



# Master's Degree

in Comparative International Relations

Final Thesis

## Revisiting the Fall: Changing Narratives in the Historiography of the Cold War's End and the Soviet Collapse

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Matriculation number

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**Academic Year**

2023 / 2024

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## Abstract

This thesis offers a nuanced historiographical analysis of the Cold War's conclusion and the Soviet Union's collapse, with a particular focus on scholarly works from two distinct periods: before 2008 and from 2008 to the present. Initially, it examines key interpretations by scholars such as Archie Brown, Robert D. English, Melvyn P. Leffler, and John Lewis Gaddis, who emphasize the significance of Gorbachev's leadership, the shift within the Soviet elite towards Western ideals, and the geopolitical context of the time. The study then addresses a historiographical gap by extending its analysis to the period post-2008, engaging with more recent works by Stephen Kotkin, Chris Miller, Kristina Spohr, and Vladislav M. Zubok. These scholars provide insights into the complex interplay of internal Soviet politics, economic crises, and global geopolitical shifts, challenging deterministic narratives of the Soviet collapse and highlighting the importance of individual agency and the contingencies of history. By integrating new perspectives that focus on globalization, nationalism, and the enduring legacies of the Soviet era, this thesis enriches the historiographical discourse on the Cold War and the Soviet Union's dissolution. It critically reviews and synthesizes diverse interpretations, identifying areas of consensus and divergence to deepen scholarly understanding of this transformative period. Moreover, it explores the impact of new primary sources and methodological shifts that have redefined the field, underscoring the dynamic and evolving nature of historiography. In essence, this work seeks to bridge the knowledge gap between two significant historiographical periods, offering a comprehensive analysis that reflects on the multifaceted global elements shaping the trajectory of the Soviet Union, and examining the enduring impact of these historical events on contemporary geopolitics. Through this focused examination, the thesis contributes to ongoing debates and enhances our understanding of the complex narratives surrounding the end of the Cold War and the Soviet collapse.

## Abstract (Italiano)

Questa tesi offre un'analisi storico-bibliografica approfondita sulla conclusione della Guerra Fredda e il crollo dell'Unione Sovietica, esaminando le opere accademiche in due periodi cruciali: prima e dopo il 2008. Inizialmente, la ricerca valuta i contributi di studiosi come Archie Brown, Robert D. English, Melvyn P. Leffler e John Lewis Gaddis, che esplorano il ruolo delle riforme di Gorbachev, il cambiamento culturale e intellettuale nell'élite sovietica verso gli ideali occidentali e il contesto geopolitico più ampio. Successivamente, si passa all'analisi post-2008 con opere di Stephen Kotkin, Chris Miller, Kristina Spohr e Vladislav M. Zubok, che presentano una visione sfaccettata del crollo sovietico, sottolineando l'interazione tra politica interna, crisi economica e cambiamenti geopolitici globali. Questo lavoro cerca di colmare la lacuna storico-bibliografica estendendosi all'era contemporanea, mirando a fornire una comprensione più completa della storiografia della Guerra Fredda nella sua fase più recente. La tesi evidenzia un'evoluzione nella comprensione storico-bibliografica del periodo che va dal 2008 al presente, mostrando una prospettiva più sfumata e complessa sul crollo dell'Unione Sovietica. Contrasta le narrazioni che enfatizzano le pressioni esterne e i cambiamenti ideologici come unici catalizzatori del crollo, sottolineando invece il ruolo critico delle dinamiche interne, comprese le azioni dell'élite sovietica, le resistenze alle riforme e il loro impulso alla autoconservazione. Queste scoperte sfidano le spiegazioni riduttive che attribuiscono la responsabilità del crollo a Gorbachev, preferendo un'interazione più sfumata tra meccanismi politici interni e forze esterne. Inoltre, lo studio riconosce l'attenzione accademica crescente verso le influenze globali che hanno incorniciato il destino dell'Unione Sovietica, ampliando il contesto storico per includere le forze della globalizzazione, l'ascesa del nazionalismo e l'evoluzione culturale. Attraverso un'esplorazione dei cambiamenti narrativi nella storiografia della fine della Guerra Fredda e del crollo sovietico, la tesi mira a gettare luce su diverse prospettive e interpretazioni, contribuendo al dibattito accademico e approfondendo la comprensione di questo periodo cruciale nella storia moderna. Questo lavoro si concentra su come le interpretazioni e gli approcci accademici a questi temi sono evoluti, mirando a contribuire al discorso accademico più ampio evidenziando questi cambiamenti. In conclusione, la tesi mira a fornire un'analisi completa delle evoluzioni storiografiche relative alla Guerra Fredda e al crollo dell'Unione Sovietica, arricchendo il campo con nuove intuizioni e prospettive emerse nell'ultimo decennio e oltre, esaminando l'impatto delle nuove fonti primarie e l'adattamento delle metodologie di ricerca nel campo.

## Introduction

*So, in your discussions of the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware the temptation of pride -- the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an **evil empire**, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil. – Ronald Reagan*

In 1983, U.S. President Ronald Reagan delivered a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, famously labeling the Soviet Union as the "Evil Empire" and expressing hope for its demise. Less than a year earlier, in 1982, Reagan had outlined a vision of freedom and democracy prevailing over Marxism-Leninism. On December 26, 1991, this hope materialized with the declaration of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, following an agreement formalized earlier that month by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union marked significant shifts in global geopolitics. In 1977, the Soviet Union celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Revolution with confidence in its historical trajectory amidst the ongoing ideological rivalry with the United States. However, by the late 1980s, profound transformations were underway. Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985 marked a critical juncture in Soviet politics. With his leadership, the Soviet Union embarked on a path of reform, seeking to address long standing economic stagnation and political stagnation. Gorbachev's introduction of perestroika, aimed at restructuring the Soviet economy, and glasnost, fostering greater transparency and openness, signaled a departure from the rigid orthodoxies of the past. These reforms, while intended to rejuvenate the Soviet system, inadvertently exposed its inherent vulnerabilities, fueling calls for change from within.

Simultaneously, events beyond the Soviet Union's borders were also reshaping the geopolitical landscape. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 symbolized the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the end of Europe's division. This momentous event marked a triumph for democracy and human rights, underscoring the growing momentum for change throughout Eastern Europe.

Amidst these developments, there emerged an unexpected thaw in relations between the

superpowers. The détente between the United States and the Soviet Union led to a series of landmark arms reduction treaties, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 1987, which signaled a shift away from the brinkmanship of the Cold War era. These agreements not only reduced the risk of nuclear conflict but also fostered a climate of trust and cooperation between former adversaries.

While international relations were improving, tensions within the Soviet leadership intensified, leading to an attempted coup in August 1991. Ultimately, the coup failed, but Gorbachev's authority had been seriously damaged and ultimately, he was not able to keep the Union together. On December 25, 1991, the Soviet Union officially dissolved. Gorbachev's televised address announcing the dissolution marked the end of an era, with the iconic red flag of the Soviet Union lowered from the Kremlin for the last time. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, the emergence of the Russian Federation as its successor state heralded a new chapter in Russian history.

While the basic chronology of these events is widely accepted, scholarly interpretations vary widely, leading to ongoing debates regarding their underlying causes, significance, and implications. This thesis aims to delve into the evolving narratives within the historiography of the Cold War's end and the Soviet collapse, offering a comprehensive analysis of the various interpretations and frameworks that have emerged.

While this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive review of the historiography of the Cold War's end and the Soviet collapse, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. Due to the vast scope of the subject matter, it is not possible to encompass every aspect of the debate within the confines of this study. Additionally, this thesis will primarily focus on English-language scholarship, which may result in the omission of important contributions from non-English-speaking scholars. Despite these limitations, this study aims to offer a thorough and nuanced analysis of the key themes and arguments within the field.

In the composition of the thesis, two distinct epochs have surfaced, encapsulating significant shifts in historiographical trends. The initial phase spans from the culmination of the Cold War until approximately 2008, while the subsequent phase extends from that point to the present. Consequently, the analysis will be structured into two corresponding parts, each reflecting the historiographical developments characteristic of these periods.

The historiography of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, spanning from the early 1990s to 2008, reflects a period of significant transformation and reevaluation in the field of Cold War studies. This era, marked by the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the

Soviet Union, prompted historians to reassess previous interpretations and explore new dimensions of this complex conflict. The immediate aftermath of these events saw an initial surge in triumphalist narratives, particularly in the West, where the end of the Cold War was often portrayed as a victory for liberal democracy and market capitalism over communism<sup>1</sup>. This perspective was epitomized by Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History?*<sup>2</sup> which posited the conclusion of ideological evolution with the universalization of Western liberal democracy.

However, this triumphalism soon gave way to more nuanced and critical approaches as scholars gained access to previously closed archives in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The opening of these archives in the early 1990s provided a wealth of new materials that challenged existing narratives and offered unprecedented insights into the motivations, strategies, and internal debates within the Soviet bloc. This access facilitated a wave of "archival revolution" in Cold War historiography, enabling a more detailed and balanced understanding of the conflict from both sides. The availability of previously inaccessible archival materials, notably those originating from the Soviet perspective, has facilitated scholarly endeavors to transcend mere speculation and conjecture, thereby engendering a more sophisticated comprehension of the Cold War phenomenon. As temporal distance from the era increases and the emotional intensity associated with the Cold War wanes, historians find themselves capable of assuming a more dispassionate stance. Consequently, there has been a notable transition in historical discourse, wherein attributions of culpability have been supplanted by an acknowledgment of the ideological confrontation that underpinned the genesis of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> Historians like Vladislav Zubok amply utilized these sources to explore Soviet foreign policy, challenging earlier Western-centric narratives and revealing the complexities and nuances of Soviet decision-making. Similarly, the slow release of documents and memoirs from China began to shape the understanding of its role in the Cold War, with scholars like Chen Jian offering comprehensive analyses that underscored the significance of Sino-Soviet rivalry and the normalization of Sino-American relations.

One significant shift in this period was the move away from viewing the Cold War strictly in terms of a bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Historians

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<sup>1</sup> See Hopkins 2007, p. 917

<sup>2</sup> We will discuss Fukuyama and his "end of history" thesis later on in the analysis of the works.

<sup>3</sup> White (2000) examines traditional typographies employed by historians to categorize the Cold War era, such as the "Orthodox" perspective, attributing blame to the Soviet Union, and the "Revisionist" view, which implicates the United States. Additionally, he addresses the "Post-Revisionist" approach, aiming to reconcile these contrasting narratives. He contends that recent evidence and perspectives have surfaced, challenging these established typologies, and emphasizes the necessity of integrating this fresh evidence into our comprehension of the Cold War and reevaluating past interpretations.

began to emphasize the global nature of the Cold War, examining its impacts and manifestations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This approach highlighted the ways in which Cold War dynamics influenced and were influenced by decolonization, national liberation movements, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Works by scholars such as Odd Arne Westad in *The Global Cold War* underscored the importance of the Third World as both a battleground for superpower competition and an actor with its agency in the Cold War narrative.

Certainly, in this period historians have increasingly adopted a global perspective when examining the Cold War era. However, it's important to acknowledge that this broader approach hasn't entirely transcended the predominant focus on the superpowers, namely the United States and the Soviet Union. In essence, while scholars now scrutinize events beyond the traditional Western-centric narrative, such as those in Afghanistan and Korea, these analyses often remain tethered to understanding their implications for either the USSR or the US. In other words, even as historians explore the subtleties of global interactions during the Cold War, the framework of superpower dynamics continues to shape their interpretations.

Furthermore, the post-1990s historiography increasingly focused on the role of ideology, culture, and technology in shaping the Cold War. The ideological underpinnings of U.S. and Soviet foreign policies received renewed scrutiny, with scholars like Michael Hunt and Odd Arne Westad beginning to examine the ideological convictions guiding the policies of both the United States and the Soviet Union. This period saw an increasing recognition of the cultural dimensions of the Cold War, with historians exploring the role of propaganda, cultural exchanges, and the battle for ideological supremacy. Additionally, the significance of technological advancements, especially in nuclear weapons, space exploration, and information technology, was explored in greater depth, revealing how technology both drove and reflected Cold War tensions. The omnipresent nuclear threat also became a central theme in Cold War historiography. Scholars debated the concept of mutual assured destruction and its impact on maintaining peace, with Gaddis's notion of the "long peace"<sup>4</sup> suggesting that nuclear deterrence contributed to stability. However, this view was contested, and the historiography expanded to consider the numerous proxy wars and regional conflicts that occurred.

By the late 1990s and into the 2000s, the historiography began to focus more on the end of the Cold War and the roles of individual leaders. Scholars like Jack F. Matlock Jr. and Archie Brown emphasized the importance of key figures such as Gorbachev and Reagan, while others highlighted the broader structural forces at play, including economic burdens and the risks of

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<sup>4</sup> Gaddis (2005), p. 196



nuclear escalation.<sup>5</sup>

The historiographical focus on individual leaders at the end of the Cold War, which had gained traction in the late 1990s, continued to develop into the new millennium. The scholarly narrative began to interweave the personal diplomacy of figures like Reagan and Gorbachev with the tectonic shifts in international relations that were occurring. This new vein of research suggested that while individual choices were crucial, they were often circumscribed by the economic limitations and strategic imperatives of their respective states. The role of personalities in history, a theme explored by historians such as Matlock and Brown, was juxtaposed against the structuralist interpretations that looked at wider social, economic, and international trends.

The collapse of the Soviet Union itself became a central area of inquiry. Historians started to probe beyond the superficial triumphalism of the early 1990s to understand the internal dynamics and pressures that led to the fall of the Soviet system. The availability of archival material from the former Soviet bloc allowed scholars to delve into the complexities of the Soviet economy, the internal debates within the Communist Party, and the impact of policies such as perestroika and glasnost. The historiography of this period, therefore, became richer, benefiting from a multitude of perspectives that highlighted the interplay between domestic factors and foreign pressures.

The early 21st century saw a renewed interest in the economic dimensions of the Cold War. As new archives opened, historians gained a deeper understanding of how economic imperatives shaped the policies of both the United States and the Soviet Union. The role of economic aid, trade policies, and the battle for economic influence in the Third World were scrutinized. This line of inquiry stressed the significance of economic strategies as both a cause and a tool in Cold War politics, complicating the previously dominant narratives that focused mainly on military and strategic concerns.

By 2008, Cold War historiography had become more reflective and self-critical. Historians were increasingly aware of the limitations of their sources and the challenges of interpreting events that had happened in the recent past. They questioned earlier narratives and sought to avoid the pitfalls of presentism and triumphalism that had colored some of the initial post-Cold War accounts. The historiographical trend was towards a more complex, less deterministic understanding of the Cold War, one that acknowledged the interplay of diverse factors and the contingent nature of historical events.

In conclusion, by 2008, the historiography of the Cold War had become a rich tapestry, incorporating multiple perspectives, methodologies, and disciplines. The study of this period had

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Matlock (1995, 2004) and Brown (1996).

evolved from a narrow focus on superpower rivalry to a broad examination of the Cold War's impact on global politics, economies, societies, and cultures. As new sources continued to emerge and as historians developed new interpretive frameworks, the historiography of the Cold War promised to remain a vibrant and contested field, offering fresh insights into one of the twentieth century's defining epochs.

As I said, within the scope of this academic enquiry, two temporal segments have been demarcated that illustrate significant evolutions in the historiography of the Cold War. The first segment, extending from the denouement of the Cold War to the year 2008, has been well-documented and critically examined in scholarly literature. An exemplar of this comprehensive examination is Michael F. Hopkins' review, *Continuing Debate and New Approaches in Cold War History*, which offers an extensive analysis of the scholarly discourse on the Cold War, elucidating its developmental phases, emergent trends, and the burgeoning body of work intelligence analyzing its denouement. In line with the results of this thesis, Hopkins' review adeptly identified key thematic areas that surpass the traditional geopolitical dialogue, encompassing cultural dynamics, espionage, intelligence activities, and economic considerations. While diplomatic and strategic concerns have been extensively canvassed within academic circles, Hopkins notes a conspicuous paucity of insight regarding the internal machinations of the Soviet Union and China. There has been some advancement in scrutinizing the economic and intelligence factors; nonetheless, knowledge in these domains, particularly with respect to the Eastern bloc, remained inchoate. Hopkins advocated for a more cohesive integration of cultural factors into the prevailing political narratives and called for a broadening of scope that transcends the predominant focus on the United States. It critiques the overreliance on investigative methodologies and stresses the imperative of grasping the foundational convictions that propelled Cold War actions. The review concludes by highlighting the ongoing (at the time) scholarly endeavors and forthcoming projects, underscoring the sustained necessity for comprehensive research to unravel the complexities of the Cold War and its enduring impact.

Within this context, Michael F. Hopkins' article resonates with our initial findings, underlining the relevance of our research in the broader academic dialogue. Hopkins' analysis adeptly identifies thematic areas extending beyond geopolitical dialogues, advocating for a comprehensive integration of cultural factors and a broader scope transcending the predominant focus on the United States. Yet, similar to Hopkins, we note a dearth of insight into the internal dynamics of the Soviet Union and China, suggesting opportunities for further exploration.

Moving forward, our study endeavors to compare our analysis of the second period with Hopkins' recommendations, thereby gauging the practical implications of his insights. This

comparative approach promises to enrich our understanding of shifts in Cold War historiography, shedding light on the extent to which scholarly discourse has evolved in response to Hopkins' suggestions.

In contrast, the second period, which spans from 2008 to the present, has not been as extensively chronicled in the historiographical literature. This thesis aims to address this lacuna by extending the historiographical analysis into the contemporary era, endeavoring to furnish a more complete and detailed understanding of the Cold War's historiography in its most recent phase. Through this work, the objective is to contribute a substantive body of research that elucidates the later developments in Cold War studies, thereby enriching the field with new insights and perspectives that have emerged in the past decade and beyond.

The analyses advanced in this thesis have led to a discernible maturation in the historiographical understanding of the period extending from 2008 to the present, revealing a more nuanced and multifaceted perspective on the collapse of the Soviet Union. The thesis posits a departure from narratives that emphasized external pressures and ideological shifts as the primary catalysts for the Soviet Union's dissolution. Instead, it underscores the critical role of internal dynamics, including the actions of the Soviet elite, the resistance encountered during reform attempts, and their inherent drive for self-preservation.

These findings challenge reductive explanations that lay the responsibility for the collapse at Gorbachev's feet, favoring a more nuanced interplay of internal political mechanisms and external forces.

Moreover, my study acknowledges the growing scholarly attention to the global influences that framed the Soviet Union's fate, broadening the historical context to include the forces of globalization, the rise of nationalism, and cultural evolution. This comprehensive approach goes beyond the simplistic Cold War binary narrative, offering a more thorough understanding of the multifarious global elements that shaped the trajectory of the Soviet Union. As evident from this analysis, the recommendations put forward by Hopkins regarding future research directions in Cold War history have been taken seriously by the historians studied in the subsequent period.

Additionally, it highlights a tendency to refute deterministic interpretations of the Soviet Union's downfall, emphasizing the significance of individual agency, the decisive nature of leadership, and the contingencies of history. It argues against the inevitability of the Soviet collapse, advocating for historical narratives that recognize the complexity and multifaceted nature of this significant event.

Notably, Hopkins' observation regarding the dearth of research addressing the Soviet Union vis-à-vis China appears to have garnered attention, as evidenced by the increasing scholarly

focus on the interplay between China and both the Soviet Union and the United States. During the subsequent period, there emerges a notable accentuation on China's geopolitical significance and its relations with both the Soviet Union and the United States

Finally, this work extends the analysis beyond the mere event of the Soviet Union's dissolution to examine the enduring legacies and subsequent repercussions in the post-Soviet era. This approach reflects a growing scholarly interest in the persistent impact of Soviet history on contemporary Russia and the broader geopolitical landscape.

The thesis aims to explore the changing narratives within the historiography of the Cold War's end and the Soviet collapse, shedding light on differing perspectives and interpretations. By critically reviewing and synthesizing key works within the field, the thesis seeks to elucidate the diverse perspectives and interpretations that have shaped scholarly discourse on these transformative events. Furthermore, by identifying areas of consensus and divergence within the historiography, this study aims to contribute to ongoing debates and deepen scholarly understanding of this crucial period in modern history.

The thesis centers on understanding how interpretations and scholarly approaches to these subjects have evolved, aiming to contribute to the broader academic discourse by elucidating these shifts. In crafting this thesis, the central pursuit has been to meticulously delineate the historiographical evolution concerning the study of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's collapse. This exploration is not confined to a mere chronological recounting but delves into how scholarly narratives have metamorphosed in response to shifting cultural understandings and academic discourses. It charts the historiographical currents, pinpointing pivotal junctures and the array of influences that have molded the study of these historical phenomena.

Integral to this analysis is an examination of the disparate interpretations that have emerged over time. The thesis undertakes a comparative analysis of the spectrum of scholarly thought, teasing out convergences and divergences in historical understanding. By juxtaposing various historiographical contributions, this work illuminates the elaborate weavings of historical interpretation.

The investigation further extends to methodological introspection, shedding light on the shifts that have informed historiographical practices. It scrutinizes the evolution of research methodologies, the integration of theoretical frameworks, and the embrace of interdisciplinary modalities that have come to redefine the field. This facet of the study underscores the adaptive nature of historiography, showcasing its responsiveness to innovative evidentiary sources, evolving scholarly paradigms, and the dynamic landscape of academic inquiry.

Equally pivotal to this thesis is the assessment of the impact wrought by the unveiling of

new primary sources. It interrogates how the influx of archival material, oral histories, and digital repositories has reconfigured established narratives and spurred novel interpretive angles. This exploration acknowledges the profound enrichment that these sources lend to the historiographical fabric, infusing it with depth and breadth.

In conclusion, by focusing on the shifts in historiographical trends over two periods, the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how scholarly interpretations and approaches to the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union have evolved. Through this focused examination, the thesis endeavors to contribute to the field by enhancing our understanding of the dynamic and evolving nature of historiography.

In developing the methodology for this thesis, I have adopted a comparative analytical approach, selecting four seminal works to represent the historiographical landscape from the end of the Cold War to 2008, and four more to represent the scholarship from 2008 to the present. This bifurcation allows for a focused examination of the evolution and maturation of historical narratives over these distinct periods, providing insights into the changing perspectives and interpretations that have come to define the study of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's collapse.

The choice of these specific works is rooted in their representational value and scholarly impact. Archie Brown's *The Gorbachev Factor*, Robert D. English's *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War*, Melvyn P. Leffler's *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, and John Lewis Gaddis's *The Cold War: A New History* collectively embody the diverse analytical threads of the first period. These texts are instrumental in illustrating the complexity of geopolitical dynamics, the interplay of individual actors, and the ideological contours that shaped the end of the Cold War. They offer a rich tapestry of interpretations, from the reformative zeal of Gorbachev to the complicated ideological engagements between East and West, all the while navigating the intricate terrain of superpower diplomacy.

For the second period, the selection of Stephen Kotkin's *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, Chris Miller's *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR*, Kristina Spohr's *Post-wall, Post-square: How Bush, Gorbachev, Kohl, and Deng Shaped the World after 1989*, and Vladislav M. Zubok's *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union*, provides a contemporary perspective that delves into the nuanced internal dynamics of the Soviet Union, the global economic pressures at play, and the broader geopolitical shifts that influenced the Soviet collapse. These works challenge deterministic interpretations of the Soviet demise, instead highlighting the interwoven fabric of internal resistance, leadership decisions, and historical contingencies. Notably, all authors also project the narrative beyond the dissolution, considering

the enduring legacies and global implications in the post-Soviet era.

This methodological framework, grounded in comparative literature analysis, enables the thesis to engage with the historiography's breadth and depth. It facilitates a meticulous dissection of scholarly discourse, illuminating the evolution of thought and methodology in response to new evidence, academic trends, and the broader socio-political landscape. By juxtaposing the contributions of these key works, the thesis aims to dissect the sophisticated interplay of narratives, identify consensus and contention, and elucidate the multifaceted nature of Cold War studies.

The rationale behind selecting these particular works stems from their comprehensive coverage of the multifaceted aspects of the Cold War's end and the Soviet Union's collapse. Each book offers distinct insights into the political, economic, ideological, and cultural dimensions that have shaped scholarly understanding over the past decades. Brown and English's works provide in-depth analyses of Gorbachev's role and the ideological exchanges that influenced the course of events. Leffler and Gaddis offer broader geopolitical and diplomatic perspectives that have defined the traditional narratives of the period.

Transitioning to the second period, Kotkin, Miller, Spohr, and Zubok's work represent a shift in focus towards the internal mechanisms of the Soviet system, the economic challenges faced by Gorbachev, and the wider implications of the Cold War's end on global structures. This selection ensures a balanced approach that encapsulates both the macro and micro historiographical shifts, enriching the analysis with diverse scholarly voices and interpretations. The selection of the works of the second period is further justified by their rigorous research methodologies and extensive utilization of diverse source materials. Their meticulous approach, characterized by the incorporation of new primary sources, archival materials, oral histories, and digital repositories, distinguishes their scholarship within the field.

This thesis, therefore, stands as an endeavor to bridge the gap in historiographical literature from 2008 to the present. By critically reviewing these key works within the field, the study aims to advance a nuanced understanding that goes beyond traditional narratives, highlighting the internal dynamics within the Soviet Union, the significance of global influences, and the contingent nature of historical events. In doing so, the thesis not only elucidates the diverse perspectives that have emerged but also contributes to ongoing debates, deepening our scholarly comprehension of the Cold War's dramatic conclusion and its enduring impact in the contemporary era.

### **Outline of the chapters**

The thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter of the thesis focuses on the initial

period of historiography concerning the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's collapse. This initial chapter of the thesis provides a comprehensive summary of the works under scrutiny. Through these summaries, we aim to gain a thorough understanding of their content. Subsequently, these summaries will serve as valuable tools for our in-depth analysis of each period.

In the first chapter, we analyze the following books: *The Gorbachev Factor* by Archie Brown (1996), *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* by Robert English (2000), *The Cold War: A New History* by John Lewis Gaddis (2005), and *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union, and the Cold War* by Melvyn P. Leffler (2007).

Brown's work emphasizes Gorbachev's visionary leadership that aimed at reforming the Soviet system internally while engaging constructively with the West. English explores the intellectual and cultural shifts that predated and supported Gorbachev's reforms, illustrating a broader receptivity within the Soviet leadership towards Western ideas of democracy, market economics, and human rights. Gaddis integrates these insights, positioning Gorbachev's initiatives within a historical continuum of strategic rivalries and ideological evolution. Leffler places these policies within the broader geopolitical context, highlighting the strategic interplay between the superpowers that eased global tensions.

Similarly to the first chapter, in the second chapter, we provide summaries of the selected works from the second period. Again, at this stage, we do not analyze these works; instead, our goal is to gain a comprehensive understanding of their content through these summaries.

In the second chapter, we delve into the analysis of *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse* by Stephen Kotkin (2001, updated 2008), *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* by Chris Miller (2016), *Post-Wall Post-Square: How Bush, Gorbachev, Kohl, and Deng Shaped the World after 1989* by Kristina Spohr (2019), and *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* by Vladislav Zubok (2021). This chapter focuses on literature spanning from 2008 to the present, offering insights into the evolving scholarly discourse on the collapse of the Soviet Union and its enduring implications.

We notice how the works from the second period delve deeper into the intricacies of Cold War historiography, focusing on the multifaceted processes that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It critiques simplistic dichotomies, such as East versus West or reform versus stagnation, and instead examines the complex interplay of leadership decisions, economic mismanagement, internal dynamics, and global shifts.

The first period's emphasis on figures like Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush, as analyzed through works by Archie Brown, Robert English, John Lewis Gaddis, and Melvyn P. Leffler, reflects a focus on the visionary leadership and strategic decisions that contributed to the Cold

War's peaceful conclusion. This perspective underscores the role of individual agency and ideological shifts in shaping historical outcomes.

The analysis of the first chapter delineates the ideological shifts within the Soviet Union towards a more liberal and open stance, facilitated by intellectual and cultural exchanges with the West. These exchanges, as documented by the authors, were pivotal in reshaping Soviet policy and ideology, contributing to a redefinition of the Soviet Union's role on the global stage. A central theme illuminated by the chapter is the pivotal role played by Mikhail Gorbachev in the twilight of the Cold War. The consensus among these narratives is that a complex interplay of leadership decisions, ideological shifts, economic pressures, and global dynamics underpinned the peaceful conclusion of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's disintegration. The authors also highlight the unsustainable nature of the Soviet economic system, particularly its centralized planning and the burdensome arms race, which necessitated reforms and ultimately led to the Soviet Union's downfall. In all works the interplay between the superpowers, characterized by the arms race and regional conflicts, are considered. Each author recognized the need for reforms which facilitated the peaceful resolution of the Cold War. Lastly, the works in the period navigate the complex terrain of the West's influence on the end of the Cold War, with all four works recognizing the role of Western policies, particularly those of the United States, in shaping the historical narrative. While each author attributes a different weight to Western influence versus internal Soviet developments, they collectively affirm the West's role in facilitating the Cold War's conclusion, underscoring the multifaceted nature of historical causation.

In contrast, the analysis of the second period shows, through the lens of Stephen Kotkin, Chris Miller, Kristina Spohr, and Vladislav M. Zubok, broader narratives that include economic mismanagement, internal dynamics, and the impact of global shifts. This analysis challenges the inevitability of the Soviet collapse, suggesting a more complex interplay of factors, including resistance within the Soviet Union, the adaptability of Soviet-era institutions, and the influence of globalization and nationalism.

One of the key themes explored in this chapter are the internal dynamics and elite influence within the Soviet Union, revealing a power struggle within the leadership and highlighting the importance of individual agency in historical trajectories. This perspective shifts the focus from broad geopolitical strategies to the microcosm of internal politics, providing insights into the fragmentation and collapse of the superpower. Also notable is how the authors situate the Soviet Union within the broader context of global shifts, emphasizing the contingent nature of the end of the Cold War. Another significant trend observed in the books of the second period is the extension of their narrative beyond the conclusion of the Cold War or the dissolution of the Soviet



Union. These authors delve into events that occurred after 1991, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to historical analysis. Moreover, they utilize their insights into Cold War and Soviet history as a lens through which to understand contemporary developments. This approach underscores the interconnectedness of past and present, offering valuable perspectives on ongoing geopolitical dynamics.

## Chapter 2:

### Cold War Perceptions and the Soviet Union's Decline (1996- 2008)

#### 1. The 1990s and early 2000s

The period following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a pivotal moment in global history, characterized by profound transformations in international relations, ideological paradigms, and geopolitical landscapes. The years spanning from the early 1990s to 2007 witnessed a complex interplay of geopolitical realignments, economic transitions, and ideological contestations, shaping the narratives and interpretations surrounding the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. This chapter explores the scholarly works and prevailing discourses on the end of the Cold War written during the period from 1996 to 2008, a time frame that encapsulates significant developments and debates within the field of Cold War historiography.

At the onset of the 1990s, the United States emerged as the preeminent global power, heralding an era of US unipolarism characterized by unrivaled military supremacy and economic hegemony. President George H.W. Bush famously spoke of a "new world order," signaling America's vision for a post-Cold War international system based on liberal democratic values and free-market principles. This assertion of American dominance reshaped the dynamics of international relations and influenced scholarly interpretations of the Cold War's end.

Central to the discourse surrounding the end of the Cold War was the triumph of capitalism over communism. The collapse of the Soviet Union was widely interpreted as the ideological victory of the West and the vindication of liberal democratic principles. The spread of market-oriented economies and the integration of former communist states into the global capitalist system underscored capitalism's perceived superiority and resilience in the face of ideological competition.

However, amidst the celebration of capitalism's triumph, Russia experienced a profound and protracted crisis. The dissolution of the Soviet Union precipitated economic upheaval, political instability, and social dislocation within Russia and other post-Soviet states. The transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-driven system was

fraught with challenges, including corruption, privatization struggles, and socioeconomic inequalities, leading to Russia's deep crisis during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Furthermore, the period from 1996 to 2008 was marked by significant geopolitical events and developments that influenced scholarly interpretations of the Cold War's end. These included the enlargement of NATO and the European Union, the Yugoslav Wars, and the rise of China as a global economic power. Each of these events contributed to shifting narratives and perspectives on the Cold War's conclusion and the Soviet collapse, reflecting the evolving complexities of international relations in the post-Cold War era.

In this first chapter, we analyze the following books: *The Gorbachev Factor* by Archie Brown (1996), *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* by Robert English (2000), *The Cold War: A New History* by John Lewis Gaddis (2005), and *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union, and the Cold War* by Melvyn P. Leffler (2007). Therefore, the first period spans from 1996 to 2007.

Archie Brown's *The Gorbachev Factor* offers a comprehensive examination of the pivotal role played by Mikhail Gorbachev in shaping the Soviet Union's final years and the end of the Cold War. Through meticulous analysis and insightful commentary, Brown explores Gorbachev's leadership style, political reforms, and strategic initiatives, highlighting his visionary approach to transforming Soviet society and engaging with the West.

Robert English's *Russia and the Idea of the West* delves into the intellectual and cultural underpinnings of Gorbachev's reforms and their implications for Soviet-Western relations. By examining the role of intellectuals in shaping perceptions of the West within Soviet society, English offers a fascinating exploration of the ideological shifts that accompanied Gorbachev's leadership.

John Lewis Gaddis's *The Cold War: A New History* presents a fresh perspective on one of the defining conflicts of the 20th century. Drawing on new archival evidence and reevaluating traditional narratives, Gaddis offers readers a compelling reinterpretation of Cold War history. From the origins of the conflict to its tumultuous conclusion, this book provides a sweeping overview of key events, personalities, and geopolitical dynamics.

Melvyn P. Leffler's *For the Soul of Mankind* offers a richly detailed account of the final years of the Cold War and the transformative leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. Through a blend of archival research and firsthand accounts, Leffler chronicles the dramatic events

that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Leffler explores the ideological tensions, geopolitical rivalries, and individual personalities that shaped this tumultuous period.

## 2. *The Gorbachev Factor* by Archie Brown (1996)

Archie Brown's book, *The Gorbachev Factor*, published in 1996, stands as a seminal work in the realm of political history, offering a comprehensive exploration of the era characterized by Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev, who served as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991 and as the President of the Soviet Union from 1990 to 1991, occupies a central position in Soviet and global history due to his instrumental role in enacting substantial political and economic reforms, most notably the policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). These reforms left an indelible mark on the Soviet Union and ultimately culminated in the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet bloc.

Brown's work provides an extensive examination of Gorbachev's leadership style, political ideology, and the myriad challenges he confronted while embarking on the ambitious task of modernizing and reforming the Soviet system. Additionally, the book delves into Gorbachev's interactions with prominent world leaders, including the likes of U.S. President Ronald Reagan, and assesses the far-reaching implications of these interactions on the global political landscape.

*The Gorbachev Factor* presents several key theses and arguments that set it apart within the historical discourse on the Soviet Union and the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev.

Firstly, the book emphasizes the importance of leadership in politics, even within highly bureaucratic and authoritarian systems like the Soviet Union. Brown posits that Gorbachev's distinct leadership style, visionary outlook, and steadfast commitment to reform were instrumental in shaping the Soviet Union's trajectory during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This thesis emphasizes the agency of leaders in effecting transformative change within political systems, challenging deterministic views of historical development.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, Brown underscores the role of ideas in driving political change. He argues that Gorbachev's intellectual background, exposure to Western ideas, and strong belief in the necessity

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<sup>6</sup> As we shall see, all the four works that I chose to represent the first period highlight Gorbachev's central role and his "new thinking" in foreign policy as pivotal to the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As detailed in the third chapter of this thesis, later historians challenged the conventional emphasis on Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms and foreign policy initiatives (cf. Lebov 1999).

of reform were crucial influences on his policy decisions. However, the book also highlights Gorbachev's pragmatism in adapting his ideals to the complex political realities of the Soviet system. This thesis underscores the dynamic interplay between ideology and pragmatism in political leadership, demonstrating how leaders navigate competing interests and constraints.

Another significant thesis posited in the book is Gorbachev's role in facilitating a relatively peaceful and non-violent transition within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Brown contrasts Gorbachev's approach with the more repressive tactics employed by his Soviet predecessors, suggesting that Gorbachev's commitment to political reform and diplomacy helped to prevent a violent outcome. This thesis highlights the potential of diplomatic and reformist leadership to mitigate conflicts and promote stability during periods of profound political change.

Lastly, *The Gorbachev Factor* stands out for its comparative analysis of Gorbachev's leadership in comparison to that of his Soviet predecessors, such as Leonid Brezhnev and Yuri Andropov. Brown underscores the unique nature of Gorbachev's leadership style and the wide-ranging consequences it had for the Soviet Union and its allies. By contextualizing Gorbachev's leadership within the broader historical framework of Soviet governance, this thesis sheds light on the distinctive features and impacts of his tenure.

Brown's *The Gorbachev Factor* offers insightful perspectives on the role of leadership, the influence of ideas, the importance of non-violent transitions, and the significance of comparative analysis in understanding the complexities of Soviet politics and Gorbachev's legacy.

In contrast to prevailing theses in the historical literature on the Soviet Union, Archie Brown's work places a profound emphasis on the role of individual leadership and ideas in shaping historical outcomes. While many historical analyses of the Soviet Union tend to focus on broader structural factors, economic conditions, or geopolitical forces, Brown's book accentuates the agency of leaders and their capacity to exert influence over historical events. This approach aligns seamlessly with the field of leadership studies and offers a distinctive perspective on the denouement of the Cold War and the ultimate disintegration of the Soviet Union. The book provides a valuable counterpoint to deterministic interpretations of the Soviet Union's decline and collapse, highlighting the instrumental role of leadership and ideas in shaping historical outcomes. As such, it stands as an essential resource for historians, political scientists, and all those with an interest in the history of the Soviet Union and the remarkable era of transformation epitomized by Gorbachev's leadership.

The first three chapters of the book delve into Gorbachev's background, tracing his formative years and early career trajectory. They shed light on the development of his ideological perspectives and attitudes, offering valuable insights into the factors that shaped his worldview.

Furthermore, the narrative extends to Gorbachev's tenure as a provincial party leader and his subsequent roles as a Central Committee Secretary and Politburo member under the successive leaderships of Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko. These chapters not only provide a detailed account of Gorbachev's ascent within the Soviet hierarchy but also serve as a primer on the structures and dynamics of power during the later stages of the Soviet era.

By elucidating the socio-political milieu in which Gorbachev emerged as a leader, these early chapters offer readers a nuanced understanding of the institutional frameworks and operational mechanisms that governed the late Soviet period. They serve as an invaluable introduction to the complexities of Soviet governance and provide essential context for comprehending Gorbachev's subsequent reforms and their impact on Soviet society and politics.

Mikhail Gorbachev's formative years, deeply marked by his peasant background in the Stavropol region and the adversity of Stalinist policies, were instrumental in developing his later leadership ethos and reformist vision. Experiencing the Soviet system's flaws through family and community hardships fostered his empathy and a critical outlook on governance and social justice.<sup>7</sup>

His academic tenure at Moscow University was pivotal, where he not only excelled in Marxist-Leninist theory but also cultivated a network of reform-minded peers and future leaders. Gorbachev's critical engagement with the discrepancies between Marxist ideals and Soviet realities set the groundwork for his advocacy for systemic reform.<sup>8</sup>

His political ascent began with the Komsomol, leading to a nuanced understanding of the Soviet bureaucracy and its resistance to change. Gorbachev's strategic networking within the Communist Party, coupled with his commitment to openness and human rights, underpinned his rise to national prominence. His policies of glasnost and perestroika later became key elements of his mission to rejuvenate the Soviet Union.

The socio-political landscape of the Soviet Union at the time was fraught with stagnation and an urgent need for reform. Gorbachev's response to this was a strategic initiative for change, navigating through the ideological rigidity of the Communist Party and the Soviet economy's inefficiencies.

His tenure under Andropov's leadership was a critical juncture, aligning with efforts towards discipline, anti-corruption, and economic renewal, shaping his reformist agenda. Gorbachev's trajectory from his rural roots to the upper echelons of Soviet politics was not merely a rise in rank but an evolution of a reformist conviction poised to transform the Soviet Union's legacy. His journey encapsulates the synthesis of personal history and political acumen, framing

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<sup>7</sup> Brown (1996), pp. 25-8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp. 29-36.

his role as a leader who sought to reshape not only Soviet governance but also the broader ideological landscape.

In the transformative era of Gorbachev's leadership, the Soviet Union experienced a revolutionary shift in ideology and policy. Gorbachev's open-mindedness to deviating from the rigid Leninist orthodoxy, paired with the erosive power of advancing technology on the Soviet information barrier, catalyzed sweeping changes.

Understanding this period, Brown argues, necessitates recognizing the influential role of ideas and individuals. Although some reformist concepts preexisted, Gorbachev's position allowed him to appoint like-minded individuals to pivotal roles, fostering the diffusion of these ideas within the Soviet political fabric.

The Soviet Union's state in 1985 was marked by a 'crisis of effectiveness' rather than a 'crisis of survival,' with the populace still largely supportive of Leninist ideals despite growing issues.<sup>9</sup> Gorbachev faced the difficult task of discerning the Soviet condition, with his path of reform being a chosen strategy amidst various possibilities.

Attempts to reform engendered unforeseen outcomes, revealing a deep ideological divide within the establishment, ranging from staunch reformists to rigid anti-reformists. The period saw a significant reevaluation of Stalin's legacy, moving from suppression to a cautious discourse, often led by older intellectuals who had experienced Stalin's and Khrushchev's contrasting policies firsthand.

Gorbachev's own views on Stalin were ambivalent, initially conforming to the party's stance before gradually adopting a critical view of Stalinism and Leninism. His leadership was marked by pragmatic reformism, strategically introducing new ideas and individuals to the Soviet leadership. This included capitalizing on events like the 1986 Party Congress to bring fresh faces into the Central Committee, as well as surrounding himself with advisers who shared his vision, such as foreign policy aide Chernyaev.

The Gorbachev era is thus characterized by the tension between ideological evolution and the structural constraints of the Soviet political system, a nuanced dance of ideational change, strategic appointments, and the complex interplay of societal forces.

The transformative period under Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership signified a pivotal shift in the Soviet Union, characterized by a reassessment of Stalin's legacy, an infusion of new intellectual thought, and the gradual implementation of political reforms. Gorbachev's administration marked a departure from conventional Soviet governance, showcasing his

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

receptivity to radical ideas such as the introduction of political competition and the restructuring of the Communist Party, suggested by Alexander Yakovlev.<sup>10</sup>

The diverse composition of the International Department and the inclusion of reformist minds like Yakovlev, Eduard Shevardnadze, Anatoly Chernyaev, and Georgy Arbatov were crucial in steering Soviet policy towards a more dynamic and multifaceted direction. These figures played instrumental roles in crafting a nuanced foreign policy and ushering in domestic reforms.

Gorbachev's engagement with Western social democratic leaders, including Willy Brandt and Felipe González, further influenced his evolving stance on socialism, aligning it more closely with values of freedom and democracy. This redefinition sought to harmonize Soviet socialism with aspects of Western political tolerance and market economics.<sup>11</sup>

Amidst this ideological evolution, Gorbachev navigated the complexities of the Soviet political landscape, balancing the pursuit of reform with the necessity to maintain party cohesion. His leadership was a testament to political learning, strategic consultation, and a transformative approach to both domestic and international policies. This era, as presented by Brown, underscores the profound ideological and policy changes that reshaped the Soviet Union during Gorbachev's tenure.

Gorbachev's leadership in the Soviet Union brought forth transformative concepts that deeply impacted politics and society. These concepts, namely perestroika, glasnost, and democratization, played a crucial role in reshaping the Soviet system during Gorbachev's leadership.

Perestroika, launched in 1986, represented a seismic shift in Soviet political discourse. Initially conceived as a platform for comprehensive societal reforms, perestroika sought to overhaul various aspects of Soviet life, including work collectives, administrative structures, party and state apparatuses, and the electoral framework. Notably, the deliberate ambiguity surrounding the term allowed it to be perceived as both a moderate reform effort and a more radical restructuring initiative. This strategic ambiguity enabled Gorbachev to navigate the complexities of Soviet politics adeptly, garnering support from diverse factions.

Similarly, Gorbachev's emphasis on "glasnost," or openness and transparency, exerted a transformative influence on Soviet politics. Broadening the scope of the term beyond mere transparency, Gorbachev expanded it to encompass freedom of speech and publication. This broad interpretation heralded an era of burgeoning diversity of voices, challenging the prevailing orthodoxies and fostering a climate of greater openness within Soviet society.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 74-5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 116.



Furthermore, the concept of democratization, first broached in 1984, initially focused on enhancing workplace democracy and empowering grassroots social organizations. However, by 1987, it assumed a central position in the Communist Party's agenda, laying the groundwork for far-reaching political reforms and fostering a more participatory political environment. This shift towards democratization represented a departure from the traditional centralized authority of the Soviet state, signaling a willingness to embrace greater political pluralism and citizen engagement.

These concepts formed the foundation of Gorbachev's efforts to reform the Soviet system, offering a flexible approach to change. They represented a significant departure from the traditional Soviet lexicon, breaking taboos and fostering a more diverse political discourse. Gorbachev's introduction of these concepts and his willingness to challenge established norms reshaped Soviet political thought. These transformative ideas led to significant political and social changes during his leadership, leaving an indelible mark on Soviet history.

In the fifth chapter of his book, Brown explores the distinctive economic challenges that the Soviet Union encountered under Gorbachev's leadership, and how it underwent significant evolution in its approach to economic reform. This period was characterized by several key developments.

Firstly, the Soviet Union grappled with a pronounced economic decline throughout the 1980s, a phenomenon substantiated by both official statistics and estimates from external sources such as the CIA. This downturn underscored the pressing need for reform within the Soviet economic system.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, amidst this backdrop of economic turmoil, the Soviet Union found itself in a unique international context. Observing the economic transformations taking place in other Communist nations, notably China and Eastern Europe, provided valuable insights and benchmarks for the Soviet leadership as they embarked on their own reform agenda.

Thirdly, Gorbachev's personal commitment to economic reform marked a departure from previous leadership approaches. Unlike his predecessors, Gorbachev demonstrated a genuine dedication to reform efforts, evident in his willingness to replace key figures within the Soviet hierarchy to advance the cause of economic restructuring.

Moreover, Gorbachev's vision for economic reform was notably more comprehensive than previous initiatives. However, despite his ambitions, Gorbachev encountered significant resistance from various quarters, including entrenched interests within ministries, regional party leaders, and elements within the military, highlighting the entrenched opposition to change within the Soviet system. Recognizing the intertwined nature of economic and political reforms,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 130-1.

Gorbachev pursued a strategy of engaging public opinion through political openness, or glasnost, and democratization. However, these measures also sparked polarization within Soviet politics, as differing factions responded to the changes with varying degrees of enthusiasm or resistance.

Finally, Gorbachev faced the dilemma of balancing the imperative for radical economic reform with the entrenched opposition to market-oriented policies within the shifting political landscape of the Soviet Union. This tension between reformist impulses and the resistance to marketization encapsulated the complexity of Gorbachev's economic agenda and the challenges inherent in navigating the changing political currents of the time. As Brown puts it, “the tension between two contradictory aims—improving the system and constructing the system on different principles—”<sup>13</sup> was the problem that Gorbachev had to deal with on every side, and it was especially acute in the economic sphere.

Gorbachev's economic views evolved over time. Initially, he aimed for partial marketization to improve economic growth. By 1987, he embraced the idea of a "socialist market" and acknowledged the market's indispensable role in the socialist economy. In 1989, he shifted towards a predominantly market-oriented economy, regulated in a Western European manner, aligned with social democracy principles. Gorbachev also endorsed the concept of a "mixed economy," including co-operative, private, and state ownership.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout this period, Gorbachev faced opposition from conservatives and vested interests resistant to change. His vision aimed to combine central planning and market dynamics, address technological backwardness, and reform the agricultural sector. Despite complexities and inconsistencies, Gorbachev's evolving views emphasized the importance of a market-oriented approach, even as he advocated for regulation and elements of private ownership. This dynamic period witnessed his persistent efforts to reshape the Soviet economy amidst significant challenges.

Chapter 6 of the book, titled *Gorbachev and Political Transformation*, explores Gorbachev's evolving approach to political change and economic reform during his tenure as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. It asserts that Gorbachev initially aimed for a socialist market economy and political reform within the existing framework but gradually shifted towards a more comprehensive transformation of the political system due to resistance to his reforms.

Gorbachev's initial vision involved democratization to revitalize existing institutions and eliminate formalism within the party. However, his understanding evolved over time, moving

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 138.

towards pluralist democracy. This transformation was reflected in his speeches and tactical maneuvers.<sup>15</sup>

The chapter also discusses the multifaceted challenges of transforming the Soviet Union, including political, economic, nationalities, and foreign policy transformations. These changes were intertwined, with Gorbachev's efforts to control the military-industrial complex playing a pivotal role.

The text outlines six phases of political change during Gorbachev's leadership, focusing on the first three, which involved preparing the ground for reform, radical political reform, and transformation at home and abroad. These phases marked significant shifts in Gorbachev's reform project, including his rejection of Communism in favor of social democracy.

In essence, this chapter offers a retrospective analysis of the dynamic political transformation during Gorbachev's tenure, highlighting its far-reaching impact on the Soviet Union's political landscape in the late 1980s.

In December 1986, Gorbachev successfully negotiated the end of Andrei Sakharov's exile, allowing his return to Moscow, symbolizing the cessation of Sakharov's exile and his continued human rights advocacy. Gorbachev's leadership entered a transformative phase in 1987, characterized by radical political reform. During the January 1987 plenum, Gorbachev emphasized democratization, proposing measures like secret ballot elections for party secretaryships.<sup>16</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress led to the advocacy for a special all-union party conference in the summer of 1988, overseeing economic reform progress and democratization discussions. Boris Yeltsin's vocal criticism during an October 1987 Central Committee meeting marked a turning point in his Communist Party career, generating condemnation from fellow party members.

In November 1987, Gorbachev's speech on the seventieth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution introduced a compromise, emphasizing the rehabilitation of Stalin's victims and an examination of unresolved repression cases. This period witnessed significant political reform efforts led by Gorbachev, with a commitment to democratization and a reevaluation of the Soviet past. It also saw growing tensions within the party, particularly with figures like Yeltsin. The late 1980s in the Soviet Union were marked by complex political developments that shaped the nation's trajectory.

One notable development was the introduction of contested elections for the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, aiming to bring a more democratic process to Soviet politics. The

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp. 155-6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. pp. 150-160. See also p. 72.

Congress included members chosen directly by political and social organizations, and representatives were elected from various constituencies. This transition towards competitive elections began to dismantle the Communist system's foundational principles, introducing elements of pluralism and democracy.

However, these changes represented transitional electoral procedures and a transitional legislature, with reservations for seats reassured the old elite while introducing democratization. The reorganization of the Central Committee apparatus, including the abolition of economic departments and the establishment of new Central Committee commissions, reflected Gorbachev's efforts to streamline the party's functions and increase influence from party members outside the apparatus.

In summary, the period leading to the 1990 Party Congress marked significant political reforms and the start of a transition towards a more democratic system in the Soviet Union, including contested elections, reorganization of party structures, and the erosion of traditional Communist principles. This contributed to the evolving political landscape in the late Soviet era.

Gorbachev's strategic approach to political transformation in the Soviet Union revolved around gradual change and a careful balance of power dynamics. He recognized the necessity of removing the Communist Party's dominant role, as enshrined in Article 6 of the Constitution, but he chose the opportune moment for this constitutional change, with a primary focus on ensuring a smooth transfer of executive power.

Pressure from radical deputies in the Soviet legislature played a pivotal role in influencing the timing of this change, demonstrating Gorbachev's responsiveness to evolving political dynamics. Gorbachev had been aware of the need for this change as early as 1988, initially considering it part of a broader constitutional overhaul, envisioning the adoption of an entirely new constitution.

Gorbachev acknowledged the need for a multi-party system and free elections but strategically timed this transition to ensure its success. This period was marked by interconnectedness between political transformation within the Soviet Union and events in Eastern Europe, with changes in Soviet foreign policy crucial for the peaceful removal of Communist regimes in the Warsaw Pact countries. His strategic approach aimed at a gradual transfer of power from the Communist Party to the state, blurring the lines between the party and the state as political pluralism increased. His dilemma regarding retaining both the General Secretaryship and the presidency reflected his desire for stability and control during the transformation.

The chapter also highlights the role of Gorbachev's trusted group of advisers, known as the 'Kitchen Cabinet,' who had a more reformist disposition compared to the Politburo.

Gorbachev sought input from social scientists and academic economists, engaging with representatives of the intelligentsia on various topics.

The decision to have Gorbachev elected by the deputies rather than the entire population as President was influenced by concerns about the Soviet Union's crisis, Baltic states' desire for independence, and economic difficulties. Gorbachev's declining popularity and the potential for a loss in a popular election also factored into this choice. The text explores the debates surrounding Gorbachev's election as President, highlighting different perspectives and considerations, including concerns about the presidency's strength vis-à-vis parliament.

Brown gives a comprehensive overview of Gorbachev's strategic decision-making during a pivotal period of political transformation in the Soviet Union, emphasizing the complexity and cautious nature of his decisions, as well as the various perspectives and considerations involved.

The following chapter explores the nuanced approach to foreign policy adopted by Mikhail Gorbachev during his tenure as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. Contrary to initial expectations, Gorbachev's foreign policy was characterized by a keen understanding of the interconnectedness between domestic and international affairs. Gorbachev recognized that the persecution of dissidents and excessive military spending strained international relations and hindered domestic reforms. Key appointments, such as Eduard Shevardnadze as Foreign Minister, played a pivotal role in shaping his foreign policy approach.

The text highlights the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a significant player in conducting foreign policy, particularly in East-West relations. It also touches on the shifting dynamics within the Soviet political system and the influential roles played by key individuals in shaping foreign policy decisions.

In summary, Gorbachev's foreign policy approach demonstrated his ability to navigate the complex relationship between domestic and international affairs, with strategic appointments playing a crucial role in shaping policy.

In the context of Soviet-American relations, Gorbachev's efforts, along with Ronald Reagan, played a key role in shaping the later stages of the Cold War. Their shared commitment to nuclear disarmament, despite challenges, contributed to improved relations. The INF Treaty, signed in 1987, marked a significant achievement in arms reduction. Gorbachev's inclusion of human rights in negotiations allowed him to address domestic liberalization and foreign policy simultaneously, contributing to his popularity domestically. The Washington summit in 1987 symbolized positive changes in East-West relations.

Chapter 8 delves into the complex issue of nationalities within the Soviet Union. It explores the challenges of democratizing while preserving statehood and the opposition between central

authority defenders and advocates of self-rule or independence. The chapter also highlights the flaws in the absolute right of self-determination and the importance of defining state boundaries clearly during the transition to democracy.

In the tumultuous period of 1990-1991, Mikhail Gorbachev faced significant challenges and decisions as the leader of the Soviet Union. The narrative focuses on the complexities of this era, marked by political polarization and Gorbachev's attempts to navigate the shifting political landscape.

Pressure came from both radical democrats and national separatists advocating for systemic change and swift reforms, while opposition emerged from various institutions, including the government, the party apparatus, the military, the KGB, and a conservative majority in the Supreme Soviet, all aiming to maintain the status quo.

Gorbachev briefly aligned himself with Boris Yeltsin's "500 Days Programme" for a rapid transition to a market economy but faced criticism and political pressures. He instituted institutional changes, including shifts in power dynamics within the Communist Party apparatus and the creation of new governmental structures like the Federation Council and the Security Council.<sup>17</sup>

Personnel changes were significant, with appointments made to address concerns such as rising crime and political balance. Anatoly Lukyanov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, played a pivotal role in advocating for preserving the Soviet Union's existing borders.

In summary, the winter of 1990-1991 marked a precarious period for Gorbachev as he grappled with political pressures, polarization, and the need for reform, ultimately shaping the course of the Soviet Union's dissolution.

The resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze as Foreign Minister in December 1990 marked a pivotal moment in the Gorbachev era. Shevardnadze, a central figure in Gorbachev's team known for his close relationship with the Soviet leader and his role in executing foreign policy, departed due to a shift in his stance. He displayed more support for American willingness to use force during the Gulf War and felt inadequately defended by Gorbachev against hardliner attacks. Strained relations with the Soviet military and concerns about potential removal from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may have influenced his decision.

Shevardnadze's resignation speech served as both a protest and a warning against authoritarian encroachment. Gorbachev persuaded him to serve for another month, acknowledging their shared experiences and choices. The event highlighted internal divisions and challenges within the Soviet leadership and raised concerns about potential reversals of preceding

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 207. See also pp. 150-154.

reforms. Shevardnadze's reflections on Gorbachev's leadership shift from bold thinking to caution added depth to the context.

The failed coup attempt in August 1991 marked a turning point, leading to significant institutional changes and a shift in power dynamics. Gorbachev emerged from the crisis with renewed determination, and key figures who had supported the coup faced consequences. The restructuring of government positions, including the democratization of the KGB, was a direct consequence of the coup's failure.

The desire for independence among Soviet republics gained momentum, and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on December 8, 1991, signaled the end of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's resignation on December 18, 1991, transferred power to Boris Yeltsin and marked the official dissolution of the Soviet Union. The events of this period reflected the rapid transformation of the political landscape and the emergence of a new chapter in Russia's history.

The book concludes with a comprehensive assessment of Mikhail Gorbachev's political legacy, the transformation of the Soviet political system, and the eventual dismantling of communism in the Soviet Union. The evaluation begins by acknowledging the prevalent perception of Gorbachev as a political failure, especially when considering his initial goal in 1985, which was to reform the Soviet Union rather than dissolve it.

Despite these perceptions, Brown argues that Gorbachev should be recognized as a serious reformer, even before his efforts gained widespread acknowledgment. His agenda included economic reform, the introduction of glasnost (openness) as a tool for reform, the pursuit of political liberalization, and endeavors to reduce the influence of the military-industrial complex. He also aimed to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan and sought to end the Cold War with the West. Many of these goals were achieved to varying degrees.<sup>18</sup>

An essential aspect of Gorbachev's legacy was the evolution of his political thinking, particularly evident by 1988. He embraced contested elections, adopted a more social democratic vision of socialism, admired Western political and economic systems, and recognized the right of Eastern European countries to choose their political and economic paths. These shifts in his thinking marked significant changes in his leadership approach.

The evaluation highlights two of four successful transformations by the late 1980s: the political system's shift towards pluralism and partial democratization, and the comprehensive changes in international relations. Gorbachev played a pivotal role in these transformations, and Western leaders responded positively to the changes in Soviet domestic and foreign policies.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp. 317-8.

However, Brown also acknowledges areas where Gorbachev faced relative failure, such as economic reform and nationalities policy. Notably, his willingness to devolve power to the Soviet republics contributed to the eventual dissolution of the USSR, though this collapse was influenced more by other factors. “It is possible that a smaller and different union might have been preserved but for the actions of Yeltsin and his supporters both before and after the August 1991 putsch and, still more, the self-defeating activity of Kryuchkov and his fellow plotters,” says Brown, “While the liberalization and partial democratization of the Soviet Union made highly unlikely the preservation of a union covering the entire territory Gorbachev inherited from his predecessors, the total collapse of the union owed more to Yeltsin—and, of course, to the putschists—than to Gorbachev.”<sup>19</sup>

Central to Gorbachev's legacy was his principled evolutionist approach. He rejected dictatorial methods, displayed a capacity for learning and adjustment, and was willing to embrace systemic transformative change, even in the face of resistance. The evaluation emphasizes that Gorbachev's legacy should not be solely judged by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but rather by his commitment to profound political transformation.

The book also touches upon the characteristics that defined communism in the Soviet Union, highlighting how these characteristics eroded over time due to Gorbachev's policies. While conventional markers for the end of communism include Boris Yeltsin's suspension of the Communist Party's activities in Russia in August 1991 and the lowering of the Soviet flag on December 25 of the same year, the system had already undergone substantial transformation before these events.

The transformation of the Soviet political system under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev was a complex and multifaceted process that unfolded over several years. By the spring of 1989, it had become evident that the traditional characterization of the Soviet Union as a Communist system no longer held true. The Communist Party's monopoly on power had been challenged by emerging movements, such as the Popular Fronts in the Baltic states, which operated within the newly created political spaces allowed by Gorbachev's reforms.

One of the key indicators of the shifting landscape was the erosion of the Communist Party's strict discipline and centralized control. Open political debate flourished, and the concept of democratic centralism, which had previously restricted intra-party discussion, began to lose its grip. Party discipline was relaxed, and Communist deputies were permitted to vote according to their conscience in the newly elected legislature of 1989. Centralization also decreased as republican party organizations started to set their own agendas.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 307.



Simultaneously, the emergence of multiple political parties challenged the Communist Party's dominance. New political parties were founded, gaining legal recognition after the Communist Party lost its exclusive entitlement to power in March 1990. Democratic Russia, a broad-based movement, played a significant role in Boris Yeltsin's election as the Russian President in 1991.

Economically, the landscape was evolving as well. While state ownership of the means of production remained prevalent, there was a noticeable shift towards a mixed economy with the establishment of co-operatives that resembled private businesses. This change broke the monopoly control of the party-state over economic activity.

Ideologically, there was a clear shift away from the traditional Communist discourse. Gorbachev's rhetoric evolved, and he moved away from the distant goal of communism in favor of developing a better and different form of socialism. By 1990, the concept of communism had lost much of its significance in the political discourse.

Furthermore, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989-90 marked the end of the international Communist movement. Gorbachev's foreign policy shifted away from supporting unpopular regimes, leading to a recognition that the Soviet Union would no longer intervene militarily to maintain such governments.

In summary, by the late 1980s, the Soviet political system had undergone profound changes. While the Communist Party officially continued to exist until 1991, it had lost its dominant position, and the Soviet Union was no longer a Communist system in practice. This transformation was characterized by the emergence of pluralism, political freedom, and a departure from the traditional tenets of communism.

## *2. Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* by Robert English (2000)

*Russia and the Idea of the West* by Robert English provides a compelling exploration of the Soviet Union's engagement with the West during the Cold War's final years. The book focuses on ideological shifts within the Soviet Union, particularly the influence of Western ideas on Soviet reformers, including Mikhail Gorbachev. It argues that the end of the Cold War resulted from an "intellectual revolution" marked by openness to democracy, market economics, and individual rights.

English emphasizes Gorbachev's pivotal role, portraying his "new thinking" as a radical departure from traditional Soviet foreign policy. This shift, influenced by engagement with Western intellectuals, led to a more cooperative approach to international relations. The impact of

Western ideas, shaping the thoughts of Soviet reformers, is highlighted as a key factor in the dramatic policy shifts during the late 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

The book challenges simplistic narratives, asserting that ideas, not just power politics, played a crucial role in ending the Cold War. The introduction contextualizes the early 1980s, detailing strained superpower relations and escalating tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. It raises questions about the Cold War's dramatic end, considering whether it was due to the inevitable decline of the Soviet Union, visionary leadership like Gorbachev's, or institutional changes favoring foreign-policy shifts.

The emergence of a Soviet intellectual elite with unorthodox beliefs is noted, forming a "Westernizing" minority by the mid-to-late 1960s. This group actively promoted reforms by the early 1970s, influencing Gorbachev's later adoption of new-thinking principles in the late 1980s. The rise of a global "Westernizing" identity among a liberal policy-academic elite is considered a crucial factor in the peaceful end of the Cold War.

The introduction discusses various explanatory approaches, highlighting the book's analytical framework that views new thinking as a transformation in national identity. English introduces the concept of national identity as a fundamental factor in understanding international relations, emphasizing its dynamic nature and the role of intellectuals as storytellers in the invention of a new nationality.

The process of identity change involves comparative-interactive and social learning, facilitated by foreign ties acting as conduits for ideas. The book stresses the impact of beliefs and identity on policy, exploring the persistence of old thinking rooted in Stalinist and Brezhnevist ideologies. It examines the origins of new thinking, tracing the emergence of a reformist policy-academic elite and their connections with reform-minded Party officials.

The mobilization of new thinking, following the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, is highlighted, emphasizing conceptual breakthroughs predating détente. The period of mobilization facilitated connections between new thinkers and reform-minded senior Party officials, including Gorbachev, who played a significant role in implementing reforms. In summary, English's book offers a nuanced understanding of the Cold War's end, emphasizing the role of ideas and intellectual transformation in shaping historical events.

The book starts with an analysis of the historical context and intellectual shifts. *Russia and the Idea of the West* delves into the transformative impact of new thinking on Gorbachev's leadership from 1982 to 1985, marked by challenges from a resistant leadership faction. Gorbachev's commitment to new-thinking values drove his principled reform agenda, culminating in a radical

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<sup>20</sup> See previous note.

disarmament plan at the 1986 Reykjavik summit. The book reveals lessons from the era, challenging the notion that "strength won the Cold War" and highlighting the complex interplay of power and ideas.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to oversimplifications, the book argues that the Western military build-up, though influential, complicated Soviet reform rather than necessitating it. It underscores the long-term influence of a policy-academic elite shaped by cultural thaw, domestic liberalization, and international ties. The détente of the 1960s and 1970s, not the 1980s confrontation, significantly shaped Soviet foreign policy:

The new thinking's global-integrationist outlook, rooted in the cultural thaw, domestic liberalization, and burgeoning foreign ties of the early post-Stalin era, had begun coalescing as a powerful alternative worldview by the mid-to-late 1960s. Shared by philosophers and physicists, economists, political scientists, and historians, this diverse policy-academic elite constituted a "Westernizing" minority within the Soviet intelligentsia. Numbering perhaps in the hundreds, the most active of its ranks—a few dozen—were already promoting a broad range of foreign and domestic reforms by the early 1970s; that is, prior to the full flowering of détente and more than a decade before the sharp worsening of problems and subsequent accession of Gorbachev in 1985. Also in advance of his accession, Gorbachev came under the influence of these ideas and, together with his core group of political allies, embraced the new- thinking *weltanschauung* and the new thinkers' ambitious agenda *before* his boldest steps of the later 1980s. So while crisis and leadership transition were vital preconditions, so was an earlier intellectual change—the rise of a global, "Westernizing" identity among a liberal policy-academic elite—a sine qua non of the cold war's sudden and peaceful end.<sup>22</sup>

The book asserts the deep significance of ideas, debunking the perception of ideas as mere instruments. New thinking was rooted in profound beliefs, shaping national identity over a generation. It draws attention to the diversity of beliefs within new thinking and their influence from international and domestic sources. Intellectual ties played a crucial role in fortifying new

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<sup>21</sup> English (2000), p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

thinking's conceptual foundation and expanding its social base among critical Soviet intellectuals.

"Russia and the Idea of the West" offers a nuanced analysis, challenging simplistic narratives, and providing insights into the subtle interplay of ideas, power, and social-intellectual change that shaped Gorbachev's reforms and the end of the Cold War. The book contrasts this with the "hostile isolationism" of old thinking, deeply rooted in a worldview fueled by war experiences, ideological indoctrination, and the belief in irreconcilable camps.

The book unveils the roots of Soviet "hostile isolationism," tracing its origins to the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. Shaped by the civil war and Stalinist era, this isolationist identity persisted until the mid-1980s. The clash between old thinking and new thinking in Soviet foreign policy is framed within the broader historical context of Russia's interactions with the West.<sup>23</sup>

Beginning with Peter the Great's efforts to Europeanize Russia, a division between a Westernized elite and a xenophobic peasantry emerged. The historical struggle between Westernizers and Slavophiles in Russian political thought is vital for understanding the ideological currents influencing Soviet foreign policy. The complex interplay between Western ideas and Russian national identity, especially during the early 20th century and the rise of Bolshevism, forms a significant theme in Russian intellectual history.

The text explores the emergence of "Neo-Slavophilism" and the celebration of Russia's Asian heritage as divergences from Western-oriented thought. It delves into the Party's role in promoting chauvinistic attitudes, leading to Lenin's and Stalin's concerns about growing nationalism within the Party.<sup>24</sup>

Despite resolutions against chauvinism, the text reveals that Russian nationalistic sentiments persisted and gained strength, impacting various domains, including history and literature. This period, while outwardly calm with economic recovery and improved relations with the West, harbored troubling implications for the future. The danger identified is not merely a return to imperialist thinking but a merger of militant and xenophobic elements within Bolshevism with chauvinistic aspects of traditional imperialism.

The rise of a new Bolshevik elite, shaped by rural prejudices, civil war experiences, and education, marks a critical development in the Soviet ideological transformation. The text highlights the influence of education and propaganda, citing *The ABC of Communism* as a widely-read work promoting anti-Western and militant perspectives. The ideological shift in 1922, marked by the adoption of the New Economic Policy, coincided with the rise of staunchly anti-capitalist

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 18. See also pp. 46 and 84.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 28. See also pp. 136-7.

views, as seen in influential texts like *The ABC of Communism* and Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism*.<sup>25</sup>

This historical overview provides a condensed yet comprehensive understanding of the ideological evolution that shaped Soviet foreign policy, emphasizing the enduring impact of "hostile isolationism" on the Soviet state until the mid-1980s.

In the late 1920s, a shift in Soviet political climate occurred, with a relative calm in domestic and foreign affairs. While the initial crisis subsided, the ideologies of a divided world and the impossibility of coexistence with capitalism persisted. The emergence of the war scare in the late 1920s rekindled fears of hostile capitalist encirclement, influencing Stalin's consolidation of power and the rise of the hostile-isolationist identity.

Post-World War II, the alliance with the West challenged Stalin's hostile and isolationist beliefs. However, this openness was short-lived, replaced by rigid isolationism and intensified propaganda against the West. Stalin's repressive measures stifled intellectual and academic freedom, curbing any admiration for foreign ideas. Russocentrism was actively promoted, with claims of Russian language superiority. Anti-Semitism emerged, with "cosmopolitan" becoming pejorative, highlighting the prevalence of such sentiment.

Stalin's economic views, outlined in *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (1952), reinforced the belief in the inevitability of conflict with the West. His death in 1953 halted further purges, but the enduring impact of his policies continued to shape Soviet ideology and society.

The post-Stalin "thaw" under Khrushchev marked a pivotal shift in Soviet history. His 1956 "secret speech" denounced Stalin, initiating domestic liberalization, economic reforms, and cultural revitalization. In foreign policy, Khrushchev rejected hostile isolationism, advocating "peaceful coexistence." This shift led to détente, the Limited Test Ban Treaty, and reduced Soviet armed forces. Challenges persisted, with conservative leaders and the military-industrial complex resisting a radically different worldview. Peaceful coexistence, while a step away from old thinking, didn't fundamentally alter the belief in a divided world.

The "thaw" transformed intellectual circles, fostering critical thought, study, and ties with the West. Despite changes, Khrushchev's successors retained a worldview divided into hostile camps, impacting Cold War foreign policy. The 1956 Hungarian uprising, influenced by Mao's anti-imperialism, shaped Soviet perceptions. Khrushchev's later efforts toward East-West relations faced resistance. His removal ushered in a return to conservative positions, emphasizing military might and socialist solidarity.<sup>26</sup>

The societal changes during the "thaw" reduced anti-Western propaganda, eased diplomatic

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Ch. 2.

isolation, and expanded cultural exchanges. Literature, language education, and media played crucial roles. Language learning broke barriers, and cultural exchanges transformed Moscow into a vibrant international capital. Media, especially radio and television, contributed to breaking psychological barriers.

Foreign radio broadcasts challenged state-controlled media, providing alternative news. The interplay between domestic revelations and foreign exposure had a profound impact on citizens' beliefs. The reevaluation of the Soviet economy, publicized by Khrushchev, set the stage for deeper economic critiques and growing disillusionment. The connection between domestic and foreign affairs during this period highlights their intertwined nature.

The post-Stalin era in the Soviet Union witnessed a transformative intellectual landscape characterized by newfound freedom and a "tumultuous reassessment of values." This shift was especially significant for intellectuals directly impacted by changing Soviet stances, including writers, historians, economists, scientists, and political analysts.<sup>27</sup>

The Thaw brought radical changes to the conditions for intellectuals, who experienced increased access to ideas and information, broader exposure to the world, and liberalized conditions for inquiry. This departure from past dogmatism began with key developments after Stalin's death, such as the exposure of the fabricated "Doctors' Plot" and a decrease in anti-foreign propaganda. Intellectuals seized the atmosphere of "spiritual emancipation" to boldly question Stalinist legacies.

Prague played a pivotal role in nurturing independent thinkers. The Prague-based journal "Problemy Mira i Sotsializma" became a hub for diverse discussions, featuring philosophers, historians, economists, and foreign-policy specialists. The Central Committee consultant groups, including influential figures like Georgy Arbatov and Nikolai Inozemtsev, provided opportunities for intellectuals to contribute to the Party apparatus, fostering critical thinking and political acumen. The transformative experience allowed intellectuals to challenge orthodoxies and engage with international perspectives, shaping a critical mass of independent thinkers.

The post-Stalin intellectual transformation in the Soviet Union was multifaceted, marked by a significant shift in perspectives and beliefs, particularly due to renewed contacts with the West. Access to diverse information sources, including foreign journals, translation bureaus, and opened archives, challenged the previous hyper-centralized control of information. This information explosion facilitated more nuanced analyses and intellectual liberation.

Renewed contacts with the West during the post-Stalin thaw period had a profound impact on Soviet scholars and intellectuals. Various agreements and exchanges allowed for academic

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 65.

interactions, with the number of Soviets visiting Western countries for academic purposes increasing significantly over the decade. The first hand exposure to Western societies and ideas challenged stereotypes, influencing prominent reformers and playing a pivotal role in shaping their outlook.

The experiences of individuals who traveled to the West opened their eyes to the world's diversity, fostering intellectual development. This exposure, accessible to a broad spectrum of reformist thought, led to a reevaluation of long-held beliefs and a willingness to question ideological taboos.

The thaw era witnessed an intellectual surge, with Soviet scholars voraciously consuming foreign literature and engaging in debates to understand the West objectively. A new intelligentsia emerged, characterized by a deep concern for sociopolitical issues, a passion for history and culture, and dedication to reforming the autocratic system. This cultural revival extended to all segments of society, fostering a renewed appreciation for literature, culture, and contemporary Western currents.

Khrushchev's 1956 "secret speech" initiated the de-Stalinization process, fostering experimentation, diversity, and a liberalizing trend in intellectual revival and critical thinking. Despite conservative forces gaining strength after Khrushchev's removal, his changes continued to shape Soviet society, leading to the formation of a distinct social identity among reformist intellectuals.<sup>28</sup>

The post-Stalin era witnessed a protest against isolationism, notably in literature, culture, and philosophy. Writers and thinkers challenged Soviet nationalism and Russian chauvinism, opening up to Western thought and literature. Literary figures like Ilya Ehrenburg criticized cultural isolationism, advocating for the exchange of ideas. Works by Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak offered alternative viewpoints on history and culture, challenging isolationist beliefs.

In summary, this period marked a significant intellectual transformation in the Soviet Union, with philosophers, historians, and scholars engaging with Western thought, challenging isolationist beliefs, and fostering a more open and diverse discourse in Soviet society. In economics and social sciences, the reevaluation of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, coupled with exposure to Western ideas, led to the emergence of a reformist intellectual landscape that sought alternatives to the prevailing ideologies.

In the mid-1960s, dissatisfaction with Khrushchev's economic policies and the acknowledgment of Soviet economic inferiority to the West prompted a "Westernizing" socioeconomic critique. Slow growth, agricultural stagnation, and grain imports underscored the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Ch. 3.

necessity for market reforms, leading economists and sociologists to question central planning.

Simultaneously, a broad reevaluation of international relations occurred after the repudiation of Stalinism. Influential figures like Otto Kuusinen played a pivotal role in shaping the perspectives of the younger generation, emphasizing the masses' interest in international affairs. Some intellectuals explored social-democratic critiques, challenging stereotypical views of the West and advocating for a genuine Soviet political science discipline.

Integration with Western thought in international relations theory was underway, facilitated by translations of works by Western authors. Soviet diplomats' exposure to Western societies, forbidden literature, and arms control negotiations influenced a pragmatic shift in their perspectives. Scientists contributed to the evolving discourse by rethinking international confrontation based on their exposure to Western views and expertise.

By the mid-to-late 1960s, a coherent intellectual current emerged among Soviet intellectuals from various fields. This "Westernizing" orientation envisioned integration with foreign advancements in economics, science, and culture. The new intelligentsia, dubbed "the children of the 20th congress," distanced themselves from Stalinist and Leninist beliefs, seeking convergence between socialist and capitalist systems.

Inspired by the Prague Spring, Soviet intellectuals admired the rapid integration of Western Europe and aspired to reform Russia similarly. Despite Khrushchev's fall in 1964 raising hopes for significant reforms, a conservative resurgence gradually stifled liberal ideals. The Prague Spring served as a model for desired reforms, impacting Soviet intellectuals and triggering widespread dissent despite the subsequent crackdown.

The suppression of the Prague Spring led to diverse responses among Soviet intellectuals, with some openly protesting, others remaining passive, and a spectrum of milder forms of resistance. The disillusionment with the end of the Prague Spring prompted some to embrace conformism, while others awaited an enlightened leader capable of meaningful liberalizing change.

By the mid-1970s, Soviet foreign policy became detached from global realities, influenced by Politburo members' prejudices and illusions. Despite hopes for reform and improved relations with the West, mounting socio-economic problems at home often led to the rejection of urgently needed changes.

In the late 1970s, despite initial efforts for economic reform, the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968 stifled hopes for significant domestic change. A period of détente, marked by arms control agreements, expanded Soviet-Western ties, and the Helsinki Accords, emerged but was limited compared to Khrushchev's era. The USSR accelerated military development, leading to strained resources, economic difficulties, and ideological controls.



English's analysis depicts the USSR as an "overextended" power facing challenges, highlighting the drain caused by military-imperial ambitions. The decision to intervene in Afghanistan showcased a belief in a Western threat and a sense of "internationalist duty."<sup>29</sup>

The era of conservatism succeeded a small reformist victory, aligning with Russian nationalism and suppressing dissent. Despite challenges, a growing intellectual movement engaged with the outside world, influenced by academic exchanges during détente. This period saw a shift towards a more global outlook, moving away from class-based perspectives to "universal human" values.

However, as conservatism rose, journals like "Voprosy Filosofii" faced restrictions, and intellectual freedom declined. Figures like Vasily Ukraintsev initiated purges, resulting in dismissals and restrictions on critical thought.

The Moscow intelligentsia faced crackdowns, with dissenters like Alexander Yakovlev sent into diplomatic exile. Sanctions, ranging from reprimands to loss of employment, targeted dissenters, while those unwilling to openly oppose the system had limited options.

Despite the crackdown, some room for reformist-integrationist thought remained in Moscow, driven by the leadership's struggle to define post-Khrushchev identity. The declaration of "developed socialism" led to critical analysis, revealing shortcomings and encouraging the rise of Russian nationalism as an alternative ideology.

In the 1970s, the Soviet Union grappled with a multifaceted intellectual landscape characterized by ideological debates, conservative backlash, and evolving economic thought. This period witnessed a clash of ideas, with conservative forces tightening control over intellectual discourse and imposing constraints on editorial freedom in certain journals. Figures like Vasily Ukraintsev and Mikhail Rutkeyevich played pivotal roles in suppressing critical thought, leading to a phenomenon of intellectuals frequently changing positions, referred to as "intellectual gypsies."

Repression was swift and targeted research groups, echoing the return of the concept of "ideological diversion" reminiscent of the Stalin era. Open dissidents, human rights activists, and prominent intellectuals like Shatalin and Mamardashvili faced harsh sanctions, including loss of travel privileges.

Simultaneously, different intellectual currents emerged, notably nationalism and neo-Slavophilism. Neo-Slavophiles advocated for a return to a "pre-modern" past and stressed the uniqueness of Russian civilization. Economic concerns took center stage, with a new generation of economists emphasizing market-oriented solutions and economic efficiency, influenced by Western economic theories. Another reformist perspective aimed at integrating the Soviet

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 123-4.

economy with the world economy, marking a shift away from traditional socialist principles.<sup>30</sup>

Despite acknowledging economic difficulties, some analysts, particularly at IMEMO, held an optimistic view during the high Brezhnev era. However, not all scholars and institutions shared the same level of optimism, with some expressing concerns about the Soviet economy and endorsing Western-style reforms.

The 1970s in the Soviet Union also witnessed a divergence between specialized publications and mainstream literature regarding the country's economic and technological standing. Specialized publications openly reported alarming statistics, highlighting the Soviet Union's lag in various areas compared to the West, emphasizing the success of capitalism in scientific, social, and environmental aspects of development.

In the mid-1970s, while official discourse acknowledged the global "scientific-technological revolution," optimism dominated the mainstream literature regarding its positive impact on "developed socialism" and Soviet power. Despite cautious discussions about the challenges in the open press, a 1972 report by a high-level study group led by Shatalin on Scientific-Technological Progress and its Socio-Economic Impact Through 1990 went largely ignored. Efforts by reformers for economic discussions faced opposition, particularly from Kosygin.<sup>31</sup>

Reformers, including Shmelev, proposed various domestic and international economic reforms. Shmelev's emphasis on self-financing, cost-accounting, and internationalization clashed with the leadership's commitment to state control, reflecting the leadership's reluctance to adopt meaningful reforms. The era of stagnation, fueled by oil windfalls, saw illusory prosperity, with reformist thinkers facing sanctions and challenges.

Despite these challenges, a shift in thinking about the USSR's economic role emerged, with a generation of specialists advocating for integration into the global economy. The ideological divide between capitalism and socialism became less salient, and joining the global economy was seen as a paramount interest.

In the realm of international relations during the 1970s, a shift away from Khrushchev's rejection of the idea of a "survivable" nuclear war occurred. Success in U.S.-Soviet arms talks, including the 1972 SALT and ABM treaties, influenced liberal voices to emphasize the absolute value of peace. Détente, arms control, and exposure to Western counterparts reshaped perspectives, fostering admiration for the United States and commitment to improving Soviet-American relations.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 136.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Détente had a profound impact on information access, with *mezhdunarodniki*<sup>32</sup> gaining access to Western studies, media, and literature. Military studies and critical analyses within the Soviet intellectual elite expanded, challenging traditional beliefs about NATO forces, Soviet military capabilities, and reevaluating the Soviet Union's relationships with China and Western Europe.<sup>33</sup>

The book highlights the significance of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) during détente, with hardliners viewing it as a threat, while new thinkers saw its humanitarian provisions as an opportunity for domestic reforms and human rights protection. Despite intellectual progress, practical implementation faced challenges, with socioeconomic issues worsening, diplomatic gains encouraging expansionism, and an aging Politburo drawing misguided lessons. Reformist advisers continued to advocate for arms control and integration with the global economy.

In 1979, the signing of the SALT II Treaty provided hope for arms control, with Soviet liberals advocating for domestic arms reductions and greater policy transparency. However, the Soviet Union faced economic challenges in the early 1980s as petrodollars diminished, leading to rising social issues. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan damaged the USSR's international standing, exacerbating tensions with the West.

This period was disheartening for reform-minded intellectuals who had championed integration with the West. Détente's gains eroded, and hopes for cooperation dwindled as the USSR embraced isolationism. The struggle for the Soviet Union's future unfolded, with liberals pushing for comprehensive reforms against senior conservatives advocating for isolationism.

The crisis in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, exposed deep-rooted problems. Some new thinkers critiqued Soviet policies, emphasizing the need for reform in the USSR and its Eastern European allies to prevent further crises.

“New thinking” emerged among Soviet intellectuals, advocating for a reevaluation of foreign policy, global economic integration, and arms control. The intellectuals recognized the limitations of the Soviet system, emphasizing moral aspects, individual autonomy, and the need for radical reforms. Concerns about the nuclear arms race prompted calls for disarmament and global cooperation.

However, this new thinking faced challenges in the 1980-82 era, marked by a lack of support from the Soviet leadership. The elderly Brezhnev's incapacity to make bold moves allowed foreign-policy hawks to gain influence. In 1982, a counteroffensive targeted “New Thinkers” and

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<sup>32</sup> Soviet scholars and experts who specialized in international affairs, foreign policy, and global Marxist-Leninist theory during the Cold War era.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 102-6.

"Westernized" institutes like IMEMO, leading to arrests, investigations, and weakening their influence.

As Brezhnev's health declined, Andropov's short-lived tenure from 1982 to 1984 introduced some bold initiatives, including economic experiments, efforts to defuse superpower tensions, and attempts to end the Afghan war. Despite facing challenges in strained U.S.-Soviet relations, Andropov's period brought renewed hope for reform in the Soviet Union, addressing internal issues and engaging with the world

In the early 1980s, a transformative shift in Soviet foreign policy and strategic thinking unfolded, driven by a group of intellectuals known as the "New Thinkers." Under Yuri Andropov's leadership from 1982, these thinkers challenged established doctrines, with a focus on reassessing support for radical regimes and prioritizing economic policy over militarization. Andropov encouraged a broader examination of world dynamics and a more positive view of Western political-economic life.<sup>34</sup>

The New Thinkers advocated for a cooperative approach, challenging the perception of perpetual crisis in capitalism. Notably, they proposed an "asymmetric response" to the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), suggesting realistic countermeasures to preserve the Soviet deterrent at a lower cost.

Mikhail Gorbachev, a protege of Andropov, emerged as a key figure in the reformist camp. Influenced by East European reform experiences, visits to Western countries, and discussions with reformist leaders like Eduard Shevardnadze, Gorbachev began questioning the superiority of Soviet socialism. His interest in economics and engagement with reform-minded individuals, economists, and exploration of Soviet history, including the New Economic Policy (NEP), shaped his reformist worldview.

Gorbachev's ascent to power anticipated significant changes in Soviet domestic and foreign policies, marking a turning point in the country's history towards a more open and reform-oriented direction. The narrative captures the tensions between reformist and hardline factions within the Soviet leadership during this crucial period

In the last chapter English discusses the significant changes that took place in Soviet foreign policy and internal politics under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev during the years 1985 to 1989. Domestically, Gorbachev's call for reform led to liberalization, known as glasnost, transforming the political system. In foreign policy, Gorbachev initiated unexpected and bold changes, including the cessation of nuclear tests in 1985, a disarmament plan in 1986, and the elimination of medium-range nuclear missiles in 1987. These actions marked a departure from the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 154.

Cold War dynamics and the end of the Iron Curtain.<sup>35</sup>

While economic difficulties played a role in reevaluating foreign military commitments, English argues that attributing these changes solely to economic decline would be an oversimplification. He emphasizes the importance of "the new thinking," a shift in Soviet ideology rejecting a divided world and embracing Western political and economic freedoms. This new thinking motivated Gorbachev's reforms, seeking not just withdrawal from an imperialist vision but also reengagement with Europe and integration with the West.

Examining Gorbachev's reliance on key reformist advisers holding Western-oriented views, the passage suggests that their influence and the integration of new thinking into Gorbachev's foreign policy paved the way for the end of the Cold War. The chapter explores the factors leading to Gorbachev's rise and the initiation of perestroika, emphasizing the role of reformist intellectuals shaping Gorbachev's policies.

Gorbachev's acceptance of a new identity and support from a core group of new-thinking advisers marked a departure from traditional power bases. Despite economic challenges in the early 1980s, popular pressures for reform were minimal, and a liberalizing turn was not guaranteed. The two powerful groups within the Soviet leadership, favoring a hard-line or reformist approach, had come to a consensus that change was necessary.

Gorbachev's election in 1985 was influenced by figures like Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who supported him, and the absence of certain opponents during crucial decisions. Gromyko's distaste for Brezhnev-era corruption and concern for the country's decline played a significant role. Gorbachev's ability to conceal the extent of his reformist ambitions behind a moderate image and the generational shift in leadership also contributed to his acceptance.

The younger leadership, including Gorbachev, represented a departure from the wartime influence on the older generation, emphasizing political means for security. Their distinct outlook, better education, and departure from chauvinism marked a generational shift, contributing to the transformative period of Gorbachev's leadership.

Mikhail Gorbachev, distinctive within the new generation, showcased intellectual openness even before assuming office, shaping his radical ambitions for change by 1985. Early signs in public statements emphasized perestroika, glasnost, demilitarization, and positioning the USSR in a "common European home," initially not raising suspicions among the old guard.

Upon assuming power, Gorbachev swiftly implemented reforms, addressing economic issues, advocating for flexible pricing, enterprise independence, and strict cost-accounting. His foreign-policy turn signaled more equal relations with Eastern European nations, a defensive military shift,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 229.

budget reductions, and unilateral actions like halting nuclear tests.

The narrative then delves into the challenges stemming from Gorbachev's bold policy decisions, generating unease and criticism within the Soviet military-industrial complex. His reliance on an informal "brain trust," including figures like Sagdeyev, Arbatov, and Primakov, influenced crucial defense-related decisions, raising concerns about bypassing established channels.<sup>36</sup>

These passages explore the significance of Shevardnadze's appointment as foreign minister, marking strategic changes. Both leaders, hailing from agricultural regions, shared a unique perspective on economic issues. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze's backgrounds and experiences in Georgia shaped their commitment to reform, making them distinct from previous Soviet leaders.

The shared concerns of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze regarding Eastern Europe and their motivations for a new approach are highlighted. Gorbachev's evolving perspective aimed at reshaping the geopolitical landscape, influenced by dissatisfaction with traditional bloc relations, while Shevardnadze's provincial roots and experiences as the leader of Georgia informed his view on Eastern Europe.

Despite initial steps in 1985, progress on Afghanistan and Eastern Europe faced hurdles from Western powers, Soviet "allies," and conservative forces within the Soviet government. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze pressed forward with a disarmament plan in 1986, proposing significant concessions, signaling determination to end the arms race despite skepticism and resistance.

The narrative acknowledges ideological remnants in Gorbachev's class-struggle lens but emphasizes his steadfast commitment to ending the nuclear arms race. Personnel changes in 1986 marked a shift towards more liberal intellectuals within the Soviet leadership, advancing new thinking in foreign policy, aligning with domestic reform goals.

In summary, Gorbachev's intellectual openness, early reform intentions, bold policy implementations, challenges faced, and collaborations with key advisers, especially Shevardnadze, marked a transformative period in Soviet foreign policy and internal dynamics from 1985 to 1986.

In 1986, Soviet foreign policy witnessed significant personnel changes, intellectual engagement, and ideological transformation under Mikhail Gorbachev and Eduard Shevardnadze. Notable appointments, like Vladimir Lukin and Andrei Kozyrev, reflected a shift toward liberal perspectives. Shevardnadze fostered openness by creating an Academic Consultative Council and an Arms Control and Disarmament Division. Dissent was encouraged, signaling a departure from past practices.

The Chernobyl tragedy had profound effects on domestic reforms and foreign policy, exposing

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. pp. 201-2. See also pp. 217-8, and p. 230.

systemic flaws, emphasizing the urgency of arms control, highlighting global interconnectedness, fostering international solidarity, prompting a reevaluation of secrecy, and influencing policy shifts. Chernobyl played a role in the Reykjavik summit, marking a crucial moment in U.S.-Soviet relations.

In the summer and fall of 1986, Gorbachev's "new thinking" in foreign policy emerged, challenging the old paradigm of mutually assured destruction. Key figures like Anatoly Chernyaev advocated for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, leading to Gorbachev's Reykjavik proposals. Despite facing opposition from hard-liners, the summit showcased a deeper rethinking of East-West issues, with significant debates on trust and the removal of intermediate-range nuclear forces.

The year 1986 marked a critical turning point in Soviet foreign policy, with significant personnel changes, intellectual engagement, and ideological transformation. The Chernobyl disaster played a pivotal role in shaping new thinking, prompting a reevaluation of policies and emphasizing the interconnected nature of global affairs.

The book concludes with a reflection on the "new thinking" transformation in Soviet foreign policy under Mikhail Gorbachev during the 1980s. It contemplates alternative outcomes and acknowledges the challenges in imagining unexplored paths during this period of significant superpower relations shift.

English identifies three potential courses for the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. The first, maintaining the status quo, was losing support. The second, a reactionary turn, could have led to a more confrontational Cold War outcome. The third, a continuation of modest changes initiated by Andropov, might have included domestic reforms but maintained a firm stance in international contests, such as Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup>

The book explores the potential consequences of these paths, suggesting that the third option could have led to a prolonged decline similar to an "Ottoman-style" imperial retreat, possibly resulting in internal dissent and conflicts with other nations. It critiques realist analyses, arguing that they underestimate the role of ideas and leadership in bringing about the "new thinking" transformation.

Mendelson's work on Soviet policy-making during the Afghan conflict emphasizes the mobilization for major policy change, citing the decline of Soviet power and challenges in sustaining global confrontation as significant factors. Checkel's broader view of new thinking considers it as a phenomenon involving various specialists addressing interconnected foreign-policy issues. However, English criticizes both approaches for not adequately explaining the origins

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 229-30.

of reformist ideas.

The text mentions scholars exploring the role of liberal ideas in Soviet foreign policy, highlighting periods of cooperation between Soviet and Western specialists and tracing the roots of liberalizing intellectual change. The conclusion addresses broader theoretical and methodological concerns in international relations, defending the value of single-case studies and emphasizing the importance of empirical analysis.<sup>38</sup>

English suggests that the case of Soviet new thinking can inform theorizing about political liberalization in other authoritarian systems. He encourages comparisons with cases of democratic transition, emphasizing the need for careful data collection and contextual understanding. The discussion expands to consider the relevance of the "elites-identity framework" in understanding ideas in political change.<sup>39</sup>

The book briefly touches on the lessons of Soviet new thinking for post-Soviet Russia, noting the resurgence of a Russian national "neo-Slavophile" current. It discusses Russia's international behavior, acknowledging some criticism of Western policies but noting Russia's generally responsible conduct on the international stage. The text explores Russia's foreign-policy opinion typology and examines its stance on the Kosovo crisis, emphasizing the role of national identity:

Finally, on the lessons of new thinking for post-Soviet Russia. The myriad changes that the country has undergone since 1991 have been deeply traumatic and, for many observers, the bright but brief flowering of Westernizing ideas and policies now seems a distant, increasingly irrelevant or even aberrant episode. A period of gradual reestrangement from the West has now lasted longer than that of perestroika's rapid rapprochement, with strains in these relations steadily worsening in tandem with Russia's deepening economic crisis. By 1999, tensions over issues from IMF policy and ties with Iran to NATO expansion and crisis in Kosovo-Serbia had reached an intensity that made Yeltsin's earlier characterization of an emergent "cold peace" seem an understatement.<sup>40</sup>

In conclusion, the book underscores the ongoing debates over the national idea and Russia's place in the world, cautioning against solely attributing contemporary Russian events to historical-cultural factors. It encourages a balanced understanding considering both material and ideational

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. See also p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 234.



forces, emphasizing the importance of intellectual innovation and enlightened leadership in shaping Russia's future.

#### 4. *The Cold War: A New History* by John Lewis Gaddis (2005)

The Cold War started when the Second World War ended and went on for multiple decades. On the people that grew up during these decades, the Cold War has left an enduring impression. Right now, however, there is a whole new generation that attends universities that have no personal recollection of the Cold War, or what it was like to live underneath its threat. Amidst the extensive collection of scholarly works dedicated to examining the Cold War period, John Lewis Gaddis's *The Cold War: A New History* emerges as a distinct contribution, tailored specifically for students and the general public. Gaddis, an esteemed academic specializing in Cold War history, draws on his extensive expertise, having authored six other well-received books on the subject. In this particular work, Gaddis seeks to engage readers who lack personal recollections of the conflict's unfolding.

Challenging the prevailing retrospective narrative that suggests an inexorable path to Western triumph, Gaddis proposes an alternative perspective. He emphasizes the role of individual contingencies, critical decisions, and latent dangers in shaping the character and trajectory of the Cold War. Rather than viewing the conflict as an inherent feature of the postwar bipolar world, Gaddis attributes it to Soviet impulses for domination, propelled by ideology and dictatorship.

The book's distinctive structure deviates from a conventional chronological method, with each chapter focusing on specific themes. Gaddis justifies this approach, arguing that a simple chronological narrative would yield confusion.

In chapter 1 Gaddis delves into the competing ideologies of the United States and the Soviet Union as the root cause of the Cold War. He examines the buildup of distrust, the fear of intentions, and the significant role of leaders, attributing the prevailing fear psychosis squarely to chapter Stalin.

Chapter 2 broadens the scope to encompass the various perceptions of leaders on both sides, exploring their perspectives on unfolding events and the looming specter of nuclear war. Gaddis underscores the significance of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, asserting that Khrushchev's strategic gamble achieved partial success despite its ultimate failure.

In Chapter 3, Gaddis probes the ideology of the era, highlighting the inherent failure of Communism and its inflexibility. Attempts to reform the system and subsequent failures are recounted, portraying the Cold War as a 'war of ideas.'

Chapter 4 extends its focus to the period from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, examining movements of independence and decolonization globally. Gaddis provides insights into freedom movements in Africa and Asia, while also analyzing the non-alignment movement as a strategic move to play superpowers against each other.

The fifth chapter delves into the hopes and aspirations of people on both sides of the Iron Curtain in the 1970s, addressing the concept of 'Détente' and its role in freezing, though not ending, the Cold War.

Chapter 6 concentrates on influential personalities shaping Cold War policies in the 1980s, including Carter, Reagan, Brezhnev, Deng Xiaoping, and Thatcher. Gaddis praises Reagan for anticipating the Soviet Union's collapse but critiques Gorbachev as lacking in strength of personality and vision compared to Reagan.

In Chapter 7, *Triumph of Hope*, Gaddis explores the end game of the Cold War from 1989 to 1991, highlighting events such as elections and democracy returning to Poland, the fall of communism in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, and the reunification of Germany.

In the epilogue, Gaddis concludes that the Cold War, despite its complexities, contributed to the avoidance of direct major conflicts due to the presence of nuclear weapons. He contends that the Cold War fostered global democracy and discredited authoritarianism, Marxist-Leninism, and communism. Ultimately, Gaddis attributes the Soviet failure in the Cold War to the incorrect premises of Marx, asserting that dissatisfaction with capitalism never reached a point where the proletariat felt compelled to unite and overthrow their chains.

John Lewis Gaddis starts his seminal work, *The Cold War: A New History*, explaining that it addresses a recurrent query posited by his pupils: "How did we ever make it out of the Cold War alive?: Gaddis observed that numerous students, being of a generation distanced from the Cold War, were largely unaware of the brinkmanship that brought the world perilously close to nuclear annihilation. Gaddis makes it clear from the outset that their work does not aim to present original scholarly research but rather synthesizes existing Cold War historiography. Moreover, he emphasizes that his analysis does not explore the origins of post-Cold War phenomena like globalization nor does it contribute to the development of international relations theory.<sup>41</sup> Despite these limitations, the author maintains that their book offers fresh perspectives on the Cold War, notably through the lens of optimism. He contends that despite the inherent dangers and costs associated with the Cold War era, it played a crucial role in resolving fundamental global issues and ultimately contributed to a more stable world order by preventing catastrophic scenarios such as global conflict or totalitarian domination.

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<sup>41</sup> Gaddis (2005), p. ix.

Rejecting simplistic narratives that portray the Cold War solely as a struggle between superpowers or political leaders, the author instead opts for a thematic approach in each chapter. By highlighting significant themes, he aims to provide readers with a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of the conflict, thereby enriching the discourse on this pivotal period in history.

To comprehend the conclusion of this fraught period, one must first grasp its origins. Consequently, Gaddis's narrative commences with an exploration of the events he identifies as the Cold War's progenitors: the dynamics of the Second World War and the nature of the alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union during and after the conflict.

The first chapter thus examines the aftermath of World War II, focusing on the intricate dynamics between the victorious Allied powers, particularly the United States and the Soviet Union. Despite their shared triumph over Nazi Germany, underlying tensions and ideological disparities persisted. The stark contrast between the American tradition of distrust towards centralized authority, rooted in the Revolution, and the Soviet embrace of authoritarianism following the Bolshevik Revolution, shaped their postwar outlooks.

As plans for the postwar settlement unfolded, ideological and geo-political differences between the United States and the Soviet Union became increasingly evident. Stalin's Marxist-Leninist perspective led him to underestimate Western commitment to capitalism, envisioning the Soviet Union as a key partner in postwar reconstruction. However, his ambition to dominate Europe clashed with evolving Western objectives, laying the groundwork for the Cold War.

The division of Europe into spheres of influence, disagreements over self-determination, and territorial integrity heightened tensions. Stalin's aggressive moves in strategic regions further fueled suspicions and resistance from Western powers. The atomic bomb further exacerbated tensions; the delay in informing Stalin about its development, coupled with his own clandestine operations to uncover its existence, sowed deeper seeds of mistrust. Stalin perceived the bomb not merely as a weapon but as a potential instrument of coercion that the Americans might wield to extract concessions in the post-war climate.

Gaddis posits that despite the shared desire among the Allied powers to avoid immediate re-engagement in conflict after the devastating Second World War, the ideological divergence precipitated a new form of strife. He articulates this notion succinctly: "Their hopes were parallel – but their visions were not".<sup>42</sup> Roosevelt and Churchill were proponents of establishing a post-war equilibrium predicated on international cooperation, advocating for national self-determination and economic integration. Conversely, Stalin sought an arrangement that would not

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

only assure the security of the Soviet Union but also incite discord among capitalist nations, thereby expanding the influence of communism. According to Gaddis's interpretation, the American model presupposed a world where divergent political systems could coexist, while Stalin believed such coexistence was untenable.

This fundamental discordance fostered a pernicious cycle of suspicion that propelled actions fostering further mistrust. Gaddis explicates how this pervasive distrust among the Allies contributed to the partition of Europe, sowing the seeds of the Cold War:

Political scientists like to speak of “security dilemmas”: situations in which one state acts to make itself safer, but in doing so diminishes the security of one or more other states, which in turn try to repair the damage through measures that diminish the security of the first state. The result is an ever-deepening whirlpool of distrust from which even the best-intentioned and most far-sighted leaders find it difficult to extricate themselves: their suspicions become self-reinforcing. Because the Anglo-American relationship with the Soviet Union had fallen into this pattern well before World War II ended, it is difficult to say precisely when the Cold War began. There were no surprise attacks, no declarations of war, no severing even of diplomatic ties. There was, however, a growing sense of insecurity at the highest levels in Washington, London, and Moscow, generated by the efforts the wartime allies were making to ensure their own postwar security. With their enemies defeated, there was less of an incentive for these former allies, as they were coming to think of themselves, to keep their anxieties under control. Each crisis that arose fed the next one, with the result that a divided Europe became a reality.<sup>43</sup>

Truman and other Western leaders rejected Soviet demands, opting for containment strategies outlined by George F. Kennan. The emergence of the Cold War in the late 1940s brought unforeseen challenges, including the Soviet atomic bomb test, Mao Zedong's rise in China, and the Korean War. These events reshaped the global balance of power and intensified Cold War rivalries.

In summary, the post-World War II period witnessed shifting alliances, ideological clashes, and nuclear anxieties, laying the foundation for the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 27.

The second chapter presents a fictional scenario wherein atomic bombs are considered during the Korean War, starting with a press conference exchange between President Truman and a reporter. It then describes a hypothetical Chinese offensive in November and General MacArthur's decision to order atomic bomb strikes on advancing Chinese troops. Condemnation from NATO allies and a Soviet ultimatum follow, leading to further fictional atomic strikes in response to Soviet bombings. However, these events are revealed to be fictional, and the Truman administration reassures the public of its policy against using atomic weapons in Korea.

The narrative then delves into the fears and consequences surrounding atomic bombs as World War II ended in 1945. The devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked a turning point, prompting a reassessment of warfare and Truman's pivotal role in shaping the post-World War II era. Despite publicly expressing no regrets over their deployment, Truman's private reflections and actions suggest otherwise. His advocacy for civilian control over atomic weapons set a significant precedent, departing from historical norms. The text also explores early Cold War dynamics of atomic weapons, Truman and Stalin's roles, and the introduction of thermonuclear bombs. Truman hoped atomic bombs would deter Soviet expansion, but Stalin remained undeterred. The advent of thermonuclear weapons posed new dilemmas, with fears of Soviet possession inducing panic in the West. Both superpowers engaged in a race to develop these weapons, recognizing their catastrophic consequences.

The chapter further discusses Eisenhower's and Khrushchev's approaches to nuclear strategy. Eisenhower recoiled at the catastrophic potential of nuclear weapons, viewing them as inherently perilous and aiming to prevent war through deterrence. Khrushchev, while advocating for peaceful coexistence, displayed erratic behavior, leveraging nuclear weapons for political purposes.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 is examined as a turning point in the Cold War, underscoring the risks of miscalculation between superpowers.

It persuaded everyone who was involved in it - with the possible exception of Castro, who claimed, even years afterward, to have been willing to die in a nuclear conflagration - that the weapons each side had developed during the Cold War posed a greater threat to both sides than the United States and the Soviet Union did to one another.<sup>44</sup>

Kennedy negotiated to resolve the crisis, emphasizing the need for diplomatic solutions to prevent catastrophic conflict. Post-crisis agreements aimed to reduce nuclear risks, including the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 79.

doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) as a deterrent against nuclear war.

Overall, the chapter highlights the complexities and dangers of Cold War geopolitics, emphasizing the imperative for arms control agreements to prevent nuclear confrontation.

In the following chapter, Gaddis illustrates how The Cold War was characterized by a clash between communism and capitalism, with each offering contrasting visions of prosperity and justice. Khrushchev's famous statement, "We will bury you," reflected Soviet confidence in communism's triumph, but economic stagnation by the 1970s challenged this optimism. Communism, inspired by Marx and Engels, promised equity, while capitalism adopted social welfare policies to address inequalities. The Bolshevik Revolution under Lenin sparked an ideological struggle that persisted throughout the Cold War, initiating a battle of ideas over the governance of industrializing societies.

Lenin and Woodrow Wilson proposed differing solutions to address industrial society's inequalities and conflicts. Lenin advocated for the overthrow of capitalism through a centralized dictatorship of the proletariat, employing authoritarian methods like propaganda and terror. In contrast, Wilson sought to reform capitalism by fostering individual freedom within the system, promoting democratic reforms and international cooperation for peace.

The aftermath of World War II saw the rise of the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership, bolstering the appeal of Marxism-Leninism in Europe. Meanwhile, doubts arose about the sustainability of democracy and capitalism, even in the United States, amid economic concerns. Reinhold Niebuhr's questioning of democracy's core values reflected these uncertainties.

During the Cold War, there was a significant shift towards democratic capitalism, leading to the decline of Lenin's influence and the recognition of Woodrow Wilson's vision. Triggered by the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States took on global responsibilities to prevent the mistakes of the interwar years. Despite challenges from authoritarian regimes, efforts were made to safeguard capitalism, address inequalities, and prevent aggression. Key speeches by leaders like Stalin, Churchill, and Truman reflected the ideological divide, while initiatives such as the Marshall Plan aimed to counter communism's appeal:

Its goal was to secure political freedom by means of economic rehabilitation in the remaining non-communist states of Europe: only hungry and demoralized people, the plan's architects assumed, would vote communists into office.<sup>45</sup>

The Cold War exemplified two competing ideologies, one driven by fear and the other by

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.162.

hope. Stalin's regime epitomized the former, using brutal methods to maintain power both domestically and abroad. In contrast, the U.S. offered hope and opportunity, showcasing an alternative to communism through capitalism and democracy.

After Stalin's death, attempts to reform Marxism-Leninism faced challenges, failing to escape the shadow of Stalinism. Subsequent leaders like Khrushchev attempted reforms but encountered resistance. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes in 1956 triggered upheavals in Eastern Europe, highlighting the difficulty of reforming the communist system from within<sup>46</sup>.

Mao Zedong's approach to post-Stalinist communism differed significantly from Khrushchev's, as he sought to emulate Stalin's methods in China. However, Mao's ambitious policies, including the "Great Leap Forward," resulted in immense suffering and undermined the credibility of communist ideologies.

Overall, the Cold War era saw the dominance of democratic capitalism as a response to authoritarian communism, shaping the post-war world order. While capitalism experienced unprecedented growth and prosperity, Marxist ideologies failed to fulfill their promises, symbolized by the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the broader shortcomings of communism<sup>47</sup>.

In chapter four we see how the Soviet Union's foreign policy changes. Nikita Khrushchev's candid acknowledgment of his impending removal from power in 1964 marked a significant departure from the absolute authority of Stalin's era. His downfall was attributed to accusations of rudeness, incompetence, and mismanagement, compounded by tensions with the West and agricultural failures. Despite his undignified removal, Khrushchev's peaceful retirement signified evolving constraints on centralized power.

This change mirrored global shifts in power dynamics during the late 1950s and 1960s, with both the Soviet Union and the United States facing challenges to their authority from smaller states and movements. As fear of centralized power waned, weaker entities became more willing to challenge stronger ones, reshaping traditional notions of power dynamics.<sup>48</sup>

The decline of European colonialism coincided with the early Cold War, accelerating after World War II due to independence movements inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution and Wilson's self-determination principle. The end of colonialism presented both opportunities and challenges for the Cold War powers, with newly independent states influencing Cold War dynamics and the rise of non-aligned movements reflecting the empowerment of formerly marginalized populations.

Non-alignment emerged as a strategy for third-world states to maintain independence and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 108-9.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 117.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 120.

flexibility without aligning firmly with either superpower bloc. Leaders like Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia pioneered this approach, further solidified during the Bandung Conference in 1955. Non-alignment granted smaller states autonomy and leverage in international affairs, challenging superpower dominance.

During the Cold War, smaller powers employed the strategy of "collapse" to gain autonomy and extract support from superpowers. Leaders like Syngman Rhee, Chiang Kai-shek, and Ngo Dinh Diem exploited fears of instability to secure support and showcase the limitations of superpower authority.

Superpowers struggled to control their allies within NATO and the Warsaw Pact, exemplified by their experiences with Germany. The construction of the Berlin Wall symbolized the challenges of superpower control within alliances during the Cold War.

Medium powers like France's Charles de Gaulle and China's Mao Zedong challenged the Cold War bipolar system to assert their autonomy. Their defiance of external authority stemmed from their pursuit of national self-esteem, leading to conflicts with the US and the Soviet Union.

The tense relations between the Soviet Union and China in 1969 prompted Mao Zedong to prepare for potential conflict while also considering negotiations with the US. This strategic alignment between China and the US, driven by mutual interests and domestic challenges, culminated in Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972, paving the way for future cooperation.

The following chapter focuses on ethics and the responsibilities of world leaders and countries, in relation to international laws. It shows how the Watergate crisis, culminating in President Nixon's resignation, shocked both domestic and international observers, underscoring the importance of adhering to standards of decency and the rule of law in global politics. This event marked a broader shift in international relations, Gaddis notes, influencing the conduct of Cold War superpowers like the United States and the Soviet Union and introducing new expectations regarding the behavior of states on the international stage.

The aspiration for international relations guided by principles of justice has roots in Immanuel Kant's writings and was furthered by Woodrow Wilson's efforts with the League of Nations and the United Nations. However, during the Cold War, the reality often fell short of this idealistic vision, with the veto power of the superpowers within the UN Security Council hindering effective enforcement of justice. Instead, the two superpowers often took it upon themselves to promote justice globally, leading to a complex interplay between power dynamics and the pursuit of justice.

The United States, while initially aiming to promote freedom and democracy globally, resorted to covert operations abroad during the Cold War, expanding the role of organizations like



the CIA. These covert actions, driven by the imperative to counter Soviet influence, often led to moral and legal dilemmas, challenging traditional international sportsmanship.

Richard Nixon's presidency exemplified this shift, with his use of secrecy and executive power for foreign policy goals. Despite diplomatic successes like the opening to China, Nixon's actions involved unjustifiable actions such as covert bombings and illegal surveillance, culminating in the Watergate scandal and his resignation. To Gaddis, this event underscored the importance of accountability and the rule of law even for the highest office in the country. "Watergate revealed that Americans placed the rule of law above the wielding of power, however praiseworthy the purposes for which power was being used. Ends did not always justify means. Might alone did not make right."<sup>49</sup>

The balance of power between the U.S. executive and legislative branches shifted after significant events like the Vietnam War and Watergate, leading to increased congressional oversight of national security policy. This internal scrutiny resulted in laws limiting military and intelligence actions, reflecting internal checks on U.S. national security capabilities.

Gaddis also examines the moral dilemmas inherent in American foreign policy during the Cold War, questioning whether legal standards alone are sufficient to hold American foreign policy accountable to moral principles. He highlights shifts in American strategy towards legal and moral principles and their impact on Cold War dynamics, as Gaddis illustrates:

But he [Eisenhower] and subsequent presidents through Nixon retained the view, most clearly articulated in NSC-68, that the legal and moral restraints limiting government action at home need not do so in the world at large: within that wider sphere, the United States had to be free to operate as its adversaries did [...] And so the Cold War transformed American leaders into Machiavellians. Confronted with "so many who are not good," they resolved "to learn to be able not to be good" themselves, and to use this skill or not use it, as the great Italian cynic— and patriot— had put it, "according to necessity."<sup>50</sup>

The unexpected outcomes of the Helsinki Agreement further illustrate the complex dynamics of Cold War diplomacy. While the agreement aimed to legitimize Soviet control in Eastern Europe, its human rights provisions empowered dissidents and religious leaders,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p.157.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 165.

contributing to the erosion of communist control and surprising both Soviet and Western leaders.<sup>51</sup>

In the penultimate chapter, Gaddis highlights the pivotal role of charismatic leaders in shaping the final phase of the Cold War, emphasizing qualities like courage, eloquence, determination, and faith. “The Cold War itself was a kind of theater,” Gaddis states, “in which distinctions between illusions and reality were not always obvious. It presented great opportunities for great actors to play great roles.”<sup>52</sup> He illustrates how Pope John Paul II, through his mobilization of millions against communist regimes, inspired movements for change in Poland and Eastern Europe. Other leaders such as Lech Walesa, Margaret Thatcher, Deng Xiaoping, Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev also played significant roles in ending the Cold War and shaping a new era in global politics.

The collapse of *détente*, a period of improved US-Soviet relations during the Cold War, is examined by Gaddis. Initially seen as promising for global stability, *détente* aimed to ease superpower tensions and maintain the post-World War II geopolitical order. However, it faced criticism for merely freezing rather than resolving the Cold War conflict and perpetuating authoritarianism, economic disparities, and political restrictions. Despite attempts to mitigate tensions, the looming threat of nuclear war persisted, and societal dynamics, including democratization and increased information access, challenged *détente*'s legitimacy. Ultimately, *détente* failed due to its inability to address underlying tensions, adapt to societal changes, and gain grassroots support, signaling the need for new approaches in post-Cold War international relations.

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the US and the Soviet Union from the late 1960s to the late 1970s are also analyzed. Initiated in 1969, SALT I agreements aimed to limit the nuclear arms race but faced criticism for not reducing arsenals. Subsequent negotiations, like SALT II, encountered complexities such as demands for equality and increased scrutiny. Political factors, including President Carter's attempt to balance arms reductions with human rights concerns and internal issues within the Soviet Union, added to negotiation complexities. Despite these efforts, the SALT II treaty signed in 1979 faced criticism for perceived ineffectiveness and verification challenges, exacerbating tensions amid broader Cold War dynamics.

Gaddis further delineates how events such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks and broader US-Soviet relations reshaped global geopolitics during the Cold War. Despite efforts like the SALT agreements, tensions between the US and the Soviet Union persisted, influenced by ideological commitments, regional dynamics, and superpower rivalry. Events such as Anwar el-Sadat's shift towards the US after the 1973 Yom Kippur War weakened Soviet influence in the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 191.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 195

Middle East, while Soviet involvement in African conflicts strained relations with the US. The 1979 invasion of Afghanistan marked a significant misstep for the Soviet Union, exacerbating tensions and accelerating détente's decline. These developments illustrate the complex interplay of factors that shaped Cold War geopolitics, leading to shifts in global power dynamics. At first, it looked as if Moscow was “on a roll” but later Gaddis illustrates:

The Soviet Union’s support for Marxist revolutionaries in Africa, its SS-20 deployment, and its invasion of Afghanistan look less like a coordinated strategy to shift the global balance of power and more like the absence of any strategy at all. For what kind of logic assumes the permanence of unexpected windfalls? What kind of regime provokes those upon whom it has become economically dependent? What kind of leadership, for that matter, commits itself to the defense of human rights—as at Helsinki in 1975—but then is surprised when its own citizens claim such rights? The U.S.S.R. under Brezhnev’s faltering rule had become incapable of performing the most fundamental task of any effective strategy: the efficient use of available means to accomplish chosen ends. That left the field open for leaders elsewhere who were capable of such things.<sup>53</sup>

The breakdown of détente in the late 1970s marked a significant setback in US-Soviet relations, as evidenced by President Carter's actions in January 1980. Despite hopes of détente easing superpower tensions and curbing the nuclear arms race, the withdrawal of the SALT II treaty and imposition of embargoes on the USSR signaled deteriorating relations. The failure of détente had immediate effects but also highlighted broader implications, including the decline of the Soviet Union and leadership limitations, leaving room for others to capitalize on Soviet weaknesses, as mentioned in the quotation above.

The 1980s witnessed a significant global shift, driven by unexpected figures like Deng Xiaoping, Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Lech Walesa. Their actions, from market reforms to challenging Soviet expansionism, reshaped the Cold War era, laying the groundwork for the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. The Cold War presented great opportunities for great actors to play great roles<sup>54</sup>, Gaddis posits, and that is what these figures did.

Lastly, Gaddis analyzes the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev during

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 214.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 195.

the late Cold War period. Reagan's strategic initiatives and rhetoric reshaped US-Soviet relations, paving the way for continued negotiations and arms control agreements. Gorbachev, unlike his predecessors, pursued a warmer and more transparent leadership style, prioritizing both domestic and international change. Gaddis does not paint a particular positive picture of Gorbachev:

Gorbachev knew that the Soviet Union could not continue on its existing path, but unlike John Paul II, Deng, Thatcher, Reagan, and Walesa, he did not know what the new path should be. He was at once vigorous, decisive, and adrift: he poured enormous energy into shattering the status quo without specifying how to reassemble the pieces. As a consequence, he allowed circumstances— and often the firmer views of more far-sighted contemporaries— to determine his own priorities. He resembled, in this sense, the eponymous hero of Woody Allen's movie *Zelig*, who managed to be present at all the great events of his time, but only by taking on the character, even the appearance, of the stronger personalities who surrounded him.<sup>55</sup>

Gorbachev's engagement with Reagan led to significant summits and agreements, ultimately leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's reforms, despite facing internal resistance, brought about profound geopolitical changes and left a lasting impact on Soviet history and international relations.

In the opening of the last chapter, Gaddis juxtaposes Margaret Thatcher's view of the French Revolution as a failed utopian experiment with Timothy Garton Ash's analysis of the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe. Thatcher criticizes the French Revolution for its descent into violence and draws parallels with the Bolshevik Revolution, highlighting the role of ideology in leading to atrocities. Garton Ash sees the 1989 revolutions as a rejection of inherited legitimacy and ideological claims to historical direction. Gaddis emphasizes the role of ordinary people in precipitating these revolutions, comparing the collapse of the Soviet Union to a sandpile ready to slide with the addition of a few more grains of sand. Despite the lack of bloodshed in the 1989 revolution, it represented a significant triumph of hope, largely due to Mikhail Gorbachev's decision not to intervene forcefully but to allow events to unfold:

What no one understood, at the beginning of 1989, was that the Soviet Union, its empire, its ideology— and therefore the Cold War itself—was a sandpile ready to slide. All it took to make that happen were a few more grains of sand. The people who

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 230.

dropped them were not in charge of superpowers or movements or religions: they were ordinary people with simple priorities who saw, seized, and sometimes stumbled into opportunities. In doing so, they caused a collapse no one could stop. Their “leaders”

had little choice but to follow. One particular leader, however, did so in a distinctive way. He ensured that the great 1989 revolution was the first one ever in which almost no blood was shed. There were no guillotines, no heads on pikes, no officially sanctioned mass murders. People did die, but in remarkably small numbers for the size and significance of what was happening. In both its ends and its means, then, this revolution became a triumph of hope. It did so chiefly because Mikhail Gorbachev chose not to act, but rather to be acted upon.<sup>56</sup>

Both the French Revolution and the 1989 revolutions were transformative moments in history, driven by complex dynamics involving ideology, societal dissatisfaction, and leadership decisions. While the French Revolution ended in violence and terror, the 1989 revolutions offered a more hopeful outcome, albeit with unforeseen consequences for the global order.

Gaddis then outlines the transformative events of 1989, particularly in Eastern Europe, which reshaped global politics. It begins with George H. W. Bush's presidency and his cautious approach to Soviet-American relations, followed by the unexpected and rapid changes that unfolded throughout the year. Highlights include Hungary's move towards autonomy, Poland's election victory for Solidarity, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in East Germany. These events contrast with China's Tiananmen Square crackdown. The narrative concludes with Gorbachev's recognition of the failure of Cold War methods and the importance of dialogue between the US and the USSR. Overall, 1989 marked a triumph of hope, leading to profound geopolitical shifts and the reconfiguration of global power dynamics.

In 1989, Eastern Europe experienced rapid change, surprising many global leaders. U.S. President George H. W. Bush, at the Malta summit with Mikhail Gorbachev, admitted the U.S. was unsettled by these events but expressed support for German reunification, a previously impractical idea. Gorbachev, welcoming U.S. involvement, remained silent on reunification, signaling a significant shift in Soviet policy.<sup>57</sup>

Despite concerns from leaders like Margaret Thatcher, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl pushed for reunification, buoyed by East German citizens' demands and the collapse of the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 238-39.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 249.

East German government.

A key issue was Germany's NATO membership. Initially opposed by the Soviet Union, Gorbachev eventually agreed to a reunified Germany in NATO, fearing the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Europe. In July 1990, Gorbachev and Kohl reached an agreement, leading to Germany's formal reunification on October 3, 1990, ending the post-World War II division.

The final passage recounts Mikhail Gorbachev's final days as leader of the Soviet Union and the empire's collapse. Facing domestic discontent and growing separatist movements, Gorbachev's policies of perestroika and glasnost inadvertently fueled the dissolution of the union. Boris Yeltsin's rise as a rival leader, coupled with a failed coup attempt, led to the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991. Despite Gorbachev's international acclaim for peaceful reform efforts, his leadership ultimately contributed to the empire's downfall:

Gorbachev dithered in contradictions without resolving them. The largest was this: he wanted to save socialism, but he would not use force to do so. It was his particular misfortune that these goals were incompatible— he could not achieve one without abandoning the other. And so, in the end, he gave up an ideology, an empire, and his own country, in preference to using force. He chose love over fear, violating Machiavelli's advice for princes and thereby ensuring that he ceased to be one. It made little sense in traditional geopolitical terms. But it did make him the most deserving recipient ever of the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>58</sup>

Gaddis does not seem to respect Gorbachev much as a leader, but he does appreciate him as a person for his role in ending the Cold War.

5. *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union, and the Cold War* by Melvyn P. Leffler (2007)

Historian Melvyn P. Leffler, renowned for his insightful analyses of American foreign relations, particularly in the context of the 20th-century Soviet-American relationship, explores the Cold War in his book *For the Soul of Mankind*. Focusing on five pivotal episodes, he frames them within the broader Cold War context, providing detailed insights into its origins, major themes,

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 257.

and evolution.

Leffler emphasizes the centrality of ideology in shaping the Cold War, with the U.S. adhering to liberal capitalism and democracy, and the USSR to communism and command economics. These ideological differences led to intense mutual distrust, shaping how leaders perceived and interacted with each other. The fear stemming from competing ideologies was palpable in the context of Germany, where both superpowers, despite concerns about a reunified Germany, recognized its strategic importance in the Cold War confrontation. The divided status of Germany, especially Berlin, became a focal point of Cold War tensions.

Leffler refrains from assigning blame, portraying the Cold War as almost inevitable due to shared desires for a secure Europe and stable Asia, though conflicting visions led to tensions. He contrasts the American post-war vision favorably with the Soviet Union's coercive approach in establishing satellite states.

Examining leaders like Stalin and Truman, Leffler notes pragmatic inclinations but emphasizes their inability to overcome biases, contributing to heightened tensions. Gorbachev's visionary leadership is credited with breaking the cycle, recognizing that the Soviet Union had nothing to fear from the West, leading to the thawing of Cold War tensions.

Unique experience, such as World War II as a child and being distanced from revolutionary orthodoxies, shaped Gorbachev's departure from established patterns, enabling a more flexible approach to governance and international relations. In the 1980s, under Gorbachev's leadership, there was a genuine willingness to end the Cold War, marking a departure from tradition and facilitating a more open and cooperative stance towards the West.

Leffler attributes credit to Reagan for allowing internal Soviet changes to progress without undue interference and engaging in negotiations that reduced tensions.

Rejecting simplistic narratives, Leffler presents a nuanced view of the Cold War's conclusion. He challenges the "evil empire" rhetoric, highlighting Gorbachev's pivotal role and stressing the complex, multifaceted nature of the Cold War's resolution. In this perspective, Gorbachev's leadership and willingness to embrace change played a central role in reshaping the geopolitical landscape.

In his examination of the Cold War, the author identifies five pivotal moments, exploring the reasons behind the failure of American and Soviet leaders to reconcile.<sup>59</sup> Leffler analyzes individual leaders, asserting that their decisions were profoundly influenced by personal backgrounds and ideological beliefs. This approach unveils the intricate interplay between leaders' perspectives and the broader Cold War geopolitical landscape. The study contends that the

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<sup>59</sup> Leffler (2007), p. 7.

personal characteristics and life experiences of key leaders played a more significant role in shaping the Cold War than economic, strategic, or domestic political factors. Emotions, rather than purely rational calculations, are argued to have substantially contributed to the Cold War's perpetuation.

To support this argument, Leffler extensively uses recently declassified primary sources, particularly from the Cold War International History Project and the National Security Archive. These archives provide crucial insights into the emotions, decisions, and perspectives of key figures on the Soviet side.

In a case study focusing on Truman and Stalin post-World War II, Leffler challenges the inevitability of the Cold War, highlighting clashes between Truman's principles and Stalin's security imperative. The interpretation of American aid by Stalin as capitalist encirclement reinforces his Marxist-Leninist stance. The case study emphasizes how personal experiences, ideological convictions, and perceptions of the international system influenced their decisions, offering a nuanced perspective on the Cold War's origins.

The book features case studies involving figures like Malenkov, Eisenhower, Khrushchev, Kennedy, Johnson, Brezhnev, and Carter. Leffler illustrates how these leaders struggled to reconcile ideological differences for common interests. Gorbachev, according to Leffler, stands out as the first leader willing to transcend ideological preconceptions.

The final chapter contains Leffler's analysis of the end of the cold war. In this chapter, Leffler argues that Gorbachev's recognition of the Soviet Union's diversion of attention and resources from domestic issues due to geopolitical competition with the U.S. was a pivotal moment in the Cold War. This realization prompted Gorbachev to prioritize domestic concerns over ideological confrontation, marking a departure from rigid Cold War ideologies.

The study underscores the influence of individual personalities, emphasizing the role of ideology and historical memory in perpetuating the Cold War. The ongoing scholarly debate on the role of ideology versus security considerations in shaping Soviet leaders' behavior during the Cold War is highlighted, with Leffler suggesting the potential for overcoming ideological barriers.

Examining interactions among Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush, the chapter describes Reagan's firm stance against communism and Gorbachev's willingness to set aside ideological considerations for *détente*. This shift towards ending the Cold War reflects both leaders' desires for peaceful competition.

Leffler details Reagan's transition from actor to political figure, emphasizing his anti-communist beliefs and leadership role in the Screen Actors Guild.<sup>60</sup> Reagan's evolution from Democrat to Republican and his presidency, centered on economic revitalization and military

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. pp. 334-4.



strength, are outlined. Despite harsh rhetoric, Reagan supported constructive dialogue, as seen in his attempt to engage with Brezhnev through a personal letter.

The ideological divide within Reagan's administration regarding Soviet approaches is discussed, with Shultz advocating dialogue and others skeptical. Reagan's nuanced foreign policy, emphasizing credible deterrence with peaceful competition, is explored. His understanding of Soviet security concerns, reflections on Soviet reactions, and commitment to reducing nuclear threats demonstrate a complex approach to the Cold War's psychological aspects.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed insight into Gorbachev's early life, shaped by World War II's aftermath, droughts, and famine. Despite hardships, Gorbachev excelled in education, joined the Komsomol, and was deeply socialized into Communist ideology. His transformative period at Moscow State University expanded his understanding of law within socioeconomic and political contexts, coinciding with Stalin's death, which influenced the university's intellectual atmosphere. Gorbachev's early life and education are intertwined with the promise of Communist ideals and the realities of Soviet society, laying the foundation for his trajectory from a rural upbringing to a transformative global leader.<sup>61</sup>

Gorbachev's early life, detailed in the chapter, illuminates the profound influence of historical events, personal experiences, and ideological education on his development. Resilience, ambition, and a commitment to flawed communist ideals shaped Gorbachev, laying the foundation for his later reform efforts in the Soviet Union. This narrative provides insights into Gorbachev's character and the broader forces at play in 20th-century Soviet society.

Gorbachev's rise in Soviet politics was fueled by ambition, intellect, and recognition within the Party. His education at Moscow State University, particularly in law, broadened his perspective on the Soviet system. Dedicated to communist ideals, Gorbachev's career showcased his commitment even as he recognized the system's flaws. Upon assuming higher positions, Gorbachev initiated policies addressing Soviet stagnation, promoting agricultural productivity, technological innovation, and democratic governance. Despite resistance, his persistence reflected a belief in necessary reforms for the Soviet Union's future. Active in international diplomacy, Gorbachev aimed to ease Cold War tensions through nuclear disarmament and dialogue. His complex character, shaped by his youth, commitment to communism, and openness to reform, reshaped the Soviet Union and played a crucial role in ending the Cold War. His legacy balances socialist foundations with recognition of imperative change for survival in a rapidly evolving world.

Reagan's public rhetoric positioned his administration as a harbinger of a "new beginning" domestically and internationally, emphasizing global freedom and peace through military strength.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. pp. 368-9.

His peace approach involved negotiations for nuclear disarmament, including the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) for weapon elimination in space. Soviet response to Reagan's overtures, initially positive under Chernenko, evolved with Gorbachev's ascension in 1985. Gorbachev's reformist outlook, shaped by World War II hardships, agricultural experiences, and exposure to the West, influenced policies decentralizing economic control and promoting transparency.<sup>62</sup>

Reagan and Gorbachev recognized the nuclear arms race's threat and aimed to reduce tensions through diplomacy and treaties. Gorbachev's radical shift from traditional Soviet stances emphasized peaceful coexistence and non-military competition. This period marked a critical shift from Cold War confrontation to dialogue, laying the groundwork for its eventual end.

Gorbachev's leadership focused on restructuring the Soviet Union to address internal challenges. Recognizing the unsustainable arms race's burden, he sought arms reduction to foster domestic transformation. To improve international relations, Gorbachev aimed to change the Soviet Union's image, initiating communication with Reagan for peaceful competition and trust-building.

In summary, Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership was marked by a recognition of the need for domestic restructuring, a desire to halt the arms race, and efforts to transform the international image of the Soviet Union. His approach aimed to revitalize socialism and improve relations with the United States while emphasizing peaceful competition and trust-building. This period marked a significant departure from previous Soviet policies and played a crucial role in the end of the Cold War.

Eduard Shevardnadze, influenced by World War II, played a pivotal role in reshaping Soviet foreign policy during Gorbachev's era. As foreign minister, he sought to transcend ideological barriers and introduced "new Soviet thinking" at the Helsinki meeting, emphasizing domestic development and cooperation. The 1985 Geneva summit between Reagan and Gorbachev marked the start of a positive relationship, focusing on dialogue, trust-building, and collaboration on global issues, nuclear arms reduction, and preventing an arms race.<sup>63</sup>

Reagan's letter urged Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, emphasizing shared responsibility for global peace. Gorbachev responded, expressing concerns about U.S. actions worldwide, reflecting a commitment to constructive dialogue and preserving peace.

Gorbachev strategically addressed Soviet weaknesses, aiming to resolve issues like the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) for domestic perestroika. He navigated resistance from the military, endorsing a comprehensive disarmament program and proposing bold visions for nuclear

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 258-9.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 378.

disarmament in 1986. Despite initial skepticism, Reagan and Gorbachev engaged in detailed discussions on arms reduction, facing challenges over SDI. His leadership in the USSR focused on perestroika, emphasizing economic efficiency, anti-corruption measures, and social justice. His domestic reforms were intricately linked to international strategy, emphasizing peaceful coexistence, cooperation with the U.S., and resolving regional disputes. Challenges included resistance to reforms and the Chernobyl disaster, but Gorbachev remained committed to perestroika.<sup>64</sup>

The Geneva summit in 1985 marked the beginning of a positive relationship between Reagan and Gorbachev. Despite differences, they aimed for arms reduction and mutual trust. Gorbachev proposed a 50% reduction in strategic arms and freezing short-range missiles. Reagan responded positively, but discussions on SDI became contentious, leading to an intense but ultimately unresolved debate. The latter part of the 1980s saw Gorbachev facing challenges in Afghanistan. Mounting domestic pressure and a desire for a political settlement prompted Gorbachev to consider withdrawing Soviet troops. The U.S., while publicly advocating withdrawal, covertly supported Afghan insurgents. Gorbachev sought a diplomatic solution, initiated talks with Pakistan, and aimed for a broadened social base in Afghanistan.

The decision to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1988 reflected a broader shift in Soviet foreign policy. His "new thinking" aimed at ending old rivalries and resolving regional disputes. Despite uncertainties about U.S. cooperation, Gorbachev instructed Afghan leader Najibullah to form a coalition government.

Gorbachev's approach towards Nicaragua reflected his domestic priorities as he reassured President Daniel Ortega that Soviet support did not entail turning Nicaragua into a Soviet base. Financial constraints, stemming from falling oil prices, limited additional Soviet loans. By late 1987, Gorbachev shifted focus to Soviet domestic reforms, emphasizing to the U.S. that the Kremlin wasn't seeking expansion through regional conflicts. Gorbachev proposed Soviet troop withdrawal within twelve months if a coalition government formed and U.S. support to anti-Soviet resistance ceased.

Despite signs of continued U.S. support for the Mujahedin in Afghanistan, Gorbachev proceeded with the withdrawal of Soviet troops, emphasizing political significance and commitment to new international approaches. The Geneva agreements in April 1988 outlined Soviet troop withdrawal and commitments from involved parties. Challenges emerged as Najibullah sought further Soviet assistance, but Gorbachev remained focused on domestic revitalization and preventing a hostile state in Afghanistan.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 354.

Gorbachev's acknowledgment of the Soviet Union's dark history, coupled with a commitment to democracy, marked a departure. Perestroika aimed at restoring Leninist ideals, emphasizing the working individual and revitalizing socialism with a humanistic focus. Gorbachev's shift in perspective on capitalism had significant implications for Soviet foreign policy, recognizing diverse capitalist approaches.

Gorbachev and Shevardnadze dispelled notions of "peaceful coexistence" as class warfare, emphasizing abandonment of an ideological approach to international relations. Gorbachev's unilateral reduction in conventional arms and reorganization of Soviet divisions signaled a shift towards a more normal international relationship. His UN speech aimed to erase the iron curtain image, but skepticism from President George H. W. Bush's administration persisted.

The Bush administration, cautious about Soviet intentions, shifted focus from arms control to broader geopolitical issues, especially in Europe. Recognizing an opportunity to weaken Soviet influence in Eastern Europe, the U.S. proposed alternative agreements on conventional arms reductions. Bush aimed to counter Gorbachev's popularity in Europe by emphasizing democratic values, freedom, and market economies during visits to Poland and Hungary. Eastern Europe underwent dramatic changes, with Poland and Hungary experiencing economic hardships and political reforms. President Bush's diplomatic approach acknowledged evolving situations in Eastern Europe, aligning with democratic values while avoiding provoking the Soviet Union. The complex diplomatic landscape reflected Gorbachev's international popularity and the U.S. determination to maintain leadership in NATO amid changing geopolitical dynamics.

The Warsaw Pact witnessed internal divisions on reform direction, with Gorbachev advocating change and reduced military tensions. Leaders like Honecker and Ceausescu expressed concerns about preserving socialism, creating challenges for Gorbachev's vision. Gorbachev's discontent with Honecker grew due to East Germany's resistance to reform and emerging opposition groups, conflicting with Gorbachev's desire for change.

The prospect of a powerful, unified Germany in Europe raised concerns. President George H.W. Bush aimed to prevent a neutral reunified Germany, presenting a challenge. Gorbachev was cautious about German reunification, fearing the geopolitical shift and the end of Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe.

President Bush and Gorbachev, initially cautious about each other's intentions, had a pivotal meeting in Malta. They openly discussed concerns, with Bush supporting perestroika but pressing on issues like free elections in Central America. This meeting set the tone for future cooperation.

Gorbachev, recognizing his role in improving relations with Reagan, sought to dispel the

Soviet Union's negative image. Despite efforts to change perceptions, substantive outcomes often favored American terms. The summit meetings with Reagan enhanced Gorbachev's global image, allowing him to pursue perestroika and democratic socialism.

With Reagan's presidency ending, Gorbachev sought continuity with George H.W. Bush. Despite initial irritations, they developed a rapport. Gorbachev appreciated Bush's cautious demeanor, contributing to a constructive relationship.

The last chapter summarizes Leffler's conclusions. The Cold War's origins were shaped by the choices of leaders like Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill. Despite initial distrust, they collaborated during World War II, and post-war cooperation became crucial, given the horrifying prospect of atomic war. Leffler underscores varied forms of collaboration in preserving peace, controlling potential foes, and rebuilding devastated areas. Gorbachev and Reagan are recognized for pivotal roles in the Cold War's resolution.<sup>65</sup>

Ideological differences notwithstanding, both superpowers recognized the need for common interests but faced challenges due to their ideas, domestic opposition, and the interests of foreign allies. The clash of visions, communism versus democratic capitalism, was rooted in historical memories and shaped by ideological assumptions, fueling the Cold War. Post-war Europe saw competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, with opportunities for communist gains in the 1970s. Exaggerated hopes and fears on both sides fueled tensions, with the U.S. perceiving Soviet actions as adventurism. Domestic considerations in the U.S., driven by discontent and fear of Soviet power, influenced foreign policy.

Changing global dynamics, technological advances, economic challenges, and vulnerabilities in the developing world shaped the Cold War narrative. Gorbachev's transformative leadership recognized internal decay as a greater risk than external threats. Reagan's trust-building and communication skills played a vital role, with both leaders acknowledging common human interests beyond ideological ties.

Gorbachev's tenure reflected a personal and visionary approach, facing opposition and making decisions guided by an evolving vision. Reagan's ideological fervor and confidence in democratic capitalism, aligning with changing global realities, played a significant role in ending the Cold War. The outcome, as Reagan astutely recognized, depended on addressing people's aspirations for a decent standard of living, a peaceful environment, and freedom of expression.

Leffler highlights the patience and prudence of American leaders during the Cold War, navigating ideological differences and avoiding armed conflict due to nuclear weapons. The early postwar years focused on careful calculations of national interests, while the 1960s and 1970s saw

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 451 ff.

fears leading to less reasoned assessments, with conflicts like Vietnam causing suffering.<sup>66</sup>

While Reagan played a crucial role, Gorbachev was the indispensable agent of change, transcending ideological constraints. Gorbachev believed success depended on democratizing socialism, making it more productive for Soviet citizens, recognizing minimal external threats, and scarce external opportunities.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. pp. 434-5.

## Chapter 2

### Recent Retrospectives on the Soviet Union's Demise (2008- Present)

#### 1. The late 2000s until the present

The period following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 witnessed significant global developments that shaped the geopolitical landscape and influenced scholarly interpretations of the end of the Cold War. This chapter explores the works on the end of the Cold War written during the period from 2008 to the present, capturing the evolving narratives and historiographical trends in Cold War studies amidst a changing world order.

The aftermath of the Iraq War in 2003 marked a pivotal moment in international relations, with far-reaching implications for global security, geopolitical alignments, and the legitimacy of military interventions. The U.S.-led invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq underscored the complexities and challenges of post-Cold War conflict resolution, highlighting the limits of American power and the fractious nature of international cooperation. The war in Iraq reshaped perceptions of U.S. foreign policy and fueled debates over the use of force in pursuit of geopolitical objectives, contributing to a reevaluation of Cold War legacies and historical narratives.

Furthermore, the world was plunged into turmoil with the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, signaling a profound economic downturn that reverberated across continents and underscored the interconnectedness of the global economy. The financial crisis exposed systemic vulnerabilities within the capitalist system and precipitated widespread economic hardship, challenging prevailing assumptions about the stability and sustainability of neoliberal economic policies. This crisis prompted scholars to reexamine the dynamics of economic globalization and its impact on Cold War legacies, fostering renewed interest in the intersections between economic power, political stability, and historical change.

Amidst these global upheavals, Russia experienced a resurgence on the world stage, marked by economic recovery and a reassertion of its geopolitical ambitions. Russia's emergence as a major player in international affairs was accompanied by growing tensions with the United States and its Western allies, fueling concerns over a potential revival of Cold War-era rivalries and geopolitical confrontations. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia's intervention in Ukraine further exacerbated tensions and reshaped perceptions of East-West relations, prompting scholars to revisit Cold War narratives and explore the enduring legacies of superpower competition in

contemporary geopolitics.

In addition to these key developments, the period from 2008 to the present witnessed the emergence of new sources and archival materials that have become available to researchers, providing fresh insights and perspectives on the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The opening of archives in former communist states, as well as the declassification of documents by Western governments, has facilitated a deeper understanding of Cold War dynamics and historical processes, enriching the scholarly discourse and enabling nuanced analyses of Cold War legacies in the post-Soviet era.

Against this backdrop of geopolitical shifts, economic crises, and archival revelations, this chapter examines the scholarly works and historiographical trends on the end of the Cold War written during the period from 2008 to the present, offering insights into the evolving narratives and interpretations of this transformative period in global history.

In the third chapter, we delve into the analysis of *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse* by Stephen Kotkin (2001, updated 2008), *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* by Chris Miller (2016), *Post-Wall Post-Square: How Bush, Gorbachev, Kohl, and Deng Shaped the World after 1989* by Kristina Spohr (2019), and *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* by Vladislav Zubok (2021).

Stephen Kotkin's *Armageddon Averted* offers a penetrating analysis of the Soviet Union's decline and ultimate collapse. Drawing on extensive research and a deep understanding of Soviet history, Kotkin explores the complex factors that contributed to the unraveling of the Soviet system. From economic mismanagement to political stagnation, Kotkin provides readers with a nuanced understanding of the internal and external pressures that led to the demise of the USSR.

In *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy*, Chris Miller offers a comprehensive analysis of Mikhail Gorbachev's efforts to reform the Soviet economy and the subsequent collapse of the USSR. Miller traces the economic challenges facing the Soviet Union and Gorbachev's attempts to address them through perestroika and other reforms. By examining the political and economic dynamics of the late Soviet period, Miller sheds light on the factors that ultimately led to the downfall of the Soviet system.

Kristina Spohr's *Post-Wall Post-Square* offers a thought-provoking exploration of the global transformations that followed the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Through a blend of historical analysis and contemporary commentary, Spohr examines the geopolitical, social, and economic repercussions of this momentous period. From the reunification of Germany to the rise of new regional powers, Spohr provides readers with a comprehensive overview of the post-Cold War world.



Vladislav Zubok's *Collapse* offers a detailed examination of the events leading to the collapse of the USSR. Through meticulous research and insightful analysis, Zubok traces the internal and external factors that contributed to the Soviet Union's demise. From economic stagnation to political upheaval, Zubok provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of the forces at play during this tumultuous period. He explores the perspectives of key actors and examines the broader historical context of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

## 2. *Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* by Stephen Kotkin (2008)

Stephen Kotkin is a distinguished historian, author, and academic known for his deep dive into Soviet history and his detailed biographies of Joseph Stalin. His work *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000* stands out among Kotkin's publications as a critical examination of the last three decades of the Soviet Union. Published initially in 2001, with an updated edition in 2008, the book argues that the Soviet collapse was largely due to internal dynamics and the actions of the Soviet elite rather than external pressures or the policies of Western governments. This counterintuitive perspective challenges conventional wisdom and underscores Kotkin's skill in reevaluating historical narratives through meticulous research and analysis. The book is a concise yet impactful study that complements his broader work on Stalin and Soviet history, providing insights into the complexity of Soviet society and the myriad factors that led to its eventual dissolution.

Kotkin critically evaluates commonly held beliefs that point to increased military expenditure and central planning failures as the crux of the Soviet Union's downfall, suggesting that the nation was, in actuality, “lethargically stable” and could have “continued muddling on for quite some time”.<sup>67</sup> He shifts the focus to a series of reform attempts initiated by Khrushchev's movement away from Stalinist policies and reaching a zenith with Gorbachev's implementation of perestroika, glasnost, and democratization—measures aimed at revitalizing a system fundamentally resistant to change. Kotkin argues that merely pinpointing the Soviet collapse to these elements, regardless of how persuasively they are presented, is inadequate, as it does not fully address lingering queries. Questions about why the reforms were pursued in the first place, the lack of resistance from Soviet elites, and the impact of the Soviet legacy on these reforms are considered to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Soviet Union's precipitous decline.

In the initial two chapters of his book, Kotkin delves into the rationale behind the reforms, deeming the well-documented superpower rivalry following World War II as not central to his

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<sup>67</sup> Kotkin (2008), p. 2.

analysis. Kotkin states that the Soviet Union posited itself as a socialist experiment, a purportedly superior alternative to capitalism, and he asserts that if socialism failed to outdo capitalism, the Soviet Union's very existence would be indefensible.<sup>68</sup> According to his analysis, it was this competition between ideologies, that the Soviet Union ultimately lost, that led to the Union's demise. As the Western economies expanded and the Soviet economy foundered—exacerbated by the burdens of sustaining satellite states and environmental degradation—the impetus for change became evident. Moreover, the Soviet Union was confronted with a grim reality: socialism was falling short of its own proclaimed ideals.

Mikhail Gorbachev emerges in Kotkin's narrative as the pivotal figure willing to embark on these reforms. Kotkin characterizes Gorbachev as a genuine believer, suggesting that Gorbachev's commitment stemmed from having been a witness to various Marxist and Soviet successes, such as Sputnik, manned space flight, and the political shifts in China and Cuba. This conviction led Gorbachev to pursue reforms with a resolve not satisfied by mere stability. With a population that maintained a robust adherence to socialism, despite worsening conditions, Gorbachev had the political acumen, unlike Khrushchev, to carry forward these reforms.

In the third and fourth chapters of his book, Kotkin navigates through the complexities of the Soviet reform attempts, adeptly managing the line between granular specifics and broader strokes. He articulates the shortcomings of the Soviet Union's economic reforms, which left the nation in a state of partial transition, described as an "economic halfway house."<sup>69</sup> Autonomy was superficially extended to state enterprises, yet they lacked the power to adjust workforce size or integrate cost considerations into pricing, with the priority placed on production volume. This led to prices that failed to mirror actual scarcities, reluctance towards new technologies, and poor product quality. Even in the face of these economic frustrations, Gorbachev was hesitant to embrace the radical reforms that would have significantly shifted the Soviet economic landscape towards private ownership and market resource distribution. Amid the economic turmoil, the transparency brought on by glasnost began to erode the vestiges of faith in the socialist doctrine and its supposed superiority.

Kotkin contends that Gorbachev's reforms were perilous, more so than Gorbachev himself could have estimated, due to the absence of an ideological fallback. Khrushchev could attribute the shortcomings of socialism to Stalin's deviations, suggesting a return to "Leninism" would be corrective. In contrast, Gorbachev's acknowledgment of socialism's need for reform led to the inevitable inference that the ideology was fundamentally defective. Ultimately, the Soviet

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 62 also see p. 67.

Union found itself unable to sustain the burdens of superpower competition. With an ailing economy and a discredited ideology, it retreated from Afghanistan and relinquished control over Eastern Europe. In August 1991, conservative forces attempted to re-establish the old regime, but their efforts collapsed as Boris Yeltsin symbolically defied them atop a Soviet tank.

The Soviet Union fragmented, culminating in Gorbachev's official dissolution of the union in December 1991, an end to its 74-year history. The story continues in chapters five and six, where Kotkin chronicles the aftermath and continued decline that ensued. Yeltsin's Russia grappled with the promise of a market economy despite Yeltsin's own lack of understanding of it. The transformation was tumultuous, with ex-Soviet elites fashioning a distorted version of capitalism to their advantage, a process marred by widespread corruption.

Many scholars chronicling the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the termination of the Cold War typically portray these events as abrupt and unforeseen, emphasizing their sudden nature and the general lack of anticipation. However, Stephen Kotkin's narrative diverges from this common starting point. In his preface, Kotkin reveals his prior conviction, well before the events of 1991, that the Soviet Union and its socialist structure were being inadvertently undermined by Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of perestroika. For Kotkin, the collapse was neither abrupt nor unexpected:

Virtually everyone seems to think the Soviet Union was collapsing before 1985. They are wrong. Most people also think the Soviet collapse ended in 1991. Wrong again. These points become readily apparent when one examines the period 1970–2000 as an integrated whole, tracing the arc of Soviet economic and political institutions before and after 1991, and when one combines a view from deep inside the system with a sober sense of the precise role of the wider context.<sup>70</sup>

The second remark on the end of the Soviet collapse, will be an important point of Kotkin's work as well, as we will see later on.

The central thesis of Kotkin's work, maintained from its original publication in 2001 through to its revised edition in 2008, challenges the academic discourse on the Soviet Union's potential for reform. Kotkin suggests that the question should not have been whether the Soviet system was capable of reforming, but rather whether such reform was viable in a world that had seen capitalism profoundly reshaped after World War II. Under these unique conditions, he argues, socialist reform was destined to end in collapse.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

Kotkin attributes the beginning of the Soviet Union's downfall to the illusory notion of "socialism with a human face."<sup>71</sup> He contends that it was the inherent contradictions of communist ideology, in the face of a more dominant capitalist first world, that precipitated the downfall of the second world. While socialism had evidently lost its competitive edge to the West, Kotkin believes that this did not seal its fate. Instead, the demise became inevitable only when attempts were made to humanize socialism, a concept that, according to Kotkin, originated not with Gorbachev but during the Khrushchev era:

This humanist vision of reform emerged in the post- Stalin years, under Nikita Khrushchev, and it stamped an entire generation—a generation, led by Mikhail Gorbachev, that lamented the crushing of the 1968 Prague Spring and that came to power in Moscow in 1985. They believed the planned economy could be reformed essentially without introducing full private property or market prices. They believed relaxing censorship would increase the population's allegiance to socialism. They believed the Communist Party could be democratized. "They were mistaken. Perestroika, unintentionally, destroyed the planned economy, the allegiance to Soviet socialism, and, in the end, the party, too. And the blow to the party unhinged the Union, which the party alone had held together."<sup>72</sup>

In examining the actions of Gorbachev and his supporters, Kotkin does not question their conviction in perestroika or their genuine belief in the possibility of reform. Instead, he inquires why the broader Soviet elite, many of whom were skeptical of perestroika, permitted the dismantling of the system. The central enigma Kotkin explores is the failure of the extensive Soviet elite to safeguard socialism and the Union.<sup>73</sup>

Distinctively, Kotkin rejects the notion that the Soviet Union's dissolution in December 1991 marked the end of its collapse, deeming such an idea as simplistic. He contends that it was not until around the year 2000 that the extensive effects of the Soviet disintegration had been fully

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 181.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p.2.

<sup>73</sup> We see Vladimir Pechatnov asking himself a similar question in his part of the roundtable with Zubok et al. *A Cold War endgame or an opportunity missed? Analyzing the Soviet collapse Thirty years later, The System Was Unable to Defend Itself*. He wonders why the Soviet system, in this case the nomenklatura part, did not defend itself. I will elaborate on this later on in the analysis of the works.

realized.<sup>74</sup> The post-Soviet Russian Federation bore the legacies of its predecessor, inheriting its societal and economic structures and institutional functions. The issues that underlined the Soviet Union's failure persisted and needed resolution beyond the official dissolution date. Hence, Kotkin extends his analysis of the Soviet collapse beyond 1991 to include the subsequent decade.

The narrative arc of Kotkin's work begins in the 1970s and spans three decades, focusing on elite dynamics and structural factors. Kotkin encapsulates his analysis by examining the interplay between political elites and the structural forces at play during this transformative period in history:

Rather, the analysis focuses on elites, and proceeds in terms of structural considerations: a Communist Party generation, led by Mikhail Gorbachev, profoundly shaped by socialist idealism, which emerged to the fore when the previous leadership finally died off; the worldview and hopes of 285 million people living within the socialist ideological space; the planned economy and its cost-unconscious, oppressively heavy-industrial physical plant; and, especially, the institutional dynamics of the Soviet state and of the Russian state. Since there is no history without contingency, the narrative also spotlights the attempts to articulate and implement policies, and their unexpected consequences. Ultimately, though, the Soviet collapse and post-Soviet Russia's contradictory first decade would remain inexplicable except as part of broad changes in the world during and after the Second World War. Mine is therefore both a historical and a geopolitical analysis.<sup>75</sup>

In the inaugural chapter, Kotkin elucidates the genesis of the Soviet Union's structural economic woes. The early 20th century saw the USSR's oil production significantly trailing behind

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<sup>74</sup> Indeed, some scholars challenged the historical accuracy of the very notion of a "collapse" of the Soviet Union. Glennys Young (2007), for example, in his "Fetishizing the Soviet Collapse: Historical Rupture and the Historiography of (Early) Soviet Socialism," examines the complex relationship between the historiography of the Soviet Union and the nation's "collapse", arguing against the overemphasis or "fetishization" of the Soviet collapse's impact on historical studies. Young suggests that the collapse has been given undue credit for paradigm shifts and thematic changes in the field, which, in reality, began evolving before the Soviet Union's dissolution. Young points out that while there is a consensus on viewing the Soviet collapse as a catalyst for historiographical change, there is less clarity on what the collapse precisely entails, its timeline, and its exact impact on historical research. The author proposes that instead of "collapse," the term "Soviet dismantlement" more accurately describes the process, emphasizing human agency in the systematic dismantling of Soviet structures rather than their spontaneous disintegration. See Chapter 3 for further discussion of this point.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.9.

global standards. However, the serendipitous discovery of oil fields in Siberia, alongside the economic ramifications of the Arab-Israeli War and subsequent oil crisis, precipitated an unexpected economic surge for the Soviet Union. This boon enabled a vast military expansion, protracting the Cold War. Kotkin conjectures that without this fortuitous find, the Soviet Union's collapse might have occurred sooner. By 1986, the dwindling Siberian oil yields and plummeting oil prices began to exert severe pressure on the Soviet economy, exacerbating the chronic energy deficits rooted in its inefficient, heavily industrialized economy. Kotkin's analysis extends beyond economic factors, arguing that the downfall of the Soviet Union was inextricably linked to the architecture of its political institutions and governance.

The Soviet Union in the 1980s grappled with not just economic struggles but also a profound geopolitical contest with the United States and its allies. It was incumbent upon the Soviet regime to exemplify the virtues of socialism as a superior system to capitalism across various domains.

In the interwar period, capitalism was marred by connotations of imperialism, conflict, and economic distress. In stark contrast, the post-World War II era saw capitalism flourish, characterized by economic prosperity, the emergence of welfare states, and strides in democratic governance.

Despite efforts to leverage the postwar decolonization movement, the Soviet Union's endeavors were largely unsuccessful. Comprised of fifteen nationally distinct republics, the Soviet Union experienced a burgeoning of national institutions and identities within these territories. As the 1970s unfolded, and former Western colonies advanced towards sovereignty, the Soviet Union's portrayal of itself as a more enlightened imperial force grew increasingly anachronistic. Its dominion over Eastern Europe, once a seeming asset, evolved into a liability. The socialist doctrine's destiny was increasingly linked to the political climates within Eastern Bloc nations. Historical crises such as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the labor upheavals in Poland further punctuated this narrative. The 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia particularly undermined the Soviet Union's global image, highlighting the challenges of maintaining hegemony over its satellite states.

At first, the oil crisis seemed a significant setback for capitalist economies, yet it ultimately served as a catalyst for vital structural reforms. In contrast, the Soviet Union lacked the immediacy for such transformation. Without the radical reforms that capitalism underwent, socialism faced a long-term disadvantage due to economic stagnation and an institutional framework resistant to necessary adjustments.

Kotkin argues that while Gorbachev championed perestroika as a dire need<sup>76</sup>, it was arguably not so. Despite its underperformance relative to Western economies, the Soviet planned economy maintained full employment, and while the standard of living did not meet expectations, it was manageable. The Soviet Union maintained a semblance of stability, with nationalist movements and dissent seemingly under control. Perestroika was borne not solely from concrete socioeconomic challenges but also from a psychological shift among the Soviet leadership—a combination of alarm at Western progress, chagrin at their own relative underdevelopment, and the beginnings of internal disloyalty. It was this erosion of confidence and burgeoning elite corruption that set the stage for the call to reform

Kotkin elucidates that the impetus for perestroika was not solely a response to superpower rivalry. Instead, it was a profound compulsion to fulfill socialism's potential, rejuvenate the Communist Party, and revive the foundational tenets of the October Revolution that significantly influenced both the initiation of perestroika and its definitive form.

In the second chapter, Kotkin presents the argument that Gorbachev's aspirations and philosophies were not aberrant but were, in fact, the culmination of a shift in mindset that began during Khrushchev's tenure. Gorbachev was a natural progression of the Soviet system's evolution in the 1980s, often celebrated as a 'reformer' in the vein of Khrushchev. Kotkin contends that the notions of reform and a more 'humane socialism' were not foreign to the Soviet ideology. Under Gorbachev, these concepts would inadvertently catalyze the system's collapse.<sup>77</sup>

Further, Kotkin delineates the transformative measures implemented by Gorbachev upon his ascent to power. He describes Gorbachev's fervent belief in reform as a necessary salvation for both the Union and socialist doctrine. Gorbachev managed to persuade fellow Party members that the perils of non-reform outweighed those associated with reform. Among the reforms was a critical focus on restructuring the Party itself.

Kotkin elucidates that the superpower rivalry was not the sole impetus for perestroika; it was also driven by a profound desire to fulfill socialism's promises, rejuvenate the party, and revive the venerable ideals that sparked the October Revolution. This desire influenced both the inception of perestroika and the particular form it adopted.<sup>78</sup>

In the second chapter, Kotkin presents the notion that Gorbachev's aspirations and vision were not aberrations but rather the culmination of a shifting mindset that began in the Khrushchev era, marking the Soviet system's evolution in the 1980s. Gorbachev, lauded as a "reformer" akin

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p.57.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 174.

to Khrushchev, embodied the era's zeitgeist. However, Kotkin posits that the very Soviet system that gave rise to these reformist and "humane socialism" ideals would, in Gorbachev's hands, precipitate its collapse.

Subsequently, Kotkin depicts the reforms initiated by Gorbachev upon his ascendancy to power. He narrates Gorbachev's determination to implement reforms, persuaded that it was the singular route to salvage the Union and socialism. He managed to convince fellow Party members that the perils of not reforming the system eclipsed those associated with its reformation, which included reforms directed at the Party itself.

Kotkin points out that despite their well-intentioned nature, many economic reforms exacerbated the situation. Misjudgments, ill-advised investments draining substantial funds, and fiascos like the anti-alcohol campaign inflicted further damage on an already faltering economy.

Simultaneously, the reforms assailed the political framework. Democracy, having become "atrophied," necessitated revitalization through competitive elections and the establishment of a new legislative body, the "Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union," intended to dilute the Communist Party's dominance. Gorbachev's insistence on these changes stemmed from his belief that "conservative" Party elements were stalling the reforms. Yet, Kotkin suggests that<sup>79</sup> it was perestroika itself that was undermining the system and, ultimately, orchestrating its demise. He portrays Gorbachev as someone either unwilling or unable to discern the unfolding reality, attributing the failure of his reforms not to opposition within the political spectrum, but to the inherent flaws of perestroika:

Thus, the "real drama of reform," obscured by fixation on the conservatives, featured a virtuoso tactician's unwitting, yet extraordinarily deft dismantling of the Soviet system—from the planned economy, to the ideological legitimacy for socialism, to the Union. Well into 1990, as calls for an overthrow of the regime multiplied and republic legislatures passed laws superseding those of the USSR, Gorbachev continued to state publicly that the principal obstacle to "reform" was opposition by "conservatives." This was after Eastern Europe had imploded.<sup>80</sup>

Over several decades, Eastern Europe's endeavors illustrated that reforms aimed at refining the socialist planning system—while retaining a fundamental opposition to the "exploitation" perceived in private property—did not merely falter but precipitated systemic upheaval. This was

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. pp. 76-77.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 85.



especially true when juxtaposed with capitalism's post-WWII resurgence and the difficult task of merging increased press and civic freedoms with the Communist Party's dominance. Gorbachev, an embodiment of the Soviet archetype, earnestly pursued a more humane socialism, yet his initiatives inadvertently unraveled the very fabric of the system he sought to improve.

Rather than a simple dichotomy of reformists versus conservatives, the true narrative complexity lay in Gorbachev's nuanced deconstruction of Soviet structures, spanning economic, political, and ideological spheres. Despite the clamor for a regime overhaul, he publicly denoted conservative factions as the main impediment to "reform", seemingly disregarding the disintegration occurring within Eastern Europe.

During the 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev orchestrated a pivotal redirection of Soviet foreign policy, advocating for the Eastern European satellite states to pursue independent courses. This policy shift, aimed at alleviating burdens on the Soviet Union, represented a stark deviation from the Brezhnev Doctrine's forceful tactics to uphold socialist regimes. Gorbachev's strategy facilitated a gradual disengagement from Afghanistan and sought to diffuse tensions with the West, eventually leading to arms reduction agreements and a thaw in relations with the United States, which had formerly denounced the Soviet Union as an "evil empire."

However, the domestic reforms of perestroika and glasnost began to yield unforeseen consequences. In Poland, the Solidarity movement exploited the newly permitted political openness to dislodge the Communist Party in semi-free elections. In East Germany, popular dissent and migration, spurred by the liberalizing policies, culminated in the nation's unification within NATO. Kotkin highlights the paradox that Gorbachev's aspiration for a "common European home" inadvertently precipitated the Soviet Union's marginalization from the European stage.<sup>81</sup>

The effects of Gorbachev's noninterventionist stance rippled into the Soviet republics, with Lithuania's declaration of independence in March 1990 igniting a chain of similar actions by other republics. The period from mid-1990 to mid-1991 was marked by political volatility, with Gorbachev's proposed Union Treaty facing internal opposition and leaving a wide spectrum of outcomes, from forceful suppression to consensual disbandment. With the Soviet military and its formidable nuclear arsenal at his disposal, Gorbachev's commitment to a peaceful resolution was not the sole conceivable path, and yet it became the historical outcome.

In 1990, Boris Yeltsin emerged as a key proponent of democratic values and market-oriented reforms, setting himself apart from Mikhail Gorbachev's approach to leadership. Yeltsin's rise to political prominence was marked by his electoral victory and subsequent appointment as

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

the chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet. While Gorbachev aimed to maintain the Soviet Union's integrity through a referendum in March 1991, Yeltsin initiated a Russian presidential election, thereby securing a robust mandate for change. The ensuing negotiations for a Union Treaty in April 1991 culminated in an accord that decentralized power to the republics and endorsed their voluntary association with the Union. Despite these efforts, certain officials were adamantly opposed to the disintegration of the Union.

This opposition culminated in a coup attempt in 1991, with military leaders confining Gorbachev to his Crimean dacha and establishing a State Emergency Committee to seize emergency control in a bid to restore order. However, the coup was plagued by ineffective coordination, hesitant military actions, and a lackluster media strategy, ultimately leading to its failure. Yeltsin's decisive leadership in rallying resistance from Moscow was instrumental during this crisis. As Gorbachev's power waned, he conceded to Yeltsin's pressure, acknowledging the independence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The abortive coup inadvertently accelerated the very outcome it sought to avert: the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In his analysis, Kotkin elucidates how perestroika catalyzed political liberalization, freedom of the press, and the initiation of competitive elections. Gorbachev's reluctance to fully transition to a market economy and his opposition to dissolving the Communist Party were rooted in his dedication to a vision of socialism that was reformed rather than abandoned, and a hesitancy to use military force for political suppression. Kotkin posits that the crux of the Soviet Union's collapse was inherent in the state's structure and a failure to curtail the exploitation of this framework.

Ultimately, the disintegration was precipitated not by the independence movements of satellite states but by the actions of the Soviet Union's central elite.<sup>82</sup> The coup's failure presented the elite with a stark choice: persist in the struggle for the Union at the risk of losing everything or pivot to the emergent Russian Federation as a safer harbor, potentially securing personal gains. The demise of the Soviet Union, therefore, was less a victory for democracy than a scramble for power and assets by officials. This pattern of power grab was mirrored in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and other constituent republics of the Union, highlighting a broader dynamic of self-preservation and opportunism among the ruling elite.<sup>83</sup>

In the tumultuous period surrounding the 1991 coup, all Soviet republics, with the exception of Russia, declared their independence. Under Boris Yeltsin's leadership, Russia sought to position itself as the legal successor of the Union, engaging in negotiations with Mikhail

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p.107.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. pp. 107-8 see also pp. 115-6.

Gorbachev. Meanwhile, other republics, notably Ukraine and Belarus, played significant roles in further destabilizing the Union. The creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) symbolized the formal end of the Soviet Union. Despite Gorbachev's appeals for military support, the armed forces threw their support behind Yeltsin. On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev resigned, and the Soviet flag was lowered, replaced by the Russian tricolor, marking the end of his tenure and the beginning of Yeltsin's ascendancy, underpinned by his electoral legitimacy.

Gorbachev's inability to rejuvenate the Soviet system contrasted with Yeltsin's capacity to dismantle the mechanisms of a repressive state. Kotkin critically observes that Gorbachev had the option to declare martial law but refrained from doing so.<sup>84</sup> He suggests that Gorbachev was taken aback by how his initiatives for socialist renewal inadvertently precipitated the disintegration of the system, leading him to passively accept the unfolding events. While Gorbachev later characterized his non-intervention as a deliberate strategy, Kotkin remains skeptical of this rationale.

In the subsequent chapter, Kotkin presents a narrative that continues to interrogate the political continuum. He asserts that before Gorbachev's tenure, the inherent contradictions of Communism were already manifesting, particularly in its inability to regulate its own party members. Despite the dissolution of the party's direct role in state governance and the initiation of democratic reforms during Yeltsin's time, the Russian government was plagued by a level of unabashed bureaucratic self-interest that surpassed even the Brezhnev era.

Russia faced the monumental task of reforming an expansive executive branch, a vestige of the Soviet system. The real struggle entailed not only reducing the sheer number of officials but also transforming their entrenched behaviors, and thoroughly reforming key institutions such as the Procuracy, the KGB, and the judiciary. Although democratic processes were taking root, the remnants of the Soviet Union's anti-liberal state machinery presented formidable obstacles. The Russian state's power was simultaneously frail and unrestrained, hampered by the legacy of the executive branch's structural and behavioral proclivities, which stymied the nation's progression towards a liberal, market-oriented society. This chapter, akin to its predecessor, reveals that the challenges faced by post-Soviet Russia—and previously by the Soviet Union—were deeply embedded in structural deficiencies, making governance an exceedingly arduous endeavor.

In the subsequent chapter, Kotkin explores the subtleties of Boris Yeltsin's presidency, highlighting the diminished authority he wielded. This limitation was partly due to his unpredictable leadership and partly due to the enduring political structures. Kotkin draws parallels between the constrained efficacy experienced by Yeltsin and the impediments faced by Gorbachev during the twilight years of the Soviet Union. He suggests that the structural complexities inherited

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p. 112.

from the Soviet Union not only made governance arduous during Yeltsin's tenure but must have also presented comparable challenges for Gorbachev.

The narrative concludes that Russia's post-Soviet trajectory was significantly affected by the legacy of its Soviet institutional framework, which slowed and complicated the country's transition.

Kotkin then contextualizes this within the broader historical narrative, tracing back to the disintegration of the Russian Empire during the First World War and the emergence of the USSR. He underscores the eventual decline of the Soviet Union, which, despite its territorial and political gains in the Second World War, could not withstand the systemic pressures it faced during the Cold War competition with the United States.<sup>85</sup>

Kotkin attributes the defeat of Soviet socialism on the global stage not to the extravagant expenditures of the 'Star Wars' program but rather to the resolute bipartisan strategy of containment and the economic and societal triumphs of capitalist democracies post-World War II. He highlights that the standard of living and political systems provided by Soviet socialism were inferior to those in the West.

Moreover, Kotkin suggests that prior to Gorbachev's perestroika, the Soviet Union was in decline but not beyond salvage. "It was falling behind," Kotkin states, "but it could have attempted a retrenchment without the upheaval of perestroika."<sup>86</sup>

Consequently, Kotkin posits that it was perestroika itself that precipitated the Soviet Union's collapse. What puzzles him is the significance of perestroika to Gorbachev and why he doggedly pursued it amidst the unfolding disintegration. He reflects on the reasons behind Gorbachev's unwavering commitment to perestroika even as the Soviet structure began to crumble:

If unbearable competition with the United States were the foremost concern that guided Soviet actions, why would the Soviet leader have exhausted himself trying to democratize the Communist Party? Why, having achieved deep disarmament, did he widen the political transformation and attempt to revive the radical-democratic system of soviets? Why, once it was clear that the survival of a centuries-old state was at stake, did the Soviet leader not employ the awesome force at his command and deliver a knock-out blow to the republican drives for independence?<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 172.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p. 173.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 173.

Kotkin offers a distinct interpretation of perestroika, arguing that it was not merely a strategy in the global rivalry but an effort to recapture the foundational aspirations of the October Revolution: a world rich with abundance, social justice, and genuine people's power—the cornerstone ideals of socialism.

China serves as a compelling contrast in this narrative. There were those who lamented that Gorbachev did not emulate China's model of reform. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese Communist Party strengthened its grip by cautiously embracing market dynamics while retaining strict political repression. However, China did not face the monumental task of modernizing what was effectively the world's largest collection of outdated industrial equipment.

Nonetheless, Kotkin suggests that China's trajectory further corroborates that the pursuit of 'socialism with a human face' catalyzed the Soviet collapse.<sup>88</sup> The Soviet Union's reforms were not led by a pragmatist in the vein of Deng or Beria but by an individual who, in the spirit of Khrushchev, was a sincere believer in socialism. This leader was prepared to dilute central power for the sake of party democracy yet harbored ideological reservations about fully embracing capitalism.

The birth of socialism as non-capitalism, its dependence on the image of capitalism, changing geopolitics, and the impact of lifting censorship played pivotal roles. The Soviet administrative structure's bifurcation, the unitary-federal nature of the USSR, and the ideological endurance of the October revolution's ideals contributed to perestroika's unforeseen consequences.

Perestroika achieved more than anticipated, surpassing even U.S. national security fantasies. The peaceful end of the Cold War and the geopolitics post-1991 were poorly understood in Washington, raising questions about potential U.S. responses to different Soviet actions. The complex factors behind the Cold War's conclusion and the subsequent geopolitics were not fully comprehended by both Republicans and Democrats in Washington. Kotkin maintains that Gorbachev was an idealist, with a sincere belief in socialism, as a result of the system from which he came forth.

Gorbachev's ideological evolution from a young Stalinist at Moscow University to a reformist leader was influenced by his generation's shift away from Stalinism. Gorbachev's rise to power resulted from an inescapable generational change in party leadership. According to Kotkin, the ideals of the October Revolution, emphasizing abundance, social justice, and people's power,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. pp. 180-1.

influenced Boris Yeltsin's anti-Communist populism. Glasnost revealed that these ideals, deeply embedded in Soviet institutions, were both unrealized and unrealizable. Despite varying sentiments among the population, the late 1980s witnessed a passionate hope, rooted in the separation of the Communist Party from Soviet power and justice.

Gorbachev tapped into this hope during the 1989 Congress of People's Deputies, captivating the country. Yeltsin, continuing this trajectory, promised these ideals without the Communist Party, garnering widespread support. Yeltsin's sincerity in launching his populist crusade was apparent, but he lacked an understanding of post-Communism, facing challenges when attempting to rule with a group of inexperienced "democrats".

Yeltsin's rule became a conduit for remnants of Soviet-era institutions, hindering the realization of revolutionary ideals. The transformation of the elite, coupled with increased venality among office-holders, showcased the socio-political structures that had long-held dreams for a better world. Yeltsin's fluctuating popularity demonstrated the deep-seated desire for a more just world, contributing to the unexpected, relatively peaceful dissolution of the Soviet system.

Kotkin again mentions how China's model of reforms under Deng, maintaining the party's monopoly while allowing market behavior, is often regretted as a path not taken by Gorbachev. However, China faced different circumstances, with a predominantly peasant population and substantial foreign investments. The Chinese example supports the notion that socialism with a human face played a pivotal role in the Soviet collapse, as opposed to a ruthless pragmatist approach. The choice of a Khrushchevian true-believer for Soviet reforms, hesitant to fully embrace capitalism for ideological reasons, further shaped the trajectory of the dissolution.

Despite the deepening militarization and challenges within the armed forces, the collapse of the USSR did not involve a cynical foreign war or the feared pre-emptive Soviet first strike. Gorbachev's handling of Eastern Europe marked a significant shift, relinquishing control over Berlin and other territories in exchange for cash, credits, and empty promises of partnership. Potkin ponders how the potential for a more forceful response from Moscow, or malicious actions after the situation became unsalvageable, could have led to a different, potentially bloodier outcome.

The complacency surrounding the Soviet collapse led to outsiders, particularly the Reagan and (first) Bush administrations, pirating credit for it. President Clinton's administration, initially eager to guide Russia's transition, found its self-promotion embarrassing as Russia struggled to achieve liberal reform and a secure market economy. The West's self-assigned role in promoting Russia's transition fueled anti-Western sentiment internally and anti-Russian sentiment abroad.

Kotkin does not finish his narrative here but continues with an analysis of what happened

in Russia. Russia's reform challenges extended beyond macroeconomic stabilization to the creation of new state capacity, he explains, given the massive and dysfunctional Soviet-era anti-liberal state.

The Soviet collapse was a societal collapse, not an overthrow, and post-Soviet Russia continued to slide throughout the 1990s. The deterioration was evident in the decay of hospitals, schools, and infrastructure. Russia faced challenges in handling its Soviet-era prison complexes, combating alcoholism, and addressing environmental issues. In the epilogue of the book Kotkin summarizes the point he has been making during it. According to him, academics that studied the Soviet Union and its collapse had been asking themselves the wrong question:

In the post-Stalin era, the big riddle had seemed to be, could the Soviet Union reform? This question was badly posed. It should have been as follows: given the transformation of the capitalist world as a result of World War II away from fascism and great depression toward democracy and middle class consumerism, could Soviet socialism find a reform path that would make itself internationally more competitive and stable?<sup>89</sup>

The outcome, as vividly witnessed by the world between 1989 and 1991, was decisively negative. The attempted reform—aiming for a socialism that was more humane, imagined as a revival of Leninist principles—ultimately led to dissolution. China, however, demonstrated a stable Communist-led reform path by combining political control with a market economy, contrasting the Soviet establishment's unpreparedness.<sup>90</sup>

Kotkin thus seems to believe that the Soviet Union could have saved itself from collapse if they had tried to reform, as the Chinese did, without moving towards democracy but maintaining an authoritarian rule. If the Soviet Union would have *truly* returned to Leninism, not only towards its October Revolution ideals but to its authoritarianism as well, the Soviet Union would have survived.

### 3. *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* by Chris Miller (2016)

Chris Miller's *Struggle* provides a historical examination of Gorbachev's endeavors to salvage the Soviet economy. Miller scrutinizes why Gorbachev diverged from Deng Xiaoping's

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p. 213.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. pp. 180-182.

approach and failed to implement effective economic reforms. Contrary to conventional beliefs, Miller contends that Gorbachev's shortcomings were not due to a lack of comprehension or effort. Gorbachev attempted to enact agricultural and industrial enterprise reforms akin to Deng's, but encountered resistance from formidable vested interests. This failure to address influential lobbies ultimately led to the bankruptcy and collapse of the Soviet Union.

Contrary to prevailing arguments that perestroika was inherently flawed and thus led to the Soviet Union's demise, Miller adopts a different perspective. He challenges the narrative that Gorbachev should have initiated economic reforms before political changes. Miller asserts that Gorbachev's initiation of political reform was a necessity, as it was pivotal to overcoming resistance from economic interest groups. According to Miller, a faster and more decisive political reform might have facilitated genuine economic reforms.<sup>91</sup>

The book is structured into two parts. The first part dismantles the assumption that Gorbachev did not attempt to follow the Chinese economic transition model, providing a detailed account of the Soviet interest in China's approach. This section elucidates the Soviet power system based on interest groups, revealing why perestroika faced implementation challenges.

Comprising seven chapters, the book's initial three chapters lay the groundwork for Gorbachev's reforms. Miller delves into the Soviet elite's views on socialist economies, showcasing the government's awareness of Western and Eastern economic models. The third chapter crucially examines the political economy of Gorbachev's Soviet Union, outlining the composition and incentives of major interest groups.

The latter half of the book explores Gorbachev's attempts to confront these interest groups. Chapters 4 to 6 detail Gorbachev's enterprise reforms, efforts to emulate Chinese special economic zones, and endeavors to reform agriculture. In each case, Gorbachev aimed to enhance productivity, alleviate fiscal constraints, and uplift living standards.

The final chapter chronicles the USSR's fiscal crisis and collapse. Miller highlights that the fiscal crisis resulted not only from oil price shocks or the anti-alcohol campaign but primarily from a lack of resolve in addressing interest groups and maintaining fiscal discipline, coupled with basic economic incompetence.

Miller's book's significant contribution lies in its reliance on archival materials, particularly from Gorbachev's Politburo, transforming our understanding of the perestroika period. He challenges prevailing perceptions of Gorbachev's strength and positions him as just one actor within the fragmented Soviet political system. The book provocatively questions whether a transition to a market economy could have occurred without political reform, asserting the intertwined nature of

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<sup>91</sup> Miller (2016), p.4.



politics and economics in Soviet politics.

Miller's *Struggle* distinguishes itself because it analyzes the path of two big communist regimes and puts them against one another: that of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the People's Republic of China (hereafter USSR and PRC). As Miller continuously points out in his book, Gorbachev did not only want to reform the economy because he just wanted to save the economy and create greater material wealth for his citizens. He also wanted to change the political system of the Soviet Union towards a system with more freedom, with "Western values" like democracy and the freedom of expression.

For Gorbachev perestroika was based on the idea that market reforms should be mixed with democracy. Miller in his book compares this idea with the situation in the People's Republic of China at that time. The PRC was moving away from central planning and toward a market economy. Their leadership, however, would not move towards democracy as the tragic events of the Tiananmen Square Protests shows. The protesters that assembled on the Tiananmen Square embraced Gorbachev's ideals and his vision of connecting democratization with economic reforms. Miller describes how Gorbachev arrived in Beijing on May 15 in 1989 just two weeks before the leaders of the PCR would decide to crush the protests with violence. While Gorbachev was there, he held a speech:

*Gorbachev told his Chinese audience that "economic reform will not work unless supported by a radical transformation of the political system". This is why, he explained, the Soviet Union had held contested elections the previous month, for the first time in generations. "We are participating in a very serious turning point in the development of world socialism," Gorbachev explained, in which many socialist countries were embracing freedom of expression, protection of rights, and democracy.*<sup>92</sup>

Unfortunately, the Chinese leadership did not see things the same as Gorbachev did. The two regimes took different turns: while China decided to crack down on the protesters and would continue with its authoritarian system, Gorbachev was introducing freedom of press and multiparty elections that were supposed to pave the way to a more democratic system. After deciding to crush the protest the economy of the CPR took a small blow but quickly recovered. The economic situation in the USSR, on the other hand, was only getting worse and worse.

Was Gorbachev completely mistaken then, and were market reforms and democracy not supposed to go together? Should the USSR have taken the same path as the CPR and try to reform the economy without reforming the political system as well? Would the Soviet Union have had a

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p.2.

chance to endure, if Gorbachev would not have taken away the power from the Communist Party and let it continue to be an authoritarian state?

In his book Chris Millers analyzes the history of Gorbachev's reforms and gives an answer to these questions. He posits that authoritarian-style solutions like those in China would not have saved the Soviet Union. He believes that under different conditions that USSR might have endured. But he does not believe that perestroika was wrong and was the cause of the USSR's demise. He believed perestroika was never able to do what it was supposed to do because Gorbachev was never able to implement it completely, because he encountered fierce opposition to it at every turn.

One aspect that led to the implementation of perestroika in the first place was a school of thought called "new thinking". Miller describes that there had been a generational shift within the USSR's elite. Where the older generation of Soviet leaders were skeptical of outsiders and anything that reeked of "the West", the newer generation had been allowed to travel and even study abroad. Some authors theorize that these kinds of exposures to the West and its values have contributed to what was called "New Thinking", as for instance does Robert J. McMahon in *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction*. Gorbachev and his foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, advanced dramatic new ideas about security, nuclear weapons, and the relationship of both their highest priorities: domestic reform and the revitalization of socialism.

Influenced by a changing intellectual milieu in the Soviet Union, shaped in part by Soviet scientists and foreign policy experts with broad exposure to the West and close contact with their Western counterparts, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze injected "new thinking" into both the staid Kremlin leadership circle and the stalled Soviet-American dialogue.

"New Thinking" entailed among others ideas of democracy, the priority of universal human rights, and a mutual security that should be based on political instruments rather than military ones. This "New Thinking" resulted also in Gorbachev's idea of creating a Common European Home. As Miller points out:

To be sure, the liberal Soviet intelligentsia deeply admired the United States and Western Europe, and wished their country could become more tolerant, more sophisticated, and more - as they saw it - like the West. [...] But the intelligentsia constituted just one part of Soviet society.<sup>93</sup>

"New thinking" was the ideology behind the changes that Gorbachev wanted to instate, it

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p.11.

was the school of thought that had “birthed” perestroika so to say. An inherent part of this school of thought was the embracing of values of democracy and universal human rights. Continuing with authoritarian rule and not working towards democracy was simply out of the question.

Not only was the Chinese path not an option for the Soviets because of the ideas and principles that constituted their “new thinking”, Gorbachev realized that the political structure had to be reformed if he wanted to be able to implement his economic reforms. Miller posits that Gorbachev’s reforms failed because of the opposition he encountered from his political peers. Sure, there was the Russian intelligentsia who shared his ideology of “new thinking”, but not many in the Politburo shared in this ideology.

Miller shows in chapter 2 *Take Off or Leap Forward? Soviet Assessments of China after Mao* that the Soviet Union was not only looking at the West and for ideas on reforms, but that had been keeping a close eye on the East and their economic policies as well. He explains how the aim of many of the economic changes that Gorbachev instituted were similar to those in China. The problem was not the changes in itself but the circumstance in which Gorbachev was trying to implement them.

The USSR was facing a budget crisis that continued to get worse but that could not be addressed because the government was in a gridlock. “Political contests limited the extent to which the Soviet Union implemented the economic lessons that its analysts were gleaning from China’s experience”,<sup>94</sup> Miller explains. Gorbachev faced “serious political opposition” among members of the Politburo, a factor that earlier accounts of the collapse of the economy and therefore as a consequence the collapse of the Soviet Union itself, have not taken into account:

Previous accounts of the Soviet economic collapse have not consulted records from Gorbachev’s Politburo – the USSR’s top policymaking body. Given that the Politburo was the most influential organ in the Soviet government, this has left a gaping hole in historians’ grasp of the Soviet economic policy. Drawing on these Politburo sources transforms our understanding of the politics and economics of the perestroika period. Above all, they shed light on the brutal political struggle at the heart of the Soviet state – clashes that Mikhail Gorbachev, who was nominally in charge of the Soviet Communist Party, often lost.<sup>95</sup>

Gorbachev tried to implement his reforms but there were powerful interest groups that

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 55.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p.8.

obstructed these policies. The three huge lobbies from the military-industrial complex, agriculture, and the industries did not want to give up on the huge parts of the budget that were allocated to them. “By the time Gorbachev came to power, the Soviet system had given power to a new ruling class: generals, collective farm managers, and industrial bosses, all of whom benefitted from waste and inefficiency,” Miller explains. “They dominated the Communist Party and hijacked its policymaking process, so that by the 1980s, there was no longer a boundary between industrial lobbies and the Communist Party itself.”<sup>96</sup> This explains why Gorbachev embraced political reform as well, why Gorbachev would introduce reforms that would take away power from the Communist Party. Political liberalization would be a means to take away a huge part of the influence that these lobbies had. “Democracy, Gorbachev told the Politburo, “guarantees our chosen path” by redistributing power away from the bureaucracy and entrenched interests, and toward representatives of the people.”<sup>97</sup>

Miller has thus shown, with his analysis of the archives, that what caused economic problems were not the economic reforms of perestroika, but the resistance to it, which meant it could not be implemented to the fullest. The sectors that mostly needed change, in order to address the deficit problem, were the ones with the most influence and the most unwillingness to change. The people in charge of these sectors did not want to give up on any of their perks and advantages. The only thing that could diminish the tremendous influence of the military, industry and agriculture sector was if the power of the Communist Party, which ruled these sectors, would greatly be restricted. With his political reforms Gorbachev did manage to take away the power from the Communist Party; unfortunately for him this led to a weakening of the whole system which eventually caused, among other factors, the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In other narratives on the collapse of the Soviet Union we have seen the importance that scholars ascribe to Gorbachev as a main figure and cause of the Union’s demise. Whether it was his personality, his perestroika, his unwillingness to use force, or a combination of all factors, Gorbachev is the culprit. Miller gives us a different explanation of what happened in these events. According to him Gorbachev was just one actor who actually yielded way less power than almost anyone realized. His attempts to reform were hindered at every turn by other members of the Communist Party who had a lot to lose and nothing to gain from them: “The Soviet system proved unreformable not because its economic problems were insurmountable, but because it entrusted vast political power to groups that had every reason to sabotage efforts to resolve the country’s economic dilemmas.”

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 182-3.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 180.

The CPR did not have any issues implementing their economic reforms because the political circumstances as well as their economic structure were very different from those in the USSR. Most importantly, they did not have a presence of immensely potent lobbies that could obstruct policy decisions. Therefore, USSR's economy could not be saved because of its political paralysis: a turn towards a more authoritarian rule would not have helped overcome this paralysis that was itself a product of an actual political system based on authoritarian rule.

What caused the demise of the Soviet Union according to Miller was not Gorbachev and his perestroika, or "New Thinking", but the political paralysis that was inherent to the Soviet system, which produced powerful forces that opposed the economic reform that Gorbachev was trying to instate.

#### 4. *Post Wall, Post Square: How Bush, Gorbachev, Kohl, and Deng Shaped the World after 1989* by Kristina Spohr (2020)

Kristina Spohr's groundbreaking *Post-Wall* offers a profound reevaluation of the period following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and its enduring ramifications for the contemporary global order. As an eminent scholar specializing in the International History of Germany since 1945, with a keen interest in summitry, statecraft, and Contemporary History, Dr. Spohr brings a unique perspective to her analysis of this transformative era. Drawing upon an extensive array of newly declassified archival sources from both the Western and Eastern blocs, Spohr presents a comprehensive account of how a new European order emerged in the wake of the Cold War, characterized by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany.

One of the central arguments advanced by Spohr is that the post-wall world was largely shaped by interactive diplomacy among a select group of international leaders, rather than through major conflicts akin to previous transformative moments in history. From Mikhail Gorbachev and George H.W. Bush to Margaret Thatcher and Francois Mitterrand, these leaders engaged in intense negotiations and cooperative efforts to adapt Western institutions of the Cold War era, such as NATO and the European Community, to forge unity across the continent. Through her meticulous analysis, Spohr underscores the pivotal role played by diplomacy in reshaping Europe, emphasizing the global context within which these developments unfolded.

Moreover, Spohr emphasizes the interconnectedness of events in Europe and Asia, contrasting the peaceful transitions in Berlin and Moscow with the brutal suppression of the pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square under Deng Xiaoping's regime. By weaving together these disparate timelines, Spohr illuminates the shared historical underpinnings of contemporary global challenges, from the rise of authoritarian leaders like Putin and Xi to the fragmentation of

the European Union and the crisis of mass migration. She argues that the roots of these developments can be traced back to the pivotal years of 1989-1992, highlighting the enduring significance of this period in shaping the present-day geopolitical landscape.

Furthermore, Spohr's study offers a nuanced reassessment of key leaders and their contributions to the end of the Cold War. While figures like George H.W. Bush, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Margaret Thatcher have received considerable attention, Spohr also shines a light on lesser-known actors who played significant roles in this historical moment. Through her detailed examination of diplomatic events from 1989 to 1992, Spohr reveals the complex interplay of interests and dynamics that ultimately led to the transformation of Europe and the wider world.

Central to Spohr's argument is the recognition of the dual nature of the events of 1989, marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the violent suppression of dissent in Tiananmen Square. By examining these disparate but interconnected developments, Spohr sheds light on the complex dynamics that characterized this period of transition. Drawing on newly available documentation, she uncovers the human stories behind these historic events, providing readers with a vivid portrayal of the individuals and decisions that shaped the course of history.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, Spohr situates the events of 1989-1992 within a broader historical context, emphasizing their enduring significance for the contemporary world. She argues that the collapse of the Cold War order and the emergence of a new world order were intricately linked to the developments of this period. Through her insightful analysis, Spohr demonstrates how the decisions made and the conflicts resolved during these years continue to reverberate in today's geopolitical landscape.

The swift and comprehensive change that occurred in 1989-91, leading to the collapse of the Cold War order, caught international leaders off guard. Unlike their preparedness for fictional scenarios of nuclear Armageddon or managing a competitive coexistence between blocs, they were unprepared for the actual ending of the Cold War. This book delves into why a seemingly stable world order collapsed and how a new order emerged from its ruins. It explores the decisions and paths taken by key statesmen who grappled with understanding and controlling the new forces at work. These leaders, primarily from the same generation born between 1924 and 1931, shared a memory of the fragility of peace due to their experience during World War II.

The focus is on the conservative diplomacy that reshaped the world in 1990-91, adapting Cold War institutions to a new era.<sup>99</sup> Led by the West, particularly US President George Bush, and supported by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, this process aimed to reorient the Soviet Union's ideology towards shared Western values. The resulting cooperation between the US and USSR

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<sup>98</sup> Spohr (2019). pp. 63-64, see also p. 122 and pp. 192-193.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p.4.

culminated in unprecedented collaboration during the Gulf War<sup>100</sup>, heralding what was described as the "New World Order". However, this partnership was fragile, overly reliant on the personal relationship between Bush and Gorbachev. With the USSR's collapse in 1991, Bush had to engage with Boris Yeltsin, who faced the challenge of transitioning Russia to capitalist democracy.

The geopolitical upheaval extended beyond Europe, affecting Asia as well. The US aimed to establish a global free-trading system, while Japan and China pursued their own economic ambitions. Meanwhile, in Europe, Yugoslavia's descent into war raised concerns about the Balkanization of the Soviet Union. Moscow's struggles with Ukraine over territory and the fate of the Soviet nuclear arsenal added to the complexity of the post-Cold War landscape.<sup>101</sup>

Overall, the book highlights the challenges and complexities faced by international leaders as they navigated the transition from the Cold War era to a new world order, reshaping geopolitics in the process.

The collapse of Soviet power in the early 1990s led to the emergence of "renegade" states asserting themselves globally. Despite the Kuwait War's conclusion in 1991, issues such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Kim Il-sung's North Korea with its covert nuclear program persisted. The year 1992, often overlooked in Cold War narratives, saw the emergence of enduring global challenges. The Cold War did not culminate in a clear victory for the United States, nor did the world adopt an American-centric model post-1991.<sup>102</sup>

The unification of Germany<sup>103</sup>, despite Margareth Thatcher's objection as illustrated by Spohr,<sup>104</sup> showcased the swiftness and effectiveness of international diplomacy, preserving and adapting key Western alliances like NATO and the European Community. Post-Wall stabilization efforts in Europe leaned towards conservative strategies,<sup>105</sup> utilizing existing Western institutions rather than crafting new ones. Despite aspirations for a pan-European security structure, the realities of post-Cold War politics favored Western-dominated frameworks.

As a consequence, the Western-Eastern asymmetry grew, leaving Russia marginalized and contributing to subsequent tensions under leaders like Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. The book draws on diverse archival sources to reconstruct key events and analyze macro-historical changes. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the geopolitical order of the late 1980s and early

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 320.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. pp. 473-4.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 540 see also p. 595.

<sup>103</sup> The unification of Germany is extensively treated in chapter 4, *Securing Germany in the Post-Wall World* pp. 191-254.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. pp. 172-173.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 205, p. 264, p. 350.

1990s, which continues to influence contemporary global dynamics.

While the conservative managers achieved stability in Central Europe, the assumption of a converging world towards US values has proven flawed. Russia and China's resurgence challenges this unipolar vision,<sup>106</sup> while the European Union's post-Cold War trajectory, modeled on German civilian power, faces setbacks amidst rising populism and nationalism. The transatlantic alliance is further strained by events like Brexit and shifts in US foreign policy under President Donald Trump.

The book highlights the shortcomings of the international settlement that ended the Cold War, manifesting in frozen conflicts, arms control challenges, weakened international institutions, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Understanding the origins and complexities of this period is crucial in navigating contemporary global challenges stemming from its troubled birth.

In the annals of history, the year 1989 stands as a pivotal moment, characterized by the seismic events of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the tragic events of the Tiananmen Square massacre. These events, while seemingly disparate, represent the dual nature of global change - one of hope and liberation, the other of repression and brutality.<sup>107</sup> Amidst these tumultuous times, the author of the text in question presents a compelling thesis: that the events of 1989 constituted a global revolutionary upheaval, leading to the establishment of a new world order without the cataclysmic conflicts that had defined previous epochs.

Central to the author's argument is the examination of the transition from protest movements to electoral revolutions in Eastern European countries. The wave of dissent that swept across the region ultimately culminated in the overthrow of communist regimes and the ushering in of democratic governance. What is particularly noteworthy is the peaceful manner in which Europe's geopolitical map was redrawn, contrasting starkly with previous epochs marked by bloodshed and territorial realignment. The author emphasizes the pivotal role played by both grassroots movements and diplomatic initiatives in shaping this transformative period. While the streets were alive with the chants of protesters demanding change, behind closed doors, a small cadre of international leaders engaged in tough yet cooperative diplomacy, charting a course towards a new global order. President Bush senior's assertion that "destiny is a matter of choice" encapsulates the proactive approach adopted by leaders during this period of uncertainty.

The restructuring of Europe, akin to the aftermath of the French Revolution in 1789, saw the collapse of communist regimes and the dissolution of the Soviet bloc. The fall of the Berlin

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 568, pp. 578-579, p. 592.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. pp. 57-60.



Wall in 1989 and Germany's reunification in 1990 served as poignant symbols of this epochal shift. Meanwhile, Eastern European states embarked on rapid economic and political transformations, buoyed by Western assistance and the demise of Soviet-led institutions like the Warsaw Pact and COMECON.

However, while Europe embraced democratic reforms with open arms, China pursued a markedly different trajectory. The violent suppression of dissent in Tiananmen Square underscored the Chinese Communist Party's unwavering commitment to authoritarian rule. The contrasting outcomes in Europe and China highlight the complex dynamics of the post-Cold War era.

The author's analysis extends beyond individual leaders to encompass broader geopolitical trends, such as the challenges of European integration and the complexities of German reunification. The collapse of Yugoslavia served as a sobering reminder of the potential for instability in the wake of the Cold War's demise.<sup>108</sup>

Through meticulous archival research and nuanced analysis, the Spohr paints a vivid portrait of this transformative period in global history. By examining the intersection of grassroots movements, diplomatic initiatives, and structural factors, the text offers valuable insights into the transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era, shedding light on the myriad forces that shaped the world order in the late 20th century.

The final chapter of the book delves into a crucial aspect of the post-Cold War era: the role of China in shaping the contemporary international landscape. A pivotal moment in this narrative is the joint declaration signed by Russian President Yeltsin and Chinese President Yang Shangkun in Beijing on December 17, a move that marked a significant shift in Sino-Russian relations.<sup>109</sup>

This declaration underscored the importance of "constructive cooperation" between the two nations, framing them as "friendly states" committed to forging mutually beneficial relations based on principles such as mutual respect, non-aggression, and peaceful coexistence. By emphasizing these principles, the declaration signaled a departure from previous rhetoric and a return to a more traditional view of international relations, one focused on geostrategic considerations rather than ideological differences.

Of particular note is the language used in the declaration, which diverged from the Atlanticist perspective advocated by Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev. Instead, it embraced a more *realpolitik* approach, critiquing hegemonic power and advocating for a multipolar world order. This shift harkened back to the triangular politics characteristic of the Cold War era, implicitly referencing the United States as the primary target of criticism for its perceived

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 513.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 578.

hegemony and power politics.

Yeltsin's decision to sign the declaration reflected Russia's desire to assert its independence from the United States and to foster closer ties with China as a means of gaining leverage in international affairs. Similarly, China viewed the partnership with Russia as an opportunity to counterbalance American influence and mitigate the diplomatic fallout following events such as Tiananmen Square and the collapse of Soviet communism.

However, despite the strategic alignment between Russia and China, divergent interests on issues such as Asian security and economic development posed challenges and limitations to the partnership. The complex power dynamics of the trans-Pacific region, with the United States maintaining its influence through alliances with Japan and South Korea, further complicated the triangular relationship. While the United States remained the preeminent actor in the region, the interactions between Russia, China, and the U.S. remained fluid, with the potential for instability in the international order.

The period from 1988 to 1992 witnessed a dramatic upheaval in global politics, with leaders such as Bush, Kohl, and Gorbachev playing pivotal roles in shaping the events of this era. These leaders were faced with the challenge of navigating rapid change, responding to popular demands, and attempting to maintain stability amidst turmoil. Their decisions, made under varying domestic pressures, contributed to outcomes that reshaped the world order after the collapse of the Cold War.

The transformative nature of this period is exemplified by the shifting fortunes of key leaders. In 1988, Gorbachev was celebrated as a global figure while Bush was seen as a relative newcomer overshadowed by the Soviet leader. By the end of 1991, however, Gorbachev's political career had ended, and Bush emerged as a prominent figure on the world stage.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the revolutionary events of 1989 led to profound changes in Europe. The map of Europe was redrawn as communist regimes crumbled, leading to the unification of Germany and the expansion of Western institutions like NATO and the European Union. These developments appeared to signal the triumph of Western values and institutions, prompting some to declare "the end of history."

However, it was the people on the streets who drove the revolutionary wave of 1989, Spohr emphasizes:

Yet, it was people on the streets who drove the revolutionary wave of 1989. From Tallinn to Tirana, from Berlin to Bucharest, they marched, demonstrated and rebelled. East Germans travelled hundreds of miles in their Trabants, rushed border

checkpoints and ran across fields hoping that no one would open fire, to pierce the Iron Curtain in a myriad of places. Political activists demanded and gained admission to the chambers of power. They bargained with the regimes that had so recently oppressed them. Excited electors crowded the polling stations, casting their votes for fresh leaders and new visions.<sup>110</sup>

The contrasting responses of Deng and Gorbachev highlight the importance of leadership in shaping the outcomes of revolutionary movements. Deng's ruthless crackdown in Tiananmen Square underscored his authoritarian control and commitment to maintaining communist power in China, despite international condemnation. In contrast, Gorbachev's decision to allow reform to escalate into revolution in the Soviet Union, followed by his restraint in using force, reflected a more nuanced approach to managing political change.

Deng's actions were informed by China's history of internal turmoil and a deep-seated resistance to foreign interference. The memory of past subjugation to Western powers influenced Deng's determination to assert China's sovereignty and resist external pressure, even at the cost of international isolation.<sup>111</sup>

The dynamics of managing the transition in Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union were complex and multifaceted. By 1989, the Kremlin's new ethos no longer favored the use of force within the Soviet bloc, and the changing political landscape could not be confined to Eastern Europe alone due to the German question. The implications of East Germany's transformation resonated across Europe and even globally, challenging the existing global order and requiring cooperation among leaders with diverse ideologies and historical backgrounds.

Unlike previous historical moments of transformation, such as the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15 and the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, there was no international conference or gathering of victorious powers after 1989. Instead, a series of summits, discussions, and negotiations over two years collectively navigated the exit from the Cold War and the reconciliation of former adversaries.

The outcomes of this period were remarkable, with communist ideology and command economies being dismantled across Eastern Europe, and a unified Germany emerging as a sovereign state within the EU and NATO. Notably, this transition occurred with minimal conflict, distinguishing it from other periods of historical transformation.

The peaceful transition was facilitated by cooperative international efforts, particularly

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid. pp.582-583.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p. 63.

through nuclear arms reduction talks between Gorbachev and Reagan, and Gorbachev's policies of perestroika and glasnost. Bush, with a more geopolitical outlook, coordinated a restrained response to the transformations in Eastern Europe, working closely with West European allies and supporting Kohl's strategy for German unification.

Bush's diplomatic approach emphasized personal contact with fellow leaders, both allies and adversaries. His constructive relationship with German Chancellor Kohl and Soviet leader Gorbachev played a crucial role in managing the transition. Additionally, Bush maintained relations with China despite the Tiananmen Square crackdown, viewing China as a potential strategic partner in the global power balance.

As mentioned before, Spohr characterizes the leadership during this period as conservative, with a preference for stability and predictability. While embracing transformative change, leaders initially sought to maintain continuity with existing systems, gradually adapting to new realities. Gorbachev's attempts to reform the USSR ultimately led to its dissolution, as his reforms inadvertently undermined the Soviet multinational state. Despite his clear goals, Gorbachev's lack of control over the reform process and shifts between radical and conservative approaches contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The transformation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) following the events of 1989 differed significantly from the experiences in Eastern Europe. While Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pursued gradual economic reforms, they faced challenges such as soaring inflation and political protests by the late 1980s. In response, the CCP cracked down on dissent in June 1989, reaffirming its control. Despite this setback, the process of liberalization resumed in 1992 under reformist party leader Jiang Zemin, focusing strictly on economic reforms. China's leadership prioritized maintaining one-party rule and suppressing nationalist movements, learning from what they perceived as Gorbachev's mistakes. The long-term transformation of China from an insular Maoist state to an authoritarian communist-capitalist powerhouse continues to shape global dynamics in the twenty-first century.

The management of change in Germany also exemplified conservative principles, particularly regarding the German question.<sup>112</sup> Chancellor Kohl facilitated unification by incorporating the Eastern Länder into the Federal Republic using existing legal frameworks. The integration of East Germany into West German structures and its subsequent accession to the European Community avoided potential complications and reassured Western allies, particularly France, about German dominance. Kohl's approach, supported by leaders like Mitterrand and Delors, contributed to the revitalization of European integration, culminating in the Maastricht

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p. 205.

Treaty. President Bush endorsed Germany's role in a more integrated Europe and sought a close partnership between the United States and Europe.

In shaping the post-Cold War European security order, Bush emphasized the importance of a unified Germany remaining in NATO, ensuring the Alliance's continuity and a continued American presence in Europe. Unlike the Warsaw Pact, which dissolved as Eastern European states rejected communism, NATO expanded to include former Eastern bloc countries and even invited the USSR to join its new North Atlantic Cooperation Council. The post-Wall architecture in Europe reflected the principles of the post-war liberal international order.

Despite efforts to integrate Russia into the new European order, the exclusion of Russia from core organizations like the EU and NATO exacerbated tensions. While Western leaders aimed to maintain a cooperative relationship with Russia, complexities in handling Moscow's transition to a market democracy led to challenges and strains in East-West relations.

The 1990s witnessed significant transformations in Russia, largely beyond Western influence. Under President Yeltsin, Russia's democratization efforts faltered, with widespread corruption and a lack of rule of law contributing to economic collapse. This turmoil fueled a resurgence of Russian nationalism, exacerbated by the country's chaotic impoverishment and the sudden dissolution of its European empire. Russian rhetoric about reclaiming its 'near-abroad' heightened tensions with neighboring states, leading to demands for incorporation into Western institutions. NATO's enlargement eastward, along with the EU's expansion, deepened Russian feelings of estrangement and fostered nostalgia for its past greatness.

Spohr illustrates how the early post-Wall, post-Square era laid the groundwork for a fundamental shift in geopolitics, which America and its Western partners initially failed to fully grasp. There was a prevailing belief that the spread of capitalism would naturally lead to the spread of democracy, and that former ideological adversaries would become cooperative partners. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations invested considerable effort in establishing institutions like the World Trade Organization, hoping to foster global cooperation.

Despite the challenges posed by Russia and China, the United States remained the world's largest economy and most technologically advanced power. Its defense budget and military capabilities far exceeded those of its rivals, maintaining its status as a superpower with unparalleled global influence. However, the nature of international affairs was evolving, with challenges emerging from 'renegade states' like Iraq and North Korea, and the threat of non-state actors acquiring nuclear weapons.

The post-9/11 era saw the United States heavily engaged in the 'war on terror', reflecting its commitment to safeguarding freedom and democracy worldwide. This vision, championed by

presidents like Bush and Obama, focused on promoting democracy through interventions and engagements across the globe. However, this focus on democratization diverted attention from the shifting global balance of power, contributing to the erosion of unipolarity.

In conclusion, while the United States maintained its position as the preeminent global power, the emergence of assertive actors like Russia and China signaled a broader geopolitical realignment, challenging traditional notions of international order. The era of unipolarity, though significant, was not indefinite, as the dynamics of global politics continued to evolve.

The transition from the Cold War era to the post-Wall, post-Square era saw significant shifts in global geopolitics, with leaders like George H. W. Bush emphasizing the importance of building a freer, more prosperous world while maintaining alliances and economic interdependence. However, the arrival of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States marked a departure from this approach. Even before assuming office, Trump expressed a worldview characterized by extreme military strength, distrust of allies, and a focus on prioritizing American interests above all else.

Once in power, Trump's administration pursued an "America First" agenda, advocating for a withdrawal from nation-building efforts and challenging the traditional bipartisan consensus on foreign policy. Trump's approach was marked by unpredictability, believing that it would give the United States leverage in negotiations. This stance led to strained relationships with longstanding allies, such as NATO and the EU, while also engaging in controversial diplomacy with countries like Russia and North Korea.

However, Trump's confrontational style and transactional approach to foreign relations raised concerns about the erosion of longstanding partnerships and the destabilization of regions like Europe and the Asia-Pacific. Trump's policies also clashed with the systemic challenges posed by rising powers like China and Russia, who sought to challenge the Western-led world order.

Reflecting on Bush's farewell speech, where he warned against escalating instability and hostile nationalism, it becomes evident that Trump's tenure represented a departure from the principles of cooperative diplomacy and multilateralism. The potential consequences of this shift, including economic decline and global instability, underscore the importance of continued American leadership and engagement in shaping the future world order.

##### 5. *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* by Vladislav Zubok (2021)

Vladislav Zubok is a prominent figure in Cold War scholarship, renowned for his seminal contributions to the field. In 1996, he co-authored a monograph with Konstantine Pleshakov entitled *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Krushchev*, which marked the beginning of his

distinguished academic career. Zubok subsequently authored several scholarly works, including the influential synthesis *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. In this later *Collapse*, Zubok offers a significant reevaluation of the twilight years of the USSR, challenging the prevailing narrative that the dissolution of the Soviet regime was inevitable. He argues that the Soviet leadership faced a critical juncture between protracted decline and radical reform, ultimately opting for the latter under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. However, Gorbachev's attempts to revitalize the Soviet economy proved calamitous, vividly depicted in Zubok's narrative as a portrayal of leaders grappling with a complex dilemma devoid of viable solutions.

Zubok contends that Gorbachev's misguided reforms, aimed at modernizing and democratizing the Soviet Union, inadvertently exacerbated resource scarcity and bolstered separatist movements. Moreover, Zubok situates the Soviet collapse within the broader context of globalization, economics, and nationalism, transcending the conventional paradigm of an ideological showdown between superpowers. His meticulous analysis extends beyond the internal dynamics of the Union, encompassing the broader geopolitical landscape, thus enriching our understanding of this epochal event.

Drawing upon an extensive array of archival sources, interviews, and memoirs, Zubok employs a rigorous historiographical approach to construct a comprehensive narrative of the Soviet Union's demise. He scrutinizes the interplay of economic collapse and the devolution of political authority, highlighting the emergence of post-Soviet oligarchs amidst societal upheaval. Furthermore, Zubok underscores the dearth of substantive international assistance, contrasting the absence of a robust reconstruction effort akin to the Marshall Plan with the Soviet Union's descent into economic turmoil.

The Soviet Union faced a major crisis marked by both economic collapse and a significant shift in how economic decisions were made and resources were managed. This meant that power moved away from central authorities to various local and regional players, including elites and managers who later became influential oligarchs in the post-Soviet era. With Gorbachev leading efforts to integrate with the West, the Soviets found themselves in dire need of aid, but received only meager support instead of a substantial assistance package like the Marshall Plan. This lack of substantial aid failed to prevent a severe economic downturn, pushing millions of ordinary citizens into poverty while a select few elites enriched themselves. Western leaders, in turn, largely ignored the suffering of the Soviet people, contributing to widespread disillusionment

As a result, the Russian Federation emerged as a global pariah, driven by bitterness and a quest for military glory at the expense of economic prosperity. Zubok's *Collapse* is highly praised for shedding light not only on historical events but also on modern Russian foreign policy.

Understanding the Russo-Ukrainian conflict requires grasping the context of the Soviet collapse, with Zubok offering keen insights into the factors that paved the way for renewed conflict in Eastern Europe years later.

In the introduction to *Collapse*, the author reflects on the complex nature of the Soviet Union's collapse, likening it to a challenging puzzle that he aims to unravel within his work. While previous attempts have been made by others to decipher this puzzle, the author notes a lack of convincing synthesis in their analyses. He observes that various interpretations often overlap, fostering a prevailing sense of pessimism that may have inadvertently contributed to the event's inevitability. However, from the perspective of a historian, the collapse remains an enigma that defies easy explanation, serving as the central focus of his book. Gorbachev, in particular, occupies a pivotal role within this complex puzzle.<sup>113</sup>

Zubok proceeds to provide an overview of factors identified by other scholars as potential causes of the Soviet Union's collapse. Individually, these factors may not appear significant enough to precipitate the demise of the Soviet state. Instead, the author argues that it is essential to consider how these disparate elements converged to form a "perfect storm" that ultimately led to the state's downfall.<sup>114</sup>

One of the primary factors identified is the perceived superiority of the United States during the prolonged ideological confrontation of the Cold War. This period placed significant strain on the Soviet Union, resulting in what scholars have termed "imperial overstretch." In its pursuit of maintaining its ideological dominance, the Soviet Union incurred substantial economic burdens through proxy wars, subsidization of satellite states, and involvement in third-world countries. The costly arms race with the United States further exacerbated these financial pressures. Despite some scholars suggesting that the Soviet Union could no longer compete militarily and technologically with the United States and its Western allies, recent analyses indicate that U.S. pressures played a minor role in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Additionally, Western governments expressed surprise and dismay at the Soviet Union's destabilization and subsequent disintegration from at least 1987 onwards. While acknowledging the influence of external factors in the collapse of the Soviet Union, Zubok argues that internal causes were paramount. These internal factors, he contends, shaped the behavior of Soviet elites, ultimately contributing to the union's demise.

Another prevalent explanation centers on Gorbachev's reform policies as the primary catalyst for collapse. Specifically, policies such as glasnost (openness and transparency) and the

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<sup>113</sup> Zubok (2021), p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 3.



media's critique of communist ideology are cited as key factors in fostering an ideological breakdown and fueling anti-communist and nationalist movements. While acknowledging the occurrence of an ideological breakdown, the author disputes its direct role in the collapse of the state. This skepticism arises from the long-standing awareness among party elites of Stalin's crimes and repressions, which had eroded the party's legitimacy over time. Moreover, the author argues that the Union's collapse was not precipitated by anti-communist or nationalist movements but rather by Gorbachev's decision to relinquish political power, a move not initiated by party officials but by Gorbachev himself.<sup>115</sup>

A third perspective attributes the collapse of the Soviet Union to economic failure. Zubok acknowledges the significant role played by the deteriorating Soviet economy in the union's downfall. He asserts, "The Soviet economic crisis played a central and often underestimated role in the last three years of Soviet history. In conjunction with revelations of past communist crimes, it contributed to mass discontent and mobilization against the central authority. It is axiomatic that the Soviet economic system was wasteful, ruinous, and could not deliver goods to people."<sup>116</sup>

However, Zubok contends that it was not solely the structural deficiencies of the Soviet economy that led to its demise but rather the reforms implemented by Gorbachev. Zubok finds the conventional explanations regarding the resistance of the Party, the military-industrial complex, and other influential factions unconvincing.

A fourth commonly cited cause of the Soviet Union's collapse is the rise of movements for national independence, which contributed to the disintegration of the "last empire." According to this narrative, similar to other historical empires, the Soviet Union was destined to fall. However, Zubok challenges this paradigm, arguing that it overemphasizes the role of nationalist movements, particularly in the Baltics and Ukraine, in the Soviet collapse. He asserts that this perspective overlooks the critical factor of the repeated failures of the central state to defend itself and provides a superficial explanation for the defection of the Russian Federation, the core of the Soviet Union.

The final factor often attributed to the Union's demise is the role of Soviet elites who opposed Gorbachev's reforms, thereby hastening the collapse. Zubok contends that Soviet bureaucrats and officials demonstrated remarkable adaptability during this period. His book reevaluates the inevitability of the Soviet collapse, questioning whether alternative policy options were available to Gorbachev besides perestroika. Zubok ponders whether the Union would have endured had it employed more coercive measures. He aims to challenge the prevailing narrative that the Soviet collapse was inevitable.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p.4.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

The book primarily focuses on governing officials, with particular emphasis on Gorbachev, without diminishing his central role. The author contends that these officials were not merely passive observers but actively involved in shaping the events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Another key aspect of the book is the examination of American influence on the Union's collapse. During 1990–91, the involvement of the US administration, Congress, media, and non-governmental organizations contributed to the radicalization of Soviet politics, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This American influence was perceived to be more significant by those within the Soviet Union than by Americans themselves at the time. Zubok argues that American soft power played a pivotal role, a perspective that has not received adequate recognition from other scholars. In historiography, various explanations exist regarding the West's impact on the disintegration of the Soviet Union, encompassing military, economic, and ideological factors. Nevertheless, while critiquing the thesis that the West, particularly the United States, bears sole responsibility for the collapse of the Soviet Union, Zubok highlights the often-overlooked influence of Western soft power in such studies.<sup>117</sup>

The initial segment of the book delves into the 1980s, a period marked by the Soviet Union's decline characterized by a succession of aging and ailing leaders preceding Gorbachev's ascension to power in March 1985. This section holds significant importance for both general readers and specialists alike, immersing them in the intricate details of the events that not only precipitated the internal collapse of the Soviet system but also elucidating the role of the external world, particularly the United States, in shaping this era.

Zubok diverges from the conventional narrative regarding the collapse of the Soviet Union. "The idea of renovating the Soviet Union originated not with Mikhail Gorbachev, but with his mentor Yuri Andropov", Zubok starts his first chapter with.<sup>118</sup> In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, many nostalgically remarked, "If only Andropov had lived longer," suggesting that his leadership could have facilitated both reform and unity within the country. Indeed, Andropov laid the groundwork for the idea of renovation, tasking his successor Gorbachev with its promotion. Aligning with other scholars, Zubok underscores the significance of the economic stagnation of the 1960s and 1970s, which culminated in a dire economic predicament in the 1980s inherited by Gorbachev. Perestroika, encompassing reforms contemplated by Gorbachev and likeminded intellectuals and party officials long before its implementation, was not a haphazard, hastily devised attempt to salvage the declining economy solely due to Western competition. However, the pace

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 8, p. 367.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. p.13.

of Gorbachev's economic reforms was sluggish, failing to instigate the requisite changes for modernizing the Soviet economy.

Glasnost, Gorbachev's policy of openness, afforded Soviet citizens a novel perspective of the world but also laid bare the flaws of the Soviet regime, both past and present. This engendered impatience among Soviet citizens eager to realize the longstanding promise of improved living standards, which, unfortunately, remained elusive.

In the subsequent section, Zubok underscores the pivotal roles played by various Western powers in the demise of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989. The meticulous insights divulged by Zubok regarding the discussions and negotiations spanning from 1989 to 1991 constitute a valuable asset in this scholarly work and are poised to inform academic discourse for years to come. Particularly noteworthy is the involvement of the administration of US President George H.W. Bush, which played a pivotal role in the unraveling of the Soviet Union, driven by its aspiration to facilitate a peaceful resolution rather than the eruption of regional or international conflict. While the Bush administration initially exhibited reluctance in the first half of 1989 to fully engage with Gorbachev, it ultimately emerged as a central actor in the sequence of events culminating in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the final months of 1991.<sup>119</sup>

In his examination of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the historian delves beyond high politics, scrutinizing the complexities of relations within the power elite, the dynamics between the 'Soviet center' and 'periphery' elites, the power struggle between Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, and Gorbachev's foreign policy initiatives along with the responses of the West, primarily the United States. Additionally, Zubok explores the influence of "soft power" on Soviet citizens. While Gorbachev's perestroika policy precipitated the liberalization of the political system and the Soviet regime, it also catalyzed a gradual opening of Soviet society to the West, leading to a transformation in its perception of the Western world—shifting from opposition to uncritical admiration. As the socio-economic crisis deepened, this admiration for the West further intensified. This cultural metamorphosis within the Soviet identity was not confined solely to the Union's 'peripheral' republics and their societies but permeated a significant segment of the Soviet nomenklatura and the majority of the Russian intelligentsia. A compelling illustration of this identity transformation is evident in the trajectory of Boris Yeltsin—a former party and Soviet figure who evolved into the emblem of democratic Russia during the perestroika era and ascended to the presidency as the country's first democratically elected leader.<sup>120</sup>

The central argument articulated in this book is that the collapse of the Soviet Union was

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. pp. 92-97.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 369.

not an inevitable outcome. Contrary to deterministic explanations positing the Union's demise as preordained by its planned, administrative economic system, the entrenched political ideology, and the conservative stronghold within the Communist Party resistant to reforms, the historian contends that even amidst a terminal crisis, the Soviet Union had the potential for survival, albeit not through the path pursued by Gorbachev. According to Zubok, a more viable course for the Soviet system would have entailed perpetuating Andropov-style authoritarianism, which enjoyed widespread popular support, coupled with radical market liberalization.<sup>121</sup> However, Gorbachev's adoption of perestroika and glasnost policies, among other factors, catalyzed the rise of nationalist sentiments and movements for self-determination. Contrary to previous scholarly emphasis on the significance of nationalist movements, Zubok argues that national self-determination served merely as a tool wielded by republic elites, both formal (party elites) and informal (the intelligentsia), to fortify the dominance of their respective titular nations. Moreover, Gorbachev's policy of liberalization and concessions inadvertently fueled this trend.

Zubok characterizes the demise of the Soviet Union as the convergence of a perfect storm and a misguided leadership. Despite years of resistance to reforms, Gorbachev's tenure witnessed their belated implementation, ushering in sweeping economic and political transformations. However, the underlying concepts and strategies of these reforms were antiquated, economically unsound, and precipitated the internal erosion of the existing economy and political structure. The architects of these reforms, notably Mikhail Gorbachev, failed to recognize their shortcomings or adjust their course accordingly. While acknowledging the formidable challenges Gorbachev faced inheriting and navigating a deeply entrenched system, Zubok critiques his leadership, arguing that while well-intentioned, Gorbachev's emulation of Lenin as a reformative model was misguided. Unlike Lenin's revolutionary success, Gorbachev's approach favored rhetoric over action, parliamentary consensus over coercion, and decentralization of power over dictatorship. Consequently, his vision of a humane socialist society became increasingly divorced from the realities of Soviet power and its economic constraints.<sup>122</sup>

Even in the tumultuous period of 1990–1991, Zubok claims, the prevailing sentiment among the majority of Russians was not aligned with aspirations for liberal democracy, civil rights, and national self-determination. Rather, they yearned for a strong leader, economic prosperity, and national unity. However, Gorbachev's leadership failed to fulfill these expectations, prompting many to throw their support behind Boris Yeltsin instead.

Hence, the preservation of the Soviet Union would have necessitated a robust authoritarian

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 428.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 427.

leader with broad popular support, particularly from the Russian populace, who could implement liberal economic reforms decisively, even employing force if necessary against dissenting republics. Gorbachev did not embody this archetype, whereas Yeltsin, amidst his power struggles with Gorbachev, emerged as a figure who appeared capable of assuming such a leadership role. However, while vying for power against Gorbachev, Yeltsin concurrently advocated for an independent Russia, ultimately contributing to the dismantling of the Soviet Union.

The final section of the book delves into Zubok's narrative and analysis of the critical period spanning August to December 1991. Detailed insights are provided into the internal dynamics of the Soviet government during its twilight phase. Boris Yeltsin, poised to become the inaugural President of the Russian Federation, emerges as a pivotal figure, demonstrating foresight regarding impending transformations and strategically positioning himself for personal gain. Meanwhile, hardline communists within the leadership obstructed Gorbachev's reform agenda at every turn, undermining its efficacy. Additionally, the nomenklatura, envisioned as the linchpin of the new system, proved to be corrupt and self-serving. Amidst the uncertainty surrounding the Soviet Union's fate, the ruling elite opportunistically exploited the tumultuous transition for personal enrichment, leading to the rampant plundering of state assets. Zubok argues that instead of rallying to save the union, many members of the Soviet elite engaged in corruption, nepotism, and other forms of self-enrichment. He suggests that these actions further weakened the cohesion of the Soviet state and contributed to its eventual dissolution.<sup>123</sup>

Zubok assigns primary responsibility for the collapse to Gorbachev, attributing it to his implementation of radical economic reforms that proved unattainable. He critiques Gorbachev's failure to adapt to evolving circumstances during his six-year tenure, which fueled widespread disillusionment with the existing system. While Gorbachev drew inspiration from the reformist principles of Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin, he only partially embraced Lenin's strategies for effecting profound change. Zubok argues that Gorbachev's reform agenda was fundamentally impractical, and instead advocates for a more assertive approach akin to Yuri Andropov's authoritarian reform trajectory initiated in 1982, emphasizing the utilization of coercion over a sequence of economic, glasnost, and political reforms.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p. 326.

## Chapter 3

### Analyses of the two Periods

#### 1. Analysis of the four works from the first period

In his work, *The Gorbachev Factor*, Brown examines the pivotal role played by Mikhail Gorbachev in bringing about the end of the Cold War and catalyzing the collapse of the Soviet Union. While many historical analyses of the Soviet Union often prioritize broader structural factors, economic conditions, or geopolitical dynamics, Brown's focus is on highlighting the agency of individual leaders and their capacity to shape historical events. Brown's work revolves around the pivotal role of Mikhail Gorbachev in reshaping the Soviet Union and precipitating the end of the Cold War. He contends that Gorbachev's leadership style, characterized by policies of openness (*glasnost*) and restructuring (*perestroika*), was instrumental in instigating profound political and societal transformations within the Soviet Union.

Central to Brown's exploration is the assertion that Gorbachev was not merely a passive figure reacting to the institutional pressures arising from the Soviet system's decline. Rather, Brown posits that Gorbachev was a proactive agent of change, actively steering the Soviet Union towards a transition from Orthodox Communism to a more pluralistic political system. This perspective seeks to correct prevailing accounts of Gorbachev's leadership that downplay his agency and portray him as merely a product of circumstances.

Brown meticulously dissects Gorbachev's reform initiatives and their repercussions on Soviet domestic politics, international relations, and ultimately, the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He underscores Gorbachev's unwavering commitment to reform and his endeavors to modernize the Soviet system, while acknowledging the unforeseen challenges and consequences that accompanied the reform process. Brown argues against criticisms of Gorbachev that rely on hindsight bias and fail to appreciate the complexities of the political landscape in which he operated.

Brown also underscores the significance of ideas in driving historical change, particularly in the context of Gorbachev's domestic political reforms and his adoption of a new foreign policy paradigm known as "new thinking." By highlighting the centrality of leadership and ideas, Brown offers a counterpoint to deterministic interpretations of the Soviet Union's decline, which attribute it solely to systemic weaknesses.

The analysis presented by Brown draws extensively from a wide array of sources, including published materials up to 1995 and insights gleaned from interviews with Russian politicians and scholars, including Gorbachev himself and several of his key associates. By meticulously examining these sources, Brown constructs a nuanced narrative that challenges deterministic narratives of Soviet collapse. Brown's analysis suggests that the collapse of the Soviet Union was not predetermined or inevitable but rather the result of specific policies, decisions, and historical contingencies, with Gorbachev playing a central role in this process.

Brown's work provides a nuanced and multifaceted analysis that places emphasis on the agency of individuals and the role of ideas in shaping historical outcomes.

In *Russia and the Idea of the West*, English delves deeply into the ideological transformations that swept through the Soviet Union, particularly highlighting the impact of Western ideologies on Soviet reformers, with a particular focus on Mikhail Gorbachev. It posits that the culmination of the Cold War can be attributed to what is termed an "intellectual revolution," characterized by a growing receptiveness to concepts such as democracy, market economics, and individual rights within Soviet circles. English places significant emphasis on Gorbachev's pivotal role in this intellectual shift, portraying his adoption of "new thinking" as a radical departure from traditional Soviet foreign policy paradigms. This departure, influenced by interactions with Western intellectuals, prompted a more conciliatory approach to international relations on the part of the Soviet Union. English's work delves into the complex historical and cultural dynamics shaping Russia's perception of the West and its quest to carve out a distinct Russian identity. He posits that Russia's relationship with the West is complex and multifaceted, influenced by historical legacies, geopolitical considerations, and ideological disparities.

Central to English's analysis is the notion that the infusion of Western ideas into the minds of Soviet reformers played a crucial role in precipitating the dramatic policy changes witnessed during the late 1980s. The emergence of a global identity favoring Western values among a liberal faction within the policy and academic spheres is identified as a key factor contributing to the peaceful resolution of the Cold War.

Acknowledging the influence of structural factors, such as economic challenges stemming from extensive military expenditures, English paints a portrait of the Soviet Union as a power stretched thin by its imperial ambitions. The decision to intervene in Afghanistan is examined within the context of a perceived Western threat and a sense of international obligation, yet English refrains from assigning it primary significance in the narrative of the Cold War's conclusion.

English contends that while economic difficulties undoubtedly played a role in prompting a reassessment of foreign military engagements, attributing the demise of the Cold War solely to

economic decline would be overly simplistic. Instead, he stresses the transformative power of "new thinking," a departure from the divisive worldview of the past in favor of embracing Western ideals. This ideological shift, embodied in Gorbachev's reform agenda, aimed not merely at disengagement from imperial pursuits but also at forging closer ties with Europe and integrating with the Western community. By examining Gorbachev's reliance on like-minded reformist advisers and their influence in shaping his foreign policy agenda, English suggests that the integration of "new thinking" into Soviet policy making paved the way for the eventual thawing of Cold War tensions.

English emphasizes the profound influence of historical, political, and cultural factors on Russia's internal dynamics and its engagement with the Western world. He acknowledges the significance of leadership and individual agency in shaping critical junctures in Russian history. While some scholars and observers have argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable due to inherent flaws within the communist system or structural weaknesses, English does not adhere strictly to this deterministic viewpoint. Instead, English emphasizes the importance of historical contingency and the role of individuals, institutions, and external factors in shaping the trajectory of the Soviet Union. He acknowledges the challenges and contradictions within the Soviet system but also highlights the agency of Soviet leaders and the impact of external pressures, such as economic globalization and geopolitical competition with the West. By examining the ideological debates, policy decisions, and geopolitical developments during the Soviet era, English demonstrates that the collapse of the Soviet Union was not solely predetermined but rather the result of a complex interplay of internal and external factors.

The author draws extensively from primary source materials, scholarly research, and firsthand testimonies to buttress their arguments, thereby enhancing the credibility and rigor of their analyses. English does not focus solely on Gorbachev as an individual agent of change but adopts a broader lens that encompasses Gorbachev's generation as a whole, and the ideological shift that had occurred in it, as the driving force behind the end of the Cold War. He is not overly positive about Gorbachev, he offers a more nuanced perspective, acknowledging the complexities and hurdles inherent in Russian-Western relations, including moments of distrust and confrontation.

In his work, *The Cold War: a New History*, Gaddis takes a thematic approach to explore the complexities of the Cold War, challenging simplistic narratives that reduce it to a mere struggle between superpowers or political figures. Instead, he delves into various themes in each chapter, aiming to offer readers a more nuanced understanding of this pivotal period in history. Although this approach may render the book somewhat challenging to read, Gaddis endeavors to enrich the



discourse on the Cold War by highlighting its multifaceted nature and shedding light on lesser-known aspects. John Lewis Gaddis frames the end of the Cold War as the culmination of long-term strategic competitions.

Gaddis clarifies that his work synthesizes existing Cold War historiography rather than presenting original scholarly research. He also makes it clear that his analysis does not delve into the origins of post-Cold War phenomena (like globalization) nor does it contribute to the development of international relations theory. However, he does examine political, economic, and social factors that influenced the transformative period of the Cold War.

Despite these limitations, Gaddis argues that his book offers fresh perspectives on the Cold War, particularly through the lens of optimism. He suggests that despite the inherent dangers and costs associated with the era, the Cold War played a vital role in addressing fundamental global issues and ultimately contributed to a more stable world order by preventing catastrophic scenarios such as global conflict or totalitarian domination. One of the central themes of Gaddis' work is the idea that the Cold War commenced in fear but concluded in hope.

Rather than viewing the Cold War as an inevitable outcome of postwar geopolitics, Gaddis attributes it to Soviet aspirations for dominance fueled by ideology and dictatorship. While he acknowledges Reagan's significant role in ending the Cold War, Gaddis underscores Gorbachev's limitations in achieving his goals, portraying him as a sympathetic figure but lacking effective policies.

Gaddis also underscores the role of individuals in shaping Soviet and American foreign policies, emphasizing the ideological assumptions that influenced leaders' decisions. He highlights the pivotal role of charismatic leaders in the final phase of the Cold War, emphasizing qualities like courage, determination, and faith. While he acknowledges Reagan's significant role in the Cold War, Gaddis emphasizes Gorbachev's limitations in achieving his goals, portraying him as a sympathetic figure but lacking effective policies. Additionally, he stresses the contributions of ordinary people in precipitating revolutionary changes, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the Iron Curtain.

Throughout the book, Gaddis consistently highlights the failure of communism to fulfill its promise of providing a better life for its citizens. His analysis reflects a clear pro-American bias, as he portrays democratic ideals as superior to the inadequately constructed Marxist ideology. This sentiment of democratic triumphalism permeates the text, with Gaddis asserting the superiority of democratic principles over those of communism.

In his book, Gaddis does not explicitly confirm the deterministic idea that the Soviet Union was bound to collapse. Instead, he offers a nuanced analysis that considers various factors

contributing to the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While Gaddis does not discount the significance of these factors in contributing to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, he also emphasizes the contingent nature of historical events and the role of individual leaders and decisions as well the actions of “normal people”. He argues that the outcome of the Cold War was not predetermined but rather the result of a complex interplay of internal and external dynamics

In the epilogue, Gaddis briefly touches on various subjects, including the growing nationalism within the Soviet republics, Boris Yeltsin's role in dismantling the Soviet Union, and the implications and legacy of the Cold War's end. He reflects on shifts in global power dynamics, highlighting the diminishing importance of military strength and the rise of democracy as a marker of legitimacy. Through his comprehensive analysis, Gaddis provides valuable insights into the complexities and enduring legacy of the Cold War era.

In *For the Soul of Mankind* Leffler delves into the intricacies of the Cold War, highlighting the pivotal role of ideology in shaping and perpetuating the conflict. Through a detailed examination of key leaders such as Stalin and Truman, he underscores their entrenched biases and their contribution to the escalating tensions between the East and West. However, Leffler credits Gorbachev's visionary leadership for breaking the cycle of confrontation, as he recognized the lack of existential threat posed by the West to the Soviet Union, leading to a gradual thawing of Cold War hostilities.

Leffler also acknowledges Reagan's significance in facilitating internal changes within the Soviet Union and engaging in diplomatic negotiations that helped reduce tensions between the superpowers. His analysis offers a nuanced perspective on the Cold War's conclusion, challenging the simplistic "evil empire" rhetoric and emphasizing Gorbachev's pivotal role in reshaping the global geopolitical landscape. Leffler emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the Cold War's resolution, highlighting the influence of individual personalities, ideological considerations, and historical legacies in perpetuating the conflict.

While structural factors certainly played a role in the end of the Cold War, Leffler argues that Gorbachev's pursuit of arms reduction stemmed from a desire to catalyze domestic transformation and alleviate the burden of an unsustainable arms race. He attributes the origins of the Cold War to ideological differences and the decisions of key leaders like Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill, shaped by their respective personalities. The ongoing narrative of the Cold War, according to Leffler, was fueled by a competitive dynamic between the two superpowers, driven by hopes, fears, and actions rooted in mutual distrust.

Leffler contextualizes the Cold War within broader global dynamics, including

technological advancements, economic challenges, and vulnerabilities in the developing world. He contends that Gorbachev's personal and visionary approach was instrumental in ending the Cold War, transcending ideological barriers and signaling a departure from the ideological rigidity that had initially sparked the conflict. While Reagan played a significant role, Leffler posits that Gorbachev emerged as the indispensable agent of change, steering the world away from the brink of nuclear confrontation towards a new era of global cooperation and détente

He believes success depended on democratizing socialism, making it more productive for Soviet citizens, recognizing minimal external threats, and scarce external opportunities. Reagan, on the other hand, according to Leffler, played a significant role in ending the Cold War by means of his ideological fervor and confidence in democratic capitalism, aligning with changing global realities.

In his book, Leffler does not explicitly address the deterministic idea that the Soviet Union was bound to collapse. Instead, his focus is primarily on the broader geopolitical contest between the United States and the Soviet Union and the strategies pursued by both sides during the Cold War. However, by examining the historical context and the policies pursued by leaders on both sides of the Cold War divide, Leffler's analysis implicitly challenges deterministic interpretations of the Soviet Union's collapse. He emphasizes the importance of contingency, individual agency, and the role of specific events and decisions in shaping the course of history. While he acknowledges the challenges facing the Soviet Union, including economic stagnation and ideological tensions, Leffler does not present the collapse of the Soviet Union as an inevitable outcome. As we shall discuss in the next section, this emphasis on contingent factors and individual agency emerges as a consistent pattern in the period under consideration.

## 2. Comparative analysis of the first period

The transformative era at the twilight of the Cold War, as captured in the selected works, is deeply entwined with Mikhail Gorbachev's distinctive leadership. The consensus among these narratives is that his strategic "new thinking" catalyzed the Cold War's conclusion and the Soviet Union's eventual dissolution. This approach, breaking from past confrontation, championed global cooperation and acknowledged the world's security interdependence. The works cited in the initial period share a common focus on several key factors, albeit with variations in emphasis among them. Through our analysis, we have identified the following factors as central to the discourse. The authors highlight Mikhail Gorbachev's pivotal role in reshaping Soviet policies through New Thinking, which marked a departure from traditional approaches. There's recognition of ideological shifts within the Soviet Union, signaling a reevaluation of Marxist-Leninist principles

and openness to alternative ideologies. Intellectual and cultural exchanges between Eastern and Western societies are noted for their profound impact on societal attitudes and policy decisions. Economic challenges within the Soviet Union significantly influenced foreign policy discussions. The interplay between global geopolitical pressures and domestic politics within the Soviet bloc shaping policy decisions are evidenced. The works analyzed show a departure from deterministic perspectives. While the authors do not explicitly engage in debates regarding determinism, their emphasis on factors such as ideology, leadership agency, and structural dynamics suggests a divergence from deterministic viewpoints.

All four works highlight Mikhail Gorbachev's central role and his "new thinking" in foreign policy as pivotal to the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This "new thinking" emphasized cooperation over confrontation, acknowledging the interconnectedness of global security.

The sophisticated portrait of Gorbachev painted by Archie Brown emphasizes his pivotal role in steering the Soviet state through reforms, while Robert English's examination reveals the broader intellectual shifts that set the stage for Gorbachev's embrace of Western concepts. Melvyn P. Leffler contextualizes Gorbachev's policies within the broader geopolitical tapestry, highlighting the strategic interplay that eased global tensions. John Lewis Gaddis integrates these insights, placing Gorbachev's initiatives within a historical pattern of strategic rivalries and ideological evolutions.

These works collectively trace the arc of Gorbachev's influence, depicting a leader whose vision reshaped the Soviet Union's course, with a ripple effect that redefined the global order. His legacy, as portrayed in these studies, is one of significant doctrinal shift and policy transformation that fostered a new era of international relations.

All authors recognize Gorbachev's significant contribution, but Brown and Leffler emphasize his crucial actions in promoting openness and reform as central to concluding the Cold War. Conversely, Gaddis and English attribute more weight to wider influences such as economic challenges, ideological shortcomings, and the long-term effects of strategic choices, without undermining Gorbachev's role.

All four works analyzed identify Gorbachev as a central figure and key catalyst in bringing about the end of the Cold War. Brown's perspective appears sympathetic towards Gorbachev, highlighting his steadfast commitment to reform and modernization within the Soviet system. Despite recognizing the unforeseen challenges and consequences of Gorbachev's reforms, Brown argues against criticisms that rely on hindsight bias and fail to grasp the complexities of the political landscape during Gorbachev's tenure.

Brown particularly emphasizes Gorbachev's efforts to foster engagement with the West and promote democratization. In contrast, English presents a more nuanced view, acknowledging the inherent complexities and obstacles in Russian-Western relations, including moments of tension and confrontation.

The portrayal of Gorbachev varies across the texts. Brown and English depict Gorbachev positively, highlighting his agency, commitment to reform, and efforts to foster engagement with the West. Both Gaddis and Leffler, however, adopt a less sympathetic stance towards Gorbachev. Gaddis underscores Gorbachev's limitations in realizing his objectives, portraying him as a sympathetic but ultimately ineffective figure in terms of policy implementation. Leffler, while acknowledging Gorbachev's role as a pivotal agent of change steering the world away from nuclear confrontation towards global cooperation and détente, assigns more credit to Reagan than Brown and English do. Similar to Gaddis, although to a lesser extent, Leffler also presents a pro-American bias in his analysis, albeit less overtly triumphant than Gaddis' portrayal of the West's victory due to its superior ideology.

As we shall see in more detail soon, while the works collectively emphasize Gorbachev's influential role and innovative foreign policy approach, they also recognize the significance of economic challenges, global and domestic pressures, and the role of the West in influencing the Cold War's end. Such compound approaches that integrate various explanations for the end of the Cold War, while emphasizing the role of individual actors, resonate with much of the historiography of the period considered.

It is worth noting, however, that the weight attributed to individual agency varies substantially among historians of this period. Anticipating a trend that we shall observe when discussing the second period, for example, Richard Ned Lebow's paper, *The Rise and Fall of the Cold War in Comparative Perspective*,<sup>124</sup> embarks on an ambitious journey to dissect the complex web of factors that led to the conclusion of the Cold War, challenging the conventional emphasis on Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms and foreign policy initiatives as the primary catalysts. Lebow argues that such a narrow focus fails to capture the evolutionary nature of East-West relations, which had been undergoing a process of accommodation long before Gorbachev's ascendancy. By placing the Cold War within a broader historical and conceptual framework and comparing it to other militarized rivalries that also ended peacefully, Lebow seeks to uncover shared patterns and draw broader lessons for conflict prevention and management.

Lebow identifies four generic explanations for the end of the Cold War: structural factors, ideas, domestic politics, and individual leaders. Each of these explanations offers a different lens

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<sup>124</sup> Lebow 1999 (ref.)

through which to view the Cold War, from a power struggle influenced by the bipolar world order to an ideological clash between incompatible social systems, the influence of domestic political dynamics, and the decisive impact of individual leadership. Despite the diversity of these perspectives, Lebow contends that none alone can fully explain the Cold War's resolution; instead, he advocates for a compound approach that integrates these various explanations.

As the Soviet Union approached the denouement of the Cold War, a significant ideological metamorphosis unfolded within its leadership. This period was characterized by an increasing receptivity towards Western democratic ideals, market economics, and human rights principles—a stark departure from the entrenched Marxist-Leninist doctrines. The books discuss this transformation as crucial for the policy changes that led to the Cold War's end.

In the crucible of these changing times, Gorbachev emerges in Brown's work not just as a leader but as a harbinger of reform, steering the Soviet state towards a more liberal future. Concurrently, English traces the intellectual blossoming that fostered an alignment with Western thought, marking a cultural and ideological awakening.

Leffler and Gaddis further this discourse by contextualizing the shifts within the grander tableau of global dynamics, suggesting that the ideological evolution was as much a response to external influences as it was an internal revolution. The Soviet Union's transition, as distilled from these works, was not merely a change in policy but a profound reshaping of its identity and stance on the world's stage, culminating in the Cold War's peaceful conclusion.

The authors generally agree on the Cold War being framed as an ideological struggle between capitalism and communism, but they differ in the degree of emphasis they place on this aspect. English and Leffler delve into the ideological shifts within the Soviet Union and the impact of Western ideas, suggesting that ideological factors played a significant role in resolving the Cold War. Brown, while acknowledging the ideological dimension, directs more attention to Gorbachev's efforts to reform the Soviet Union rather than exclusively framing the Cold War in ideological terms. In contrast, Gaddis argues that the ideological divide between capitalism and communism was the core reason for the Cold War, with both sides competing to prove the superiority of their respective ideologies. Gaddis consistently highlights the shortcomings of communism in delivering on its promises of prosperity, revealing a distinct pro-American bias in his analysis. He portrays democratic ideals as superior to Marxism, a perspective that permeates his work and reflects a sentiment of democratic triumphalism.

There is a consensus on the impact of intellectual and cultural exchanges with the West in shaping the thoughts and policies of Soviet reformers. All works in this first period highlight how these interactions facilitated a broader reconsideration of the Soviet Union's stance both

domestically and internationally during the latter years of the Cold War. These intellectual and cultural shifts were instrumental in catalyzing the ideological transformation previously highlighted.

Through the narratives of four insightful books, it becomes clear that these exchanges were pivotal in shaping the outlook and policies of Soviet reformers. Archie Brown, in *The Gorbachev Factor*, delves into Mikhail Gorbachev's exposure to new ideas from the West, which played a crucial role in strengthening his resolve for reform. Brown's analysis reveals how the infusion of Western political thought and cultural norms influenced Gorbachev and his contemporaries, leading to significant shifts in the Soviet Union's approach to governance and foreign relations.

Similarly, Robert English's *Russia and the Idea of the West* explores the intellectual transformation among Soviet leaders spurred by their engagement with Western ideas. English illustrates how this interaction prompted a new generation of Soviet thinkers to advocate for political liberalization and economic reform, contributing significantly to the Cold War's conclusion. Melvyn P. Leffler, in *For the Soul of Mankind*, places these exchanges within the broader context of superpower negotiations and détente, arguing that the sharing of culture and ideas between the East and West helped to ease the tensions and ideological rigidity that had characterized much of the Cold War era. John Lewis Gaddis's *The Cold War: A New History* views these intellectual and cultural exchanges as part of a larger historical narrative. Gaddis acknowledges the influence of Western intellectual and cultural norms on the Soviet Union as one of many factors that facilitated the peaceful resolution of the Cold War.

Collectively, these authors make a compelling case that the intellectual and cultural exchange with the West was instrumental in redefining Soviet ideology and policy. This reevaluation played a critical role in reshaping the USSR's role on the global stage and ultimately contributed to the end of the Cold War in a peaceful manner.

The examination of economic challenges within the Soviet Union constitutes a central theme in historiographical analysis, as evidenced by several significant works. These studies shed light on how the unsustainable economic structure necessitated reforms, ultimately contributing to the USSR's downfall.

*The Gorbachev Factor* underscores the economic stagnation that drove reform efforts, emphasizing the broader spectrum of leadership and ideological shifts at play. Similarly, *Russia and the Idea of the West* delves into the ideological transition within the Soviet Union, highlighting economic hardships as a key driver and illustrating the gravitational pull towards Western economic ideologies. *For the Soul of Mankind* interlaces economic pressures with global and domestic factors influencing policy decisions, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of these

pressures in shaping strategic choices. Meanwhile, *The Cold War: a New History* contextualizes the Soviet Union's economic struggles within the broader narrative arc of the Cold War, recognizing these challenges as pivotal to strategic decisions.

Across these accounts, despite varying degrees of emphasis, there's a shared recognition that the Soviet Union's economic system, particularly its centralized planning and the burdensome arms race, was unsustainable. These difficulties demanded reforms and are acknowledged as a potent force that set the stage for the Soviet Union's transformation and its rapid disintegration. However, none of the works examined during this period prioritize economic factors as the central focus of analysis. While economic considerations are acknowledged, they are not the primary focus when examining the factors contributing to the end of the Cold War.

As the analysis proposed in this thesis shows, historians from this period acknowledge the significance of economic challenges, as well as global and domestic pressures, and the role of ideas in influencing the Cold War's resolution, mirroring Lebow's emphasis on structural factors and ideological clashes as contributing forces. By recognizing intersecting themes across the analyzed works, including the influence of both external pressures and internal dynamics, the thesis implicitly incorporates Lebow's compound approach to understanding the Cold War's conclusion.

The confluence of global pressures (such as the arms race and regional conflicts) and domestic issues (including economic stagnation and political dissent) as catalysts for change is woven through the fabric of the historical discourse presented in the four books. This convergence of pressures created a context for transformation within the Soviet Union, one that was both necessary and, with the passage of time, increasingly inevitable.

In exploring this theme, Gorbachev's policies, as recounted in *The Gorbachev Factor*, emerge as responses to the compounded stresses of economic stagnation and the arms race, while simultaneously acting as catalysts for further change. The narrative suggests that these policies were integral components of a broader array of necessary reforms, ultimately culminating in significant internal transformations. Additionally, the dialogue with the West, elaborated upon in *Russia and the Idea of the West*, introduced an additional layer of domestic pressure for change. Soviet leadership, increasingly aware of alternative economic and political systems, faced intensified calls for ideological openness, intertwined with the tangible strains of competing militarily with the West, which placed unsustainable burdens on the Soviet economy. Within this larger tapestry of superpower relations, as indicated in *For the Soul of Mankind*, domestic challenges are situated, highlighting how the arms race and regional conflicts sharpened Soviet leaders' focus on the imperative for reforms. This perspective underscores how external pressures played a crucial role in transforming the once-distant prospect of change into a tangible reality. Lastly, *The Cold War: A*



*New History* provides context for the interplay between global rivalry and internal systemic weaknesses, framing these pressures not merely as background elements but as active agents in facilitating the Cold War's peaceful resolution.

All works illuminate the complex interplay of forces that shaped the Soviet response to global and domestic pressures. While each author presents a distinct angle on the Soviet Union's response to these pressures, they agree that the combination of global challenges and domestic issues played an important part in creating the conditions for the monumental changes that ensued.

In the scholarly discourse on the Cold War's conclusion, the West's policies, particularly those of the United States, emerge as a subject ripe for nuanced analysis. Strategic diplomacy and ideological sway are central themes across four texts, though each author navigates a different course in assessing the balance of Western influence and Soviet internal evolution.

The nuanced examination of these themes reveals a complex tapestry of interactions and influences. While acknowledging the West's role, the narrative within *The Gorbachev Factor* leans into the decisive nature of Gorbachev's internal reforms and leadership, painting them as the fulcrum upon which the Soviet Union pivoted towards transformation and ultimately, the end of the Cold War.

Conversely, *Russia and the Idea of the West* ascribes considerable emphasis to the ideological currents flowing from the West. The text proposes that engagements between Soviet reformers and Western thinkers seeded changes in Soviet ideology and policy, marking the ideological exchange as a pivotal element in the broader narrative of transformation. In "For the Soul of Mankind," the West's influence is observed through the prism of diplomacy and statecraft, underscoring strategic negotiations as critical levers in the reduction of Cold War hostilities. *The Cold War: A New History* widens the lens to encompass the strategic interplay that characterized the entire Cold War period, suggesting that the aggregate impact of Western policies played a non-negligible part in steering the course towards a peaceful resolution.

While each text contributes a distinct shade to the overall picture, they collectively affirm the West's role in this historical chapter. They navigate through the interplay between Western actions and the Soviet Union's internal dynamics, each author attributing a different weight to these sets of influences and leaving the reader to contemplate the multifaceted nature of historical causation.

The literature reviewed also provides valuable insights into the dynamics of international relations during the final years of the Cold War, with a particular focus on the interactions between the superpowers and the role of diplomacy in facilitating a peaceful resolution. Rather than attributing the conclusion of the Cold War solely to military confrontations, these works emphasize

the significance of diplomatic efforts, treaties, and international cooperation in de-escalating tensions and reshaping the geopolitical landscape.

Highlighted in *The Gorbachev Factor*, Gorbachev's diplomatic initiatives and commitment to de-escalation, such as nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from Afghanistan, underscore the importance of leadership in shaping diplomatic outcomes. *Russia and the Idea of the West* delves into the intellectual currents influencing Soviet foreign policy, suggesting that the adoption of Western ideas played a pivotal role in moderating Soviet hostility towards the West. This ideological shift is deemed as significant as formal diplomatic agreements and negotiations. *For the Soul of Mankind* takes a strategic and geopolitical approach, emphasizing the importance of détente and the sophisticated negotiations between the superpowers. This work explores the interplay between ideological motivations and practical considerations in shaping diplomatic decisions. In *The Cold War: A New History*, a comprehensive overview contextualizes diplomatic interactions within a broader historical narrative. While acknowledging Gorbachev's reforms, the book places them within the continuum of Cold War diplomacy, illustrating the complex web of factors influencing the Cold War's end.

However, all four works primarily focus on the perspectives of the two superpowers, examining the Cold War within a bipolar framework without considering its broader global context. This trend reflects a common approach among works of the period, which predominantly view the Cold War through the lens of US-USSR relations, highlighting the significance of this bipolar paradigm in shaping scholarly discourse on the subject.

Such a paradigm is well illustrated by Eric F. Petersen's *The End of the Cold War: A Review of Recent Literature*, which stands as a notable exploration within the bipolar framework of Cold War historiography, dissecting the scholarly discourse on the myriad factors that culminated in this pivotal period's conclusion. Published in *The History Teacher* in 1993, Petersen's review navigates through the complex terrain of interpretations surrounding the Cold War's end, especially focusing on the Soviet Union's collapse. His analysis traverses both internal dynamics and external pressures, Mikhail Gorbachev's reformative role, the American military buildup during the 1980s, and the strategic maneuvers of President Reagan's administration.

While Petersen sheds light on the "buildup argument," positing the Reagan administration's military expansion as a critical catalyst for Soviet reform and eventual dissolution, this perspective finds limited resonance within the broader corpus of literature analyzed in the thesis. Although figures like John Lewis Gaddis acknowledge the ideological superiority of capitalism over communism, attributing the Cold War's end to the inherent strengths of the capitalist system rather than a direct result of American military pressure, this view diverges from Petersen's emphasis on

Reagan's policies.

Furthermore, as we shall see, the thesis highlights a nuanced shift in the second period of analysis, where authors like Zubok and Miller suggest the Soviet Union's trajectory towards dissolution was not inevitable. They argue that the reforms initiated by Gorbachev, driven by an ideological commitment to "socialism with a human face," rather than external pressures from the United States, played a pivotal role in the USSR's fate. This interpretation challenges the reductionist view of the Cold War's end as primarily a victory of American military strategy, suggesting instead a complex interplay of factors, including economic strains, ideological shifts, and internal political dynamics.

Petersen's exploration of the historiographical landscape, therefore, serves as an example of the bipolar framework that has dominated discussions on the Cold War's conclusion. Yet, it stands in contrast to the broader trend observed in the thesis, where the emphasis on military and strategic factors is seen as part of a larger mosaic of influences. This includes economic crises, social upheaval, global security shifts, and Gorbachev's transformative leadership, which collectively contributed to the Soviet Union's collapse.

In presenting Petersen's work as part of this discourse, it becomes evident that while the "buildup argument" and the role of American policies are essential components of the narrative, they represent only one facet of the multifaceted tapestry that defined the Cold War era. This perspective underscores the importance of integrating a wider array of factors and influences to achieve a richer, more nuanced understanding of this transformative period in global history.

Among the four works considered in the first period there is a common thread of skepticism toward deterministic interpretations of Soviet history, particularly regarding the collapse of the Soviet Union. While each author approaches the subject from a slightly different perspective and focuses on different aspects of the Cold War and Soviet history, they all emphasize the importance of contingency, individual agency, and the complex interplay of internal and external factors in shaping historical outcomes.

None of the authors explicitly confirm the deterministic idea that the Soviet Union was bound to collapse. Instead, they highlight the multifaceted nature of historical events and the limitations of simplistic narratives that attribute historical outcomes solely to structural factors or inherent weaknesses within the Soviet system. By examining the role of leaders, policies, geopolitical dynamics, and ideological tensions, they offer nuanced analyses that challenge deterministic interpretations and underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of Soviet history and the Cold War era.

Summing up what was said, the comparative analysis of the first period's historiography

on the end of the Cold War reveals several intersecting themes across the four books. They collectively emphasize Mikhail Gorbachev's influential role and innovative foreign policy approach, highlighting his move towards cooperation and global security interconnectedness. The ideological shifts towards openness in engaging with Western ideas are acknowledged as crucial for Soviet policy changes. Intellectual and cultural exchanges with the West are seen as shaping Soviet reformers' perspectives, leading to policy reconsideration. Economic challenges are universally noted as contributing factors to the USSR's transformation and collapse. Global and domestic pressures, including the arms race and political dissent, created a context necessitating change. All books recognize the West's role, particularly the United States, in influencing the Cold War's end, though they differ in the extent of weight given to Western influence versus internal Soviet developments. None of the authors explicitly endorse the deterministic theory positing that the Soviet Union was destined to collapse. A recurring theme across all four works is their predominant focus on the perspectives of the two superpowers, analyzing the Cold War within a bipolar framework while largely overlooking its broader global context. They predominantly view the Cold War and its conclusion through the lens of US-USSR relations, underscoring the significance of this bipolar paradigm in shaping scholarly discourse on the subject.

In the expansive historiography of the Cold War, characterized by an increasing trend to broaden the scope of analysis to incorporate a broader array of internal and external influences, Raymond Garthoff's *Foreign Intelligence and the Historiography of the Cold War* stands out as a remarkable exception. This work delves into the often overlooked yet crucial dimension of espionage and intelligence operations, revealing their profound impact on political decisions and historical narratives during the Cold War era. Unlike the general trend observed in the second period of analysis, where the historical narrative expands to include diverse global actors and multifaceted influences, offering a richer and more nuanced understanding of the era, the role of intelligence in the unfolding of events has not been thoroughly explored in the works analyzed in the thesis.

Garthoff's paper shines a light on the secretive machinations of intelligence agencies and their operations, a domain that, despite its significant influence on geopolitical dynamics, remains surprisingly underexplored in academic circles. The reluctance to engage deeply with intelligence-related sources, often viewed as marginal to respectable historical inquiry, has contributed to this oversight. Yet, as Garthoff persuasively argues, intelligence was integral to the political processes of the time, shaping the decisions and actions of policymakers through insights not available through open sources.

Through a meticulous examination of declassified documents and intelligence assessments,

Garthoff provides a crucial foundation for understanding the multifaceted influence of intelligence on Cold War crises and confrontations. His analysis of pivotal moments, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin crisis, illustrates the complex interplay between intelligence gathering, policymaker assumptions, and the unfolding of international crises, revealing both the limitations and the critical importance of intelligence in crisis management.

Garthoff's call for a more nuanced historiographical approach that integrates the shadowy realm of intelligence into the broader Cold War narrative is a timely reminder of the necessity to acknowledge the pivotal role intelligence played in shaping events. This comprehensive examination not only encourages further academic exploration but also underscores the significance of critical engagement with intelligence as a fundamental factor in the historiography of the Cold War, thereby filling a notable gap in the thematic focus of the thesis' analyzed works.

### 3. Analysis of the four works from the second period

Stephen Kotkin's *Armageddon Averted* presents multiple perspectives on the event. It makes the book hard to read, because he seems to be arguing for multiple theses at the same time.

On the one hand, he emphasizes how the fall was primarily caused by Communist ideology and the misguided belief that socialism could be reformed and made to work. Gorbachev and the Soviet elite were instrumental in this attempt but ultimately failed due to their inability to recognize the inherent flaws in the socialist project. According to Kotkin, there was no alternative to liberal modernity, and attempts to reform socialism destabilized the system further. He argues that the collapse was not a result of neoliberal reform programs or the emergence of civil society but rather the inevitable outcome of a failed social system.

Central to Kotkin's argument is the idea that the Soviet Union positioned itself as a socialist alternative to capitalism, and its failure to outdo capitalism ultimately led to its demise. As Western economies expanded and the Soviet economy faltered, exacerbated by the burdens of maintaining satellite states and environmental degradation, the need for change became evident. Soviet socialism had lost the competition with capitalism, it could not provide a better standard of living or a superior political order.

Mikhail Gorbachev emerges as a pivotal figure willing to embark on reforms, characterized by Kotkin as a "genuine believer." He contends that perestroika was driven not solely by economic challenges but also by a psychological shift among the Soviet leadership, including alarm at Western progress and internal disloyalty.

Kotkin elucidates that the superpower rivalry was not the sole impetus for perestroika; it was also driven by a profound desire to fulfill socialism's promises, rejuvenate the party, and revive

the venerable ideals that sparked the October Revolution. This desire influenced both the inception of perestroika and the particular form it adopted. The failure of perestroika, coupled with the actions of the Soviet elite, led to the demise of the Union.

Moreover, Kotkin suggests that prior to Gorbachev's perestroika, the Soviet Union was in decline but not beyond salvage. It was lagging behind the West, yet there was still potential for its survival. Consequently, Kotkin posits that it was perestroika itself that precipitated the Soviet Union's collapse. What puzzles him is the significance of perestroika to Gorbachev and why he doggedly pursued it amidst the unfolding disintegration.

He argues that cynical leaders in the republics abandoned the Soviet state when they saw it was sinking, leading to a relatively swift and bloodless dissolution. Therefore, the internal dynamics and actions of the Soviet elite played a pivotal role in the demise of the Union. In examining the actions of Gorbachev and his supporters, Kotkin does not question their conviction in perestroika or their genuine belief in the possibility of reform. Instead, he inquires why the broader Soviet elite, many of whom were skeptical of perestroika, permitted the dismantling of the system. The central enigma Kotkin explores is the failure of the extensive Soviet elite to safeguard socialism and the Union.<sup>125</sup>

On the other hand, Kotkin also emphasizes structural factors alongside agency. These factors include geopolitical competition with the United States, the Soviet Union's failure to transition to a consumer economy, the flawed Soviet constitution, and the absence of essential liberal institutions needed for economic reform. Kotkin also highlights how glasnost undermined support for socialism and created illusions about an affluent welfare society in Russia. Kotkin also critiques the half-hearted nature of the Soviet Union's marketization and liberalization efforts. Granting autonomy to cooperatives resulted in rampant criminal activity and a loss of state control. Similarly, strategic retrenchment led to unforeseen consequences and exacerbated economic strains, ultimately undermining the authority of the Communist Party.

His analysis thus seems to be two-fold: it focusses on elite dynamics as well as structural factors. Kotkin encapsulates his analysis by examining the interplay between political elites and the structural forces at play during this transformative period in history.

In his analysis, Kotkin elucidates how perestroika catalyzed political liberalization, freedom of the press, and the initiation of competitive elections. Gorbachev's reluctance to fully transition to a market economy and his opposition to dissolving the Communist Party were rooted in his

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<sup>125</sup> As we shall discuss in more detail in a later section, the role of Soviet elites in the demise of the Union is a theme that has been greatly emphasized by Zubok as well as Miller (see the analysis of these books in this section). See also Zubok et. al (2021).

dedication to a vision of socialism that was reformed rather than abandoned, and a hesitancy to use military force for political suppression, due to ideological convictions.

Another important point he makes in his book is that the collapse of the Soviet Union was ongoing, extending beyond the official dissolution date in 1991. He argues that the structural complexities inherited from the Soviet Union continued to affect governance during the post-Soviet era, complicating Russia's transition. Distinctively, Kotkin rejects the notion that the Soviet Union's dissolution in December 1991 marked the end of its collapse, deeming such an idea as simplistic. He contends that it was not until around the year 2000 that the extensive effects of the Soviet disintegration had been fully realized. The post-Soviet Russian Federation bore the legacies of its predecessor, inheriting its societal and economic structures and institutional functions. The issues that underlined the Soviet Union's failure persisted and needed resolution beyond the official dissolution date. Hence, Kotkin extends his analysis of the Soviet collapse beyond 1991 to include the subsequent decade.

In line with this trend, Laurien Crump's article, "New Cold War or Unfinished Post-Cold War Settlement?" published in the *Atlantisch Perspectief*, provides a nuanced exploration into the contemporary geopolitical landscape, positing it as an extension of unresolved issues from the Cold War era rather than the commencement of a new Cold War. Through this lens, Crump challenges the prevailing narrative that the ideological and nuclear tensions defining the latter half of the 20th century have re-emerged in the same form. Instead, she argues, the current geopolitical tensions, particularly in Europe, stem from unresolved disputes and the incomplete integration of Russia into the European security architecture.

The backdrop for Crump's analysis is the stark contrast between the geopolitical dynamics at the end of the Cold War and those of the present day. She draws a parallel between the ongoing Paris peace talks between Russia and Ukraine and the historical summit in November 1990, which aimed to end the Cold War through the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). This comparison underscores the changed political landscape, including the notable absence of Great Britain in recent negotiations due to internal political shifts and its implications for the European Union's cohesive role in the post-Cold War world.

Central to Crump's argument is the assertion that the post-Cold War settlement remains "unfinished." This viewpoint is supported by a report from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which highlights the unresolved issues from 1990, particularly concerning Russia's role in European security and the unfulfilled aspirations for a "Common European Home" as envisioned by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Moreover, Crump critiques the notion of an unequivocal triumph of liberal democracy in

the post-Cold War era, as famously predicted by Francis Fukuyama. She points to the rise of populism across Europe and the erosion of the delineation between truth and fiction in politics, embodied by figures such as Donald Trump and Boris Johnson, as evidence of the ongoing challenges to Western democratic values and institutions.

The debate surrounding continuity versus discontinuity across the 1991 divide also presents intriguing historiographical parallels, which is worth mentioning briefly. Certain scholars have criticized the excessive focus on the historical rupture at this juncture, arguing that it has led to a misguided interpretation of paradigm shifts in the historiography of the Soviet era. Glennys Young's paper, *Fetishizing the Soviet Collapse: Historical Rupture and the Historiography of (Early) Soviet Socialism*, for example, examines the complex relationship between the historiography of the Soviet Union and the nation's collapse, arguing against the overemphasis or "fetishization" of the Soviet collapse's impact on historical studies. Young suggests that the collapse has been given undue credit for paradigm shifts and thematic changes in the field, which, in reality, began evolving before the Soviet Union's dissolution. This evolution, according to him, was influenced by broader academic trends, including the linguistic turn and increased interest in cultural and social theory, which pulled historians towards integrating new theories, concepts, and non-Russian historiographies.

In line with Kotkin's observations, Young points out that while there is a consensus on viewing the Soviet collapse as a catalyst for historiographical change, there is less clarity on what the collapse precisely entails, its timeline, and its exact impact on historical research.

Young's paper concludes by highlighting the consequences of overemphasizing the Soviet collapse, including the underestimation of continuity and overestimation of novelty in Soviet historiography.

Another distinctive point raised by Kotkin's book, is his suggestion that the structural complexities inherited from the Soviet Union not only made governance arduous during Yeltsin's tenure but must have also presented comparable challenges for Gorbachev. The narrative concludes that Russia's post-Soviet trajectory was significantly affected by the legacy of its Soviet institutional framework, which slowed and complicated the country's transition.

He also emphasizes that Gorbachev's commitment to "humane socialism" played a crucial role in averting a more violent collapse of the Soviet Union. Crushing protests or suppressing separatist movements would have contradicted Gorbachev's ideological convictions and potentially intensified societal tensions. With the Soviet Union's military and nuclear arsenal at his disposal, the outcome of the war could have been so much worse than it was. Hence the title of his book, "Armageddon Averted". In relation Kotkin mentions how China's model of reforms under Deng, maintaining the party's monopoly while allowing market behavior, is often regretted



as a path not taken by Gorbachev.

The Chinese example supports the notion that socialism with a human face played a pivotal role in the Soviet collapse, as opposed to a ruthless pragmatist approach. The choice of a Khrushchevian true-believer for Soviet reforms, hesitant to fully embrace capitalism for ideological reasons, further shaped the trajectory of the dissolution.

Kotkin thus challenges traditional narratives of the Soviet collapse, highlighting the complex interplay of internal dynamics, ideological competition, and structural factors. By reexamining the motivations behind perestroika and the actions of the Soviet elite Kotkin provides a nuanced understanding of the Union's downfall and its ongoing implications for post-Soviet Russia. Rather than a simple dichotomy of reformists versus conservatives, the true narrative complexity lay in Gorbachev's nuanced deconstruction of Soviet structures, spanning economic, political, and ideological spheres. He delves into the rationale behind the reforms, emphasizing that the superpower rivalry post-World War II was not central to his analysis. Instead, he focuses on questions regarding the motivations for reform, the lack of resistance from Soviet elites, and the lasting impact of the Soviet legacy on these reforms.

Kotkin disputes the notion that increased military expenditures or central planning failures were the primary causes of the collapse, suggesting that the Soviet Union remained "lethargically stable" despite these challenges.

Chris Miller's *Struggle* delves into Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to salvage the Soviet economy, offering a historical examination of his endeavors. Contrary to common narratives, Miller argues that Gorbachev's failure to implement effective economic reforms was not due to a lack of understanding or effort on his part. Rather, Gorbachev faced significant resistance from entrenched interest groups, particularly in the military-industrial complex, agriculture, and industry sectors, which hindered his reform efforts. This resistance, coupled with a lack of fiscal discipline and economic incompetence, ultimately contributed to the bankruptcy and collapse of the Soviet Union.

Miller provocatively questions whether a transition to a market economy could have occurred without political reform, highlighting the interconnected nature of politics and economics in Soviet politics. He draws a comparison between the USSR and the CPR, which was also implementing economic reforms in that period. He refutes the notion that the Soviet Union should have followed China's model of economic reform, emphasizing that Gorbachev and his allies extensively studied and attempted to implement similar policies. However, where the Soviet Union diverged from China was due to the obstructionism of influential interest groups. He challenges the prevailing argument that Gorbachev's perestroika was inherently flawed and led to the demise

of the Soviet Union. Instead, Miller suggests that political reform was a necessary precursor to genuine economic change, as it was crucial for overcoming resistance from powerful interest groups.

Miller argues against the notion that authoritarian-style solutions, akin to those implemented in China, could have salvaged the Soviet Union. He suggests that under different circumstances, the USSR might have endured. Importantly, Miller does not attribute the collapse of the Soviet Union solely to perestroika, nor does he deem it inherently flawed. Instead, he contends that perestroika failed to achieve its intended goals because Gorbachev encountered fierce opposition at every juncture, preventing its full implementation. This opposition stemmed from powerful interest groups within the Communist Party who resisted the reforms, ultimately thwarting Gorbachev's efforts to effect meaningful change. As Miller elucidates, these groups exerted such dominance over the Communist Party that Gorbachev was effectively precluded from utilizing the party as a vehicle for reform.

Unlike Gorbachev, Deng Xiaoping encountered relatively weaker resistance from interest groups in China. The comparative weakness of Chinese interest groups can be attributed, in part, to the less advanced state of Chinese industry compared to its Soviet counterpart. Additionally, the military and security apparatus in China lacked the pervasive influence and strength wielded by their Soviet counterparts. These factors contributed to a more conducive environment for reform in China, allowing Deng Xiaoping greater latitude in implementing his economic policies.

Similar to the works under scrutiny in the first chapter of this thesis, Miller highlights the generational shift within the USSR's elite that led to an ideological change among them. He shows how the ideology of "New Thinking" served as the foundation for the changes that Gorbachev sought to implement, essentially giving birth to perestroika. This ideological framework was characterized by an embrace of democratic principles and universal human rights. For Gorbachev, continuing with authoritarian rule and eschewing the pursuit of democracy was no longer a viable option. Instead, he believed that embracing democratic values and advocating for universal human rights were essential steps in addressing the challenges facing the Soviet Union and ushering in a new era of political and social transformation. Thus, New Thinking represented a departure from the traditional authoritarianism that had long characterized Soviet rule, signaling Gorbachev's commitment to fostering a more open and democratic society. He challenges the idea that political and economic reforms could be treated as separate processes, asserting that they were inherently interconnected within the Soviet context. This highlights the intricate relationship between politics and economics in shaping the trajectory of perestroika.

Miller argues that the failure of Gorbachev's reforms stemmed from opposition within the

Communist Party, which was dominated by powerful interest groups reluctant to relinquish their influence and privileges. Miller refutes the conventional narratives that perestroika was inherently flawed and was what ultimately caused the Union's demise. The USSR was facing a budget crisis that continued to get worse but that could not be addressed because the government was in a gridlock. Gorbachev's attempts at political reform, aimed at curbing the Party's power, further weakened the system and contributed to its eventual collapse.

In contrast to other narratives that attribute the Soviet Union's demise solely to Gorbachev, Miller offers a nuanced explanation that emphasizes the broader political dynamics at play. He suggests that the Soviet system was unreformable not because of insurmountable economic problems, but because it vested vast political power in groups resistant to change.

As opposed to narratives that we have seen in the books of the first period analyzed in this thesis, Miller does not portray Gorbachev as a very powerful individual. He challenges prevailing perceptions of Gorbachev's strength and positions him as just one actor within the fragmented Soviet political system, who faced many challenges in implementing his reforms.

Miller challenges conventional narratives, as others have before him, that attribute the collapse of the Soviet Union solely to losing the ideological battle with the United States. While acknowledging the ideological dimension of the Cold War and its influence on the Soviet Union's trajectory, Miller's analysis reveals that this explanation alone is insufficient to fully comprehend the complexities of the Soviet collapse.

Overall, Miller's analysis challenges conventional interpretations of the collapse of the Soviet Union and underscores the complex interplay between politics and economics in shaping historical events. Miller's analysis however has the tendency to oversimplify the complex array of factors contributing to the decline of the Soviet system. Miller predominantly focuses on the internal dynamics and power struggles within the Soviet elite, as well as the resistance from bureaucratic interests, as primary drivers of the Soviet collapse. However, as evidenced in numerous other scholarly works that have been analyzed in this thesis, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a multitude of interconnected factors. By exclusively examining the structural economic and political dimensions, coupled with changes in the ideological orientation of the Soviet elite, Miller overlooks other significant contributors to the Soviet Union's demise. For instance, the erosion of the ideological legitimacy of the state during the later stages of socialism or the influence of nationalist and independence movements in Soviet republics.

Central to Spohr's *Post-Wall* are several key arguments regarding the transformative period following the end of the Cold War. Her main argument is that interactive diplomacy among

international leaders played a central role in shaping the Post-Wall world, rather than major conflicts as seen in previous transformative moments in history. She emphasizes the pivotal role of negotiations and cooperative efforts among leaders such as Gorbachev, Bush, Thatcher, and Mitterrand in adapting Western institutions to foster unity across Europe and managing the transition from the Cold War era to a new global order.

Secondly, Spohr highlights the interconnectedness of events in Europe and Asia, contrasting peaceful transitions in Berlin and Moscow with the violent suppression in Tiananmen Square under Deng Xiaoping's regime. By examining these events together, she illuminates shared historical underpinnings and their impact on contemporary global challenges.

Spohr's work expands the narrative of the Cold War to encompass a broader, global perspective, diverging from the narrower focus of previous authors we encountered in the earlier period.

Additionally, Spohr offers a nuanced reassessment of key leaders' contributions to the end of the Cold War, shedding light on lesser-known actors and the complex interplay of interests and dynamics during this period. She challenges the conventional focus on Gorbachev as the sole mover of events, highlighting the roles of other leaders like Bush and Kohl.

Another central argument is the examination of the transition from protest movements to electoral revolutions in Eastern European countries. Economic and political transformations in Eastern Europe led to a wave of dissent that swept across the region ultimately culminated in the overthrow of communist regimes and the ushering in of democratic governance. What is particularly noteworthy is the peaceful manner in which Europe's geopolitical map was redrawn, contrasting starkly with previous epochs marked by bloodshed and territorial realignment. The author emphasizes the pivotal role played by both grassroots movements and diplomatic initiatives in shaping this transformative period.<sup>126</sup>

Furthermore, Spohr emphasizes the dual nature of the events of 1989, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the violent repression in Tiananmen Square, and their lasting impact on global dynamics. She also underscores the importance of grassroots movements and diplomatic initiatives in shaping the transition, contrasting responses in Europe and China. Spohr discusses the challenges and complexities faced by international leaders as they navigated the transition to a new world order, reshaping geopolitics in the process. She highlights shortcomings in the international settlement that ended the Cold War and emphasizes the importance of understanding

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<sup>126</sup> As we shall discuss in more detail later, Spohr's emphasis on the significance of grassroots movements and diplomatic efforts in precipitating the downfall of the Soviet Union is echoed in other scholarly works from the same period (cf. Autio-Sarasmo 2011, *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: from Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975–1985*, and *Europe and the End of Cold War: A Reappraisal*).

the period's origins in addressing contemporary global challenges.

We see a similar move in Laurien Crump's article, *New Cold War or Unfinished Post-Cold War Settlement?*, that has been mentioned above in relation to Kotkin. Crump also illustrates the fall of the Berlin Wall, using this event as a springboard for a broader reevaluation of the Cold War's conclusion and its enduring influence on contemporary geopolitics. In this paper, Crump introduces a special issue arising from a conference that marked thirty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. This issue, by leveraging new perspectives enabled by the opening of Central and Eastern European archives, contributes to what Crump terms 'New Cold War History.' This emerging historiography portrays the Cold War as a global, cultural, and ideational conflict, extending beyond the traditionally understood geopolitical and ideological boundaries.

The contributions to this special issue cover a wide array of topics, from the specific impacts on Europe to the broader global implications, including the role of individuals and institutions in German reunification and the Cold War's extensive reach to regions such as the Middle East.

In concluding, Crump posits that while the term 'New Cold War' might not accurately capture the essence of current international dynamics, the exploration of Cold War history through newly available archival materials and other sources is imperative for comprehending the nuances of today's global relations. This exploration not only revisits the end of the Cold War but also scrutinizes its lasting legacy, demonstrating that the Cold War's influence persists in shaping the political, cultural, and security contours of the contemporary world.

Spohr's analysis challenges the prevailing notion of a universal convergence towards US values following the Cold War, disputing the thesis of capitalism's inevitable triumph over communism. This perspective diverges from Fukuyama's "end of history" theory. Furthermore, Spohr's work highlights the shortcomings of the international settlement that concluded the Cold War, pointing to unresolved conflicts, arms control challenges, weakened international institutions, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as key issues. Spohr also illustrates how the post-Cold War geopolitical realignment led to the emergence of new global powers like Russia and China. Understanding the complexities and origins of this period is crucial for addressing contemporary global challenges. Spohr emphasizes the ongoing influence of the late 1980s and early 1990s geopolitical order on contemporary global dynamics.

Spohr observes that historical transitions typically involve more conflict. She credits the peaceful nature of the Cold War's end to cooperative international efforts, notably including nuclear arms reduction talks between Gorbachev and Reagan, as well as Gorbachev's policies of perestroika and glasnost. She also points out how Gorbachev's implementation of perestroika and

glasnost, played a crucial role in hastening the Soviet Union's collapse. Although intended to revitalize the Soviet system, these reforms inadvertently accelerated its disintegration, underscoring the profound impact of leadership dynamics on historical trajectories.

The main thesis of her book is that the period from 1988 to 1992 was marked by rapid and transformative change, driven by the actions of key leaders and the aspirations of ordinary citizens. Overall, Spohr's work offers valuable insights into the transformative period following the end of the Cold War, emphasizing the roles of diplomacy, leadership, and historical legacies in shaping the Post-Wall world.

Spohr's perspective diverges from a predominant focus on structural factors as the primary causes of the Cold War's end. She assigns less significance to economic factors and the structural weaknesses of the Soviet Union in her analysis. Moreover, she does not view the ideological battle between superpowers as a crucial factor in the collapse. Disagreeing with deterministic arguments suggesting the Soviet Union's collapse was inevitable, Spohr instead emphasizes "people power," representing grassroots change, and "high politics," indicating diplomatic efforts and cooperation among world leaders, as key drivers behind the Soviet Union's downfall. Unlike the authors in the earlier period, Spohr positions the narrative of the Cold War's conclusion and the Soviet Union's collapse within a significantly wider global context. Furthermore, she shifts her focus away from Gorbachev as the primary figure influencing events, diverging from the prevailing trend observed in the earlier works.

Spohr stresses the significance of comprehending the geopolitical landscape of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which continues to exert influence on contemporary global dynamics. A pivotal aspect of her work lies in its broader scope; Spohr not only recounts the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union but also delves into how these events have shaped the present world. Unlike authors from the previous period who primarily recounted historical events, Spohr's approach involves analyzing history as a tool for understanding the present. This represents a significant historiographical trend observed in the works analyzed during the second period.

In his comprehensive *Collapse*, Zubok challenges the prevailing belief that the collapse of the Soviet regime was an inevitable outcome. He argues that during Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership, the Soviet Union faced a critical juncture between continued decline and radical reform, ultimately opting for the latter. However, Gorbachev's attempts to revitalize the Soviet economy through reform proved to be disastrous.

Zubok emphasizes the pivotal role of Gorbachev in the demise of the Soviet Union. Despite individual factors not appearing significant, Zubok contends that their convergence

formed a "perfect storm" leading to the state's downfall. While the opposition of Soviet elites to Gorbachev's reforms is often cited, Zubok argues that they demonstrated adaptability. His reevaluation of the inevitability of the Soviet collapse questions alternative policy options available to Gorbachev.

Contrary to the belief that external pressures, particularly from the United States, played a major role, Zubok emphasizes internal causes as paramount. He disputes the direct role of anti-communist or nationalist movements, attributing the collapse more to Gorbachev's decision to relinquish political power.

Zubok also challenges the notion that the Soviet economy's structural deficiencies solely caused its demise, instead pointing to Gorbachev's reforms. He suggests that a greater willingness to employ coercion and adherence to Yuri Andropov's policies aimed at improving labor discipline, productivity, and combating corruption could have placated elites and enabled gradual integration into the global economy.

Furthermore, Zubok underscores the lack of substantial international assistance, contrasting it with the Marshall Plan's absence, exacerbating the Soviet Union's descent into economic turmoil. Despite Gorbachev's efforts to integrate with the West, aid was insufficient, contributing to widespread disillusionment and the emergence of the Russian Federation as a global pariah. Zubok's work sheds light not only on historical events but also on modern Russian foreign policy, offering insights into factors that contributed to renewed conflict in Eastern Europe. While scrutinizing the interplay between economic collapse and the devolution of political authority, he highlights the emergence of post-Soviet oligarchs amidst societal upheaval. Zubok's narrative extends beyond the dissolution of the Soviet Union to analyze the subsequent events and their impact on the contemporary state of Russia. His narrative elucidates how the nomenklatura, charged with laying the groundwork for the new system, became ensnared in corruption and self-interest. Amid the pervasive uncertainty about the future, they exploited the tumultuous transition to advance their own interests, resulting in the extensive looting of state assets, and the birth of post-Soviet oligarchs we see in Russia today.

The crisis of Soviet power involved both economic collapse and a reconfiguration of economic power as control over economic decision-making devolved from central authorities to local elites and managers. Zubok's work contextualizes the Soviet collapse within a broader framework encompassing globalization, economics, and nationalism, moving beyond the traditional paradigm of superpower ideological confrontation. He brings attention to the often-overlooked influence of Western soft power, enriching our understanding of factors contributing to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Contrary to Spohr, in his critique of Gorbachev's leadership, Zubok suggests that a more authoritarian reform path, similar to that initiated by Andropov, could have potentially preserved the Soviet Union by addressing economic challenges more decisively. However, his rationale for advocating coercion lacks clarity, and the feasibility of such an approach remains debatable. Contrary to other interpretations, Gorbachev is portrayed as a tragic figure who had good intentions but lacked the skills to achieve the monumental task at hand.

Zubok's meticulous examination, drawing from diverse archival sources, interviews, and memoirs, constructs a comprehensive narrative of the Soviet Union's demise. By considering both domestic and international factors, Zubok offers insights into the complex interplay between economic collapse, political authority, and global geopolitics during this pivotal period in history.

#### 4. Comparative Analysis of the second period

The second period of Cold War historiography, as reflected in the narratives of the four chosen books, presents a sophisticated reevaluation of the multifaceted processes leading to the Soviet Union's dissolution. This period's analysis transcends simplistic dichotomies of East versus West or reform versus stagnation, delving into the interplay of leadership decisions, economic mismanagement, internal dynamics, and global shifts that collectively precipitated an era-defining transformation. In exploring these narratives, recurring themes emerge, shedding light on various dimensions of the Soviet Union's decline and eventual dissolution. In examining the analyses presented in the books from the second period, several recurring themes have come to the forefront, indicating the multifaceted nature of the discourse.

These themes, which intersect and overlap within the scholarly literature, encompass various aspects of Soviet history and its eventual dissolution. One recurring theme revolves around the complex role of leadership within the Soviet Union, highlighting the complex dynamics between top political figures and their influence on policymaking and governance. The authors also consistently highlight the significant role played by economic mismanagement in contributing to the decline of the Soviet Union, pointing to inefficiencies in resource allocation, production, and distribution as key factors. There is a notable emphasis on internal dynamics and the influence of elite groups within Soviet society, with analyses delving into power struggles, factionalism, and patronage networks that shaped political decision-making processes. The broader global context and ideological shifts are also examined. We see the authors taking a more explicit stand against the deterministic view. A critical reassessment of Western actions or inactions during the Soviet Union's final years can be noticed as well. Scholars also examine the unintended consequences of economic and political reforms initiated during this period, assessing how these reforms impacted



various aspects of Soviet society and governance. Lastly, there is an exploration of the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, with discussions extending beyond the events of 1991 to examine the long-term implications for post-Soviet states and the international order.

The books critically analyze leadership decisions, particularly Gorbachev's reforms, portraying them as well-intentioned but ultimately contributing to the USSR's destabilization. This nuanced view contrasts with previous emphasis on leadership's innovative approach, suggesting a more critical evaluation of the reforms' unintended consequences.

The period following the Cold War's climax offers a richly complex narrative, woven by historians who scrutinize the period with a critical eye, particularly examining the nuanced role of leadership. The reforms initiated under Mikhail Gorbachev, once viewed with optimistic fervor, are re-evaluated through the prism of their unintended and destabilizing consequences.

Stephen Kotkin's *Armageddon Averted* presents a multifaceted analysis of the Soviet Union's decline, attributing the collapse to more than just economic failures. Kotkin argues that the ideological rigidity of the Communist system, coupled with the belief that socialism could be reformed, led to the USSR's downfall. Gorbachev's perestroika, while ambitious and driven by a genuine belief in socialism's potential, inadvertently accelerated the Union's demise. The reform measures, despite their intent to revitalize the Communist Party and honor the legacy of the October Revolution, could not counter the deep-seated issues that plagued the Soviet state.

Chris Miller's *Struggle* disputes the idea that Gorbachev's economic policies were flawed from inception. Instead, Miller points to the formidable resistance from the Soviet Union's powerful sectors as the primary obstacle. This resistance, starkly contrasting the more successful reform efforts in China, thwarted the Soviet Union's chances of economic recovery.

Kristina Spohr's "Post-wall, Post-square" casts the transformative era in a new light, emphasizing the effectiveness of diplomacy over confrontation. Spohr credits leaders such as Bush, Thatcher, and Mitterrand with shaping a unified Europe in the wake of the Cold War, a stark counterpoint to the violent events of Tiananmen Square. Her work challenges the finality of the 'end of history' narrative, instead highlighting the long-lasting effects of the geopolitical shifts of the late 20th century.

Vladislav Zubok's *Collapse* argues against the notion of an inevitable Soviet collapse. Instead, Zubok suggests that Gorbachev's policy decisions, particularly his reluctance to resort to coercion and his adherence to outdated principles, played a significant role in the USSR's end. Zubok's narrative goes beyond the Soviet Union's official end, tracing the continued influence of Soviet-era institutions on the shaping of modern Russia.

These scholarly works craft a layered account of the Soviet Union's final years, suggesting

that Gorbachev's pivotal reforms were interlaced within an intricate web of economic, ideological, and political factors. This collection of historical insights portrays a scenario where leadership decisions were not isolated missteps but rather part of a broader mosaic of internal and structural challenges that together facilitated the Soviet Union's ultimate unraveling.

A detailed critique of economic policies underscores systemic failures, not just external pressures, as central to the Soviet collapse. This focus shifts from earlier accounts that stressed economic challenges to a more in-depth analysis of how mismanagement and structural weaknesses precipitated the fall.

As the Soviet Union navigated the tempestuous waters of the late 20th century, the voyage was fraught with economic missteps and systemic oversights. The ideal of a reformed socialism, with which Gorbachev so passionately identified, faced the reality of entrenched ideological structures and an economic edifice resistant to change. Stephen Kotkin's examination in "Armageddon Averted" captures this contradiction, highlighting the union's internal struggles and the external allure of Western prosperity, which collectively hastened its downfall despite Gorbachev's well-meaning reforms.

Kotkin in *Armageddon Averted* presents a leadership caught in the throes of a psychological and ideological shift, where the desire to revitalize socialism's original promises collided with economic realities. His narrative suggests that perestroika, far from being the Soviet Union's salvation, was the harbinger of its collapse, exacerbated by the resistance of the republics' leaders, who were more inclined to secure their futures than to salvage the faltering state.

Complementing this perspective, Chris Miller's *Struggle* redirects the spotlight to the formidable barriers Gorbachev faced. The Soviet leader's vision for economic overhaul was continually thwarted by the military-industrial complex and other sectors, deeply entrenched in their ways. Miller dissects the political and economic intertwining that defined Soviet politics, contending that without political reform, economic change was unattainable, a lesson starkly contrasted with China's more successful reforms under Deng Xiaoping.

Kristina Spohr's *Post-wall* expands the historical scope, tracing the role of international diplomacy in shaping the post-Cold War world. Her analysis underlines the interconnected events across Europe and Asia, the transformative power of negotiations, and the influential undercurrents of 'people power' and high-level political strategy that collectively charted the course of the era's dramatic changes.

In *Collapse*, Vladislav Zubok revisits the Soviet Union's downfall as a confluence of internal and external factors. Rather than depicting an inevitable decline, Zubok sees Gorbachev's reforms as a gamble that did not pay off, undermined by the Soviet elites' adaptability and the lack of robust

international support. He notes the complexities of post-Soviet Russia, where the past continued to cast long shadows over the nation's tumultuous transition to a new order.

Through these narratives, a portrait of the Soviet Union's collapse emerges not as a single storyline but as a mosaic of economic, political, and ideological factors, where leadership decisions are interwoven with structural challenges against the backdrop of global change. Together, these historians offer a nuanced tableau of the Soviet Union's twilight years, providing a multifaceted understanding of the economic mismanagement and the structural weaknesses that presaged the end of an era.

The narratives also delve into the Soviet Union's internal dynamics, highlighting how elite actions and interests significantly influenced the course of events, a perspective that adds complexity to the understanding of the collapse beyond external pressures and ideological shifts. The unraveling of the Soviet Union, as examined through the discerning lenses of contemporary historians, is a narrative rich with the complex interplay of internal forces and the potent influence of the elite. This narrative challenges the simplicity of earlier perspectives that focused predominantly on external pressures and ideological shifts, revealing a nuanced tapestry of power, conviction, and the machinations within the Union itself.

For Kotinkin, in this complicated dance of power, Gorbachev stands as a pivotal figure. His policies, rooted in an ideological conviction for socialism, sought to revive the ideals of the October Revolution. Yet, Kotkin's examination suggests that these reforms, while driven by noble aspirations, inadvertently hastened the collapse they aimed to prevent. Kotkin sheds light on the Soviet elite's critical role, not as staunch defenders of the system but as agents of its disintegration, choosing self-preservation over the survival of the Union. His narrative explores the contradictions and consequences of perestroika and glasnost, revealing how these reforms, combined with the elite's actions, fueled the Union's decline.

Miller's account echoes this theme, emphasizing the resistance Gorbachev faced from within, particularly from interest groups within the military-industrial complex and other sectors whose obstructionism hindered the path to economic reform. The internal power struggles and the elite's dominance over the Communist Party are shown to be as instrumental in the Union's demise as any economic mismanagement.

Spohr's analysis adds a global dimension to the understanding of the Soviet Union's end. She highlights the influence of international diplomacy and grassroots movements in reshaping the world post-Cold War, a period marked by significant transformations driven by leaders and ordinary citizens alike. This broadens the context in which the Soviet collapse is understood, moving beyond the myopic focus on Gorbachev and instead examining the collective impact of

various global actors.

Zubok's work provides a revisionist counterpoint, arguing against the notion of an inevitable Soviet demise. He presents the Union's collapse as a result of choices made within a spectrum of possible paths, where the elite's adaptability and decisions played a decisive role. Zubok brings to light the influence of the Soviet elite, whose adaptability and actions in the face of a declining system contributed to the Union's collapse. Rather than staunch resistance to change, it was perhaps their very adaptability that sealed the fate of the Soviet Union. The narrative extends beyond the Union's dissolution, painting a picture of a Russia grappling with the legacies of its Soviet past and the emergence of new powers on the global stage. The nomenklatura, envisioned as the linchpin of the new system, proved to be corrupt and self-serving. Amidst the uncertainty surrounding the Soviet Union's fate, the ruling elite opportunistically exploited the tumultuous transition for personal enrichment, leading to the rampant plundering of state assets. Zubok argues that instead of rallying to save the union, many members of the Soviet elite engaged in corruption, nepotism, and other forms of self-enrichment. He suggests that these actions further weakened the cohesion of the Soviet state and contributed to its eventual dissolution.

Zubok's examination of the post-Soviet transition further underscores the lasting influence of Soviet legacies on Russia's current state, an influence that continues to shape the geopolitical landscape.

The perspective presented in Vladimir Pechatnov's article, *The system was unable to defend itself*, aligns with Kotkin's and Zubok's takes on the role of the Soviet Elite. Pechatnov's examination of the Soviet collapse underscores the role of the elite in hastening the Union's demise through self-serving actions and a lack of commitment to preserving the existing system. The author reflects on their experience as a junior diplomat stationed in Washington DC during the collapse of the Soviet Union. They recall the surreal and incomprehensible nature of witnessing events unfold from afar, particularly the lowering of the Soviet flag at the embassy. This prompts them to contemplate the reasons behind the Soviet system's inability to defend itself, despite its apparent control and dominance. The disintegration of the nomenklatura, the Soviet bureaucratic elite, is highlighted as a critical aspect. By the late 1980s, the elite became divided and disoriented, with pragmatic elements embracing privatization and seeking personal enrichment. Pechatnov highlights part of the Soviet's elite that adapted to the changing times of the late 1980s, seeking to enrich themselves rather than preserving the old command and control economy.

Like Pechatnov, Zubok and Kotkin both highlight the detrimental role played by the Soviet elite in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both authors emphasize how the Soviet elite ultimately played a crucial role in the Union's demise, accelerating its downfall by means of their corrupt

behavior.

Zubok, Miller, and Kotkin converge on the theme of the Soviet elite's pivotal role in the Union's demise, challenging earlier narratives that solely attributed responsibility to Gorbachev. Zubok contends that while Gorbachev was influential, a broader spectrum of Soviet actors shaped the Union's fate, presenting a revisionist perspective that questions the inevitability of the Soviet collapse. Zubok's examination extends beyond Gorbachev's leadership, highlighting the adaptability of the Soviet elites and their opportunistic exploitation of the transitional period, which contributed to the widespread plundering of state assets and the emergence of influential oligarchs. Kotkin makes a similar point in his book. While also underscoring the significance of the elite in the collapse of the Soviet Union, Miller posits an earlier locus of blame: he contends that it was the elite's obstruction of Gorbachev's reforms that ultimately precipitated the demise of the Union. According to Miller, had it not been for this opposition from the elite, and had Gorbachev's reforms been implemented in their entirety as he intended, the Union might have been salvaged.

Together, these accounts paint a picture of the Soviet Union's fall as a complex interplay of internal dynamics and elite influence, where the actions and interests of those at the helm had as much to do with the Union's fate as the broader economic and political structures. This perspective provides a deeper understanding of the collapse, one that appreciates the complexities of power within the Soviet Union and recognizes the profound impact of elite decisions in the course of historical events. Overall, the authors in their respective works tend to shine the spotlight on a multitude of actors rather than solely focusing on Gorbachev. While acknowledging Gorbachev's significance in the historical narrative, they also delve into the roles played by various other individuals and entities. This trend of broadening the scope to encompass multiple actors is notable throughout the second period we are analyzing.

By situating the Soviet collapse within broader global shifts and examining the impact of globalization, nationalism, and cultural transformations, these works extend the discourse beyond the binary Cold War confrontation narrative, offering a richer tapestry of influences. In the twilight of the Soviet Union, a complex interplay of factors—both internal and global—converged to shape its destiny. The traditional narrative of a binary Cold War confrontation does little justice to the intricate dynamics that precipitated the fall of this once-mighty power.

The Soviet Union's internal struggle, marked by the Gorbachev-led reforms of perestroika and glasnost, represented a profound shift in governance and policy. These reforms, intended to inject life into the stagnating Soviet system, instead exposed the fragility of its foundations, already weakened by deep-seated economic and political issues. Gorbachev, portrayed by Stephen Kotkin as a "genuine believer" in socialism, aspired to a grand vision of reforming and reviving the Union's

socialist roots. However, the impact of globalization and the appeal of liberal modernity presented challenges far beyond what the Soviet ideological framework could withstand.

Chris Miller's scrutiny of the Soviet economy reveals a battlefield of resistance where entrenched interest groups within the military-industrial complex and other sectors of power stymied Gorbachev's efforts for economic transformation. Unlike China, where Deng Xiaoping's reforms faced lesser resistance and could draw on the resilience of an emerging market, the Soviet Union's path was marred by a rigidity that left little room for the flexibility needed in an era of rapid global change.

The broader global context of the era is masterfully depicted by Kristina Spohr, who illustrates a world where the geopolitical landscape was being redrawn, not through the binary lens of East versus West but through a more nuanced prism that considered the complex interdependencies of nations. The peaceful end of the Cold War and the transformation of Europe's political map were as much a result of astute diplomatic engagement as of the ideological shifts occurring within and beyond the Soviet borders.

The synthesis of these perspectives reveals a Soviet collapse that cannot be attributed to a single cause. It was the culmination of a series of economic missteps, ideological rigidity, and a failure to adapt to an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. The Soviet Union, a formidable superpower, found itself outpaced by the very global currents it had once sought to navigate and shape.

In the realm of Cold War historiography from this period, Michael F. Hopkins' 2007 paper *Continuing Debate and New Approaches in Cold War History* (that we have mentioned before), has surfaced a critical void in the exploration of the complex interplay between the Soviet Union and China. Hopkins illuminates the insufficiency of in-depth analysis that grapples with the nuances of these two pivotal players on the global stage, underscoring a profound necessity for a more granular understanding of their interactions and individual developments. This call for a multi-faceted examination resonates through the subsequent historiographical efforts, particularly those of Spohr and Miller, who have embraced the challenge and significantly advanced the discourse.

While several later authors touch upon the subject of China in their works, it is Spohr and Miller who particularly emphasize its importance, Spohr and Miller's scholarly contributions serve as exemplars, addressing the lacuna highlighted by Hopkins. They provide a comparative lens through which the intricate dynamics of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the unfolding events in the Soviet Union are meticulously analyzed. Their works transcend the conventional narratives, offering a robust analytical framework to dissect the critical junctures that shaped the trajectories of both regimes. It is within this intellectual milieu that Spohr and Miller's focus on

China gains profound significance.

As Spohr extends the purview of her analysis to encapsulate global dynamics, she presents a compelling argument against the notion of a unipolar world order postulated in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution. Her work scrutinizes the intricate weave of international events that demonstrate a palpable interconnectedness, thereby challenging the triumphalist assertions of capitalism's ideological supremacy. Miller, in tandem, employs the Sino-Soviet comparison to shed light on the divergent paths chosen by these nations in the face of analogous political and social upheavals. The stark contrast between the USSR's disintegration and China's endurance provides a fertile ground for discourse, as Miller elucidates the factors that precluded the Soviet Union from emulating China's trajectory.

Their analyses converge on the pivotal occurrences that preceded the Soviet Union's collapse—the resonance of the Berlin Wall's fall and the echoes of Tiananmen Square—each embodying the distinct choices and outcomes that befell the two communist giants. Through this juxtaposition, Spohr and Miller unravel the complexities of the period, enriching our comprehension of the historical landscape with a nuanced perspective that captures the essence of Hopkins' call for an expanded historiographical approach.

The intellectual odyssey embarked upon by Spohr and Miller not only fills the historiographical gap lamented by Hopkins but also propels the discourse forward. Their works embody the shift towards a broader understanding of Cold War dynamics, one that is inclusive of varied geopolitical actors and sensitive to the undercurrents of cultural, economic, and ideological forces. In essence, their scholarship is a testament to the evolving nature of historical inquiry, one that continues to challenge, refine, and enhance our grasp of the Cold War era and its enduring legacy.

Challenging deterministic views, the books argue for the contingency of the Soviet collapse, presenting it as a multifaceted process influenced by a confluence of factors rather than a preordained outcome, thus inviting a reevaluation of historical inevitability. In the complex web of the Soviet Union's demise, the interplay of internal dynamics and the influence of the Soviet elite cannot be understated. Their actions and interests were not just a backdrop but a driving force in the unraveling narrative of one of the 20th century's superpowers. It becomes evident that the Soviet collapse was not solely the result of external pressures or an ideological about-face in a Cold War vacuum. Instead, it was a rich tapestry woven from global shifts, the ambitions and fears of the Soviet leadership, and deep-rooted systemic weaknesses.

The profound implications of Gorbachev's “New Thinking”, as laid out by Chris Miller, underscored the emergence of a policy driven by a longing for democratic principles and universal

human rights. It was a departure from traditional authoritarianism, signaling a readiness for political and social metamorphosis. Miller suggests that the perestroika reforms encountered fierce opposition from powerful interest groups entrenched within the Communist Party, indicating a complex struggle within the echelons of power where economic and political reforms were inseparable. This internal resistance, set against a backdrop of worsening budget crises and government gridlock, highlights a Soviet Union in a state of inertia, where change was as much about overcoming internal opposition as it was about economic overhaul.

Simultaneously, Stephen Kotkin's exploration delves into the psychological and ideological undercurrents driving perestroika. He paints a picture of a Soviet Union positioned defiantly as a socialist alternative to capitalism, yet failing to match the latter's expansion and prosperity. Kotkin identifies a dual focus in the Soviet leadership's reform motivations: a desire to fulfill socialist promises and an alarm at Western progress, suggesting that Gorbachev's reforms were a gamble to rejuvenate the socialist ideal rather than a concession to capitalist success. Yet, this very commitment to socialism is depicted as a double-edged sword, leading to a destabilization from which the Union could not recover.

Kristina Spohr and Vladislav Zubok offer narratives that place the Soviet Union within broader global contexts. Spohr's depiction of the transformative diplomacy following the Cold War and the interconnected events of Berlin and Moscow, contrasted with the violent suppression in Tiananmen Square, highlights the multifaceted nature of this historical juncture. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent geopolitical realignment, including the emergence of new global powers, indicate a world in flux, challenging deterministic views of the Soviet Union's collapse. Disagreeing with deterministic arguments suggesting the Soviet Union's collapse was inevitable, Spohr instead emphasizes "people power," representing grassroots change, and "high politics," indicating diplomatic efforts and cooperation among world leaders, as key drivers behind the Soviet Union's downfall.

A central argument in her book is the examination of the transition from protest movements to electoral revolutions in Eastern European countries. Economic and political transformations in Eastern Europe led to a wave of dissent that swept across the region ultimately culminating in the overthrow of communist regimes and the ushering in of democratic governance. She contends that 1988 to 1992 was marked by rapid and transformative change, driven by the actions of key leaders and the aspirations of ordinary citizens. Disagreeing with deterministic arguments suggesting the Soviet Union's collapse was inevitable, Spohr instead emphasizes "people power," representing grassroots change, and "high politics," indicating diplomatic efforts and cooperation among world leaders, as key drivers behind the Soviet Union's downfall.



Zubok further enriches this dialogue by situating the Soviet collapse within the broader framework of globalization, economics, and nationalism, moving beyond the paradigm of superpower confrontation and underscoring the neglected influence of Western soft power. In his comprehensive analysis, Zubok challenges the prevailing belief that the collapse of the Soviet regime was an inevitable outcome. He argues that during Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership, the Soviet Union faced a critical juncture between continued decline and radical reform, ultimately opting for the latter. However, Gorbachev's attempts to revitalize the Soviet economy through reform proved to be disastrous. Zubok emphasizes the pivotal role of Gorbachev in the demise of the Soviet Union. Despite individual factors not appearing significant, Zubok contends that their convergence formed a "perfect storm" leading to the state's downfall. Zubok also challenges the notion that the Soviet economy's structural deficiencies solely caused its demise, instead pointing to Gorbachev's reforms. He also underscores the adaptability of Soviet elites who, rather than resisting change, often sought to navigate the tumultuous waters of reform for their own benefit, contributing to the fragmentation of authority and the disintegration of the Union.

These accounts collectively advocate for a reassessment of historical inevitability, inviting a more nuanced comprehension of the Soviet Union's end. They argue for the contingency of the Soviet collapse, presenting it as a process influenced by various factors rather than a foregone conclusion. The collective efforts of these scholars present a historical narrative that is rich in its acknowledgment of the complex forces at play, urging a reevaluation of the past that is critical for understanding the present and future.

A critical reassessment of Western actions or inactions during the Soviet Union's final years suggests a complex interplay of external influences, contrasting with narratives that predominantly highlight Western roles in facilitating the end of the Cold War. In dissecting the demise of the Soviet Union, the interwoven narratives of Stephen Kotkin, Chris Miller, and Kristina Spohr highlight the complex interplay of internal dynamics, elite decision-making, and ideological evolution. These accounts collectively challenge deterministic histories, arguing instead for a nuanced understanding of the Soviet collapse as a contingent process shaped by a multitude of factors, rather than a single, inevitable outcome.

The transformation of the Soviet Union was not a simple story of ideological defeat or economic calamity. It was, as these scholars articulate, a multi-layered saga of change, marked by the pivotal actions of elites and the profound shifts within the apparatus of power. The leadership's decisions, far from being uniformly strategic or visionary, were often reactionary, shaped by pressures both from within the Party and from an increasingly connected global landscape.

Kotkin's *Armageddon Averted* critically examines the period, not solely through the lens of

superpower rivalry but also through the ideological steadfastness of leaders like Gorbachev, who, while earnest in their commitment to reform, perhaps underestimated the forces of inertia within the Soviet system. Meanwhile, Miller's *Struggle* pivots to the significant resistance met by reform initiatives, where the entrenched interests within the Soviet military-industrial complex and other sectors acted as a formidable bulwark against economic transformation. Miller challenges conventional narratives, as others have before him, that attribute the collapse of the Soviet Union solely to losing the ideological battle with the United States. While acknowledging the ideological dimension of the Cold War and its influence on the Soviet Union's trajectory, Miller's analysis reveals that this explanation alone is insufficient to fully comprehend the complexities of the Soviet collapse.

Furthermore, the impact of globalization and cultural shifts is evident in the examination of Spohr, who underscores the role of international diplomacy and the global realignment of power post-Cold War. The emergence of grassroots movements and the push towards democratic governance also signal a departure from the rigid dichotomy of the Cold War, underscoring the significance of internal transformations that were as much about cultural and ideological shifts as they were about economics or politics.

An important point that Zubok makes is the influence of the West and in particular of America on the collapse of the Soviet Union. He does not allude to superpower-competition that led to economic strain, but he speaks of the American government, non-governmental actors, and media playing an outsized role in Soviet imagination and politics and radicalizing Soviet politics. He brings attention to this often-overlooked influence of Western soft power, enriching our understanding of factors contributing to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

This collective reevaluation of the Soviet Union's final years thus reframes the narrative of its collapse, recognizing the crucial role played by internal dynamics, the choices of its elites, and the evolving global context. The works of Kotkin, Miller, and Spohr offer a tapestry of influences that move beyond simplistic binary oppositions, inviting a reexamination of the Soviet Union's place in the larger continuum of 20th-century history.

The analysis of reforms reveals their exacerbating effects on existing issues, challenging narratives that solely attribute the collapse to ideological or economic insufficiencies. In the intricate tapestry of the Soviet Union's final years, the threads of economic and political reforms intertwine in a pattern far more complex than a mere unraveling due to ideological or economic weaknesses. The narrative, rich with the interplay of perestroika and glasnost, reveals the unintended exacerbation of existing systemic issues.

Caught in this web of transformation were the Soviet elites, whose resistance and vested

interests significantly shaped the course of events. Kotkin's insights in *Armageddon Averted* suggest that Gorbachev, while a "genuine believer" in socialism, may have underestimated the inertia of an established order resistant to his reforms. This resistance was not only ideological but also practical, as it entangled the interests of those within the military-industrial complex and other sectors of power who stood to lose their privileged positions. Kotkin's analysis also acknowledges the role of external geopolitical pressures and the allure of Western economic models, but it is the internal dynamics and the elite's unwillingness to embrace the necessary liberal institutions for economic reform that he identifies as critical to the Union's collapse.

Miller, in *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy*, emphasizes the Soviet Union's missed opportunity for economic transformation. He challenges the narrative of perestroika's inherent flaws and instead focuses on the resistance from entrenched interest groups that stymied Gorbachev's efforts. Miller's portrayal of Gorbachev is not as a leader with unchallenged authority but as one whose power was circumscribed by the very party he led, a party dominated by powerful groups opposed to relinquishing their grasp on the economy. This opposition created a gridlock that exacerbated the Union's budget crisis, hindering any substantial economic reform and contributing to the system's eventual collapse. For Miller, it was not the reforms that led to unintended effects that ultimately led to the Union's demise. He was opposing political forces that would not let him implement his reforms as he wanted, thus thwarting them to come to their full potential.

Contrary to Miller, Zubok's central argument is that during Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership, the Soviet Union faced a critical juncture between continued decline and radical reform, ultimately opting for the latter. It was Gorbachev's attempts to revitalize the Soviet economy through reform that proved to be disastrous. Zubok also challenges the notion that the Soviet economy's structural deficiencies solely caused its demise, instead pointing to Gorbachev's reforms. He suggests that a greater willingness to employ coercion and adherence to Yuri Andropov's policies aimed at improving labor discipline, productivity, and combating corruption could have placated elites and enabled gradual integration into the global economy. Zubok emphasizes the pivotal role of Gorbachev in the demise of the Soviet Union.

The analyses collectively challenge the notion that the Soviet collapse was a straightforward consequence of failed economic systems or ideological deficiencies. Instead, they present a scenario where reforms, however well-intentioned, interacted with entrenched interests and structural deficiencies to create a perfect storm, leading to outcomes that were far from inevitable. This nuanced understanding invites us to reevaluate the role of leadership decisions, internal elite dynamics, and the complex interplay of political and economic factors in the grand narrative of

the Soviet Union's dissolution.

Another notable trend observed in the literature of this subsequent phase is the refusal to conclude the narrative at the termination of the Cold War or the demise of the Soviet Union. It is evident that history does not abruptly terminate with the cessation of the Soviet Union's existence. Rather, the authors adeptly illustrate how the trajectories initiated prior to the collapse of the union persist well beyond that pivotal moment. In essence, the scholars of this phase do not merely dissect historical events and leave them in the past; rather, they leverage historical analysis as a means to comprehend the developments unfolding post-Soviet Union collapse and their reverberations in our contemporary era.

Kotkin refutes the simplistic notion that the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 marked the definitive conclusion of its collapse. He contends that the complex structural legacies inherited from the Soviet era continued to exert influence on governance throughout the post-Soviet period, thereby complicating Russia's transition. According to Kotkin, it wasn't until around 2000 that the full extent of the repercussions stemming from the Soviet disintegration became apparent. The Russian Federation, in its post-Soviet iteration, inherited not only the societal and economic frameworks but also the institutional mechanisms of its predecessor. The unresolved issues that plagued the Soviet Union persisted beyond the official dissolution date, necessitating further remediation efforts. Thus, Kotkin's analysis extends beyond 1991, encompassing the subsequent decade to fully grasp the complexities of the Soviet collapse and its aftermath.

Miller shares a similar perspective with Kotkin, positing that the Soviet system's unreformability stemmed not solely from insurmountable economic challenges but also from the entrenched political power vested in resistant factions. While not the central focus of his argument, Miller underscores the enduring challenges faced by Gorbachev even after the fall of the Soviet Union. He concurs with Kotkin that the protracted collapse of the Soviet economy persisted beyond the dissolution of the USSR. Miller elucidates how Yeltsin struggled within the flawed economic and political structures inherited from the Soviet era, ultimately leading to political stalemate. He identifies these structural deficiencies as the primary drivers of the Soviet Union's demise and acknowledges their continued impact on its successor state.

In Zubok's work, a similar trend emerges, albeit not as the primary thesis. Zubok's narrative illuminates how the nomenklatura, tasked with facilitating the transition to a new system, became entangled in corruption and self-interest. Exploiting the uncertainty of the transitional period, they engaged in widespread looting of state assets, laying the groundwork for the emergence of post-Soviet oligarchs. Zubok's analysis delves into the crisis of Soviet power, encompassing both

economic collapse and the decentralization of economic decision-making to local elites. He underscores the interplay between economic disarray and the devolution of political authority, highlighting the rise of post-Soviet oligarchs amid societal upheaval. Additionally, Zubok criticizes the lack of substantial international assistance, contrasting it with the Marshall Plan, which exacerbated the Soviet Union's descent into economic turmoil. Beyond historical analysis, Zubok's work offers insights into modern Russian foreign policy, examining the factors contributing to renewed conflicts in Eastern Europe. By extending his narrative beyond the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Zubok emphasizes the ongoing ramifications of Soviet collapse on contemporary Russia.

Spohr's work further emphasizes this trend, with its primary objective being to elucidate how the events of 1989-1992 continue to shape contemporary geopolitics. She underscores the importance of understanding the geopolitical landscape of the late 1980s and early 1990s, asserting its enduring influence on present global dynamics. Spohr's narrative not only recounts the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union but also explores their lasting impact on the modern world. By shifting focus from broad geopolitical strategies to internal political dynamics, Spohr offers insights into the fragmentation and eventual collapse of a superpower. Her analysis situates the Soviet Union within a broader context of global shifts, challenging the notion of its collapse as an inevitable outcome. Moreover, Spohr's work highlights the role of individual agency in historical trajectories, emphasizing the contingent nature of historical events.

In conclusion, these works collectively challenge the conventional narrative of the Soviet collapse as a singular event in 1991. Instead, they offer nuanced perspectives that extend beyond that pivotal moment, emphasizing the ongoing impact of Soviet legacies on contemporary Russia and the broader global landscape.

The role of internal dynamics and the influence of elite decisions reveal a power struggle within, highlighting the importance of individual agency in historical trajectories. This focus shifts the lens from broad geopolitical strategies to the microcosm of internal politics, offering insights into the fragmentation and eventual collapse of a superpower. The narratives also engage with the broader context of global shifts, situating the Soviet Union within a web of international relations and internal transformations that challenge the inevitability of its collapse. These points of contact suggest a historiographical shift towards viewing the end of the Cold War as a contingent, rather than inevitable, outcome, shaped by a constellation of factors both within and beyond the Soviet Union. Another important trend among these works is that they do not only analyze history, but use it as a tool to understand the present as well. For these authors, history does not end with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Following this line of reasoning, Autio-Sarasmo's paper *A New Historiography of the Cold War?* serves as an exemplary reflection of this historiographical shift. Sarasmo discusses the evolving focus in Cold War studies from the dominant superpower narrative to a broader consideration that includes the vital roles and perspectives of European actors. This change in scholarly perspective reflects a broader reevaluation of the Cold War era, recognizing it as a period marked by significant socio-economic and cultural dynamics in addition to political-military confrontations.

Autio-Sarasmo's analysis highlights the importance of European politics and processes, conducted by European actors, in shaping the trajectory of the Cold War. This approach challenges the old bipolar paradigm and suggests that understanding the late Cold War period requires acknowledging Europe's centrality in influencing international politics during the 1980s. In essence, Autio-Sarasmo's work emphasizes the agency of a diverse set of actors and underscores the interconnectedness of events that contributed to the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, Autio-Sarasmo points out the gap in historiography concerning the economic dimensions of East-West relations in Europe, which were pivotal in shaping political developments during the Cold War. While recent historiography has made significant strides in reinterpreting the Cold War with a focus on Europe, there remains ample room for further research into the lower-level interactions and the everyday practices of ordinary actors.

Several works from this period discuss the idea of expanding the focus of historical narratives beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. These include works that explore the interplay of international actors during pivotal moments like the Solidarity movement, the roles of European processes like the CSCE in the Cold War's trajectory, and the impact of the Cold War on Third World countries. They pivot away from the bipolar superpower narrative, suggesting that various regions and actors played significant roles in shaping the global dynamics of the era.

For instance, Gregory F. Domber's work emphasizes the importance of local actors in Eastern Europe and challenges the notion of direct American responsibility for the collapse of Communism. Similarly, *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: from Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975–1985*, along with *Europe and the End of Cold War: A Reappraisal*, shift the narrative to focus on European integration and the roles of European leaders.

Vojtech Mastny's and John Lewis Gaddis's works delve into broader themes like Soviet insecurities and rethinking Cold War history with new evidence, while Odd Arne Westad's seminal work, *The Global Cold War*, looks at the Cold War's impact on Third World countries, analyzing it as a global conflict with far-reaching consequences.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. Mastny (1996, 2002), and Gaddis (2005).

These works illustrate the trend, evidenced by my analysis, of expanding the historical scope to include a wider array of actors and influences, offering a richer, more nuanced understanding of the Cold War era. They underscore the interconnectedness of international events and challenge simplistic binary narratives, highlighting the role of socio-economic and cultural dynamics in shaping historical outcomes.

Another significant shift between the first and second periods pertains to the reduced emphasis on atomic weapons, nuclear warfare, and the concept of mutually assured destruction (MAD). While the initial phase highlights discussions surrounding nuclear bombs, atomic warfare, and the looming threat of MAD, the latter period sees a noticeable decrease in such discussions. Although topics like nuclear arms reduction negotiations are still addressed, there seems to be less overall focus on these issues.

This decline in attention could be attributed, in part, to the passage of time since previous instances of intense nuclear tensions, or the perceived threat of nuclear conflict. As the memory of these threats fades, there is a tendency to place less importance on them in current discourse. This suggests that when people no longer feel immediate fear of a particular danger, they tend to pay less attention to it.

In essence, the diminishing emphasis on atomic weapons and nuclear warfare in the later period highlights the complex interplay between historical context and contemporary concerns in shaping global security discussions. This phenomenon invites further exploration into the implications of societal memory and the shifting priorities within the realm of international relations.

However, it is crucial to note an exception to this observed trend, particularly evident in the work of Stephen Kotkin. His scholarship diverges from the prevailing narrative by highlighting the USSR's possession of a substantial nuclear arsenal, which it notably refrained from deploying. Kotkin's analysis emphasizes the theme of strategic restraint and explores alternative pathways that the dissolution of the USSR could have taken, suggesting missed opportunities for a more impactful outcome.

The fact that Kotkin's books are the oldest among those analyzed within the second period supports our idea that the passage of time plays a role in the reduced emphasis on atomic warfare in historical works about the Soviet Union and the Cold War. His books were first published in 2001, with an update in 2008. Therefore, Kotkin wrote his books at a time when the memory of the world's nearness to nuclear war was fresher in his mind than in the minds of authors of other books from the second period.

Finally, in examining the literature of this period, it is crucial to acknowledge the significant

impact of the newly accessible Russian archives on Cold War scholarship, particularly regarding Soviet foreign policy. Westad (1997) foresaw the profound implications of these archives in his work *Secrets of the Second World: The Russian Archives and the Reinterpretation of Cold War History*. He anticipated that these archives would provide invaluable insights into the internal mechanisms and external strategies of the Soviet Union during the Cold War era. Westad likened the exploration of these archives to a period of groundbreaking political discoveries, highlighting the transformative effect of the wealth of information contained within them on existing understandings of Cold War dynamics.

Westad (1997) delineates the progression of archive accessibility in post-1991 Russia, noting an initial phase characterized by sporadic access and enthusiastic exploration, followed by a period of increasing regularization and public discourse, and finally, a stage marked by stagnation and restricted access due to various political and financial constraints. Despite these challenges, certain archives, such as the Foreign Ministry Archive, have emerged as exceptions, granting researchers access to a vast array of documents dating back to the early 1960s.

He contended that the exploration of Russian archives was still in its nascent stages, with a wealth of untapped documents necessitating a reevaluation of established narratives surrounding Soviet foreign policy. He advocated for a more comprehensive approach that transcends traditional realist interpretations and incorporates factors such as ideology, power dynamics, and individual histories into the analysis of Soviet international relations.

The works examined in this study, particularly those by Zubok and Spohr, corroborate Westad's predictions by delving into the inner workings of the Soviet apparatus and shedding new light on Cold War dynamics.<sup>128</sup>

## 5. Comparative analysis across the two time periods

The shift in historiographical narratives between the first and second periods reveals a deepening complexity in understanding the Cold War's end and the Soviet Union's collapse. Initially, narratives often emphasized the roles of key leaders, particularly Gorbachev, and the binary opposition of East vs. West. However, as scholarship progressed into the second period, a nuanced reevaluation emerged, focusing on multifaceted processes including leadership decisions, economic mismanagement, internal dynamics, and global shifts.

This analysis individuated the following key shifts in historical narrative from the two periods considered.

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<sup>128</sup> See White (2000) for further discussion of this point.



A notable shift among the books of the second period is the attention to internal dynamics and elite influence, moving beyond simplistic external pressures and ideological shifts to explore how power, conviction, and elite machinations within the Soviet Union influenced its unraveling. This includes a greater focus on the resistance Gorbachev faced from within, pointing to a more elaborate understanding of the Soviet collapse as a mosaic of economic, political, and ideological factors.

In the earlier period, authors like Archie Brown in *The Gorbachev Factor* and John Lewis Gaddis in *The Cold War: A New History* centered Gorbachev as the agent of change, with his policies of glasnost and perestroika seen as the result of a change in ideas and ideology, combined with external and internal structural pressures, leading to these initiatives aimed at reforming the Soviet Union and easing global tensions. Similarly, Robert English's *Russia and the Idea of the West* and Melvyn P. Leffler's *For the Soul of Mankind* acknowledged the significant role of ideological shifts towards Western ideas of democracy and market economics, positing them as crucial for the policy changes leading to the end of the Cold War. While all authors acknowledge Gorbachev's role, Brown and Leffler present him as a more pivotal figure whose proactive steps towards openness and restructuring were key to ending the Cold War. Gaddis and English, while not denying Gorbachev's importance, place greater emphasis on the broader forces at play, including economic pressures, ideological failures, and the cumulative impact of strategic decisions over decades.

Contrastingly, narratives of the second period emphasize the significant role of internal dynamics and elite actions and interests on historical events, challenging earlier interpretations focused solely on external pressures and ideological shifts. These perspectives challenge earlier, simplistic views that primarily attributed the collapse to external pressures and ideological shifts. Gorbachev, a central figure in this narrative, is portrayed as inadvertently hastening the Union's downfall through reforms like perestroika and glasnost. Kotkin underscores the critical role of the Soviet elite in the Union's disintegration, highlighting their prioritization of self-preservation over the system's survival. Miller's account echoes this, detailing internal resistance to Gorbachev's reforms, particularly from interest groups within the military-industrial complex. Spohr adds a global perspective, discussing the influence of international diplomacy and grassroots movements in shaping the post-Cold War era. Zubok's revisionist perspective challenges the notion of an inevitable collapse, emphasizing the adaptability of Soviet elites and their influence on transitional outcomes. Together, these scholars challenge simplistic narratives that solely attribute responsibility to Gorbachev, highlighting the complex interplay of internal and external factors in the Union's demise.

The global context and ideological shifts have also received increased attention, situating

the Soviet collapse within broader global shifts, including globalization, nationalism, and the impact of cultural transformations. This extends the discourse beyond the binary Cold War confrontation narrative, offering a richer tapestry of influences that shaped the Soviet Union's destiny.

All authors in the first period recognize the significance of global factors, particularly the interconnectedness of global security. Brown painted Gorbachev as a reformer influenced by an ideological evolution towards Western liberalism, while English noted an intellectual revolution among Soviet elites, influenced by engagement with Western ideas, as crucial to policy change. Intellectual and cultural exchanges with the West are seen as influential in shaping the perspectives of Soviet reformers, prompting reconsideration of policies. Economic challenges are universally cited as contributing factors to the transformation and eventual collapse of the USSR.

Additionally, global pressures such as the arms race and political dissent are deemed crucial in creating a context that necessitated change. Furthermore, the books touch upon events in other countries, such as the war in Afghanistan, with Gaddis also addressing the war in Korea. However, all four works primarily focus on the perspectives of the two superpowers, examining the Cold War within a bipolar framework without considering its broader global context. This trend reflects a common approach among works of the period, which predominantly view the Cold War through the lens of US-USSR relations, highlighting the significance of this bipolar paradigm in shaping scholarly discourse on the subject.

Contrasting this, the works in the second period extend the discourse to include the effects of broader global shifts like globalization and nationalism. Kotkin's examination in *Armageddon Averted* articulates how global economic forces and internal ideological evolution influenced the Soviet Union's collapse. Chris Miller situates the Soviet Union within the context of global economic trends and utilizes the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as an analytical tool to understand the Soviet Union's collapse. Zubok explores the impact of global cultural transformations alongside nationalistic movements within the Soviet republics that challenged the central power. Spohr skillfully portrays the broader global context of the era, illustrating a geopolitical landscape characterized by nuanced interdependencies among nations. The peaceful end of the Cold War and Europe's political transformation resulted from diplomatic engagement and ideological shifts within and beyond Soviet borders.

This evolution in historiography suggests a more integrated understanding of the Soviet Union's collapse, situating it within a global framework of ideological, economic, and cultural shifts rather than a binary Cold War confrontation narrative. The shift from a primarily Gorbachev-centric narrative with a focus on Western ideological influences to a more nuanced appreciation of globalization, nationalism, and cultural transformations indicates a deeper comprehension of

the various global influences that shaped the Soviet Union's destiny.

This trend is amply represented in the literature of this period. To mention just one more example, in Federico Romero's seminal paper, *Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads* (2014), we are presented with a comprehensive examination of the evolving field of Cold War studies. Romero's insightful analysis detects a shift in historical scholarship from a once precise, narrowly defined understanding of the Cold War to a broader, more encompassing perspective. This perspective incorporates a diverse array of interconnected conflicts and transformations, effectively extending the narrative beyond the traditional confines of the Soviet Union and its immediate sphere of influence.

Romero meticulously details how Cold War studies have transcended their original Euro-Atlantic orientation, now embracing a global viewpoint that includes the nuanced roles and narratives from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. This expansion into the Global South enriches Cold War historiography with multidimensional analyses spanning diplomacy, security, ideology, culture, and even human rights—a trend we've seen reflected in the recent literature that places a pronounced emphasis on China, such as the works of Miller and Spohr. Romero's approach resonates with this emerging trend, advocating for a historiographical approach that acknowledges the complex interplay of forces that shaped the global narrative.<sup>129</sup>

Romero's analysis becomes particularly relevant when considering the critical juncture between 1989 and 1991, encompassing the reunification of Germany and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He urges a comprehensive understanding that takes into account the intricate web of global capitalism, the waning of Third World revolutionary movements, the crisis within the Soviet empire, and the burgeoning politics of human rights. This call for a comprehensive view echoes Spohr's meticulous focus on the same period, capturing the essence of Romero's argument by highlighting the "power from below" and how it translated into significant political change.

Furthering his call for an integrative approach, Romero encourages collaboration among

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<sup>129</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Romero (2014) is cautious about the potential overextension of the term "Cold War" to the point of diluting its conceptual coherence. He argues for maintaining a balance—a precise cultural understanding that does not obscure the core East-West antagonism marked by ideological, strategic, and geopolitical conflicts that were the hallmark of the Cold War era. Westad (2000), analogously, addresses concerns about broadening the study of the Cold War to the point of indistinguishability from global history, emphasizing the importance of understanding interactions between the East-West conflict and other societal changes during the Cold War era.

historians to achieve a nuanced and holistic comprehension of the Cold War. He posits that exploring the connections between economic policies, the ascendance of human rights discourse, and the transformation of political cultures across the globe can shed light on the Cold War's dynamics and its enduring influence.

Additionally, there's a growing emphasis on the contingency of the Soviet collapse, challenging deterministic views and presenting it as a multifaceted process influenced by a confluence of factors rather than a preordained outcome. This invites a reevaluation of historical inevitability and highlights the complex web of internal and external factors that led to the Soviet Union's end.

While none of the authors in the first period explicitly endorse the deterministic view of the Soviet Union's collapse, their works in the second period explicitly reject this perspective. Stephen Kotkin, in particular, dismisses the notion of inevitability, emphasizing the pivotal role of individual actors like Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet elite in driving the collapse through their reform attempts. Kotkin argues that while structural issues existed, the collapse was not predetermined but rather the outcome of specific leadership decisions.

Similarly, Miller challenges deterministic narratives by highlighting the internal resistance Gorbachev faced in implementing economic reforms. Miller suggests that political reform was crucial for economic change and the full implementation of Gorbachev's reforms could have averted the collapse. Spohr's *Post-wall* takes a broader view, stressing the significance of diplomacy and grassroots movements in shaping the post-Cold War world. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of events in Europe and Asia, Spohr rejects deterministic theories, suggesting that the collapse was influenced by various factors beyond structural deficiencies.

Zubok also disputes deterministic beliefs, arguing that different policy choices could have altered the outcome. He underscores the role of Gorbachev's decisions and the actions of the Soviet elite, portraying Gorbachev as a tragic figure grappling with historical circumstances beyond his control. Both Zubok and Kotkin explicitly argue that they believed the Soviet Union could have persisted, had they not implemented the reforms.

In summary, these works collectively reject deterministic theories regarding the Soviet Union's collapse. Instead, they highlight the importance of individual agency, leadership decisions, and historical contingencies. Through nuanced analyses, they deepen our understanding of the collapse and its ongoing ramifications for global politics. These authors' collective works advocate for a reassessment of historical inevitability, presenting the Soviet collapse as a contingent process shaped by a confluence of internal and external factors, rather than a foregone conclusion. This historiographical shift reflects a more nuanced understanding of the Soviet Union's end,

acknowledging the importance of internal elite dynamics and global changes, thus challenging the inevitability of its collapse and advocating for a more detailed exploration of its causes.

Another noticeable trend in recent literature is the reluctance to conclude the narrative with the end of the Cold War or the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Authors delve into how the trajectories set prior to the collapse of the union persist beyond this crucial moment, analyzing the unfolding developments in the post-Soviet era and their implications for our contemporary world. This perspective contrasts sharply with the intellectual currents stirred by Francis Fukuyama in his seminal work, *The End of History and the Last Man*, where he postulated that the ideological evolution of governance might have reached its zenith with the ascendance of Western liberal democracy. However, as the post-Soviet realities reveal, the end of ideological conflicts prophesied by Fukuyama was less of a conclusive end and more of a transformation, as new complexities and challenges rose from the ashes of the Soviet regime. It is worth delving a little deeper in this contrast.

In *The End of History and the Last Man*, published in 1992, Francis Fukuyama presents a thought-provoking and seminal exploration into the progression of human history and governance, culminating in the assertion that Western liberal democracy may represent the zenith of mankind's ideological evolution. This work, an extension of his 1989 essay, delves into the philosophical underpinnings and potential implications of a world where the ideological battles that have characterized much of human history have come to a close with liberal democracy as the victor.

Fukuyama's argument is deeply rooted in Hegelian dialectics, in particular with its teleological determinism, suggesting that history should be understood as a series of conflicts that propel society towards an ever-improving state of freedom and governance. According to Fukuyama, the collapse of communism and the widespread acceptance of liberal democracy across the globe signify not just a momentary shift in power, but the end of ideological evolution. In this "end of history," liberal democracy stands unopposed as the most just and efficient system of government, having outlasted its ideological rivals.

Central to Fukuyama's thesis is the idea that liberal democracy uniquely meets the innate human thirst for dignity and recognition, a concept borrowed from Hegel's master-slave dialectic. It is in the democratic framework, with its emphasis on individual rights, rule of law, and economic opportunity, that individuals find their desires for freedom and acknowledgment fulfilled. However, this triumph brings with it the figure of "the last man," a concept Fukuyama adapts from Nietzsche to describe the complacent citizen of a post-historical world, devoid of the ambitions and struggles that previously drove societal progress.

Despite the momentous influence of Fukuyama's vision, *The End of History and the Last Man* has sparked considerable debate and critique. Critics point to the ongoing conflicts, rise of authoritarian regimes, and resurgence of nationalist and religious movements as evidence that history, far from reaching a conclusion, continues to be marked by ideological contention and strife. These developments suggest a world still very much in the throes of historical progression, challenging Fukuyama's assertion of liberal democracy's ultimate triumph.

Kotkin, we have seen, challenges the simplistic view that the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991 marked the definitive end of its collapse, an assertion that stands in stark contrast to Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis. Instead, Kotkin posits that the complex legacies inherited from the Soviet era continued to shape governance well into the post-Soviet period, complicating Russia's transition. This observation mirrors the critique of Fukuyama's work, which did not foresee the enduring ideological struggles and the thirst for recognition that continue to drive human history. The full impact of the Soviet disintegration, as argued by Kotkin, only became evident around 2000, with unresolved issues persisting beyond the official dissolution date, requiring further remedial efforts.

Similarly, Miller highlights the enduring challenges faced by Gorbachev and the prolonged collapse of the Soviet economy, which extended beyond the USSR's dissolution and contributed to political deadlock under Yeltsin's leadership. Fukuyama's "last man," the complacent citizen of a post-historical world, finds no refuge in Miller's account, as the post-Soviet citizens grapple with economic woes and the quest for stability and dignity, far from the ideological endgame Fukuyama envisioned.

Zubok's narrative extends beyond the Soviet Union's dissolution, exploring the crisis of Soviet power and its aftermath. His analysis offers a counterpoint to Fukuyama by illustrating that the ideological vacuum left by the Soviet collapse did not lead to an uncontested triumph of liberal democracy but rather to a reconfiguration of power and resurgence of nationalism. Zubok's insights into modern Russian foreign policy reveal a nation still wrestling with its past, seeking a place in a world where the ideological battles have mutated rather than ceased.

Spohr's work emphasizes this trend with its primary objective being to elucidate how the events of 1989-1992 continue to shape contemporary geopolitics. She emphasizes the importance of understanding the geopolitical landscape of the late 1980s and early 1990s, asserting its enduring influence on present global dynamics. This perspective is crucial to contextualizing Fukuyama's thesis within the broader historiographical debate. Spohr's narrative not only recounts the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union but also explores their lasting impact on the modern world, suggesting that the flow of history is far from stagnant.

Collectively, these works challenge the conventional narrative of the Soviet collapse as a single event in 1991 and Fukuyama's assertion of liberal democracy's ultimate triumph. Instead, they offer nuanced perspectives that extend beyond this pivotal moment, highlighting the ongoing influence of Soviet legacies on contemporary Russia and the broader global landscape. They present a world still in the throes of grappling with the very human desires for freedom and recognition that Fukuyama believed had found their resolution, thereby challenging his vision of the "end of history" and underscoring the dynamic and unpredictable nature of global ideological evolution.

A noticeable trend in recent literature is the reluctance to conclude the narrative with the end of the Cold War or the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Authors delve into how the trajectories set prior to the collapse of the union persist beyond this crucial moment, analyzing the unfolding developments in the post-Soviet era and their implications for our contemporary world. In contrast, earlier works seem content with simply recounting historical events without exploring their lasting consequences.

Kotkin challenges the simplistic view that the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991 marked the definitive end of its collapse. He argues that the complex legacies inherited from the Soviet era continued to shape governance well into the post-Soviet period, complicating Russia's transition.

According to Kotkin, the full impact of the Soviet disintegration only became evident around 2000, with unresolved issues persisting beyond the official dissolution date, requiring further remedial efforts. Similarly, Miller highlights the enduring challenges faced by Gorbachev and the prolonged collapse of the Soviet economy, which extended beyond the USSR's dissolution and contributed to political deadlock under Yeltsin's leadership.

Zubok's narrative extends beyond the Soviet Union's dissolution, exploring the crisis of Soviet power and its aftermath. Zubok's work offers insights into modern Russian foreign policy and the ongoing ramifications of Soviet collapse on contemporary Russia.

Spohr's work further underscores this trend with its primary objective being to elucidate how the events of 1989-1992 continue to shape contemporary geopolitics. She underscores the importance of understanding the geopolitical landscape of the late 1980s and early 1990s, asserting its enduring influence on present global dynamics. Spohr's narrative not only recounts the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union but also explores their lasting impact on the modern world.

Collectively, these works challenge the conventional narrative of the Soviet collapse as a single event in 1991. Instead, they offer nuanced perspectives that extend beyond this pivotal moment, highlighting the ongoing influence of Soviet legacies on contemporary Russia and the

broader global landscape.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of historiographical narratives spanning two distinct periods illuminates the evolving understanding of the Cold War's end and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Initially, scholarly discourse predominantly centered on key leaders such as Gorbachev and the binary dynamics between East and West. However, as scholarship progressed into the second period, a more nuanced and multifaceted approach emerged, emphasizing internal dynamics, global influences, and the contingency of the Soviet collapse.

The shift towards a deeper examination of internal dynamics within the Soviet Union represents a departure from earlier narratives that primarily attributed the collapse to external pressures and ideological shifts. Scholars in the second period highlight the role of elite actions, resistance to reforms, and the prioritization of self-preservation within the Soviet elite, underscoring the complexity of factors contributing to the Union's demise. This nuanced understanding challenges simplistic interpretations that solely attribute responsibility to Gorbachev, emphasizing instead the interplay of internal and external forces.

Furthermore, the increased attention to global influences situates the Soviet collapse within broader historical contexts, including globalization, nationalism, and cultural transformations. This broader perspective extends the discourse beyond a binary Cold War narrative, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the various global forces shaping the Soviet Union's destiny.

Moreover, the rejection of deterministic views regarding the Soviet collapse underscores the importance of individual agency, leadership decisions, and historical contingencies. Scholars in the second period argue against the notion of inevitability, advocating for a reassessment of historical narratives to account for the multifaceted nature of the collapse.

Lastly, recent literature extends beyond the dissolution of the Soviet Union, exploring the enduring legacies and implications of the collapse in the post-Soviet era. This trend reflects a growing recognition of the ongoing impact of Soviet history on contemporary Russia and global geopolitics.

In summary, the comparative analysis of historiographical narratives reveals a shift towards a more nuanced, multifaceted understanding of the Soviet collapse, emphasizing internal dynamics, global influences, and the contingency of historical events. This evolving discourse not only enriches our comprehension of the past but also provides valuable insights into the ongoing ramifications of the Soviet Union's collapse in shaping our contemporary world.



I will now propose some avenues for future research in the fields of Soviet Union history and Cold War history, identifying certain gaps in the existing academic literature. While I will highlight specific factors, it is essential to underscore that these individual aspects should always be contextualized within a broader framework, considering structural factors, internal and external forces, individual agency, and contingencies. Indeed, history is a complex interplay of these elements, and a comprehensive understanding requires their integration.

One significant gap in the historiography of the Soviet Union pertains to the lack of research on Western peace movements and civil society in countries outside of the USSR. While much has been written about the influence of independence and nationalism movements within the Soviet republics, there is a notable dearth of literature examining the impact of civil society movements outside the USSR on the end of the Cold War. During my thesis research, I initially intended to focus on the influence of Western peace movements on the end of the Cold War, only to find scant literature on the topic. This suggests another potential gap in historiography.

To illustrate, the Nuclear Freeze campaign emerged as a mass movement garnering widespread support across America. It attracted backing from various peace groups, as well as mainstream religious, professional, and labor organizations. The anti-nuclear weapon march in New York City in 1982 stands as one of the largest protests in U.S. history, drawing between 700,000 and 1,000,000 protesters. Similarly, the peace demonstration on October 29, 1983, in The Hague marked the largest ever organized in the Netherlands, with a turnout of 550,000 participants—a unique event in the country's history.

The scale of these protests is staggering, and it's difficult to fathom that they didn't exert any influence on the realm of "higher politics." As Spohr argues in her work, both grassroots movements ("forces from below") and the actions of political elites ("high politics") play crucial roles in shaping political outcomes. According to her, it is the politicians who harness the energy of the forces from below and translate them into tangible political power. Therefore, delving into the events surrounding civil society outside of the USSR could yield valuable insights into the interplay between grassroots activism and political decision-making. Such an investigation could shed light on the extent to which popular mobilization influenced diplomatic strategies and policy decisions during the Cold War era.

While the influence of independence and nationalism movements within the Soviet republics has been extensively studied, there remains a need for further examination of the impact of civil society movements in countries outside of the USSR on the end of the Cold War.

Autio-Saraso in his article *A New Historiography of the Cold War?* makes an observation regarding the evolving historiography of the Cold War, which emphasizes a shift in scholarly

attention from superpower dynamics to the roles and perspectives of European actors, is evident in our analysis of the second period. However, despite this shift, a notable gap persists: the absence of scholarly works dedicated to exploring economic interactions between European states and the Soviet bloc. This gap, as identified by the author, remains unaddressed, as confirmed by our analysis of existing literature.

As we have seen earlier on in this thesis, in his article *Foreign Intelligence and the Historiography of the Cold War*, Garthoff emphasizes that while a vast body of literature narrates the exploits of intelligence agencies and their operations during the Cold War, a comprehensive analysis of how intelligence impacted the course of events remains elusive. This gap persists despite the declassification of numerous documents, particularly in the United States, which shed light on intelligence assessments, espionage activities, and the inner workings of policy support functions. The paper suggests that these declassified materials, although susceptible to biases and inaccuracies, provide a crucial foundation for understanding the multifaceted influence of intelligence on the Cold War's crises and confrontations. As confirmed by our analysis of existing literature this gap persists.

As a final remark, I would like to share a thought on subjectivism. As I reflect on my exploration of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, I've noticed the significant diversity in methodologies and subjective elements prevalent in historical analysis. This field, vital for comprehending the 20th century, is approached from various angles—political, economic, social, and military—each with its own emphases and methodological preferences. Consequently, we encounter a rich, though sometimes conflicting, array of interpretations.

At the core of this complexity lies the multidisciplinary nature of the topic. Political scientists, economists, and historians all contribute to the narrative, each from their unique perspectives. Political scientists might focus on leadership dynamics and ideological shifts, economists on the unsustainable nature of the Soviet economy and the impacts of the arms race, while historians often take a broader narrative approach, weaving together political, economic, and cultural threads.

The academic discourse surrounding these methodologies is lively and well-documented. Scholars like Archie Brown and Vladislav Zubok advocate for an interdisciplinary approach and highlight the insights gained from newly accessible archival materials. However, this diversity also brings to light tensions between archival research and theoretical models, as well as between narrative and analytical history. Stephen Kotkin's work, which blends narrative detail with analytical depth, exemplifies attempts to strike a balance that minimizes subjective bias while maintaining the richness of narrative history.

Despite the contributions of interdisciplinary approaches, the integration of archival research, and the analytical rigor of scholars like Kotkin, I am left questioning the epistemological underpinnings of the discipline. The debate between emphasizing individual agency versus broader structural factors, and between empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, underscores the challenges in establishing a firm methodological stance. While these efforts address some of the field's methodological shortcomings, I am ultimately left with a sense that the epistemological foundation of the discipline remains less than firm.

It seems that historians often attribute varying degrees of importance to factors based more on intuition and personal beliefs rather than on objective grounds. In their analyses, they sometimes dismiss theories and arguments simply because they are "not convinced" by them, yet fail to provide a substantiated rationale for their skepticism. This tendency raises questions about the reliability and rigor of historical interpretation, as well as the extent to which subjective biases may influence scholarly discourse.

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