

**NAME: ADEJUWON JOSHUA**

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**DEPT: PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES**

**COURSE CODE: PCS 302**

**COURSE TITLE: THE COLD WAR**

You are required to read up on the end of the Cold War:

Highlight the role of Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.

Discuss the role of President Ronald Reagan of the USA in ending the Cold War.

Discuss the implication of the collapse of the Cold War on global politics with an emphasis on the emergence of a "New World Order."

### **The Role of Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union**

In March 1985, a longtime Communist Party politician named Mikhail Gorbachev assumed the leadership of the USSR. He inherited a stagnant economy and a political structure that made reform all but impossible.

Gorbachev introduced two sets of policies that he hoped would help the USSR become a more prosperous, productive nation. The first of these was known as glasnost, or political openness. Glasnost eliminated traces of Stalinist repression, like the banning of books and the omnipresent secret police, and gave new freedoms to Soviet citizens. Political prisoners were released. Newspapers could print criticisms of the government. For the first time, parties other than the Communist Party could participate in elections.

The second set of reforms was known as perestroika, or economic restructuring. The best way to revive the Soviet economy, Gorbachev thought, was to loosen the government's grip on it. He believed that private initiative would lead to innovation, so individuals and cooperatives were allowed to own businesses for the first time since the 1920s. Workers were given the right to strike for better wages and conditions. Gorbachev also encouraged foreign investment in Soviet enterprises.

However, these reforms were slow to bear fruit. Perestroika had torpedoed the “command economy” that had kept the Soviet state afloat, but the market economy took time to mature. (In his farewell address, Gorbachev summed up the problem: “The old system collapsed before the new one had time to begin working.”) Rationing, shortages and endless queuing for scarce goods seemed to be the only results of Gorbachev’s policies. As a result, people grew more and more frustrated with his government.

The state lost control of both the media and the public sphere, and democratic reform movements gained steam throughout the Soviet bloc.

And it is a widely held belief that Soviet defense spending accelerated dramatically in response to the presidency of Ronald Reagan and proposals such as the Strategic Defense Initiative. In fact, the Soviet military budget had been trending upward since at least the early 1970s, but Western analysts were left with best guesses in regard to hard numbers. Outside estimates of Soviet military spending ranged between 10 and 20 percent of GDP, and, even within the Soviet Union itself, it was difficult to produce an exact accounting because the military budget involved a variety of government ministries, each with its own competing interests. What can be said definitively, however, is that military spending was consistently agnostic of overall economic trends: even when the Soviet economy lagged, the military remained well-funded. In addition, the military took priority when it came to research and development talent. Technological innovators and would-be entrepreneurs who could have helped support Gorbachev’s partial transition to a market economy were instead funneled into defense industries.

Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States teetered on the edge of mutual nuclear destruction. What few had considered, however, was that the Soviet Union would be brought down by an incident involving a civilian nuclear plant. Gorbachev had been in power for just over a year when, on April 26, 1986, the Unit 4 reactor at the Chernobyl power station in Prypyat (now in Ukraine) exploded. The explosion and subsequent fires released more than 400 times the amount of radioactive fallout as the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. The official response to the disaster would be a test of Gorbachev’s doctrine of openness, and, in that regard, glasnost would be found fatally wanting. Communist Party officials acted quickly to suppress information about the severity of the disaster, going as far as to order that May Day parades and celebrations in the affected area should proceed as planned despite the known risk of radiation exposure. Western reports about the dangerously high levels of wind-transported radioactivity were dismissed as gossip, while apparatchiks quietly collected Geiger counters from science classrooms. Workers were finally able to bring the radiation leak under control on May 4, but Gorbachev did not issue an official statement to the public until May 14, 18 days after the disaster. He characterized the incident at Chernobyl as a “misfortune” and pilloried Western media coverage as a “highly immoral campaign” of “malicious lies.” Over time, Communist Party propaganda was increasingly at odds with the daily experiences of those in the contamination zone who were dealing with the physical effects of radiation poisoning.

Whatever trust remained in the Soviet system had been shattered. Decades later, Gorbachev marked the anniversary of the disaster by stating, "even more than my launch of perestroika, [Chernobyl] was perhaps the real cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union five years later."

### **The role of President Ronald Reagan of the USA in ending the Cold War**

In Ronald Reagan's first presidential press conference, he stunned official Washington by denouncing the Soviet leadership as still dedicated to "world revolution and a one-world Socialist-Communist state." As he wrote in his official autobiography, "I decided we had to send as powerful a message as we could to the Russians that we weren't going to stand by anymore while they armed and financed terrorists and subverted democratic governments."

Based on intelligence reports and his life-long study, Reagan concluded that Soviet communism was cracking and ready to crumble. In May 1982 he went public with his assessment of the Soviets' systemic weakness. Speaking at his alma mater, Eureka College, he declared that the Soviet empire was "faltering because rigid centralized control has destroyed incentives for innovation, efficiency, and individual achievement."

One month later, in a prophetic address to the British Parliament at Westminster, Reagan said that the Soviet Union was gripped by a "great revolutionary crisis" and that a "global campaign for freedom" would ultimately prevail. He boldly predicted that "the march of freedom and democracy ... will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history as it has left other tyrannies which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of the people."

He directed his top national security team to develop a plan to end the Cold War by winning it. The result was a series of top-secret national security decision directives that:

1. Committed the U.S. to "neutralizing" Soviet control over Eastern Europe and authorized covert action and other means to support anti-Soviet groups in the region.
2. Adopted a policy of attacking a "strategic triad" of critical resources - financial credits, high technology and natural gas - essential to Soviet economic survival. Author-economist Roger Robinson said the directive was tantamount to "a secret declaration of economic war on the Soviet Union."
3. Determined that, rather than coexist with the Soviet system, the U.S. would seek to change it fundamentally. The language, drafted by Harvard historian Richard Pipes, was unequivocal: America intended to "roll back" Soviet influence at every opportunity.

Following these directives, the administration pursued a multifaceted foreign policy offensive that included covert support of the Solidarity movement in Poland, an increase in pro-freedom public diplomacy (through instruments like the National Endowment for Democracy), a global campaign to reduce Soviet access to Western high technology and a drive to hurt the Soviet economy by driving down the price of oil and limiting natural gas exports to the West.

A key element of Reagan's victory strategy was the support of anti-communist forces in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Angola and Cambodia. The "Reagan Doctrine" (a name coined by syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer) was the most cost-effective of all the cold war doctrines, costing the United States less than a billion dollars a year while forcing the cash-strapped Soviets to spend some \$8 billion annually to deflect its impact. It was also one of the most politically successful doctrines in Cold War history, resulting in a Soviet pullout from Afghanistan, the election of a democratic government in Nicaragua and the removal of 40,000 Cuban troops from Angola and the holding of United Nations-monitored elections there.

And then there was SDI - the Strategic Defense Initiative. Dismissed as "Star Wars" by U.S. skeptics, it put the Soviet military in a state of fear and shock. A decade later, a top Soviet strategist revealed what he had told the Politburo at the time: "Not only could we not defeat SDI, SDI defeated all our possible countermeasures."

The American president who effectively wrote finis to the Cold War was Ronald Reagan. He entered the Oval Office with a clear set of ideas he had developed over a lifetime of study. He forced the Soviet Union to abandon its goal of world communism by challenging its legitimacy, regaining superiority in the arms race and using human rights as a powerful psychological weapon.

By the time Reagan left office in January 1989, the Reagan Doctrine had achieved its goal: Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet system, publicly acknowledged the failures of Marxism-Leninism and the futility of Russian imperialism. In Margaret Thatcher's words, Ronald Reagan had ended the Cold War without firing a shot.

### **Discuss the implication of the collapse of the Cold War on global politics with an emphasis on the emergence of a "New World Order."**

Many People hoped that after the cold war the new world order of the 1990s would be marked with the security and prosperity to which they had become accustomed.

The phrase "new world order" or similar language was used in the period toward the end of the First World War in relation to Woodrow Wilson's vision for international peace;[a] Wilson called for a League of Nations to prevent aggression and conflict. The phrase was used sparingly at the end of World War II when describing the plans for the United Nations and the Bretton Woods system partly because of its negative associations with the failed League of Nations. However, many commentators have applied the term retroactively to the order put in place by the World War II victors as a "new world order."

The most widely discussed application of the phrase of recent times came at the end of the Cold War. Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush used the term to try to define the nature of the post-Cold War era and the spirit of great power cooperation that they hoped

might materialize. Gorbachev's initial formulation was wide-ranging and idealistic, but his ability to press for it was severely limited by the internal crisis of the Soviet system. In comparison, Bush's vision was not less circumscribed: "A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known". However, given the new unipolar status of the United States, Bush's vision was realistic in saying that "there is no substitute for American leadership". The Gulf War of 1991 was regarded as the first test of the new world order: "Now, we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order. The Gulf war put this new world to its first test".

One of the implications of the collapse of the Cold War was an era it brought which was mostly dominated by the rise of globalization (as well as nationalism and populism in reaction) which was enabled by the commercialization of the Internet and the growth of the mobile phone system. The ideology of postmodernism and cultural relativism has according to some scholars replaced modernism and notions of absolute progress and ideology. That era enabled renewed attention to be paid to matters that were ignored during the Cold War. The Cold War paved the way for nationalist movements and internationalism. Following the nuclear crises of the Cold War, many nations found it necessary to discuss a new form of international order and internationalism, where countries cooperated with one another instead of using nuclear scare tactics.

That period saw the United States become by far the most powerful country in the world and the rise of China from a relatively weak developing country to a fledgling potential superpower. Reacting on the rise of China, the United States strategically sought to "rebalance" the Asia-Pacific region. It also saw the merger of most of Europe into one economy and a shift of power from the G7 to the larger G20. Accompanying the NATO expansion, Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) systems were installed in East Europe. These marked important steps in military globalization.

The end of the Cold War intensified hopes for increasing international cooperation and strengthened international organizations focused on approaching global issues. This paved way for the establishment of international agreements such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the Paris Climate Agreement. Environmentalism also became a mainstream concern in the post-Cold War era following the circulation of widely accepted evidence for human activity's effects on Earth's climate. The same heightened consciousness is true of terrorism, owing largely to the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States and their global fallout.

