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### The Berlin Wall

After World War II ended in 1945, peace conferences at Yalta and Potsdam split Germany into allied occupation zones. The western part of the country went to the United States, Great Britain and France, while the eastern part went to the Soviet Union (“Berlin Wall”). The City of Berlin was split into similar sectors, with the allies taking the western half, and the Soviets taking the eastern half. The existence of West Berlin was out of place within communist East Germany, as it was a conspicuously capitalist city. The Russians began maneuvering to drive the United States, Britain and France out of the city for good (“Berlin Wall”). Their efforts were unsuccessful and only led to rising tensions between East and West Berlin, with millions of East Germans fleeing to the West to escape the repressive political system and limited economic opportunities. The amount of refugees became so excessive that East Germany constructed the Berlin Wall. The wall divided families and communities, and was inherently controlling, as its primary purpose was to restrict and regulate the movement of East Germans. This reinforced the overall authoritarian control of the German Democratic Republic and Soviet influence over Eastern Europe (“Berlin Wall”). The Wall was originally built in 1961 under Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, however when Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, the whole perspective of the Wall changed. Gorbachev’s ideology was unexpected given the historical conflict of the Soviet Union (“Mikhail Gorbachev”). Ultimately, as time went on, the Soviet leader allowed the Berlin wall to come

down because he had a broader vision for the Soviet Union and its role in the world. The main reasons for this are that he wanted a more dynamic socialist system, there was a need for internal economic recovery, and he desired to reposition the soviet union as a cooperative global power.

Gorbachev allowed for the Berlin wall to be taken down because he sought a greater purpose for the Soviet Union made possible by a socialist system with a more innovative approach. Perestroika was Gorbachev's policy introduced in 1985 to reform the Soviet Union's stagnant economy and political system. Gorbachev's perestroika program loosened centralized control of many businesses, allowing some farmers and manufacturers to decide for themselves which products to make, how many to produce, and what to charge for them. This went against the strict price controls that were typical for Soviet economic policies ("Perestroika"). It led to the rise of privately owned stores, restaurants and manufacturers. Gorbachev also reduced restrictions on foreign trade. Such aspects of free-market capitalism had not been seen in the Soviet Union since the brief New Economic Policy of Vladimir Lenin, instituted in 1922 after the Russian civil war ("Glasnost"). Glasnost was introduced in 1985 with the design to foster a more participatory and dynamic socialist system by relaxing censorship, allowing media, intellectuals, and citizens to openly criticize government policies, and expose corruption. This created a climate of political engagement, empowering citizens to demand reforms ("Glasnost"). These policies show that Gorbachev was striving for a more dynamic socialist system because the policies he installed paved the way for East Germans to demand reforms and protest to have the Berlin Wall removed. However, these reforms placed other considerations on the economy for Mikhail Gorbachev.

The Soviet leader's recognition of the Union's dire need for internal economic recovery shifted concern away from the Berlin Wall. By 1985, the time that Gorbachev took office, the

soviet economy had been stagnant for 20 years. The country's gross national product dropped from 5.8% in 1940 to 2.6% in 1970 ("Consequences of"). The region's large energy and raw material base had prompted the Soviet economy to rely little on foreign trade throughout history. It was recorded in 1985 that exports and imports accounted for just 4 percent of the Soviet gross national product ("Consequences of"). Most of the Soviet Union's trade was with communist countries, usually in Eastern Europe. Although Gorbachev had instituted the Perestroika and Glasnost reforms to jumpstart the inactive Soviet economy, many of them had the opposite effect ("Perestroika"). For example, the agricultural sector had provided food at low cost due to decades of heavy government subsidies. However, it could now charge higher prices in the marketplace. Many soviets could not afford these prices. Government spending and Soviet debt reached an all time high, and workers demanding higher wages led to dangerous inflation ("Perestroika"). Unlike past Soviet interventions Gorbachev's economic priorities meant he avoided military action. This shift reflected Gorbachev's practical vision to modernize the Soviet Union, prioritizing economic survival over imperial control. Ultimately, that enabled the Wall's fall on November 9, 1989. Furthermore, Gorbachev wanted the Union to have less political intervention.

Gorbachev's vision to reposition the Soviet Union as a cooperative global power, embodied in the Sinatra Doctrine and pursuit of détente, allowed the Berlin Wall to fall by enabling East German protests to succeed. The Sinatra Doctrine a policy allowing neighboring Warsaw Pact countries to resolve their internal affairs and determine their political evolution ("Sinatra Doctrine"). As a result, democratic reforms were enabled across the Eastern Bloc. One of the most notable was Poland's Solidarity movement, which secured semi-free elections in 1989. In East Germany, it signaled no Soviet intervention, emboldening other protests as well

("Poland's Solidarity"). Gorbachev's non-intervention, rooted in the Sinatra Doctrine, allowed East German protests to escalate. The Wall fell on November 9, 1989, after a bureaucratic error by a German Democratic Republic official, with Gorbachev refusing to deploy Soviet troops ("Sinatra Doctrine"). This ultimately shows that Gorbachev's desire to make the Soviet Union a more cooperative global power led him to allow the wall to come down, because he knew that in order to integrate the Soviet Union into a cooperative global framework, he had to reduce Cold War tensions and remove the past authoritarian control.

In conclusion, the Soviet leader allowed the Berlin wall to come down because he had a broader vision for the Soviet Union and its role in the world. The main reasons for this are that he wanted a more dynamic socialist system, there was a need for internal economic recovery, and he desired to reposition the soviet union as a cooperative global power.

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