

How secure was the USSR's control over Eastern Europe, 1948-89?



1. Why was there opposition to Soviet control in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), and how did the USSR react to this opposition?

HUNGARIAN UPRISING

Causes:

De-Stalinisation caused problems because people in Hungary looked at Russia slackening control and wanted that in their country

Religion as the Communists had practically banned worshipping religion and imprisoned Cardinal Mindszenty for opposing communism, angering Catholics

Poland: Gomulka had managed to make changes in Poland without a Russian reaction

Excessive Soviet control: people were annoyed because of censored media, the secret police (AVH) and the Russians exploiting their economy

Opposition leader and changes made:

NAGY

Removed state control of media.

Encourages political and economic reform.

Encouraged democracy, freedom of speech and religion.

Freed Mindszenty and others.

Said he would leave the Warsaw Pact.

Appealed to NATO to recognise Hungary's independence.

Soviet reaction:

Fighting: 25th Oct—the Soviets try to oppose this violently and are met with 4000 Hungarians with machine guns. Soviet Union send in 1000 tanks and many men to end this by force, and do!

Punishment: Many ring leaders of the resistance are killed or imprisoned

Change of leadership: The Russians replace Nagy with Kadar and Nagy is executed in June 1958

Summary: Both Hungary and Czechoslovakia are examples of nations being oppressed by an almost tyrannical regime and rising up against this control and making changes. The USSR did not want to lose Eastern Europe because they made a lot of money from them, kept a buffer zone between themselves and the capitalist world and had a huge symbol of dominant communism on one side of the continent. Although there are some similarities, there are huge differences also. You will find a comparison on the next page...

CZECHOSLOVAKIAN UPRISING

Causes:

Novotny: he had begun to lose control due to a few things such as: A clumsy handling of a student protest (death involved), a broken economy being exploited by the Russians, huge censorship of the media and lack of other freedoms.

Dubcek: A more liberal and popular communist who took over from Novotny. He announced some changes he wanted to make under his 'New Model of Socialism' (see next box down for details). Popular with the people.

Believed USA would help them: Many people there believed that they would receive assistance if challenged by the Soviets

Opposition leader and changes made:

DUBCEK (Dubstep): The Prague Spring!

Increased individual liberties.

Allowed other political parties (even though he was supposedly communist).

Freedom of speech.

Less government control over Industry.

Wanted to stay in the Warsaw pact, but had a visit from Josef Tito, a communist not in the Warsaw pact who resided on the other side of the Iron Curtain

Soviet Reaction:

Brezhnev Doctrine: A policy announced which meant that the USSR would not allow any Eastern European country to reject communism and would use Warsaw Pact troops to maintain it.

Fighting: 500,000 Warsaw pact troops march into Czechoslovakia and are met with peaceful resistance (as advised by Dubcek). Only 70 civilians were killed and student, Jan Palach, burnt himself to death in protest to the Soviet invasion.

Change of leadership: Gustav Husak put in as new leader, Dubcek allowed to live

2. How similar were events in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968)

Similarities

Causes:

- Russian control
- Poor economic performance
- Reliance on UN / USA intervention
- Opposition triggered by intellectuals
- Both events started when Russia refused to provide assistance to deal with protests in the two countries

Events:

- In both cases the new leaders introduced policies which moved their countries towards democracy
- Concerns about the Warsaw pact when Hungary said it would leave and Czechoslovakia was visited by Tito (not in Warsaw pact!)

Key people:

- Rakosi and Novotny were unpopular
- Nagy and Dubcek were both Communists, but preferred a more liberal and free version of it
- Kadar and Husak were both leaders who were loyal to Soviet interests
- Khrushchev and Brezhnev both wanted to improve their reputation by sorting out the situations

Differences

Causes:

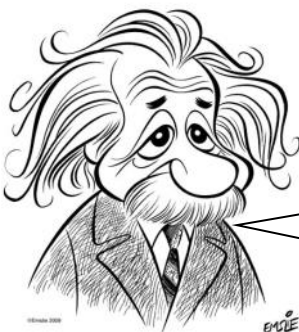
- The 1956 uprising in Hungary started with riots, but in Czechoslovakia there was a peaceful change of power from Novotny to Dubcek.
- Nagy said he would leave the Warsaw pact whereas Dubcek said he would stay in

Events:

- Uprising in Czechoslovakia had better planning and followed Dubcek's socialist action plan
- Nagy wanted total democracy whereas Dubcek wanted democratic Communism
- 4 months freedom in Cz (Prague Spring) whereas it only lasted 5 days in Hungary
- Catholic church helped in Hungary, but not in Czechoslovakia

Responses from Soviet Union:

- Hungarians fought back whilst the Czechoslovaks reacted peacefully, using passive resistance
- 4000 Hungarians were executed whereas only 47 Czechoslovaks were arrested
- Dubcek was arrested and released whereas Nagy was executed



You must be able to make comparisons between Hungary and Czechoslovakia as you may well be asked an Explain or Describe question about these. For the higher levels you must be evaluating the similarities and differences and reaching conclusions about HOW similar or different. Which are the most significant similarities/differences?

3. Why was the Berlin Wall built in 1961?

Main Causes

Germany became FORMALLY divided

As a result of the Berlin Blockade the 3 zones of Germany belonging to the allies were united in 1949 and became known as the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). In response Russia created the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). After this Berlin became the focus

West Germany was more prosperous

Due to money given by the USA in the Marshall plan to West Germany it became more wealthy. East Germany received none as the Russians refused the offer. People in the East also lost 25% of their industrial output to the Soviet Union.

East Germans left to go to West Germany

Many began to flee towards west Germany as the standard of living was higher. The East German government put up a border in 1952. However, in Berlin people could still go from east to West and by 1961 three million people had done this! The Soviet Union were embarrassed.

The Vienna Summit (4th June 1961)

Khrushchev approaches Kennedy and demands that the USA leave West Berlin because he believed that the USA were using it as a spy base. Kennedy refused and less than a month later the Soviet Union begin to build the Berlin Wall

Construction

13th August 1961—Building starts with barbed wire fence

16th August 1961—Barbed wire being replaced with concrete blocks

End of August—building completed, East and West is now separate



Consequences

Wall became a propaganda disaster for the Russians which symbolised everything 'wrong' with Communism

200 East Germans shot dead trying to cross to the West

Difference in lifestyles either side of the border and families were literally torn apart

Some possible questions:

Describe how the Berlin Wall was constructed (4 Marks)

Explain the consequences of the Berlin Wall (6 Marks)

"The Berlin Wall was built because West Germany was more prosperous. Do you agree with this statement?"

Explain your answer (10 Marks)

4. How important was Solidarity?

Solidarity was set up in 1980 by Lech Walesa and some of his trade union friends. They were set up to represent the poorly treated workers (low wages, working conditions, food shortages etc). Walesa led the Gdansk shipyard strike in 1980 and this spread a wave of strikes over the country. The government were forced to sign the Gdansk Agreement in August which gave the workers the 'right' to strike, set up unions and more. Due to Gierek's (leader of Polish Communists) failings, he was replaced with Jaruzelski who introduced martial law, imprisoned Walesa and arrested 10000 others and made Solidarity illegal. This lasted until 1983 and other restrictions until several years later. A change of attitude from Russia under President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986 meant that Jaruzelski had to negotiate the release of Walesa with the trade unions.

Short term impact

Increased opposition within Poland to Communism when Solidarity was outlawed

Restricted Civil liberties during the time Martial Law was in place

The first non communist prime minister of Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki was elected in December 1986. Within a year of this Walesa was the PM

Solidarity became a legal political party and won 99 of 100 seats in the Polish senate.

Long term impact

The events in Poland showed the rest of Eastern Europe that non-violent resistance to Communist rule could work under President Mikhail Gorbachev running the USSR.

Many anti-communist revolutions took place in countries like East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria

By 1991 the Soviet Union effectively broke down and Eastern Europe were independent countries once more



To Summarise: Solidarity was a workers union (very similar to the Soviets in Russia during the Prov Gov). Through their resistance, the Gdansk Agreement and the Martial Law that followed they were outlawed and oppressed. Their underground popularity rose and, as soon as a moderate Russian President came into power, the movement reached it height, toppled communism in Poland and can effectively be seen as a trigger to the Collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

5. How far was Gorbachev responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Empire? (you decide how big a role he played!)

Factor	More detail about these factors
Domestic policies including Perestroika and Glasnost	Glasnost meant that there was greater openness and transparency in the media and the communists did not censor it. This meant that some embarrassing truths were revealed about the government, for example Stalin's death lists (ie) 25,700 Polish soldiers in Soviet prison camps. Perestroika: Reduced control over industry and allowed private ownership. Given how the Russian economy worked and was structured, this resulted in instability and corruption as well as a drop in goods, high inflation and an overall drop in the standard of living for Russians.
End of Brezhnev Doctrine	Now the Soviet Union would not back struggling Communist governments in Eastern Europe, this would make and did make resistance easier.
War in Afghanistan	The war went disastrously and over 10,000 Russian troops had been killed there due to the efficiency of the Mujahedeen fighters. Also, the large Muslim population within the borders of the Soviet Union meant that this war was unpopular anyway. The USSR withdrew in 1989.
Weakness in Soviet Economy	The Russians could not afford to fight wars, including supporting other Communist countries which were struggling. The countries in the Warsaw Pact were milked dry and feeling hostile towards Russia. Not only this, but after a long arms race during the Cold War with America they finally signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty in 1987 and had to stop investing in weaponry.
Social problems in Eastern Europe	Eastern Europe was very poor by comparison to the West. There was also food shortages, huge crime figures, alcoholism, lots of drugs and all of these problems were out of control in Soviet towns. Due to modern media, these people were now becoming more and more aware of the huge gulf in living standards between East and West and hated it.
Unpopularity of Gorbachev's reforms in the Communist Party	Many hard liners in the communist party disliked Gorbachev and there was a failed Coup against him in August 1991. This caused a split in the party and Gorbachev was left with little power. Eventually he was replaced by Boris Yeltsin who ended the Soviet Union and created the Russian Federation.

Summary: There were many factors at play in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Years of oppression and reduced living standards had brought the people in Eastern Europe to boiling point. The money in the Soviet Union was running out, cutbacks had to be made across the board and, as a result, this caused their control over these countries to be reduced because they had to. However, Gorbachev's reforms meant that change was possible so the 2 categories these reasons can be put into are Gorbachev's (internal) changes or other (external) factors? Many historians view Solidarity as one movement which helped trigger that change. Would the collapse of the Soviet Union have happened otherwise? The answer, in my opinion, is most likely yes... just a little bit later!

COLLAPSE OF USSR: TOP 10 QUIZ

1. Give 3 reasons that the Hungarians and Czechoslovaks were upset with communist rule in their countries.
2. Who were the disliked Communist leaders in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968)
3. Who were the popular leaders who took over in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) and name 3 changes each leader introduced
4. What was the Soviet response to these uprisings and how was each reaction different?
5. Who was the leader of Solidarity?
6. What did Jaruzelski put in place in Poland which prevented Solidarity meeting or achieving it's aims between 1981-83.
7. Which Russian president was in charge when Solidarity become a legal political party in Poland?
8. Who was the first non-Communist prime minister in Poland, who was later replaced by Lech Walesa?
9. Name 6 reasons why Communist control over Eastern Europe collapsed by 1989.
10. Which 2 categories can these 6 factors (in Q9) be placed into?

EXAM QUESTIONS: COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

DESCRIBE:

- Describe the events in Hungary in 1956. (4 Marks)
- What was the Warsaw Pact? (4 Marks)
- Describe the soviet response to the Hungarian uprising in 1956 (4 Marks)
- What was the Prague Spring? (4 Marks)

(perhaps 2 of the above questions could come up about Czechoslovakia too!)

EXPLAIN:

- Explain why the Soviet Union was worried by developments in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (6 Marks)
- Explain why the Berlin Wall was built (6 Marks)
- Explain why there was opposition within Czechoslovakia to Soviet control in 1968. (6 Marks)
- Explain why the Polish Government was unable to stop the Solidarity movement. (6 Marks)

EVALUATE:

- How far was Solidarity the main reason for the decline of Soviet power in Eastern Europe? Explain your answer. (10 Marks)
- How far was Gorbachev responsible for the collapse of Soviet control in Eastern Europe? Explain your answer. (10 Marks)
- 'The Soviet Empire collapsed because of Solidarity in Poland' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. (10 Marks)
- How far were economic problems responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Empire? Explain your answer. (10 Marks)