

# **The Collapse of the USSR: Document Based Question**

**Cold War Historical Context:** Between 1945 and 1990, the USSR and the Communist Bloc grew to cover nearly all of Asia and Eastern Europe. Starting in 1981, Mikhail Gorbachev instituted a policy of *perestroika*, or “restructuring,” that led to a decline in Soviet political control and pressure in satellite countries. These countries and their Communist regimes began to move away from the strict rules and regulations they had lived by since the 1940’s, leading to the collapse of the USSR itself.

**Directions:** Using the documents below complete the Document POV and Significance worksheet and respond to the question posed below in two to three paragraphs.

**Question:** *Was Gorbachev personally responsible for the collapse of Soviet control over Eastern Europe? What other issues played a part?*

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## **Document 1**

Vaclav Havel, president of Czechoslovakia, 1990 Speech

*“The state, which calls itself a state of workers, is humiliating and exploiting them instead. Our outdated economy wastes energy, which we have in short supply. The country, which could once be proud of the education of its people, is spending so little on education that today, in that respect, we rank 72nd in the world. We have spoiled our land, rivers, and forests, inherited from our ancestors, and we have, today, the worst environment in the whole of Europe. Adults die here earlier than in the majority of European countries...”*

## **Document 2**

Yuri Krotkov, “Worker’s Paradise Lost”

*“Our apartment contained eleven rooms. It had one kitchen, one telephone in the hall, a bath and toilet, which only the fastest were able to get to in the morning (many just stopped in the public restrooms on their way to work). There were 18 people in the apartment. There was not a single washing machine in the apartment; we had never even heard of a clothes-drier. But there were three TV sets and 2 radios. Furthermore, all eighteen people ate at home. They never went to even the cheapest cafeteria, much less a restaurant. It was the expense. My apartment was somewhat typical. But at the same time we were exceptional, in that each resident could say with satisfaction: “it’s crowded, but the people, thank the lord, are decent. They don’t spit in their neighbor’s soup, as they do in Apartment 5.”*

## **Document 3**

The End of the Cold War, 1995

*“By 1989 a number of startling facts about life in the USSR had emerged. 28% of Soviets lived below the official poverty line which was the equivalent of just \$1920 a year. Industries poisoned the environment with widespread pollution. 30 million Soviets drank unsafe water. The average Russian earned 200 rubles (\$320). While rents and food prices were set officially low, other prices put many products far beyond the reach of the common person. A pair of blue jeans cost between 200 and 400 rubles, a used foreign car between 50,000 and 100,000 and a pair of shoes between 400 and 500 rubles. The average citizen in an Eastern bloc country could only dream of goods and services Westerners took for granted.”*

## **Document 4**

Mikhail S. Gorbachev, speech from the Socialist Idea and Revolutionary Perestroika

*“...At the present stage.... the (Communist) Party will promote the development of opinions in society and the broadening of glasnost in the interests of democracy and the people. “*

## **Document 5**

CIA Report, February 1988: USSR: Domestic Fallout From the Afghan War

*“Military involvement in Afghanistan has lasted longer than any previous Soviet war and, we estimate, has cost the USSR more than 12,000 lives and 15 billion rubles, approximately 3% of the Soviet Defense budget... The war has intensified some societal and health problems. Returning combat veterans have spread infectious diseases, especially hepatitis, and drug usage...most soldiers in Afghanistan experiment with various types of drugs and at least 10% returned addicted to hashish.”*

## **Document 6**

The Afghan War and Breakdown of the Soviet Union by Rafael Reuvny and Aseem Prakash, Review of International Studies, 1999.

*“We view 1986 as the turning point in the Afghanistan war and, accordingly, as marking the second phase of Gorbachev’s reform agenda. In 1986, the Mujaheddin (Afghan freedom fighters), now well armed with US-supplied surface-to-air missiles, rockets, mortars, and communication equipment, won many confrontations with the Soviet army. As successful ambushes of Soviet convoys became a daily phenomenon, the number of Soviet casualties mounted, the number of disabled soldiers seen in Soviet cities grew substantially, and the war veterans (Afgantsy) increasingly became part of the Soviet urban landscape. Since many Afgantsy belonged to the non-Russian nationalities (of the Soviet Union), opposition to the war from citizens in non-Russian Soviet republics increased. Since their presence often was not acknowledged by the authorities, who wished to play down Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, these Afgantsy became bitter and openly critical of the Soviet leaders.*

## **Document 7**

Yegor Gaidar, acting prime minister of Russia from June of 1992 to December of 1992

*“During Detent, the leaders of the USSR had lifted some of the restrictions on trade with non-communists countries. Soviet oil was often in demand in nearby Europe since it was closer than Arabic oil. Soviet agriculture had stagnated in the 1980’s but the demand for grain in the cities was increasing. It was necessary to buy grain in the international market. While the price of petroleum was high, it was feasible to finance the purchase of grain from within the Soviet Bloc nations. When the price of petroleum fell in the last 1980’s the Soviet Union needed to borrow the funds from Western banks to purchase the needed grain. This severely restricted the international activities of the Soviet Union. It could not send in Soviet troops to put down the rebellions against communism in Eastern Europe because such an action would have resulted in a refusal of Western sources to lend the money needed.”*

## **Document POV and Significance**

|                   | <b>Author</b> | <b>Point of View (POV)</b> | <b>Audience</b> | <b>Significance</b> |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| <b>Document 1</b> |               |                            |                 |                     |
| <b>Document 2</b> |               |                            |                 |                     |
| <b>Document 3</b> |               |                            |                 |                     |
| <b>Document 4</b> |               |                            |                 |                     |
| <b>Document 5</b> |               |                            |                 |                     |
| <b>Document 6</b> |               |                            |                 |                     |
| <b>Document 7</b> |               |                            |                 |                     |