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Chapter 18, Section 5: The End of the Cold War

Objectives
[Understand how the Soviet Union declined.](#)
[Analyze the changes that transformed Eastern Europe.](#)
[Explain how communism declined worldwide and the United States became the sole superpower.](#)

Terms, People, and Places
[Mikhail Gorbachev](#)
[Glasnost](#)
[Perestroika](#)
[Lech Wałęsa](#)
[Solidarity](#)
[Václav Havel](#)
[Nicolae Ceaușescu](#)

CRITICAL QUESTIONS
How did Gorbachev's policies lead to a new map of Europe and Asia?
How did glasnost in the Soviet Union lead to the end of communism in Eastern Europe?
How did communist countries react differently to the collapse of the Soviet bloc?
Why did America's position as the sole superpower produce mixed reactions?

Section Summary

The Soviet Union emerged from World War II as a superpower with control over many Eastern European countries. For many years, the country's superpower status brought the benefits of consumer goods, but these were inferior and scarce. Because of the lack of innovation and technology, there was little investment in product quality. The 1980s saw some important technological advances. One example was *glasnost*, the first official satellite. Keeping on with the United States in an arms race also strained the economy. Then in 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan and became involved in a long war. The Soviets had less success battling the mujahideen, or Muslim religious warriors, creating a crisis of confidence in the USSR.

Then, near Soviet leader **Mikhail Gorbachev** urged reforms. He called for *glasnost*. He ended censorship and encouraged people to discuss the country's problems. Gorbachev also called for *perestroika*, or a restructuring of the government and economy. His policies, however, first unraveled across the Soviet empire.

Eastern Europeans demanded an end to Soviet rule. Previous attempts to push the Soviets had failed. When Gorbachev and Gorbachev challenged the communist rule, the Soviets pulled them. By the end of the 1980s, a powerful democratic movement was sweeping the region. In Poland, **Lech Wałęsa** and *Solidarity*, an independent labor union, demanded economic and political changes. When Gorbachev declared he would not interfere in Eastern European reforms, *Solidarity* met its goal. A year later, Wałęsa was elected president of Poland.

Meanwhile, East German leaders resisted reform, and thousands of East Germans fled to the West. In Czechoslovakia, **Václav Havel, a dissident writer, was elected president. One by one, communist governments fell. Most changes happened peacefully, but Romanian dictator **Nicolae Ceaușescu refused to step down and he was overthrown. The Baltic States regained independence. By the end of 1991, the remaining Soviet republics had all formed independent nations. The Soviet Union ceased to exist after 69 years of communist rule.****

In 1991, Czechoslovakia was divided into Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Additionally, some communist governments in Asia, such as China, initiated economic reforms.

*NOTES

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Chapter 18 Section 1 Origins Of The Cold War Quiz