

# The End of the Cold War and the Shape of a New Era: World History 1990–2006

## The End of the Cold War

- Decades of the Cold War were ended in the 1980s. What factors brought an end to Russian expansion? Following Khrushchev, Soviet leadership lost its dynamism, at the same time that neighbors of the Soviet Union broke away from Soviet dominance. Iran's revolution frightened the Soviets, who invaded Afghanistan to create a buffer. The Polish Solidarity movement threatened control in eastern Europe. Even China, which remained communist, took a different course, distancing itself from the Soviet Union. The United States, under Jimmy Carter, criticized Soviet human rights violations, while negotiating arms limitations. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan was denounced by the United States. Under Ronald Reagan, military spending soared, while the "Reagan doctrine" promised help to any group fighting communism.
- From 1985, the Soviet Union undertook reforms intended to boost its economy. While industrial production slumped, social programs suffered.
- In 1985, **Mikhail Gorbachev** took charge of the Soviet Union. He demonstrated his willingness to turn toward the West. He announced his policy of **glasnost**, initiating a more open attitude toward political critique. Yet he did not turn from communism. The Soviet Union was opened to foreign companies. Gorbachev next began a new program, centered on **perestroika**, or economic restructuring. He called for lowered military spending, more foreign investment and agricultural reform. He supported the creation, in 1988, of the Congress of People's Deputies. Gorbachev was elected president of the Soviet Union in 1990. Unrest among minority nationalities rose, partially due to economic difficulties.
- Outside the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's programs had clear results. Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland moved away from communism or abandoned it altogether. The Berlin Wall was torn down, and Germany was reunified in 1991. Some countries retained communism, but under new, more moderate regimes. Ethnic clashes occurred in many areas. Yugoslavia in particular was torn by violence among its peoples. The decade of the 1990s was a period of economic uncertainty. Gorbachev gave Soviet bloc nations the right to self-determination.
- Gorbachev's regime and his programs were threatened by an unsuccessful coup in 1991. His leadership of the Soviet Union was contested by leaders of the

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republics, especially the Russian Republic. The Russian leader, **Boris Yeltsin**, declared that the Soviet Union was gone, calling for a commonwealth. The Commonwealth of Independent States emerged, but was threatened from the outset by challenges from the Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Economic difficulties in the late 1990s challenged Yeltsin's leadership. A war with Chechnya broke out. Vladimir Putin followed Yeltsin in 1999, keeping a firm hold on the media and opposing Chechen calls for independence.

### The Spread of Democracy

- Divergent forms of government—communism, fascism, democracy—were rivals for most of the 20th century. The century ended with democracy in the ascendant. Spain, Portugal, and Greece, along with all Latin American countries except Cuba, adopted democratic forms of government. South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines have also chosen democracy. In Africa, democratic regimes included those of South Africa and Nigeria. Georgia and Ukraine have also held democratic elections, as have several countries of the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia.
- China, North Korea, other Asian countries, and some in the Middle East have made other choices. In 1989, Beijing student demonstrations in support of democracy were brutally repressed. After 2000, questions arose concerning the promises of democracy. The U.S. supported non-democratic countries, while democracies in Latin America experienced problems that brought the system into question.

### The Great Powers and New Disputes

- Regional rivalries became clearer with the end of the Cold War.
- When the Soviet Union was dismantled, repressed internal problems became obvious. Armenia and Azerbaijan, formerly under Soviet rule, faced ethnic hostility. Yugoslavia dissolved as rival ethnic and religious groups faced off. Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina became independent nations. Another conflict arose in Kosovo, between Albanian nationalists and Serbians.
- In some areas of the world, old rivalries continued. In the Middle East, hostility between Iran and Iraq had led to an Iraqi victory. Then Iraq invaded Kuwait, leading to the **Persian Gulf War** in 1991, which ended with the defeat of Iraq. Israeli-Palestinian struggles continue. India and Pakistan have engaged in disputes over their common border.
- New conflicts arose elsewhere. European countries faced separatist or nationalist movements. Immigration, especially from former colonies, caused intense problems in European countries, leading to new political movements. Violent conflicts in Africa have plagued the continent. High death tolls have added to the problems faced by African nations. The international response has often been slow.

### The United States as Sole Superpower

- While Russia devoted less money to its military budget, U.S. military spending has been high. Fear of U.S. aggression has led to new partnerships among other world powers. The U.N. has the ability to counter U.S. power, but its role is not

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secure. In the United States itself, there is no consensus about how to use its monopoly on power. The country has been reluctant to sign international agreements that may interfere with its sovereignty.

- Terrorism aimed at the United States reached a high point with the bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001. The “War on Terror” has become an important facet in U.S. international relations. The international community was supportive of the successful U.S. attack on Afghanistan, but the subsequent invasion of Iraq has been subject to widespread criticism.

### ***Multiple-Choice Questions***

1. How long had the Cold War lasted before its context began to shift after 1985?  
(A) ten years  
(B) forty years  
(C) thirty years  
(D) fifty years  
(E) eighty years
2. What 1979 treaty, negotiated between the Soviet Union and the United States, was aimed at limiting the two nations’ arsenals?  
(A) Kyoto Protocols  
(B) SALT II  
(C) NATO  
(D) EFTA  
(E) OPEC
3. What Russian leader significantly altered political, diplomatic, and economic policies in the Soviet Union after 1985?  
(A) Yuri Andropov  
(B) Leonid Brezhnev  
(C) Mikhail Gorbachev  
(D) Yuri Gagarin  
(E) Rudolph Nureyev
4. German reunification occurred in what year?  
(A) 1991  
(B) 1990  
(C) 1988  
(D) 1995  
(E) 1955
5. In 1991, Boris Yeltsin emerged as head of what major Soviet republic?  
(A) Belrus  
(B) Russia  
(C) Ukraine  
(D) Georgia  
(E) Latvia
6. This man succeeded Yeltsin as leader of Russia.  
(A) Khrushchev  
(B) Andropov  
(C) Putin  
(D) Kerensky  
(E) Gorbachev
7. The Persian Gulf War of 1991 was in response to the Iraqi invasion of  
(A) Israel.  
(B) Kuwait.  
(C) Syria.  
(D) Iran.  
(E) Jordan.
8. The dissolution of Yugoslavia led to all of the following EXCEPT:  
(A) Serbia.  
(B) Bosnia-Herzegovina.  
(C) Croatia.  
(D) Slovakia.  
(E) Slovenia.
9. The spread of democracy around the world in the 1990s and early 21st century has been challenged by  
(A) the spread of communism.  
(B) questionable results in some democracies.  
(C) new fascist regimes.  
(D) Soviet global dominance.  
(E) ethnic divisions.

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10. The role of the United States as sole super-power has been challenged by all of the following EXCEPT:
- (A) U.N. resolutions criticizing United States interventions.
  - (B) lack of consensus within the U.S. concerning overseas involvement.
  - (C) reduced U.S. military spending.
  - (D) tentative coalitions between other world powers.
  - (E) terrorist activity.

**Free-Response Question**

*What relationship exists between the emergence of the United States as sole super-power and the spread of democracy?*

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**ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS**

**Multiple-Choice Questions**

- **1. (B) is correct.** The Cold War began in the period immediately following World War II.
- **2. (B) is correct.** The treaty referred to is the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty.
- **3. (C) is correct.** Mikhail Gorbachev was responsible for initiating widespread change.
- **4. (A) is correct.** East and West Germany were reunited in 1991.
- **5. (B) is correct.** Yeltsin came to power as the leader of one of the Soviet Union's most powerful republics.
- **6. (C) is correct.** Vladimir Putin followed Yeltsin as Russian premier.
- **7. (B) is correct.** Iraq's invasion of Kuwait led to the Gulf War.
- **8. (D) is correct.** Slovakia was one of two republics that emerged when Czechoslovakia split.
- **9. (B) is correct.** Democracy has been challenged more by questions about its effectiveness against economic problems than by "external" challenges.
- **10. (C) is correct.** U.S. military spending remains high.

**Free-Response Essay Sample Response**

*What relationship exists between the emergence of the United States as sole super-power and the spread of democracy?*

The spread of democracy has often been aided by U.S. support. Democracy has been spread and fostered by many nations, often drawing on local traditions of representative governments, or those based on consensus. U.S. interference, it can be argued, has led as many countries to experiment with communism, as it has led others to democracy. However, U.S. aid in favor of moving toward democracy, or sanctions when countries did not, have been powerful influences.