

**Western History**  
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**DISINTEGRATION OF THE USSR**

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The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was created after the socialist revolution in Russia in 1917, which ended the Russian empire. The USSR was a loose confederation of 15 republics and Russia was the leader. It was a strong segment with great control over politics of entire world from 1922 to 1991 when it was disintegrated into smaller units, mainly due to Mikhael Gorbvachev's economic and political reforms- Perestroika and Glasnost respectively.

This led to the end of the cold war between the two superpowers USA and USSR. It was marked by events like the fall of the Berlin Wall and power shift from Soviet center to the republics. The breakdown of USSR made USA the sole global power, ending the bipolarity in the world order.

## **Problems faced by USSR**

There were many problems with the USSR. Some of them are as follows:

- At that time, there was a bureaucratic and authoritarian system.
- Democracy was just another word.
- There was no freedom of speech.
- There was one party system which was unaccountable to people.
- Because of the dominance of Russia, there was neglect to the interests of other republics.
- There was a very high expenditure on defense and the system was low on infrastructure and technology.

## **Major Events that led to disintegration of the USSR**

The following were the main reasons for the disintegration of USSR: -

- **Socialist bloc crisis:** The people from many east European countries started protesting against their own governments and USSR without the right intervention from USSR at the right time. Communist governments in the Second World War collapsed one after the other without the right intervention from USSR at the right time.

- **Fall of Berlin Wall:** After the Second World War Germany was divided among the socialist USSR and the capitalist western regimes. Fall of Berlin led to a series of events including the disintegration of the USSR.
- **Political and Economic reforms in USSR:** Gorbachev realized the economic and political problems of USSR, and started a series of reforms, with the intention to revive the economy and settle economic problems. This was more closely associated with the market economy and was a deviation from the communist policies. Many communist leaders in USSR opposed to reforms initiated by Gorbachev. They encouraged a coup in the year 1991.
- **Opposition against the coup:** Boris Yeltsin, who won the popular election in the Russian Republic, also protested against the coup and central control of USSR. The freedom for republics became the slogan. Boris Yeltsin and the pluralist movement advocated democratization and rapid economic reforms. The hard-line Communist elite wanted to thwart Gorbachev's reform agenda.
- **The power shift from Soviet center to republics:** Republics like Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus emerged as a powerful country. They declared that the Soviet Union as being disbanded.

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## **Factors that led to the disintegration of USSR**

The factors that led to the disintegration of USSR are as follows:

### **1. Economic Weakness**

The weakness in the economy at that time was the major cause of dissatisfaction among the people in USSR. There was a huge shortage of consumer items. The reasons for economics weakness were as follows:

- A Huge amount was spent on the military.
- In the Easter Europe, there was a large maintenance of satellite states
- Maintenance of the Central Asian Republics within the USSR states.

## 2. Political Un-accountability

There was a single party rule for around 70 years that turned authoritarian. There were widespread corruption and lack of transparency in the system. Gorbachev made a decision to allow elections with a multi-party system and create a presidency for the Soviet Union. This began a slow process of democratization that eventually destabilized Communist control and contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

## 3. Gorbachev's reforms

Once freedom was achieved by under Michael Gorbachev's reforms, they demanded more for it. The demand grew into a big force which turned very difficult to control. The people wanted to catch up on the western side very quickly.

## 4. Rise of nationalism

There was a rise of nationalism among countries like Russia, Baltic republics, Ukraine, Georgia etc. This is the most important and immediate cause of the disintegration of the USSR. The national feeling was strong among the most prosperous areas in USSR and not in Central Asian republics. Ordinary people among prosperous republics never liked to pay the big price to uplift the backward Central Asian republics.

## Consequences:

The major consequences of the disintegration of the USSR upon countries like India were:

- **End of ideological battle:** The disintegration of USSR showed the lacunae of socialistic model of economic governance to the developing world. It was seen as a victory of capitalism over socialism, often termed as 'end of ideology' thesis.
- **Rise of free-market economic model:** Dominance of western institutions like IMF and World Bank in the global economic governance pushed developing countries to adopt neo-liberal economic policies. India adopted free-market economic model in the form of LPG reforms post 1991.

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- **Decline in financial aid to other countries:** Though a member of NAM, India had mutual strategic cooperation with USSR as per its **1971 Indo–Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation**. The financial aid from the Soviet Union to India was significantly reduced due to the disintegration of the USSR. This was also one of the reasons for balance of payments crisis of India in 1991.
  - **Reorganization of Eastern Europe:** Changes in politics of Europe led to dilution of division between Western and Eastern Europe. Demolition of the Berlin wall, the unification of Germany, the end of the Warsaw Pact and rise of democratic regimes changed the politics of Europe. The membership of European Union enlarged, leading to emergence of new economic bloc -EU.
  - **Rise of Central Asia:** Central Asia became a new centre of global interest particularly from Chinese expansionist ambitions in the region.

## **Conclusion**

Hence, the disintegration of the USSR resulted in a phase of USA's dominance in world politics. Countries like India maintained good relations with Russia post-disintegration and shared the idea of having a multipolar world order.

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