

Collapse of the Soviet Union

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**"Gorbachev's radical reforms led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991."
How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.**

The given assertion makes the claim that Gorbachev's radical reforms, which includes Perestroika and Glasnost, resulted in the Soviet Union being dissolved in 1991. This statement is largely supported by the reason that Perestroika and Glasnost revealed the weaknesses of the Soviet government, as well as the communist system, to the people, allowing for dissent to brew, and for the masses to speak up. However, this reason is myopic, because although Gorbachev's radical reforms unleashed forces that brought about the downfall of the Soviet Union, it was the presence of the flaws in the communist system that set the grounds for dissent to brew and to be unleashed through the reforms, and the mounting U.S. pressure that put a strain on the Soviet economy in the first place, resulting in the hastened radical reforms, in an attempt to maintain parity with the U.S. Thus, I believe that Gorbachev's radical reforms should be accorded an equal amount of blame in the collapse of USSR as the prevailing circumstances.

The reason behind the given assertion is largely due to the fact that Perestroika and Glasnost brought the problems of the communist system and the Soviet government to the surface, dismantling the idea of the USSR being a "heaven" for its people, representing the people and building a country for its people. [Perestroika](#) was introduced by Gorbachev in an attempt to improve the Soviet economy, given that it had stagnated

for a period of time. It was an attempt to transition the command economy to one of a free market economy, to prevent the further stagnation of the USSR economy. However, while Gorbachev intended to make the shift, insufficient support was provided for the people, given that the small businesses often had to pay high taxes for resources such as machinery and trucks. Overtime, the struggle to establish a business that was profitable resulted in the lack of drive of the people to start new businesses. As such, Perestroika was a reform too much and too fast for the people to adapt to the sweeping changes, ultimately resulting in the low motivation of the people to support such a reform by innovating and starting businesses, and hence the failure of Perestroika to drive change in the economy to prevent its further stagnation. Additionally, in an attempt to better distribute the country's spending, Gorbachev made the decision to reduce military spending, given that it took up a whopping 16% of their spending when they tried to maintain parity with the U.S. However, such a decrease resulted in the USSR losing prestige as the superpower, in terms of military, and led to the perceived weakening of the Soviet military, in comparison to the U.S. Adding on, [democratisation](#) and the introduction of free elections enabled the rise of opposition parties such as that of Yeltsin. In an attempt to change the communist system from within while maintaining his rule, Gorbachev established himself as the president of the Soviet Union and introduced the idea of free elections. However, this soon proved costly when strong opposition parties such as Yeltsin emerged, threatening the rule of Gorbachev and paving the way for the USSR to be disintegrated.

[Glasnost](#) was introduced to provide transparency and to encourage the freedom of speech, to pave the way for the introduction of and complementary to Gorbachev's main reform Perestroika, in an attempt to address the weaknesses and flaws of the Soviet government. The people were now allowed to publicly voice their dissent towards the government and its policies without the fear of punitive measures of imprisonment. Furthermore, the removal of censorship in books and newspapers, coupled with the full revelations of the Soviet history, such as the full extent of the atrocities of Stalin in purging the masses, allowed the people to see and judge for themselves, the Soviet Union, for the

first time. This paved the way for hatred and discontent with the Soviet government to boil, seeing that the idea of the country being somewhat a "utopia" was demolished with such releases. As such, while Glasnost was introduced with good intentions, for the people to provide feedback and to raise the concerns with regards to the communist system, which Gorbachev wanted the people to see as a work in progress through his reforms, its introduction inadvertently paved the way for nationalist ideas to brew, seeing that the years of suppressing dissent and the non-disclosure of the inherent flaws of the government were brought to the surface. Thus, Gorbachev's reforms indeed paved the way for discontent and dissent within the USSR, and their failure made the fact that the government was unable to resolve the inherent issues apparent to the people

However, such discontent could only exist on the basis of the flaws in the communist system and the mounting U.S. pressure.

The [flaws in the communist system](#) set the ground for dissent to brew, seeing that it manifested into economic and social problems. From the time of Stalin's reign, the USSR actively glorified itself, claiming to represent the people and having the intention of building a country for the people. However, the low quality of life contradicted the "heaven" promised. The command economy had stagnated, resulting in a myriad of problems such as the low quality of life, as well as the shortages and low quality of consumer goods. All enterprises in the USSR were state-controlled and were provided with a quota to meet for the quantity of goods produced. This reduced competition, the driving force of innovation and creativity, resulting in the low quality of consumer goods. Furthermore, there was a trend of officials falsifying the statistics to meet the quota and corruption practices such as bribery. Thus, while quotas were met, the presence of such production was lacking, due to the false statistics. This left the people hungry and leading miserable lives, with low morale amongst workers and the shortages or poor quality of basic necessities such as food, clothing and healthcare. This provided to be the basis of dissent when Glasnost was introduced later on, as the government had squelched dissent and the officials had provided false data on the quantity of items produced before the

introduction of Glasnost and the people were under the illusion of Soviet utopia.

Furthermore, with the economy of the USSR already stagnating, the mounting U.S. pressure put a further strain on the Soviet economy, when they renewed the arms race in the form of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), through the developments in their technology and weaponry, given their rise in economy. This resulted in a huge disparity between the U.S. and the USSR economies, since the U.S. helmed the free market economy while the USSR helmed the command economy. Such a move to continue the arms race proved vital to the further strain in the Soviet economy, seeing that since the US' economy was doing better than the USSR's, for the same amount of money allocated to furthering their military capacities and capabilities, a larger proportion of the economy was accorded to military developments in the USSR than the US, causing the economic problems in the USSR to worsen exponentially, resulting in the worsening of the quality of life and well-being of the people. This is a result of the huge emphasis being placed on the development of the military and rapid industrialisation, resulting in the neglect of the standard of living and the provision of necessities, in good quality, to the people.

Weighing the factors, it is safe to conclude that while the introduction of Gorbachev's reforms was indeed fundamental in driving the dissent of the people and the rise of opposition parties such as Yeltsin, who squelched the August coup staged by the hardliners on the breakaway and collapse of the Eastern European satellites, and Gorbachev's refusal to reign them in due to his reforms, as they saw it as the decline of USSR's sphere of influence and credibility as a superpower, it was with the prevailing circumstances — the weaknesses of the communist system and the stagnation of the command economy, as well as the mounting U.S. pressure, which further strained the already stagnating economy — that such radical reforms had to be introduced in the first place. Thus, I believe that Gorbachev's radical reforms should be accorded just as much blame as the US' intervention and pressure, and the inherent flaws of the Soviet government and communist system.