



Name: _____ Date: _____

Collapse of the Soviet Empire

As the fighting in Afghanistan dragged on, the Soviet economy stagnated. In 1985, an energetic new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, took up the reins of power. Gorbachev was eager to reform inefficiencies in government and the economy. The changes he unloosed, however, spiraled out of his control, swamping him and the Soviet Union.

The Gorbachev revolution. In foreign policy, Gorbachev sought an end to costly Cold War tensions. He renounced the Brezhnev Doctrine, signed arms control treaties with the United States, and eventually pulled Soviet troops out of Afghanistan.

At home, Gorbachev launched a twopronged effort at reform. First, he called for glasnost, or openness. He ended censorship and encouraged people to discuss publicly the country's problems. Second, he urged the restructuring of government and the economy, **called perestroika** (pehr uh sTROi kuh). Streamlining government and reducing the size of the bureaucracy, he hoped, would boost efficiency and output. He backed some free-market ideas, including limited private enterprise, but wanted to keep the essence of communism.

Corrupt or incompetent officials were dismissed. To produce more and higher-quality consumer goods, factory managers, instead of central planners, were made responsible for decisions. To increase food supplies, farmers were allowed more land on which to grow food to sell on the free market.

Unexpected results. Such rapid change brought economic turmoil. Shortages grew worse and prices soared. Factories that could not survive without government help closed, throwing thousands out of work. Old-line Communists and bureaucrats whose careers were at stake denounced the reforms. At the same time, other critics, like the popular Russian leader Boris Yeltsin, demanded even more radical changes.

Gorbachev faced a host of other problems. Glasnost encouraged unrest in the multinational Soviet empire. The Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had been seized by Stalin in 1940. In 1991, they regained full independence. In Eastern Europe, countries from



Freedom for the Baltic States As the Soviet Union weakened, the small republics of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania declared independence. In a tense standoff, Soviet troops threatened to crush the independence movements. These demonstrators at the United Nations demanded that Gorbachev recognize the independence of the Baltic states. In the end, the Soviet army withdrew. **Geography and History** Look at the map on page 990. Why are Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania called the Baltic states?

Poland and East Germany to Romania and Bulgaria broke out of the Soviet orbit.

In mid-1991, hardliners tried to overthrow Gorbachev and restore the old order. Their coup failed, but it further weakened Gorbachev. By year's end, as other Soviet republics declared independence, Gorbachev resigned as president. After 74 years, the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

The Russian Republic

Russia, the largest republic in size and population, had dominated the Soviet Union. After the breakup, Russia and its president, Boris Yeltsin, faced a difficult future.

Political problems. Russians approved a new constitution, but they had no democratic traditions. In the 1990s, economic hardships and political turmoil increased. Many Russians feared the growing chaos and longed for a return to order.

Yeltsin clashed repeatedly with parliament. Many members were former Communists who

Why Did the Soviet Union Collapse?

1. Who was the new Soviet leader in 1985?

2. What was he trying to do to solve the USSR's problems? _____

3. Why were there food shortages in the Soviet Union?

4. Why was the average Soviet consumer angry at the government's economic policies?

5. Afghanistan has been called the Soviet Union's Vietnam War. Why? _____

6. What was **glasnost**? _____

7. Under **glasnost**, what would the average Soviet citizen consider to be their country's greatest problem? _____

8. What was the goal of **perestroika**? _____

9. Was **perestroika** successful? _____ Explain. _____

Directions: Read the following account of the collapse of the Soviet Union and answer the questions that follow on separate paper.

THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

We have already read about how the Soviet Union collapsed. The Commonwealth of Independent States took its place. The C.I.S. Is made up of ten independent nations that used to be part of the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Today, each republic is an independent nation. However, independence has created many problems for each nation. The largest and the most **POPULOUS** of these nations is Russia. Let's examine some of the problems it faces today.

I: THE ECONOMY:

Russia's economy is in trouble. This is happening because the Russian people have dropped communism and central government planning. In its place they have **ADOPTED** a free market economy like many western nations. This means that in Russia today many people own their own businesses and keep the **PROFITS**. Decisions are no longer made centrally by the government. The changeover from communism to a market economy has been very difficult. It has caused very great **INFLATION**. This means that prices have gone up and the old Soviet money is worth very little. Western nations have helped Russia with tens of billions of dollars. However, the road ahead will be a difficult one for the new nation.

II: DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM:

Everybody who lived in what used to be the Soviet Union lived under a totalitarian, communist dictatorship. They never knew what it was like to live in freedom. However, the changes brought about by Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin has given the Russian people real freedoms for the first time in the history of the nation. The Russian people will have to work to keep their freedoms at a time when their economy is weak. Some people in the country want to return to "the good old days" and bring back dictatorship. The longer Russia stays a democracy; there is less chance that they will return to dictatorship. However, the Russian people must be careful to protect their new freedoms. This will not be east because of the many economic problems faced by the country.

III: NUCLEAR WEAPONS:

Russia (and some of the other CIS countries) has thousands of nuclear missiles that were built by the Soviet Union. These missiles are very dangerous if they are not taken care of. The Russian government would like to take these weapons apart. The United States is helping Russia with this problem. However, the process costs a great deal of money and is dangerous. Russia has also reduced its military by millions of people. This means that new jobs have to be found for ex-soldiers and scientists who are no longer needed.

IV: NATIONALITIES:

There are almost 100 different **ETHNIC** groups and nationalities in the CIS. Most of the CIS member countries are made up of one ethnic group. For example, Russia is made up mostly of Russians. Georgia is made up mostly of Georgians. Kazakhstan has mostly Kazaks. Each of these nations and groups is very proud of their culture. Each has different languages and different religions. This has caused several problems in the C.I.S. First, it has made **UNITY** very difficult because the people are so different. Second, many minority groups in these nations have not been given their rights. In the old days under the leadership of the Soviet Union, the totalitarian dictatorship made decisions-for everyone. But with independence and new freedoms, each nation **now** makes its own decisions. The people will have to work hard to learn how to work and to live together in peace.

QUESTIONS:

1. List 4 problems faced today by the C.I.S.
2. Discuss how the C.I.S. might solve each of these problems.
3. Why have the United States and other Western Bloc nations helped the C.I.S.?
4. Some nuclear scientists who worked for the Soviet Union are now planning to work for other countries like Iran, Iraq and North Korea. Why might that cause a problem? How can this problem be avoided?