

Chapter 18: The Promises and Realities of Decolonization: 18-5a Crisis in the Soviet Union
Book Title: The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History 7th Edition Update, AP® Edition
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18-5a Crisis in the Soviet Union

Under U.S. president Ronald Reagan and the Soviet Union's general secretary Leonid Brezhnev (**leh-oh-NEED BREZ-nef**), Cold War rhetoric remained intense. Massive new U.S. investments in armaments placed heavy competitive burdens on a Soviet economy already suffering from shortages and mismanagement. Obsolete industrial plants and centralized planning stifled initiative in the Soviet Union and led to a declining standard of living relative to the West, while the arbitrariness of the bureaucracy, the manipulation of information, and material deprivations created a crisis in morale. Despite the unpopularity of the war in Afghanistan and growing domestic discontent, Brezhnev refused to modify his unsuccessful policies, but he could not escape criticism.

Self-published underground writings (*samizdat* [**sah-meez-DAHT**]) by critics of the regime circulated widely despite government efforts to suppress them. In a series of powerful books, writer Alexander Solzhenitzyn (**sol-zhuh-NEET-sin**) castigated the Soviet system. Although he won a Nobel Prize

AP® Exam Tip

Explain the factors that contributed to the end of the Cold War and its effect on global politics.

in literature, Soviet authorities charged him with treason and expelled him in 1974. By the time [Mikhail Gorbachev \(Head of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991. His liberalization effort improved relations with the West, but he lost power after his reforms led to the collapse of communist governments in eastern Europe.\)](#) (**GORE-beh-CHOF**) came to power in 1985, weariness with war in Afghanistan, economic decay, and vocal protest had reached critical levels. Casting aside Brezhnev's hard line, Gorbachev authorized major reforms in an attempt to stave off total collapse. His policy of political openness (*glasnost*) permitted criticism of the government and the Communist Party. His policy of [perestroika \(Policy of "restructuring" that was the centerpiece of Mikhail Gorbachev's efforts to liberalize communism in the Soviet Union.\)](#) (**per-ih-STROY-kuh**) ("restructuring") was an attempt to address long-suppressed economic problems by moving away from central state planning. In 1989 he ended the unpopular war in Afghanistan.

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