Pressures on the Union

Trace how economic strain and reform contributed to the Soviet breakup.

MWH.C.7.6.B "Explain how internal pressures within the Soviet Union, including economic stagnation, the burdens of military commitments, and the policies of perestroika and glasnost under Mikhail Gorbachev destabilized the Soviet system and contributed..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline a detail showing how military costs strained the economy, circle two effects of Gorbachev's reforms, and number three linked steps in the final paragraph that led toward the breakup.

A System Under Strain

1. In the 1980s, a shopper in the Soviet Union might wait in a long line for basic goods, only to find empty shelves. The state directed factories and farms through detailed plans, but the system often rewarded meeting quotas rather than making useful, high-quality products. Growth slowed, and shortages frustrated people. At the same time, the Soviet government paid for a huge military and supported forces abroad, including its war in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Those commitments used money, workers, and materials that could not also be used to modernize factories or supply stores.

2. Mikhail Gorbachev became Soviet leader in 1985 and tried to repair the system, not end the union. His policy of perestroika, or restructuring, gave some businesses more freedom while much of the planned economy remained. The mixed rules sometimes disrupted supplies without creating a reliable new system, so shortages persisted. His policy of glasnost, or openness, allowed wider public discussion and less censorship. Newspapers and citizens could criticize corruption, shortages, and past government abuses more openly. Criticism brought problems into view, but it also weakened the Communist Party's claim that it alone could govern effectively.

3. As complaints spread, people in several Soviet republics demanded more control over their own laws and resources. In 1989, Soviet leaders chose not to use force to keep communist governments in Eastern Europe in power, showing that Moscow's reach was changing. Within the union, reforms weakened central control while the economy remained troubled. By 1990, some republics had declared that their laws took priority over Soviet laws, and independence movements gained strength. After a failed coup by hard-line officials in August 1991, central authority weakened further. The Soviet Union broke apart in December 1991, an outcome Gorbachev had not intended.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did military commitments make the Soviet Union's economic problems harder to solve?

2. How could perestroika leave the economy unstable even though Gorbachev meant to improve it?

3. How did glasnost turn public frustration into a challenge to Communist Party authority?

4. How did demands in the republics and the failed 1991 coup together push the union toward breakup?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine Soviet leaders sharply cut military spending in 1988 but kept perestroika and glasnost. Write a four-sentence advisory note predicting whether that cut alone would prevent the union's breakup, using at least two other pressures from the passage to explain your prediction.

ANSWER KEY

Pressures on the Union

HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.C.7.6.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a detail showing how military costs strained the economy, circle two effects of Gorbachev's reforms, and number three linked steps in the final paragraph that led toward the breakup. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did military commitments make the Soviet Union's economic problems harder to solve?	**They used money, workers, and materials that could otherwise have modernized factories or supplied stores.**
2	How could perestroika leave the economy unstable even though Gorbachev meant to improve it?	**It gave some businesses more freedom while much of the planned economy remained, creating mixed rules that disrupted supplies without establishing a reliable replacement.**
3	How did glasnost turn public frustration into a challenge to Communist Party authority?	**Less censorship let people openly criticize shortages, corruption, and past abuses, weakening the party's claim that it could govern effectively.**
4	How did demands in the republics and the failed 1991 coup together push the union toward breakup?	**Republics asserted control over their laws as independence movements grew. The failed coup further weakened central authority, making it harder to hold the union together.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Cutting military spending in 1988 could free resources for factories and stores, but it would not guarantee that the Soviet Union survived. Perestroika's mixed rules could still disrupt supplies and leave shortages in place. Glasnost would still let people openly criticize the government, weakening its authority. Republics seeking control over their own laws might still push for independence, especially if shortages continued.

Accept either prediction if the four-sentence note explains how at least two other pressures could affect the outcome. Students should treat the proposed spending cut as a possibility, not a historical event.