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ANSWER:

The Cold War period of 1985-1991 began with the rise of Mikhail Gorbashev as General Secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev was a revolutionary leader for the USSR, as he was the first to promote liberalization of the political landscape (Glasnost) and capitalist elements (perestroika); prior this, USSR has been strictly prohibiting liberal reform and maintained inefficient command economy. The USSR, despite facing massive economic difficulties, was involved in a costly arms race with the United States under president Ronald Reagan. Regardless, the USSR began to crumble as liberal reforms proved difficult to handle and capitalist changes to the economy were badly instituted and caused major problems. The Cold War came to an end when the last year of Soviet occupation ended up in Afghanistan, the berlin wall came down in Germany, and a series of mostly peaceful revolutions swept the Soviet Bloc states of eastern Europe in 1989

part in bringing the end to the Cold War. It may also be said that he is the most controversial character among them. We have seen a multitude of contrasting opinions about the motivations and consequences of Gorbachev’s statesmanship, ranging from Western euphoric fascination in the 1990s to accusations of treason by the members of the collapsed Soviet establishment. More analytical judgments point to the problem of the factual importance of individual agency in shaping the considered events. Several years after the end of the Cold War it became apparent that the USSR was bound to ‘lose’ the prolonged competition with the Western world. Especially the rigid, wildly inefficient planned economy presented a self-defeating idea. Additionally, Communism as an ideology began to lose its appeal among third world countries, and in the early 1980s the Kremlin was beginning to realize that the possibility of a Communist expansion had become rather marginal. Simultaneously, there was growing pressure from the United States which reinitiated the arms-race with resources vastly beyond the Soviet capabilities. Parallel to these arguments is the recognition that even if the Soviet cause was moribund, it was not certain when and how the Cold War would end. The competition could have extended well into the 21st century – or could have ended in a nuclear confrontation.

The foreign policy of the Ronald Reagan administration from 1981 to 1989 was characterized by a strategy of “peace through strength.” Critics label Reagan’s policies as aggressive, imperialistic, and “warmongering”; however, these policies were supported by leading American conservatives who argued they were necessary to protect U.S. security interests. While Ronald Reagan worked to restrict the influence of the federal government in people’s lives, he simultaneously pursued interventionist policies abroad as part of a global Cold War strategy. Eager to cure the United States of “Vietnam Syndrome,” he increased the American stockpile of weapons and aided anti-Communist groups in the Caribbean and Central America. As part of the policies that became known as the Reagan Doctrine, the United States also offered financial and logistical support to the anti-communist opposition in central Europe, and took an increasingly hard line against socialist and communist governments in Afghanistan, Angola, and Nicaragua.

Along with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Reagan harshly criticized the Soviet Union on ideological and moral terms.

In 1983, Soviet Union fighter planes shot down a Korean Air commercial passenger plane, killing all 269 passengers, including a US congressman. This prompted a harsh diplomatic and economic response by President Reagan.

Under the Reagan Doctrine, the United States provided arms, training, and financial aid to anti-communist movements around the world, including Islamist Mujaheddin forces in Afghanistan.

The “Reagan Doctrine” offered support to anti-communist opposition in central Europe and worked against socialist and communist governments. During his presidency, Reagan implemented the Strategic Defense Initiative, which attempted to create a missile-defense system. Critics challenged this as technologically unfeasible.

Global Positioning System: A space-based satellite navigation system that provides location and time information in all weather, anywhere on or near the earth, where there is an unobstructed line of sight to four or more satellites; it is maintained by the United States government and is freely accessible to anyone with a receiver.

Strategic Defense Initiative: A system proposed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan on March 23, 1983, to use ground- and space-based systems to protect the United States from attack by strategic nuclear ballistic missiles.

Détente: A relaxing of tension between major powers, especially the particular thawing of relations between the Soviet Union and the United States following the Cold War.

First, globalization has weakened nation states: Countries and individuals alike are exposed to unprecedented risks in the face of international capital. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union, the Western capitalist world order saw a golden opportunity to sweep across the planet. Expansion of such an order was given the name of “globalization” in the mid and late 1990s. The generally shallow interpretation of globalization refers to the increasingly strengthened global connections and interdependence in economy, trade, transport and communications. But the insight of such scholars as Herbert Hart is especially worth notice, as he pointed out the essence of globalization is the global expansion of capitalist production and economic relations. In this sense, globalization obviously has a longer history, only that it had not become true to its name until after the Cold War. Globalization benefited many countries and individuals, but has at the same time brought about great risks: First is the extreme imbalance in distribution of the benefits, resulting in greater gaps between nations and individuals; second, capital’s easy penetration of national boundaries has also weakened countries’ capabilities for managing and coping with such a phenomenon, exposing individuals more directly to the control of international capital, rendering them helpless.

Second, Russia-West relations are difficult to ease. Their relations are in part extension of the confrontation between the US and Soviet camps, only that Russia is evidently in a more defensive position now. After the Cold War, the West has seen unprecedented success in expanding its own sphere of influence and security boundaries, the rapid expansion of the European Union and NATO in the former Soviet Union’s sphere of influence, in particular, has inevitably made Russia nervous. The West’s success has taken advantage of its triumph in the Cold War, and come with its long-standing arrogance. In complete disregard of Russian feelings, it has extended its sphere of influence to Ukraine, a core source of Russian pride. The reactions of Vladimir Putin on one hand reflect his individual personality, but are on the other hand natural Russian defensive responses to the overbearing West. Geo-strategic factors aside, cultural factors can’t be ignored in Russia-West ties. In Russia, there has been the long-standing debate and tension over whether the country belongs to the East or West. Europeans have shown universal refusal of Russia, believing that Russia isn’t a part of Europe. The latest meeting between heads of the Catholic and Orthodox churches in Cuba again brought to attention the convoluted relations between Russian and European civilizations. Their divergent values, rooted in differences in culture, civilization and system, have demonstrated profound impacts on bilateral ties, resulting in structural and psychological standoff that is difficult to reconcile. Russia’s refusal to back down on the Ukraine issue and subsequent Western sanctions against Russia have made it possible for Putin, who is good at manipulating nationalist feelings, to maintain relatively high approval ratings at home; in the face of Western sanctions and dramatic falls in international energy prices, it is within anticipation that Putin has chosen to seek a breakthrough by intervening in Syria.

Third, Western expansion and intervention have resulted in failed states and turbulent areas. Victory in the Cold War and smooth expansion in the post-Cold War era have led to the West’s inflated self-confidence, making it believe it can realize transition by imposing regime change. The plans and policies that have been or are being applied to Iraq, Libya and Syria are cases in point. Except for post-WWII Japan and Germany, however, precedents of successful transition by means of forceful external intervention are extremely rare. The successes in Japan and Germany had their own special conditions in terms of national characteristics, timing and policies. The interventions in Iraq, Libya and Syria activated the existing historical schisms there, resulting in rapid loss of the capabilities of the states, producing failed states, and ultimately turning the countries into hotbeds for religious extremism and terrorism. Emergence of the ISIS in Iraq and Syria is the fruit of such conditions. Contemporary civilization had originally been fragile in those areas. Now it has collapsed. It would be extremely difficult to rebuild it. Syria has become a playground for proxy war and geopolitical wrangling. For Russia and the West (including Turkey), Iran and Saudi Arabia, and in fact the entire world, each party has its own private calculations in the fight against terror. It hardly makes sense to quarrel about who is truly fighting terrorism, who is supporting the Assad regime or the moderate opposition. The real outcome is that outside interventions have led to further political and social disorder. Millions have fled their homeland and are suffering.

Fourth, the turmoil and chaos have in turn brought the West, Europe in particular, serious terrorism and refugee crises. Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Ankara and Istanbul have suffered from real or potential terrorist threats last year. Unlike traditional military conflicts, terrorism is an asymmetrical threat. A couple of terrorists could take a city, even a country, hostage. That is in part a by-product of technological globalization. Last year alone, Germany accepted more than 1 million refugees. The sudden inflow of the refugee population, the involvement of refugees in the New Year’s Eve sexual assaults in particular, has subjected the government’s accommodating refugee policy to criticism, and political correctness has concealed many real concerns there. The further rise of right-wing extreme nationalist forces in France and Germany is closely related to the current terrorist threats and refugee crisis. Russia knows that very well in its intervention in Syria. France and Germany seek to mediate between Turkey and Russia mainly because Europe faces the threats of both terrorism and the refugee crisis.

Fifth, regional conflicts, turmoil and crises have not only emerged in the Mediterranean area (its north, east and south coasts), but the Caucasus-Central Asia region – the area’s eastward extension and part of the former Soviet sphere of influence – is also facing increasingly severe crisis. Due to the falls in global energy prices and Russia’s own economic crisis, these two important economic pillars of Caucasus-Central Asian countries have been weakened, rendering them increasingly vulnerable to risks of economic collapse and political turbulence. Those countries had not had their own sovereign rights until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Their capabilities for participating in world division of labor and their capabilities as countries remain limited. In the face of the crisis, the existing national conflicts, religious extremism and competition for resources (water, for example) will become even fiercer. Since the local economies are highly dependent on external factors (their imports come mainly from China and Russia), and long-retained hereditary dictatorships have dominated politically, they have experienced currency depreciation, inflation, and extreme difficulties in people’s livelihoods. Afghanistan, which sits south of the region, is a major base of extremism. It is not difficult for extremist forces to infiltrate northward. Turbulences occurring in the hinterlands of Asia will also threaten China’s security.

To sum up, the main challenges for the post-Cold War world include: Control by and challenges from international capitals, legacies of the Cold War, asymmetrical threats such as terrorism, regional and transnational conflicts. These challenges are diffusive, cascading, and unpredictable. Things get even more complicated given the various problems involving economy, society, humanitarian concerns, epidemics, and the environment. The world has yet to find proper and effective means to cope with such challenges and manage the crises in a time when the mobility and interdependence of personnel, capital, goods and ideas are increasingly enhanced.