

Decline of the USSR

Glasnost

- In 1985, the USSR elected 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev to be its leader.
- Gorbachev was aware of the terrible problems facing the USSR and introduced a series of radical measures in a bid to reform it. One of these reforms was the policy of Glasnost ("openness").
- Under this policy, Gorbachev called for open debate on government policy and honesty in facing up to problems.
- With openness and reforms, the Soviet people were able to learn about the heinous crimes committed by the Soviet Union in the past.
- For example, during the Stalinist years in an exhibition called **"Week of Conscience"** held in **November 1988**.
- Unfortunately, Glasnost backfired.
 - It released much resentment against the communist government.
 - Glasnost also exposed the shortcomings of the government officials such as their inefficiency and corruption.
- This led to decreasing confidence in the party.
- The Soviets were also further exposed to aspects of the outside world, especially the better quality of life in the United States and Western European countries, through popular Western culture.

Outcome

- As a result, the positive picture that the government previously presented to the public quickly fell apart.
- Many in the Soviet bloc felt deceived and lost confidence in the vision and rule of the communist governments.
- Hence, instead of rallying the people behind the reforms of "openness", Glasnost had unintentionally created a platform which unleashed criticism of communist rule that eventually brought about the disintegration of the USSR and thus the end of the Cold War.

Perestroika

- In 1985, the USSR elected 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev to be its leader.
- Gorbachev was aware of the terrible problems facing the USSR and introduced a series of radical measures to reform it. One of these reforms was the policy of Perestroika ("restructuring").
- It was a series of political and economic reforms that was intended to encourage new ideas, to increase efficiency and to fight the problem of corruption.
- One such measure in **1987** saw Perestroika allow market forces to be introduced in the Soviet economy.
 - For the first time in 60 years, it was no longer illegal to buy and sell for profit.
 - However, the policy was a failure. There was no overall increase in output.
 - Instead, there were chronic problems of unemployment, growth of black markets, as well as shortages in necessities.
 - The number of unprofitable enterprises that needed government

support also increased, while many Soviet Citizens lost interest in setting up their businesses.

Reduction on Military Spending

- In 1985, the USSR elected 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev to be its leader.
- Gorbachev was aware of the terrible problems facing the USSR and introduced a series of radical measures to reform it.
- One area of his reforms was in regard to military spending.
- Gorbachev was realistic enough to recognise that the USSR could not hope to outspend the United States on nuclear weapons and other military spending.
- He thus began to take measures to reduce Soviet military spending.
 - In 1988, he began the final withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.
 - Furthermore, in 1990, Gorbachev signed the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) that established comprehensive limits on key categories of conventional military equipment in Europe.
- Both these measures allowed the Soviets to reduce military spending, causing the Soviet Union's competitors in the Cold War, the US and its Western allies, to feel less threatened by it.
- This, in turn, reduced tensions and thus contributed to the end of the Cold War.

The Reagan-Gorbachev Summits

- In response to Gorbachev's reforms and a desire to advance nuclear

disarmament and tamp down the strategic arms race, Reagan made overtures to Soviet leaders and eventually engaged Gorbachev in negotiations with a shared commitment to nuclear abolition.

- This led to five summit meetings between Reagan and Gorbachev from 1985 and 1988.
- By the end of these summits, they had reached agreements to reduce their nuclear weapons further. Reagan also declared that he no longer thought the USSR was an "evil empire" because of the changes Gorbachev was making.
- The summits thus served to help resolve difference between the two superpowers and reduce tensions.
- In doing so, it contributed to the end of the Cold War.

De-Ideologisation of Soviet Foreign Policy

- The "de-ideologisation" of Soviet Foreign Policy meant an end to all ideologically driven engagements designed to promote communism globally and challenge the United States.
- Gorbachev recognised that to reform the Soviet economy successfully, he had to first reduce the large amounts of money being spent overseas as part of these efforts.
- To that effect, he declared that the USSR would no longer intervene in other countries to support communist regimes or takeovers, as it did under former leaders such as Brezhnev.
- To demonstrate his commitment towards de-ideologisation, Gorbachev withdrew troops from military engagement in Afghanistan and Angola alongside Soviet support for communist regimes in Cuba and Vietnam.
- By no longer engaging in superpower competition with the United

States, the USSR eliminated one of the biggest sources of tension fueling the Cold War, thus contributing to its end.

US Economic Superiority

- In the 1970s, the United States and Western Europe enjoyed an economic boom.
- For example, the Gross Domestic product (GDP) per capita of the USA grew from USD 23,958 to USD 29,611 between 1970 and 1980s.
- In contrast, in the same period, the USSR's GDP per capita only grew from USD 8,886 to USD 10,245.
- This boom was partially a result of measures pursued by leaders such as US President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who emphasised that governments should cut taxes and advocated that governments should spend less and limit their involvement in people's lives, such as through welfare or state healthcare, as far as possible.
- As a result of this economic boom, the US and its allies could simply outspend the USSR in the superpower competition in a way that the Soviets struggled to overcome. This encouraged the Soviets to seek to de-escalate the tensions underpinning the Cold War, thus contributing to its end.