**Materials for the website Chapter 3**

**Practice Questions.** Check your knowledge on some important individuals, dates, institutions and events.

How did Gorbachev become Secretary General of the Communist Party?

What does the term “socialist entrepreneurship” stand for?

Define perestroika and glasnost.

What was Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution about?

Why and how did Gorbachev try to reform the party?

Explain the “radical economic reform” during perestroika.

What was “new thinking” in foreign policy?

Explain GRIT as a foreign-policy tactic.

When did the August coup take place? What was the key goal of the coup organizers?

Who was the informal leader of the democratic opposition in Russia?

Explain the term *imperial overstretch*.

What is the triumphalist view explaining the end of the Cold War?

Describe the four periods of the Yeltsin-Gorbachev interactions.

Perestroika was the practical result of an idealistic vision of a small group of party officials. Please explain this statement.

**The Reforms of 1985-1991: A Summary**

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| **Policies and Actions** | **Consequences** |
| **Revealing the need for a “more efficient and rational system of administration” (1985)** | Implementation of small and often confusing changes in economic planning, social management, and overall distribution of goods. |
| **Policies of Perestroika and Glasnost: enthusiasm of early reforms**  **(1985-88)** | Policies of re-structuring and openness have affected the entire country. The acceptance of many political freedoms was a major change. |
| **Gorbachev faces a growing opposition: problems with the party (1986-89)** | Multi-candidate elections were reluctantly accepted with a growing resistance from the core of the party. Sweeping personnel changes followed. Removal of Article 6 of the Constitution. |
| **The introduction of ‘the new thinking’ policy in international relations (1986-87)** | Emphasis on universal human values. Changes from an offensive to a defensive strategy. Refusal to support communist movements around the world. |
| **Real steps to promote a new global policy and end the Cold War**  **(1986-91)** | Unification of Germany. The end of war in Afghanistan. Dismantling of the Warsaw Pact. Negotiations with the USA on nuclear arms reduction. |
| **Gorbachev wavering (1989-90)** | Unpredictability of relentless plans, new ideas, turns, cancellations, new initiatives, and new actions. |
| **Weakening of the federal structure of the Soviet Union (1987-91)** | Growth of national and nationalist movements. Crises in Kazakhstan, Baltic states, Moldova, Georgia, Nagorny-Karabakh (Armenia-Azerbaijan). |
| **Sweeping social changes across the country (1989-91)** | Acquisition of civil liberties. Development of a domestic unregulated free market. Soviet people are allowed to travel abroad freely. |
| **Alarming signs of economic decline and social crisis (1989-91)** | Inflation, scarcity of basic products and economic uncertainties were rampant. Crime and lawlessness grew. |
| **Growing and widening domestic opposition (1989-91)** | Opposition grew from several sides: from the left (communists), from the democratic center (Yeltsin and supporters) and from national movements in the republics. |

**A case in point. Boris Yeltsin. A short political biography.**

Boris Yeltsin (1931-2007) was born in Sverdlovsk, a big industrial center. He joined the Communist Party in 1961 as a construction engineer and continued to move up gradually through the official ranks, first as a manager and later as a local party leader. He became First Secretary of the Party Committee of the Sverdlovsk region in 1976. In 1985, Gorbachev brought Yeltsin to Moscow to work for the Central Committee. He was named Secretary of the Central Committee in July and then in December of that same year, Yeltsin became head of the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party, one of the most prestigious positions in the country. Yeltsin quickly won popular support for his criticisms of Soviet bureaucracy and transparent style of management. In the fall of 1987, he openly criticized Gorbachev for the slow speed of reforms. He was demoted but allowed to work in the government as a minister. His personal conflict with Gorbachev grew. In 1989 Yeltsin was elected to the Soviet parliament. In 1990, he was elected to the Parliament of the Russian Federation and became its Chairman. In June 1991, Yeltsin won in an all-Russian election and became President of the Russian Federation, which at that time was a part of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the U.S.S.R., he remained President until 1999 (he was reelected in 1996). He retired after handpicking Vladimir Putin as his successor. Boris Yeltsin died in 2007 and was buried in Moscow.

**A case in point. Understanding Mikhail Gorbachev, a person and politician**.

Political psychologists attempt to establish reliable information about the individual and personal factors affecting political decisions. One of the most important questions they try to address is why and how political leaders make certain choices. What political events, developments in their individual lives and circumstances, and idiosyncrasies cause their actions? Understanding past decisions provides valuable insight into current developments and, quite often, future trends. It is important to understand that Mikhail Gorbachev—as a political leader—was part of the old communist system that raised him. On the other hand, he was a political maverick, an individual who was capable of understanding the problems in the system and the need to reform it.

After Andropov's death in February 1984, a stalemate between the Andropov and Brezhnev cliques (two former General Secretaries) in the Politburo led to the interim selection of the old and frail Konstantin Chernenko as the new Soviet leader. During the next few months Gorbachev, driven by ambition and support from others, accumulated new posts, won allies, and generally prepared himself to take over the post of the next general secretary. Upon Chernenko's death, Gorbachev was successful in securing the top position.

From the start, he wanted to undertake basic reforms. He wrote on several occasions that he could have lived like a Tsar by doing very little: no one would have dared to challenge his power. However, he chose change.

What did he want to do? People who knew him well explain that he wished to narrow the discrepancy between communist ideals and practices. He was profoundly offended by the hypocrisy of the old communist system. He wanted the democratization of a party that he thought had lost its way amidst complacency and stagnation. Through a loosening of state controls over speech and the economy he thought he could promote creativity and productivity. He would revise the concept of national security: he wanted to encourage nuclear arms reductions worldwide. The end result would be not only a decrease of tensions between the U.S.S.R. and the United States, but also a reduction of military expenditures that had become such a drain on the Soviet economy. He chose not to confront the United States but to open up a dialogue. This was his personal choice. Some say openness to negotiations is part of the “Russian character”. If this was true, then other Russian leaders would have never chosen confrontation in their foreign policy, which is not the case if we look at the developments of the 21st century.

Gorbachev's extraordinary personal skills contributed to his early success. To achieve anything, he had to take the Communist Party along with him. He was a good tactician: he was able to rally the party behind him, at least initially, by his own commitment to socialist ideals as well as his ability to keep his own counsel. Many party traditionalists supported his first efforts at glasnost. They also supported his international incentives because they saw him as committed to the well-being of the Soviet regime as they were.

Gorbachev had superb communication skills. In meetings of the Politburo, his arguments were clear and impressive. His apparent openness to new ideas enabled him to tap into information resources, statistics, facts, and opinions that previous leaders had ignored. Gorbachev also had a unique way of relating to the public. He had a brilliant smile, could give a long speech without any notes, and made himself accessible to ordinary people. The cheering crowds around Gorbachev grew rapidly when he would step out of his car. He liked to speak without a microphone, just standing in the middle of the pack. He appeared young, tough, funny, and utterly persuasive. Not for several decades had the Soviet people greeted a new leader with such high hopes and without fear.

Personally, he was relieved to tear away the mask of hypocrisy that had covered up the lies of the past. Despite his busy schedule, he committed himself to reading previously censored books. He was saddened that he could not have been exposed to such works in his student days. He wrote later, "Yes, our generation was spiritually cheated, given meager intellectual rations consisting of ideology alone and deprived of the chance to compare different schools of philosophical thought for ourselves and to make our own choices".

Yet Gorbachev remained a product of the old social and political system. Not only was he committed to many communist ideals, but as General Secretary of the ruling party he also employed some of the traditional techniques of management. Some were productive, others not. Trying to reform the Communist Party, he wanted to replace the traditionalists with his own, loyal people. The appointment of Eduard Shevardnadze (born in 1928) was an example of personal preference. The two men first met back in the 1950s. Over time they developed a sense of personal trust. They shared with each other their concerns about the country. Once in power, Gorbachev passed over far more qualified candidates to choose Shevardnadze as his foreign minister. Though Shevardnadze had no diplomatic experience, Gorbachev was more concerned with having a dedicated and intelligent man at his side, a person who was willing to put Gorbachev's new designs into practice. Another Gorbachev confidant was Alexander Yakovlev (1923-2005), a reform-minded political scientist, party apparatchik, and former ambassador to Canada. Yakovlev managed the Communist Party’s propaganda, culture and foreign-policy strategies. Shevardnadze and Yakovlev are commonly viewed as the closest associates of Gorbachev and his “brain power” at earlier stages of the reforms.

Many other appointments were far less successful. A few top officials whom he had trusted later turned against him. They attacked him from opposing positions, like diehard communist, Egor Ligachev and committed anti-communist, Boris Yeltsin. As former allies deserted Gorbachev, his judgments deteriorated. His new appointees, party bureaucrats such as Gennady Yanayev, Boris Pugo, and Valentin Pavlov, openly betrayed him during the August 1991 coup.

As Gorbachev's difficulties increased, particularly in 1989, he fell back into the old communist practice of issuing directives from the center in an attempt to resolve problems. His close adviser, A. Chernyaev, describes Gorbachev’s methods: “Problems with officials? Let's call a [meeting]. Problems with ethnic minorities? Let's call a meeting…Let’s show these bureaucrats their place. Let’s fire them!”. Trying to dismantle the party’s administrative apparatus, he also lost control of the institutional mechanisms that had been effective in implementing the policies of the center. Moreover, he began silencing some of his opponents. He threatened to dismiss newspaper editors who published material not to his liking. Gorbachev talked about transferring power to the regions, but actually kept a tight grip on agencies, ministries, and committees.

Somewhat puzzling, in contrast to the charm he exhibited in public, was Gorbachev's frequent insensitivity to his own political team. He often talked at people rather than discussed issues with them. Perhaps more importantly, he rarely shared credit and seldom thanked those who he worked with closely. Alexander Yakovlev said that during the five years he and Gorbachev worked together, Gorbachev never thanked him for his work. Increasingly relying on himself, he failed to build a team in which the leaders shared their goals and stuck together through adverse developments.

Overall however, Gorbachev was an extraordinary leader, a man who had both the personal integrity and the skills that enabled him to climb up the Communist Party hierarchy in the Soviet Union, while maintaining a commitment to reform it. Gradually, like many other people of the so-called Khrushchev generation of the 1960s, he came to see the maladies in the communist system. But he was also a well-educated and courageous man who had entered onto a track that would eventually give him the power to change the broken system.

History judges political leaders for their accomplishments. Gorbachev accomplished much, tearing down a totalitarian system without bloodshed and ending a costly and dangerous nuclear arms race. His inability to finish the task he began was in large part due to the difficulties inherent in bringing about simultaneous major economic, social, and political reforms in a polity accustomed to rule from the center. Yet certain personal qualities also contributed to his problems. Among such qualities was his impatience and inability to direct, over the long haul, the processes he started. A transitional figure, he carried over from his socialization in the Communist Party some leadership characteristics that contributed to his problems. But somewhat ironically, his commitment to democratic values and his idealism compounded his problems. In his perestroika and glasnost policies he had unleashed new and powerful forces. But lacking any clearly thought-out plan and support, he could not manage them. Source: B. Glad and E. Shiraev (1999).

**Additional explanations and theories of the Soviet Union implosion**

Several views of the causes and mechanisms of Soviet transformation and collapse exist. Consider just a few of them.

* Some experts in Russia maintain that Russia’s history has always been a struggle between two major domestic political and ideological camps: Westerners (supporters of the Western path of development) and Slavophiles (those who support the idea of Russia’s unique path). Russian and Soviet leaders at different times embraced one of those paths while rejecting the other, so that Russia as a country proceeded in a “zigzag” fashion. Gorbachev’s reforms, for example, were the direct result of the Westerners’ attempt to change history in their favor and dismantle the legacy of their more conservative predecessors. President Yeltsin, in fact, continued the Gorbachev’s pro-Western course. After President Putin came to power in the late 1990s, the pendulum swung in a different, pro-nationalistic, direction, which continues under Russia’s president Dmitry Medvedev. In other words, the Soviet transformation was a natural process during which Western sympathizers have won. After the accession of Vladimir Putin in 1999, the Slavophiles could celebrate their victory again and remain triumphant through the early 2000s.
* Other explanations belong to the category of so-called conspiracy theories. In comparative politics such theories claim that certain important events take place as a result of a deliberate plan or conspiracy initiated and executed in secrecy by powerful forces. According to several assumptions, the whole transformation process of the 1980s was a clever Western plot designed to dismantle the Soviet Union, break it into pieces, and enslave a newly independent but weak Russia. If this goal was accomplished, the West would have destroyed its historic Eurasian rival. To some conspiracy-theory supporters, the 1980s was the right time for the West to move against the Soviet Union and use perestroika to defeat Moscow. To others, the very concept of perestroika was planned in the White House, Western think tanks, and the CIA. Most of these ideas are not necessarily theories but rather political slogans and clichés. Russian communists, for example, continue to call Gorbachev an “American android” a zombie-like creature who followed obediently the instructions from the White House (Malinnikiv, 2008). Although these and similar views are entertaining, they tend to be overtly politicized and they commonly lack factual support (Dugin, 1998; 2008)
* Finally, some scholars as well as the direct participants of the transformation process claim that, in fact, there was neither a special domestic plan nor a foreign plot according to which Gorbachev and his supporters initiated the reforms in 1985. Gorbachev had no overall strategy for moving from a centralized economy to a free market, from an autocratic system to a democratic form of government. What he introduced was just a "sum of ideas" (Medvedev, 1994, 30). Gorbachev was simply unhappy with the state of affairs and used his “peasant mind” combining common sense and the amazing sense of momentum (Nikitinksky, 1994). One Gorbachev's close adviser wrote that that Gorbachev's ideology was just “common sense views" (Chernyaev, 1995, 521), which wasn’t enough to understand the complexities of the transformation. Looking back, Gorbachev himself seemed to agree: “We simply didn't know much about our society. We have not been receiving necessary information about ourselves, about the world around us" (Gorbachev 1992, 141).

**Additional study resources:**

**Check out several reviews of literary works by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Vasily Aksyonov, Anatoly Rybakov—whose works were prohibited in the Soviet Union prior to glasnost. They were allowed for publication in Russia after 1986.**

**Alexander Solzhenitsyn:**

<http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-autobio.html>

<http://www.gradesaver.com/author/solzhenitsyn/>

**Vasily Aksyonov:**

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/blogs/article/379377.html>

<http://www.librarything.com/author/aksyonovvassily>

**Anatoly Rybakov:**

<https://nyti.ms/3hpsX47>

<http://www.librarything.com/author/rybakovanatoli>

**Recommended Videos:**

**ABC News - Red Star Rising: The Dawn of the Gorbachev Era** (54 min.):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPqopWXcmNg>

**Life in the Soviet Union** (56 min):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SU-3V8diEVk>

**Mikhail Gorbachev Becomes Leader of the Soviet Union - 3/11/1985:** A fascinating discussion with Henry Kissinger, Denis Healey and a former Soviet diplomat about the new General Secretary of the USSR and what changes Gorbachev might bring to his country and to US-Soviet relations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NinMN6HO_M>

**A 1992 article explaining why perestroika failed. Peter Boettke is a Professor of Economics and Philosophy at George Mason University:**

<https://fee.org/articles/why-perestroika-failed/>

**Inside the collapsing Soviet Economy, a 1990 report:**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/06/inside-the-collapsing-soviet-economy/303870/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIjN_E0qj46wIVjZ-zCh2sMwweEAMYASAAEgJmqPD_BwE>

**The Collapse of the Soviet Union:** Documentary which comprises episodes filmed mainly at the Kremlin, the Soviet Union's headquarters which enable us to have a glance into one of the world's most well-known political kitchens. Director TOOMAS LEPP, author and producer JUHAN AARE. Eesti Kultuurfilm 2006:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYD6ouVHXbo>