When Systems Shift

Trace the pressures and choices that reshaped Europe.

MWH.C.7.6 "Evaluate the conditions leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequences for Europe. Examine the goals of Poland's Solidarity Movement and other civil resistance movements that challenged communist rule..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two pressures within the Soviet Union, circle one example of civil resistance, and number three events in order from public resistance to the Soviet breakup.

From Protest to a New Europe

1. By the 1980s, Western Europe's postwar recovery had produced growing trade and higher living standards, while many people under communist rule faced shortages and censorship. In Poland, shipyard workers formed Solidarity in 1980 to demand independent unions and political rights. Lech Wałęsa helped lead it, and Pope John Paul II gave many Poles moral support. Although Poland's government imposed martial law in 1981, Solidarity survived underground and later negotiated partly free elections in 1989.

2. The Soviet economy stagnated as factories struggled to meet people's needs. Military spending and the costly war in Afghanistan added pressure. Mikhail Gorbachev introduced perestroika, economic restructuring, and glasnost, greater openness, hoping to reform communism. Openness made public criticism easier, while reforms failed to quickly fix shortages. When Gorbachev declined to send Soviet troops to protect Eastern Europe's communist rulers, protests and negotiated transitions helped topple governments across the region in 1989.

3. As independence movements grew within Soviet republics, the Soviet Union broke apart in 1991. New states emerged, and many Eastern European countries built democratic governments. The United States became the leading global power, while NATO and the European Union later expanded eastward, drawing on Western Europe's history of trade and cooperation. Yet national loyalties remained strong. Russia regained influence and seized Crimea in 2014, then launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These conflicts showed that Europe's post-Cold War order remained contested.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Solidarity challenge communist rule in Poland despite the government's response?

2. How did economic problems and military commitments put pressure on the Soviet system?

3. How did Gorbachev's policies and his decision about Soviet troops help communist governments fall in 1989?

4. What two developments in the passage show different directions for Europe after 1991?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label arguing whether pressures within the Soviet Union or resistance in Eastern Europe mattered more to its collapse. Use two distinct details from the passage and explain one lasting consequence for Europe.

ANSWER KEY

When Systems Shift

HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.C.7.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two pressures within the Soviet Union, circle one example of civil resistance, and number three events in order from public resistance to the Soviet breakup. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Solidarity challenge communist rule in Poland despite the government's response?	**It demanded independent unions and political rights, survived underground after martial law, and later negotiated partly free elections.**
2	How did economic problems and military commitments put pressure on the Soviet system?	**Stagnant factories failed to meet people's needs, while military spending and the war in Afghanistan added costs.**
3	How did Gorbachev's policies and his decision about Soviet troops help communist governments fall in 1989?	**Glasnost made criticism easier, and he declined to send troops to protect Eastern European communist rulers. Protests and negotiated transitions then helped topple those governments.**
4	What two developments in the passage show different directions for Europe after 1991?	**Many Eastern European countries built democratic governments and later joined an expanding EU or NATO, while Russia's actions in Ukraine challenged the post-Cold War order.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Pressures within the Soviet Union mattered more because they weakened the government that had backed communist rule across Eastern Europe. Economic stagnation and the costly war in Afghanistan strained the Soviet system. Gorbachev's decision not to send troops also left Eastern European rulers to face protests without Soviet protection. After the Soviet breakup, many Eastern European countries built democratic governments, though later conflicts showed that Europe's new order was not secure.

Accept either position in Part 3 if the argument uses two accurate, distinct passage details and names a lasting European consequence. For the marking task, a valid sequence is Solidarity's formation, the fall of Eastern European governments in 1989, and the Soviet breakup in 1991.