Empire Comes Apart

Trace the decisions and pressures that ended the Cold War

SS24.WH.15c "Describe the collapse of the Soviet Empire; Russia's struggle for democracy, free markets, and economic recovery; and the roles of Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, and Boris Yeltsin in bringing the Cold War to a conclusion."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one action by each of the three leaders, circle two signs that Soviet control was collapsing, and box two problems Russia faced after independence.

From Standoff to Breakup

1. In the mid-1980s, the Cold War divided Europe, and Soviet leaders spent heavily on weapons while stores at home often lacked basic goods. When Mikhail Gorbachev took power in 1985, he tried to repair the Soviet system through economic restructuring and greater openness in public debate. These changes exposed public anger, but they did not quickly fix shortages. Gorbachev also refused to use Soviet troops to keep communist governments in Eastern Europe in power. In 1989, crowds tore down the Berlin Wall as communist governments across the region fell. Soviet control over its neighboring states was breaking apart.

2. US president Ronald Reagan increased military spending and challenged Soviet leaders as their economy struggled. Yet pressure was only part of his role. Reagan met with Gorbachev, and in 1987 they signed a treaty eliminating an entire class of nuclear missiles. Their talks helped reduce the danger of direct conflict. Meanwhile, demands for self-rule grew inside the Soviet Union. In August 1991, hard-line officials tried to remove Gorbachev and halt his reforms. The coup failed after public resistance, but it weakened the central government further. By December, the Soviet Union had dissolved into independent countries.

3. Boris Yeltsin, elected president of the Russian republic in June 1991, opposed the August coup. He stood on a tank outside the Russian parliament and urged people to resist. When the Soviet Union dissolved that December, he continued as president of independent Russia. His government moved toward free markets by removing many price controls and selling state businesses. Prices rose sharply, savings lost value, and many people faced hardship, while some gained great wealth. Russia also held elections, but disputes over presidential power and parliament tested its new democracy. Ending the Cold War did not settle how Russia would govern or rebuild its economy.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Gorbachev's changes weaken Soviet control at home and in Eastern Europe?

2. Describe two different ways Reagan acted during the Cold War. How did one of them help reduce tensions?

3. How did Yeltsin respond to the August 1991 coup, and what role did he hold when Russia became independent?

4. Explain one hardship linked to Russia's move toward free markets and one test of its new democracy.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence museum label arguing whether the Cold War ended in a single moment or through connected changes. Include one action by each of the three leaders, one sign of the Soviet breakup, and one economic or democratic challenge for independent Russia.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 9 · SS24.WH.15c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one action by each of the three leaders, circle two signs that Soviet control was collapsing, and box two problems Russia faced after independence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Gorbachev's changes weaken Soviet control at home and in Eastern Europe?	**Greater openness exposed public anger, while his refusal to use Soviet troops allowed communist governments in Eastern Europe to fall.**
2	Describe two different ways Reagan acted during the Cold War. How did one of them help reduce tensions?	**Reagan increased military spending and negotiated with Gorbachev. Their 1987 missile treaty helped reduce the danger of direct conflict.**
3	How did Yeltsin respond to the August 1991 coup, and what role did he hold when Russia became independent?	**Yeltsin publicly urged resistance to the coup. Already president of the Russian republic, he continued as president when Russia became independent.**
4	Explain one hardship linked to Russia's move toward free markets and one test of its new democracy.	**After price controls were removed, prices rose sharply and savings lost value. Disputes over presidential power and parliament tested the new democracy.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Cold War ended through connected changes, not one dramatic moment. Gorbachev loosened Soviet control by refusing to send troops to preserve communist governments in Eastern Europe. Reagan negotiated a 1987 missile treaty with Gorbachev, easing the danger of conflict. Yeltsin resisted the 1991 coup and continued as president when Russia became independent. The Soviet Union dissolved into separate countries in December 1991, but Russia still struggled as rising prices damaged people's savings.

Accept other passage-supported actions and challenges. For Yeltsin, preserve the distinction between his election as president of the Russian republic in June 1991 and his continued presidency after independence.