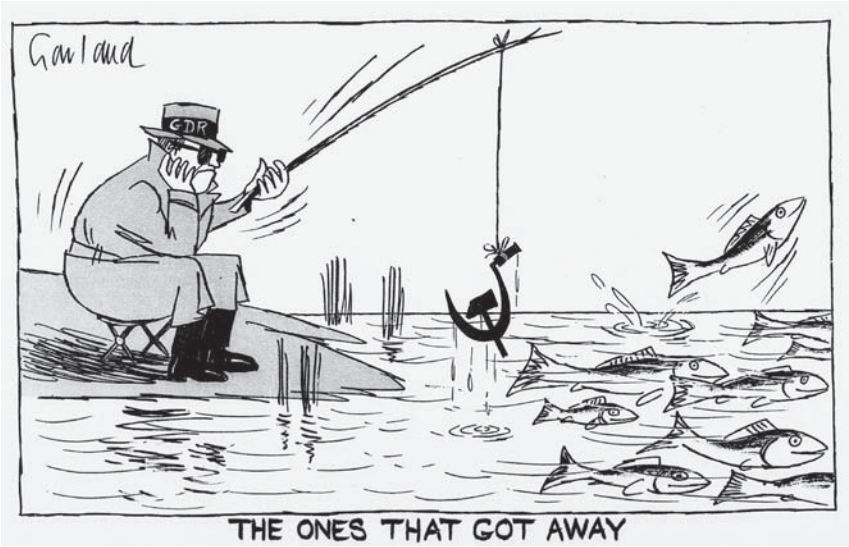
Discontented East Germans began to emigrate to the West through the newly opened border between Hungary and Austria. Németh accepted 500 million German marks from the West German government to facilitate the movement of East Germans ostensibly on holiday, to the Austrian border, in defiance of a treaty from 1969 between Hungary and East Germany not to allow East Germans to move to the West through Hungarian territory. The Hungarian government took the decision to revoke this agreement with the implicit approval of Gorbachev, who had made it abundantly clear that the Brezhnev Doctrine was over.

By the end of September 1989, there were 130,000 East Germans in Hungary waiting to cross the border into Austria and almost 25,000 had reached West Germany. Thousands of East Germans also took refuge in the West German

embassy in Prague, Czechoslovakia. They would be allowed to travel to West Germany by train through East Germany, but during their transit, riots erupted in Dresden as others attempted to board. This led to the total closure of East Germany's border with Czechoslovakia.

**SOURCE K**

**A cartoon by Nicholas Garland that appeared in a British newspaper, *The Independent*, on 12 September 1989. Garland is a British cartoonist who has worked for many major British publications. *The Independent* is a daily British newspaper in publication since 1986.**




What is the message conveyed by Source K? ?

## Gorbachev's visit to the GDR

The catalyst for the crisis that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall was Gorbachev's visit to the GDR on 6 October 1989. The purpose of the visit was to mark the fortieth anniversary of the East German state's foundation. Gorbachev was confronted by demonstrators from the communist youth movement carrying placards with slogans like '*Perestroika!* Gorbachev! Help us!' (see Source L, see page 180). This indicated that even many young communists felt alienated from their own government which rejected liberalization and reforms. Gorbachev made it clear to Honecker that reforms were necessary, commenting that 'life punishes harshly anyone who is left behind in politics'.

Gorbachev also asserted that he would not sanction the use of the 380,000 Soviet troops stationed in East Germany to maintain Honecker's grip on power. Honecker was reluctant to accept this new political reality and seemed determined to crush dissent. He was encouraged by Deng Xiaoping's actions in China (see page 85), which the chief of the *Stasi* praised as a firm way to control civil disturbances.

The day after Gorbachev left the GDR on 9 October, Honecker authorized the security police to shoot into crowds of protesters, 70,000 of whom demonstrated against the government in Leipzig. Daily protests in the city had been co-ordinated by the Lutheran Church. However, a massacre on the scale of Tiananmen Square did not occur, mostly due to the opposition of other senior SED figures like Egon Krenz.

? According to Source L, what was the significance of Gorbachev's visit to Berlin in October 1989?

**SOURCE L**

**Excerpt from *Memoirs* by Mikhail Gorbachev, published by Doubleday, New York, USA, 1995, pages 524 and 526. In this extract, Gorbachev, as Head of State at the time, describes his visit to East Germany in October 1989.**

*Columns of representatives from all the regions of the republic filed past the dais where the East German leader and their foreign guests were standing … Participants in the march, I was told, had been hand-picked in advance. They were primarily activists in the Free German Youth Movement, young members of the SED and parties and public organizations close to it. So much the more indicative, then, the slogans and chanting in their ranks: 'Perestroika! Gorbachev! Help us!' … I had sensed that something was wrong when we were driving into Berlin from Schönefeld Airport. Along almost the entire route to the residence there were solid rows of young people chanting 'Gorbachev! Gorbachev!' – even though Honecker was sitting right next to me … Anyone who saw all that would instantly have dismissed Honecker's later statements about his removal from the leadership of East Germany being the result of an intrigue sanctioned by Gorbachev among the apparatus of the SED Central Committee.*

## Krenz becomes leader

The protests in Leipzig and other German cities undermined what remained of Honecker's fragile political authority and led to his replacement on 17 October 1989 by Egon Krenz. Krenz was a reform-minded communist who did not favour the use of force against protesters. However, he came to power too late to save the GDR and historian Martin McCauley's acerbic commentary describes him as not equal to the formidable political challenges that he faced by the autumn of 1989.

Krenz was tainted by his association with Honecker's regime, so he lacked credibility in the eyes of many East Germans. His appointment was certainly not enough to satisfy growing numbers of demonstrators in cities like Leipzig and Dresden, whose political agenda now included the end of communist rule. By the first week of November, up to 1.4 million demonstrators demanded the recognition of opposition groups, free elections and the right to travel abroad.

Gorbachev's advice to Krenz was to reduce political pressure on his regime by agreeing to the opening of the border with Czechoslovakia for East Germans. A large number of East Germans now fled to the Austrian border.

One of Krenz's final attempts to regain support was to remove two-thirds of the Politburo on 7 November 1989; this had little real impact.

## The fall of the Berlin Wall

On 9 November 1989, having visited Moscow for talks with Gorbachev, Krenz decided to relax, but not eliminate, travel restrictions to the West as part of an attempt to stabilize his regime. Temporary visits to the West of up to four weeks a year were to be made more obtainable. When the decision was announced to the media by the poorly informed First Secretary of the SED, Gunter Schabowski, it was stated that all citizens of the GDR were free to cross to the West with immediate effect and that the border was now open.

That evening, thousands of East Berliners began to demonstrate along the Berlin Wall, anticipating that they would soon be allowed to cross unimpeded into West Berlin. As the evening progressed, some East Berliners began to scale the wall itself and security forces, conscious of Krenz's political weakness and the lack of desire for political repression in Moscow, did not stop them. Finally, several border guards at Bornholmer Strasse took the decision to relieve the crush of people at the border crossing and opened the gates.

Assess the value and limitations of Source M for a historian evaluating the reasons for the collapse of the Berlin Wall. ?

**SOURCE M**

**East Berliners climbing on top of the Berlin Wall on the night of 9 November 1989.**

**What consequences did the collapse of the Berlin Wall have for Germany?**

## The end of the East German state and the reunification of Germany

Egon Krenz's leadership of the SED proved to be short lived and he was replaced on 7 December by Hans Modrow. Modrow initially favoured the idea of a loose confederation of the two states, but this was opposed by West Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who wanted full reunification. This was one of Kohl's stated political aims that he had expressed in a 10-point plan on 28 November 1989. He informed Gorbachev at the end of January 1990 that most East Germans were not in favour of the concept of two separate German states. This certainly seemed to be the case in cities like Leipzig, where protesters displayed banners with slogans like 'Germany – united fatherland!'

### The Malta Summit, December 1989

Gorbachev was reluctant to agree unconditionally to Germany's reunification, fearing that it could alter the European balance of power that had existed since 1945, since it would probably mean that a united Germany would remain in NATO. Gorbachev's fears were allayed at the Malta Summit with US President Bush in December 1989. At the very beginning of 1990, both Helmut Kohl and Hans Modrow visited Moscow for talks during which Gorbachev stated that reunification was probable and that it was up to Germans themselves to decide what sort of state they wanted to live in. He also stated that reunification could not happen in the short term and must not be allowed to undermine international stability.

### 'Two Plus Four'

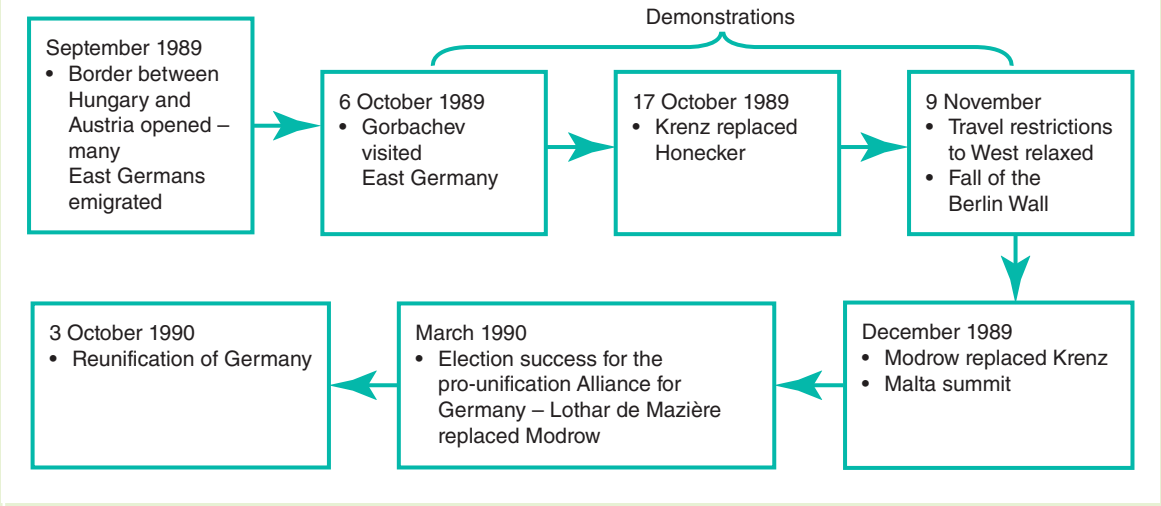
In February 1990, US Secretary of State James Baker travelled to Moscow to engineer a 'Two Plus Four' solution. This meant that the external mechanics of reunification would be determined by the four occupying powers from the end of the Second World War. The FRG and GDR (the 'two') would deal with internal affairs. Gorbachev gave his consent to this political formula.

### March 1990 elections

Further impetus was given to the reunification process in March 1990 when the reformed SED, now renamed the Party of Democratic Socialism, achieved only 17 per cent of the vote in national elections. By this stage, its membership was less than half that of the former SED. The winner of the election in the GDR was the resolutely pro-unification Alliance for Germany. This led to the replacement of Modrow as premier and the formation of a coalition government under Lothar de Maizière. This government stated its intention to push through reunification with West Germany as quickly as possible. All the while, at least 1000 East German refugees per day continued to leave the GDR for the West and the East German economy began to grind to a halt as state subsidies to industry started to end.

## Reunification

Despite Gorbachev's initial reluctance, by July 1990, after another visit by Kohl to Moscow, Gorbachev had come to concede that reunification might proceed and brokered the formal reunification of Germany, which eventually took place on 3 October 1990.




**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the East German state

# 3 The Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia

*Key question: What were the causes and consequences of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia?*

After the Prague Spring in 1968 (see page 108), Czechoslovakia was tightly controlled by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC), although this was resented by much of the population. The nationalist aspirations of the Slovak minority also remained unfulfilled.

**What was the nature of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in the 1980s?**

# Opposition to communist rule

In 1948, a communist regime was established in Czechoslovakia. It remained a totalitarian state for the next 20 years. Alexander Dubček's appointment as CPC First Secretary in January 1968, following a period of economic stagnation, ushered in a brief period of social and economic liberalization, the Prague Spring (see page 108), before Soviet intervention and the arrest of Dubček in 1969. Dubček was replaced by Gustav Husák. Husák remained in power for over 20 years, backed by the implicit threat of another Soviet invasion should the Brezhnev Doctrine have need of being enforced.

## Czechoslovakia under Husák

Under Husák, a policy called **normalization** was implemented. This involved the careful management of any political dissent. Intellectuals and writers were forced to repudiate the events of the Prague Spring in order to be published. The secret police, the **StB**, kept a watchful eye on dissidents. The policy of normalization was not greeted with much enthusiasm by most, although there was slightly greater acceptance of the policy in the Slovak part of the country. This may have reflected the large amount of government investment in heavy industry, the bulk of which was located in Slovakia.

### *Dissent*

Despite StB measures, political dissent did not totally disappear. The Helsinki Accords of 1975 (see page 111), in particular the clauses regarding human rights, acted as a catalyst for the emergence of a protest movement. All over eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia, 'Helsinki Groups' emerged, dedicated to holding their governments accountable on human rights issues.

### Charter 77

One prominent example of a 'Helsinki Group' was **Charter 77**. Inspired by Poland's Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) (see page 191), it was established on 7 January 1977, when a group of over 200 Czechoslovak intellectuals, including writer Václav Havel, issued a charter demanding that the Helsinki Accords and the **United Nations Declaration on Human Rights** be fully implemented in Czechoslovakia. The immediate trigger for the issue of the manifesto was the arrest of the members of a dissident rock group named The Plastic People of the Universe.

**KEY TERM**

**Normalization** Used to describe the period of repression and stagnation in Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of the Prague Spring Movement.

**StB** Acronym for the State Security Service of Czechoslovakia.

**Charter 77** Human rights association of hundreds of Czechoslovak intellectuals and dissidents that advocated democracy; established in 1977.

**United Nations Declaration on Human Rights** A statement of 30 human rights adopted by the UN in 1948.

**SOURCE N**

**Excerpt from 'The politics and power of humiliation' by Jan Urban in *After the Velvet Revolution: Václav Havel and the New Leaders of Czechoslovakia Speak Out*, Tim D. Whipple, editor, *Focus on Issues*, No. 14, Freedom House, New York, USA, 1991, pages 279–80. Urban is a Czech historian and journalist, signatory of Charter 77 and persecuted by the StB.**

*It is in the arts that our deepest politics are played out in Czechoslovakia; and it was out of a battle in the arts that the movement which mobilized a further generation of Czechs, including myself, came into being. When the clash came, the pretext was the imprisonment of the musicians of the underground pop group*

? According to Source N, what was the importance of Charter 77?

*'The Plastic People of the Universe.' A broad coalition professing the most varied political opinions and beliefs, from former functionaries of the CPC to Catholics who spoke out in defense of these musicians' rights to free artistic expression.*

*In this way, in January 1977, Charter 77 came into being. It was a historic moment. People, humiliated to the point of desperation about their own powerlessness, were no longer able to remain silent and hide.*

Charter 77 and another dissident group, the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted (known by its Czech acronym of VONS), never threatened to overthrow Husák's regime. Their memberships were small and mostly confined to the intellectual élite; the bulk of the Czechoslovak working class, unlike in Poland (see page 190), remained passive supporters of a regime that ensured reasonable living standards for workers.

### *Moral opposition*

In the West, these groups' moral opposition to totalitarianism received widespread publicity. Intellectuals like Havel laid bare the ideological and moral bankruptcy of the ruling élite. Another source of moral opposition was the Catholic Church, which by the 1980s was becoming a powerful institution once again. An indication of this is that when Cardinal Tomásek, the Archbishop of Prague, issued a petition in 1988, entitled 'Suggestions of Catholics for the Solution of the Position of the Faithful,' it was signed by 600,000 people.

## Czechoslovakia under Jakeš

In 1987, Husák was succeeded as First Secretary of the CPC by Miloš Jakeš. He was also unwilling to emulate Gorbachev's *perestroika* programme. Jakeš faced increasing economic problems. Compared with the West, Czechoslovakia's industry was outdated and uncompetitive. The combination of economic weakness, dissident opposition and the communist regime's lack of legitimacy dating back to 1968, created a crisis situation for the CPC by 1988.

# The end of communist rule in Czechoslovakia

**Why did the communist regime collapse in Czechoslovakia in 1989?**

The twentieth anniversary of the Prague Spring in 1988 was marked by student demonstrations in Prague involving up to 10,000 protesters. Most had nothing to do with Charter 77. This suggested that the base of opposition to the regime was beginning to widen beyond the intellectual élite. Protests continued into January 1989, and led to the arrest of Václav Havel. Security forces began to use water cannon and tear gas against the protesters. Events in the GDR in 1989 (see page 179) further radicalized the youth and as several thousand East Germans fled to the West German embassy in Prague, there was increasing awareness of growing political volatility across the Warsaw Pact nations. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 acted as a catalyst for opponents of the communist regime.

## Demonstrations, 17 November 1989

On 17 November, the tense political atmosphere worsened. Students gathered in Prague to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the death of a student killed by Germans in the Second World War. Speakers at the rally called for the removal of First Secretary Jakeš. As 50,000 protesters made their way to Prague's Wenceslas Square, they found their way blocked by the police and soldiers. These forces used their batons to try to disrupt the demonstration. In the confused political situation, a false rumour circulated that a student had been killed by the security forces and this prompted further student demonstrations on 18 November.

**SOURCE O**

**'A proclamation of the university students to the workers and peasants of Czechoslovakia' issued on 20 November 1989 from *The Velvet Revolution: Czechoslovakia, 1988–1991* by Bernard Wheaton and Zdeněk Kavan, published by Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, USA, 1992, pages 198–9. The students were from the University of Prague. Wheaton is a British historian at Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, and Kavan is a Czech Professor of International Relations at the University of Sussex, UK.**

*We, the university students of Czechoslovakia, protest most strongly against the brutal breaking up of the peaceful demonstration which took place on November 17th 1989 … this was not an attempt to restore public order but the meting out of physical punishment and with very serious consequences. This course of action is in contradiction to the function of the security forces, to current Czechoslovak law, and to accepted international treaties. Please understand that this was not simply an attack on students but at the same time an attack on your children, on the children of workers' and peasants' families …*

*We therefore demand the formation of a suitable parliamentary commission of inquiry with the participation of the university strike committees and the subsequent punishment of the guilty, regardless of their present position and office. As we see no other way of expressing our disagreement and alarm at the present internal political situation in our country, nothing remains for us but to embark upon a week-long protest strike …*

? According to Source O, what were the political views of university students in November 1989?

## Civic Forum

Protests and the government use of violence gave impetus to the establishment of **Civic Forum** on 19 November. Its initial political demands included the replacement of the older generation of hard-line communist leaders like Miloš Jakeš and the release of all political prisoners. Civic Forum became a co-ordinating group for all the different protest factions that emerged, such as students, Catholic priests and even Marxists disillusioned with the process of normalization. The Slovak equivalent of Civic Forum was called the Public Against Violence and demonstrations began in the Slovak city of Bratislava.

**KEY TERM**

**Civic Forum** Czechoslovak non-violent civic association that quickly became a political force in November 1989.

## Final collapse of communist rule

On 22 November, up to 250,000 demonstrators, the majority of them students, protested on the streets of Prague in favour of free and fair elections. They were addressed by Václav Havel. Within two days, this number had grown to 350,000 and slogans appeared on placards such as 'Truth will triumph' and 'We've had enough'. When Alexander Dubček appeared in public for the first time since 1968 in Bratislava, he was given a rapturous reception. With Gorbachev as leader of the USSR, this time there was no prospect of a repeat of the Soviet invasion of 1968.

A military crackdown similar to that carried out by Jaruzelski in Poland (see page 193) was discussed in the CPC Central Committee, but rejected. There was some doubt as to whether conscripted soldiers would be prepared to attack fellow citizens. Pragmatic members of the CPC hierarchy now favoured negotiations with Civic Forum. The CPC did attempt to maintain its political grip on the provinces by censoring news about the events in Prague, but this could not be sustained.

On the evening of 24 November, the entire Politburo, including Jakeš, resigned. The party's hope was that the removal of those most associated with the policy of normalization would reduce the scale and intensity of the opposition movement. Václav Havel, who had emerged as the leading political voice within Civic Forum, denounced what he saw as a ploy by the CPC to maintain a hold on power.

Assess the value and limitations of Source P for a historian studying the Velvet Revolution. ?

**SOURCE P**

**Demonstrations in Prague during November 1989.**

### *Continuing demonstrations*

Demonstrations of up to 800,000 people continued in Prague and Civic Forum remained determined to extract further concessions, such as the abandonment of Article 4 of the Constitution that guaranteed a leading governing role for the CPC. Seventy-five per cent of the population participated in a general strike on 27 November, a clear sign that the CPC's hold over the working class was ending.

Faced with these developments, Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec agreed to share power and on 29 November, Article 4 of the Constitution was formally removed. Adamec had made a quick trip to Moscow to consult with Gorbachev, but received only reiteration of the USSR's role as a bystander. The CPC was on its own.

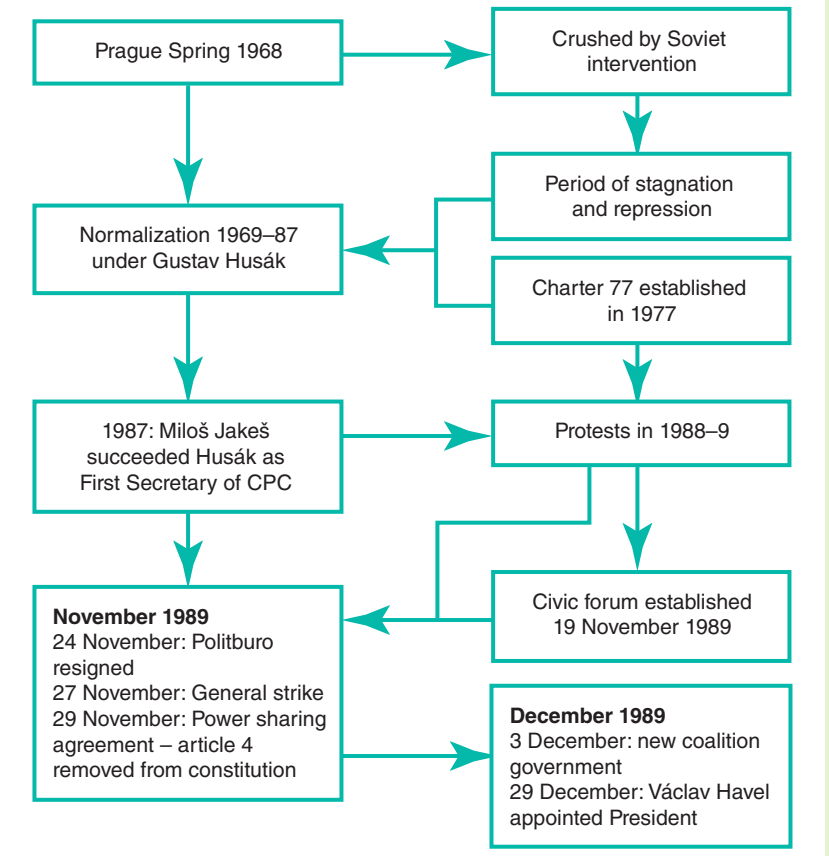
### *Havel as President*

A new coalition government, mostly consisting of non-communists, was announced on 3 December 1989. Adamec resigned three days later when it became clear that his presence in the new government would provoke a fresh round of strikes and demonstrations. The decisive political moment came on 29 December 1989. Václav Havel was appointed as President of Czechoslvakia by a unanimous vote in parliament, replacing Husák. On 1 January 1990, the old regime was clearly over when President Havel gave amnesty to 16,000 political prisoners and soon abolished the StB. Havel ensured that the transition to democracy was a peaceful one, hence the name Velvet Revolution.

## Czechoslovakia after 1989

Democratic parliamentary elections were held in June 1990 under a system of proportional representation. Civic Forum reaped the benefits of its prominent role in the overthrow of the old regime and won most seats, forming a coalition government. However, Civic Forum, which had always been a very broad coalition of interest groups, soon split up into five competing political parties.

Czechoslovakia did not remain a united polity and in 1992, the Velvet Divorce took place. Czech and Slovak national elements of the state were constitutionally separated into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.




**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

The Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia

## 4 The collapse of communist rule in Poland

*Key question: What were the causes and consequences of the collapse of communism in Poland?*

Following the Red Army's expulsion of German forces at the end of the Second World War, in 1948 a totalitarian state was established and Marxism–Leninism became the official state ideology under the single-party rule of the Polish United Workers' Party (**PUWP**), as the Communist Party in Poland was called.

**KEY TERM**

**PUWP** The Polish United Workers' Party, the main Marxist–Leninist Party in Poland between 1948 and 1990.

? What does Source Q convey about relations between Poland and the USSR?

**SOURCE Q**

**Excerpt from *The Cold War: A New History* by John Lewis Gaddis, published by Penguin Books, London, UK, 2006, pages 21–2. Gaddis is a Professor of History at Yale University, USA.**

*The offenses [of the Soviet Union against Poland] included the 1939 Nazi–Soviet Pact, which had extinguished Polish independence, together with the subsequent discovery that the Russians had massacred some 4,000 Polish officers at Katyn Wood in 1940 – another 11,000 remained unaccounted for … Stalin's insistence on taking a third of Poland's territory after the war further embittered the nation … Because Poles would never elect a pro-Soviet government, Stalin imposed one – the cost, though, was a permanently resentful Poland …*

**What was the nature of the communist regime in Poland?**

## Communist rule in Poland

Following Khrushchev's 1956 denunciation of Stalin (see page 15), Polish workers began to strike and riots broke out in the city of Poznań. The demonstrators felt vindicated in their condemnation of Stalin, who had perpetrated so many offences against the Polish people (see Source Q). Workers demonstrated, carrying slogans like 'Russians go home'. The resulting political crisis led to Władysław Gomułka being reappointed as Party Secretary. He had been jailed by Stalin in 1948 for being too much of a Polish nationalist, to the detriment of socialism. Khrushchev freed him and agreed to Gomułka's reinstatement.

Gomułka maintained Poland as a Marxist–Leninist state within the Warsaw Pact, with some concessions to his fellow countrymen. For example, Cardinal Wyszczyński, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and outspoken critic of the regime, was released from prison. Collectivization in the countryside was reversed. Even so, Gomułka was very far from being a political liberal and the PUWP continued to be the dominant force in Polish politics.

In the 1960s, Gomułka lost popularity as significant improvements in the standard of living failed to materialize and censorship was strengthened. In 1970, the government's decision to increase food prices by 20 per cent led to strikes in the shipyards of the port of Gdańsk. At least 50 people were killed as the security forces aggressively restored order and the crisis led to Gomułka's resignation and his replacement by Edward Gierek, a communist official.

### Discontent in Poland during the 1970s

After an initial period during which Gierek raised workers' wages and extended social welfare benefits to farm workers, the 1970s saw growing dissatisfaction with the PUWP. The new economic programme failed to deal with the fundamental problem in the Polish economy: military expenses and food shortages. Strikes and protests acted as a catalyst for the development

of opposition groups, similar to those that sprang up elsewhere in eastern Europe.

The most important of these opposition groups was the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR). Illegal periodicals such as KOR's *Kommunikaty* were circulated by hand from person to person.

## The Catholic Church

Another reason for the growing unpopularity of communism was the role played in the national life of Poland by the Catholic Church, which remained an extremely influential, independent, nation-wide organization following the imposition of communist rule.

In the 1970s, over 20 million Poles attended church services on a regular basis and 95 per cent of the population was baptized. Catholics received a massive boost in 1978, when Cardinal Karol Wojtyła became the first Polish-born Pope, known as John Paul II. This spurred many Poles to assert their commitment to Catholicism as opposed to Marxism. In June 1979 the Pope visited Poland. For a brief moment, ordinary Poles were given the opportunity in public to demonstrate their loyalty to something other than Marxism–Leninism and they seized the moment with enthusiasm.

**SOURCE R**

**Excerpts from *The Crystal Spirit: Lech Wałęsa and His Poland* by Mary Craig, published by Hodder & Stoughton, London, UK, pages 154–5. Craig is a British writer and biographer.**

*Gierek and the Party had hovered between delight and dismay at the time of his [the Pope's] election, but had finally settled for a cautious chauvinistic pride in this 'son of the Polish nation, which is building the greatness and prosperity of its Socialist fatherland with the unity and co-operation of all its citizens.'*

*… Miners, the darlings of the regime, defying a government ban, turned out in their thousands, wearing their traditional dress. The regime knew the baffling humiliation of a quarter of a million miners singing: 'Christ has conquered. Christ is king, Christ commands our lives' at full throttle.*

*The media did their best to play down the visit, to give it a minor place in the evening TV bulletins … But nobody was fooled, … [Pope] John Paul spoke to the whole of Poland, giving voice to truths that had too long been silenced, convincing the people that social renewal was possible only at the price of their own moral renewal.*

According to Source R, were the reactions of the government and the people of Poland to the Pope? ?

By 1980, the Polish government was in a very weak position. Gierek's authority had been undermined both by the Pope's visit and by his failure to successfully address the economic crisis. By this stage, Poland's debt to the West had risen to $25 billion, which necessitated exporting as much as possible in order to generate hard currency. This, in turn, compounded shortages at home.

## The Solidarity Movement

In September 1980, the Solidarity trade union (see page 108) was formally established on a legal basis. As the movement developed, its demands became more explicitly political and it became engaged in a power struggle with the communist government.

### *Strikes in Gdańsk*

In August 1980, the government announced an increase in meat prices by 100 per cent. Seventeen thousand shipyard workers in Gdańsk began a strike. The most prominent leader of the protests and the chairman of the shipyards' strike committee was electrician Lech Wałęsa. Within a week, the strike spread to more than 250 factories and over 150,000 workers were involved.

On 31 August 1980, the government agreed to Wałęsa's demands for wage increases, the establishment of independent trade unions, the relaxation of censorship and the release from prison of civil rights activists. General Secretary Gierek resigned on 6 September 1980 and was replaced by Politburo member Stanisław Kania.

**SOURCE S**

**Lech Wałęsa being acclaimed by Gdańsk shipyard workers in 1980.**

? Assess the value and limitations of Source S for historians studying the development of Solidarity during the 1980s.

### *Solidarity's challenge to the communist regime*

Solidarity hoped to avoid a Soviet invasion of Poland by accepting the leading political role of the PUWP. Solidarity's very existence, however, was a challenge to the communist regime; its political agenda was different from the PUWP as it called for democratic reforms. Solidarity soon had the support of the majority of manual workers in the country. In December 1980, this prompted the Soviet Politburo to authorize Red Army troop manoeuvres on the border with Poland, a sign that military intervention, as had happened in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, was being considered. The Soviet Politburo, however, decided not to sanction an invasion of Poland, a crucial break with the past, partly due to the fact that Soviet forces were already heavily involved in Afghanistan. US President Carter also cautioned the Soviets that intervention would heighten global tensions.

In addition, Kania persuaded Brezhnev that a Soviet invasion would trigger a national uprising. Other senior Soviet Politburo figures, such as Gromyko, were convinced that military intervention would be a disaster. By 1981, Solidarity was a mass movement with 10 million members out of a population of 38 million. Emboldened by the relaxation of censorship, in September it sent a 'Message to Working Class People in Eastern Europe', offering to help establish independent trade unions.

The economy continued to lurch from crisis to crisis with both inflation and food shortages, especially meat, creating hardship. By the end of 1981, a political stalemate between Solidarity and the government was reached. Negotiations between the two sides had made no significant progress and police prevented Solidarity members from working in certain sectors of the economy, such as the arms industry.

## Poland under Jaruzelski 1981–9

In October 1981, the Defence Minister and Premier, General Jaruzelski, became First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party, replacing Kania, in whom the Soviets had lost confidence. Jaruzelski had close ties with the Soviet regime and with Andropov in particular. On 13 December 1981, in response to the Solidarity demand for a referendum on the future of the PUWP and relations with the USSR, Jaruzelski declared martial law and a state of emergency. The Army Council of National Salvation was given power; banning political meetings and imposing strict curfews. As a consequence, Solidarity was banned and its leader, Lech Wałęsa, arrested along with many others. Forty-nine internment camps were created to deal with the influx of Solidarity prisoners.

Jaruzelski maintained the political fabric of the communist state and crushed the wave of Solidarity-led strikes. The economic situation remained extremely severe and Jaruzelski asked the USSR for a loan of $700 million to help it service its debts. This was not forthcoming but, in 1981, the Soviet government did deliver 13 million tons of petrol, for which the Polish government was charged 90 roubles a ton (the world market price at the

time was 170 roubles a ton). This was an example of the Soviet subsidies that were required by the early 1980s in order to stabilize fragile governments of the Warsaw Pact. However, the USSR had economic problems of its own and was unable to continue subsidizing Poland and other eastern European countries for much longer.

### *Stagnation*

Under the rule of Jaruzelski, Poland stagnated in similar fashion to the USSR under Brezhnev. The country's economic problems remained severe and in 1986, the government defaulted on $1.4 billion of debt repayments to the West. Martial law was not relaxed until 1983 and by 1986 most political prisoners had been released. Solidarity was banned, but it continued to circulate illegal newsletters and journals that condemned the military coup. It received support from the West.

Gorbachev visited Poland in July 1988 and admitted that there were difficulties in the history of interactions between the two countries. This was a coded reference to Stalin's massacre of Polish army officers at Katyn in 1940 – a long-running grievance for Poles. In 1990, the Soviet government admitted responsibility for that crime.

**How did the communist regime in Poland collapse in 1989?**

## The end of communist rule in Poland

In 1989, the Poland's economy entered another crisis and its debt now stood at $56 billion. The cost of food had gone up by an average of 48 per cent in 1988, leading to further strikes.

Jaruzelski, acting on the advice of the Catholic Church, began talks with Wałęsa and Solidarity in February 1989. Wałęsa persuaded workers to end their strikes and, even more significantly, agreement was reached for new elections in June 1989. Solidarity was made legal. Jaruzelski mistakenly believed that he could win these elections. Solidarity re-emerged as by far the most popular political movement in Poland and it won 99 out of the 100 seats that it was permitted to contest in the **Senate**. In the lower house of parliament, the **Sejm**, Solidarity was permitted to contest 35 per cent of the seats and won 160 out of 161 seats where it fielded candidates. This was a spectacular victory.

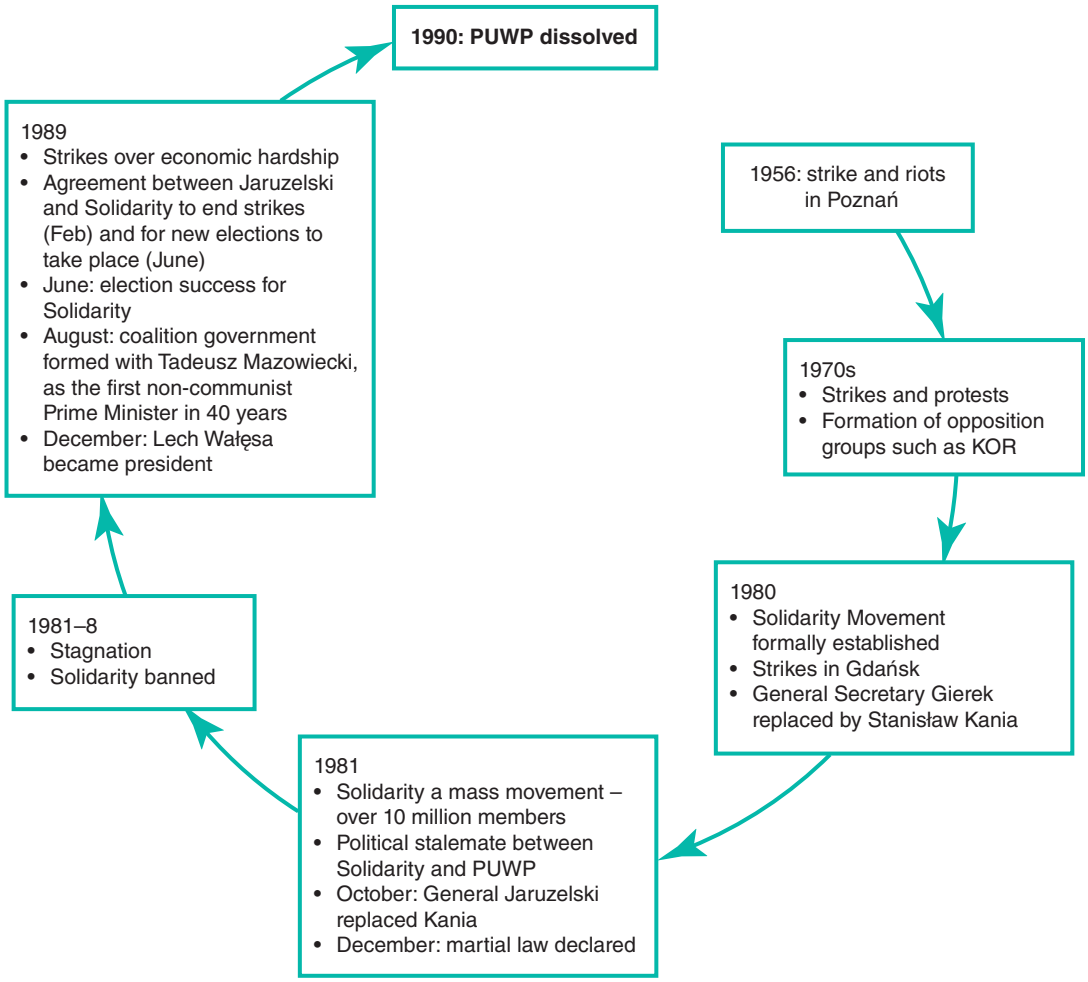
**KEY TERM**

**Senate** Upper house of the Polish parliament.

**Sejm** Lower house of the Polish parliament.

Talks were held about the formation of a power-sharing coalition government. Gorbachev intervened by informing Mieczsław Rakowsi, the new First Secretary of the PUWP, that Poland could no longer function as a single-party state. Rakowksi was pragmatic enough to accept this political reality and so a negotiated transition ensued. In August 1989, a coalition government formed, with a member of Solidarity, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, as the first non-communist Prime Minister in more than 40 years. The PUWP's leading role and the compulsory alliance with the USSR still remained key features of the Polish Constitution, but this soon changed.

In December 1989, the Marxist–Leninist preamble to the Polish constitution was abolished and the name of the state was changed from the Polish People's Republic back to the Polish Republic. In the same month, Wałęsa was elected as President to replace Jaruzelski, although the relatively low voter turnout of 53 per cent suggests that disillusionment with Solidarity had started to develop. Demoralized by the collapse of communism in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, the PUWP dissolved in January 1990. This heralded the end of communist influence in Poland.




**SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

The collapse of communist rule in Poland

# 5 Key debate

*Key question: Why did communist rule in eastern Europe collapse at the end of the 1980s?*

## Changes in the USSR

The emphasis in the writings of many historians is on changes in the USSR that made a relatively sudden collapse of communist rule in eastern Europe possible. For instance, political scientist and historian Archie Brown makes the point that the communist regimes in eastern Europe were always inherently unstable as they relied not on popular consent or support, but in the last resort, on Soviet troops (see Source T). Therefore, Gorbachev's decision not to implement the Brezhnev Doctrine was always likely to provoke a popular backlash, which the repressive governments of Jaruzelski, Honecker and Jakeš would then find it very difficult to control.

**SOURCE T**

**Excerpt from *The Gorbachev Factor* by Archie Brown, published by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1996, page 247. Brown is Professor Emeritus of Politics at Oxford University, UK, and an expert in Russian and Eurasian Studies.**

*But there is no need to search far to find the main stimuli to change. These were the relative failure of the regimes both in economic terms and in terms of political socialization of the population into acceptance of Communist values. Western Europe presented far more attractive and successful economic and political models than anything on offer from the Soviet Union … The essential point is that the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe existed because the Soviet Union had put them in place – by force of arms or threat of force – and had been ready to intervene to sustain them in power. The sudden collapse of the systems, accordingly, requires no elaborate explanation, although the internal situation varied greatly from one to another …*

? According to Source T, what were the key reasons for the collapse of communist rule in eastern Europe?

## Internal problems

It is certainly possible that communist governments in eastern Europe may still have collapsed, even if Gorbachev had never come to power. This is due to the scale of the problems confronted by these regimes by the 1980s. The governments of Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia all lacked democratic legitimacy and this became more of a political issue once the USSR had signed up to the Helsinki Accords (see page 111). An even bigger problem was the stagnant and indebted state of almost all eastern European economies, presided over by self-perpetuating élites who increasingly lacked any sort of real faith in Marxism–Leninism.

**SOURCE U**

**Excerpt from *The Cold War: The Great Powers and Their Allies*, second edition, by John P.D. Dunbabin, published by Pearson Education, Harlow, UK, 2008, pages 577–8. Dunbabin is a former Reader in International Relations at Oxford University, UK.**

*There had always been fears that the collapse of any one communist state could bring down more … In 1989, the Polish (and more gradually) the Hungarian parties relinquished power, setting off a chain reaction.*

*Perhaps we need look no further. But one could see other developments converging to promote a general crisis of communism. One factor common to all Warsaw Pact members except Czechoslovakia was high hard currency debt. Servicing this led to the squeezing of living standards and corresponding discontent …*

*It may be, too, that people had always been aware of higher living standards in the West … But images and information were now more readily available than ever before, from Western radio and tapes, from West German, Austrian and (along the Adriatic) Italian television, and, indeed, from the* post-glasnost *Soviet and Hungarian media.*

*Alongside this went a collapse in communist belief … By the later 1980s the East European, and Soviet, parties had become ideologically broad churches, still retaining authoritarian Leninists but also people who had essentially become social democrats, plus many who were simply government-oriented politicians and administrators, as ready to operate within liberal capitalism as Marxist socialism.*

*Finally, there were the changes in the Soviet Union. These do not constitute a sufficient explanation for the passing of communism in eastern Europe, for this occurred also in Yugoslavia and Albania, which had long left the Soviet sphere. But within it, Moscow mattered. …*

*Gorbachev says that at his first meeting with Warsaw Pact leaders in 1985, he implied that the Brezhnev Doctrine was a thing of the past.*

According to Source U, what were the key reasons for the collapse of communist rule in eastern Europe? ?

## The role of the people

Other historians give much credit to the ordinary people of the USSR and eastern European countries who helped to create a crisis of communism as a form of government. Historian John Lewis Gaddis uses the metaphor of a 'sandpile ready to slide' to explain the situation across eastern Europe at the beginning of 1989 and he argues that those responsible for dropping the final few grains of sand which precipitated political change were the ordinary citizens of Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia.

? According to Source V, what were the key reasons for the collapse of communist rule in eastern Europe?

**SOURCE V**

**Excerpt from *The Cold War: A New History* by John Lewis Gaddis, published by Penguin Books, New York, USA, 2006, pages 238–9. Gaddis is a Professor of History at Yale University, USA.**

*Nevertheless, the upheavals of 1989, like those of 1789, caught everyone by surprise. Historians could of course look back, after the fact, and specify causes: frustration that the temporary divisions of the World War Two settlement had become the permanent divisions of the post-war era … resentment over the failure of command economies to raise living standards … the unexpected emergence of* independent *standards for making moral judgements …*

*What no one understood at the beginning of 1989 was that the Soviet Union, its empire, its ideology – and therefore the Cold War itself – was a sandpile ready to slide. All it took to make it happen were a few more grains of sand. The people who dropped them were not in charge of superpowers or movements or religions: they were ordinary people with simple priorities who saw, seized and sometimes stumbled into opportunities. In doing so they caused a collapse no one could stop. Their 'leaders' had little choice but to follow.*

*One particular leader, however, did so in a distinctive way. He ensured that the great 1989 revolution was the first one ever in which almost no blood was shed. There were no guillotines, no heads on pikes, no officially sanctioned mass murders. People did die but in remarkably small numbers for the size and significance of what was happening. In both its ends and its means, then, this revolution became a triumph of hope. It did so chiefly because Mikhail Gorbachev chose not to act, but rather to be acted upon.*

## Weakness of communism as a system of government

Some historians assign a minor role to internal problems in Warsaw Pact countries and changes in the USSR. Instead, more emphasis is given to a denunciation of communism itself, as an ideology of government.

? According to Source W, why did communism collapse?

**SOURCE W**

**Excerpt from *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power* by Zbigniew Brzezinski, published by Basic Books, New York, USA, 2012, pages 42–3. Brzezinski was National Security Advisor to US President Carter from 1977 to 1981 and teaches US Foreign Policy at Johns Hopkins University, USA.**

*For a variety of reasons – with some rooted in Soviet policy errors and some in domestic ideological sterility, bureaucratic degeneration and socioeconomic stagnation, not to mention the mounting political unrest in eastern Europe and hostility from China – the Soviet Union imploded …*

On the other hand, the Marxist school of historical analysis criticizes the moral bankruptcy of communism as a viable system of government. In the

end, many party members were playing a role and not really believing in communist rule with conviction.

**SOURCE X**

**Excerpt from *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* by Eric Hobsbawm, published by Michael Joseph, London, 1994, pages 488–9. Hobsbawm was a well-known British Marxist historian.**

*Yet hardly anyone believed in the system or felt any loyalty to it, not even those who governed it. They were no doubt surprised when the masses finally abandoned their passivity and demonstrated their dissidence … At the moment of truth no East European government ordered its forces to fire. All abdicated quietly, except in Romania, and even their resistance was brief. Perhaps they could not have regained control, but nobody even tried. No groups of communist ultras anywhere prepared to die in the bunker for their faith, or even for the far-from-unimpressive record of forty years' communist rule in a number of these states. What should they have defended? Economic systems whose inferiority to their Western neighbours leaped to the eye which were running down, and which had proved to be un-reformable, even where serious and intelligent efforts at reform had been made? Systems which had plainly lost the justification that had sustained their communist cadres in the past, namely that socialism was superior to capitalism and destined to replace it? Who could any longer believe that, though it had not looked implausible in the 1940s or even the 1950s? … In any case, in Europe as in the USSR, the communists who had once been sustained by the old convictions, were now a generation of the past … Even party members among the less-than-elderly were likely to be not communists in the old sense, but men and women (alas, far too few women) who made careers in countries that happened to be under communist rule. When times changed, and if they were allowed to, they were ready at a moment's notice to change their coats. In short, those who ran the Soviet satellite regimes had lost their faith in their own systems or had never really had it.*

Compare and contrast Sources W and X regarding the key reasons for the collapse of communist rule in eastern Europe. ?

## The role of SDI

Right-wing historians have also been tempted to give a lot of credit for the collapse of the Soviet sphere of influence, and indeed of the USSR itself, to US President Reagan's SDI programme. According to this thesis, the costs of trying to match SDI imposed an intolerable economic burden on the USSR and forced Gorbachev into scaling down the USSR's imperial commitments as quickly as possible. There are several flaws in this argument. At first, Reagan's announcement of SDI failed to drive either Chernenko or Andropov to the negotiating table, and, initially, it also seemed to achieve little in terms of prompting a relaxation of the Soviet grip on eastern Europe. Therefore, the threat of SDI on its own was clearly not enough to prompt a reassessment of Soviet foreign policy, especially as Soviet and western scientists rightly doubted the technical feasibility of Star Wars.

TOK Historians use evidence to make arguments. Review the sources above. What gives evidence value and makes it convincing? (History, Ethics, Language, Emotion, Reason.)

## Chapter summary

**The collapse of Soviet influence in eastern Europe**

Diplomatic relations between the USA and the USSR improved considerably between 1985 and 1989. The signing of the INF Treaty in 1987 removed a large number of nuclear weapons from Europe and illustrated how much diplomatic progress had been made since 1985.

The collapse of communism in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia cannot be understood without reference to this improved international context in which control over satellite states in eastern Europe became less of a strategic priority for the Soviet leadership. The fact that Gorbachev proved unwilling to enforce the Brezhnev Doctrine may have allowed protest movements to develop in eastern Europe.

In East Germany, Gorbachev's visit to the GDR in October 1989 acted as a catalyst for political discontent and he explicitly stated that he was unwilling for Red Army troops to be used in order to maintain Honecker's repressive regime. Already weakened by the exodus of refugees via Hungary, Honecker struggled to contain the demonstrations in Leipzig and was removed in October 1989. His replacement, Egon Krenz, bowed to the inevitable and relaxed travel restrictions for East Germany's citizens. This led directly to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, a fatal blow to the long-term prospects of the East German state. Krenz (and the SED) soon fell from power and within less than a year the GDR had collapsed and Germany was reunified.

Following the repression of the Prague Spring, Czechoslovakia had endured a period of totalitarian communist rule, euphemistically entitled normalization. However, the political *status quo* was altered in 1989 with the advent of student protests. Václav Havel helped to establish Civic Forum to co-ordinate the disparate opposition movement. The communist government lacked the explicit backing from the USSR and the consent of its own citizens for harsh repressive measures. The CPC felt that they had no choice but to agree to the formation of a coalition government. The symbolic end of the CPC's political dominance came on 29 December 1989, when former dissident Václav Havel became President.

The communist government in Poland was almost toppled in 1981. Solidarity, led by Lech Wałęsa, challenged the regime and was legally recognized. The USSR was tempted to intervene, but failed to do so partly as a result of its involvement in Afghanistan. A military coup by General Jaruzelski in December 1981 drove Solidarity underground, granting the government temporary respite. Economic problems were not solved by the communist government, leading to constant unrest and major debt. Both Solidarity and the Catholic Church remained committed to opposing the PUWP and, with Gorbachev unwilling to sanction military intervention, by 1989 the communist government had decided to negotiate with the political opposition. This paved the way for elections and the formation of a coalition government that ended the PUWP's monopoly of power.

# Examination practice

Below are some exam-style questions for you to practise. Paper 1 exams are one hour long, not including five minutes of reading time at the exam's start when only reading is permitted. You may wish to only practise specific questions, and if this is the case, allow the following amounts of time per question:

**Question 1:** 5 minute
**Question 2:** 10 minutes
**Question 3:** 10 minutes
**Question 4:** 35 minutes

These questions relate to the collapse of communist regimes in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. The sources used are found within this chapter on the following pages:

- Source C (page 169)
- Source D (page 170)
- Source N (page 184)
- Source O (page 186)
- Source R (page 191)
- Source S (page 192)

**1 a)** What, according to Source R, were the reactions to the Pope's visit to Poland? *(3 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 37.)

**b)** What is the message conveyed by Source S? *(2 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 41).

**2)** Compare and contrast the views expressed in Sources C and D about the reasons for the collapse of Soviet influence in eastern Europe. *(6 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 91.)

**3)** With reference to their origin and purpose, assess the value and limitations of Source N and Source O for historians studying the Velvet Revolution. *(6 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 130.)

**4)** Using these sources (Sources C, D, N, O, R) and your own knowledge, analyse the key reasons for the collapse of communist rule in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. *(8 marks)*
(For guidance on how to answer this style of question see page 160.)

# Activities

**1** Make a table summarizing the sequence of events that led to the collapse of communism in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Then debate the extent to which the collapse of communism in these countries can be said to conform to a general pattern.

**2** When revising this topic, work in groups of three and appoint one person to be the 'expert' on one of the following case studies: Poland, East Germany or Czechoslovakia. The 'expert' should write and present a summary of how and why communism collapsed in the country they are an expert on, and then be tested on their knowledge by the rest of the group.

**3** All historical arguments are simply assertions unless they are backed up by evidence. Look at the statements below and decide how far you agree or disagree with them. You may wish to use a 10-point scale, with 10 equating to strong agreement with the statement and 1 equating to total disagreement with the statement. Then make a list of evidence to support your point of view on each statement.

- Gorbachev could have preserved Soviet influence in eastern Europe if he had acted with greater determination.
- The political achievements of both Lech Wałęsa and Václav Havel have been exaggerated by posterity.
- By 1989 the collapse of communist regimes in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia could not have been prevented.