

The Deterioration Of The Soviet Empire

Posted on September 11, 2019

Assignment Essay

The Western people mostly associated the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union around 1989-1991 as the triumph of democracy and capitalism. The West viewed the fall as a direct result of policies made by the Thatcher and Reagan governments. This self-congratulatory analysis is seen to have minimal relation to the actual circumstances, facts and political dynamics that were responsible for the deterioration of the Soviet Union and its states. If one aims to understand the fundamental causes of the degradation of the Soviet empire, one needs to look at the Internal Soviet history and not the policies and speeches of the Western politicians.

The fall of the Soviet Union was a result of economic, cultural and political factors. All these factors attributed to the fall of the empire. One of the political factors that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union was the Stagnation in the 1970s. Before 1980, the Soviet Union had been declared as a world power. After the fall of Sino-Soviet relations around 1960, all global communist hegemony evaporated (Bulliet et al). The Nixon administration began improving American ties with China, and the Soviets saw the urgency to scale down nuclear weapons. The threat of nuclear war was reduced by the ABM (Anti-ballistic missile) and the SALT (Strategic arms limitation treaties) that had been formulated by the Nixon administration. The Soviet Union entered an era of economic stagnation around 1975, and this forced the ESSR to depend on Europe and Germany for financial support while the U.S. provided grains. This trade relationship worked in favour of the Stalin gold reserves as they were able to produce more consumer goods. However, this was not enough, as the Soviet Union was full of corruption and was technologically backward. The USSR was also unable to maintain military superiority, and this resulted in the fall of the Soviet Union.

There was a lot of tension between the UUSR and the US after the Korean War. How the United States got involved in the Vietnam War has been a controversial debate, as not everyone has an idea of how it all went down. The US got involved with Vietnam through Eisenhower, the US President at that time, providing military equipment and funding to the South Vietnamese. The involvement with Vietnam brought about major effects to American culture and history affecting how perceived the US.

The war acted as a forefront for numerous protests and debates across the globe as everyone kept wondering how the US began fighting a war not many nations supported (Davidson, 1991). The war affected the American forces as everything happened on American soil. Considering the fact that the Soviet Union and the United States were not on good terms, there has been controversy as to why the United States decided to support the Vietnam War. Some argue that the US agreed to participate in the Vietnam War to assist in defeating international communism while paving the way for the

downfall of the Soviet Union.

Both the Soviet Union and the US had taken different paths that would work as backup when the Cold War began. Others argue that the US involvement in Vietnam was aimed at fighting against communism, giving South Asian states time to come together and fight against communist insurgencies (Lawrence, 2010). As time went by, the Soviet Union could not afford to fund the North Vietnam military, and this sent the Soviet Union into oblivion. The only way the US could do away with the Soviet Union was through the Vietnam War, something they did very well. Regardless of the setbacks the US underwent in Vietnam, it took pride in fighting communism, exemplifying and winning the Cold War.

In early 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, who was the first secretary of the CPSU, decided to denounce Stalin for his various crimes during the 20th Party Congress. Khrushchev also decided to expose the cult of personality that surrounded Stalin as he was viewed as a one-man dictatorship. The speech Nikita gave at the party Congress was referred to by many as a secret speech as it was given behind closed doors. Though it wasn't published in the Soviet Union, it was read out by every CPSU member at local meetings. Immediately after the secret speech, millions of labour camps were ordered to be released, and the Khrushchev regime provided the process of them being assimilated into Russian society.

In his speech, Khrushchev revealed Stalin's paranoia, purges, and mistakes that he made that caused the Soviet individuals in WWII. He went ahead to demolish Stalin's cult as an infallible leader. After the speech, the Soviet communist party was seen campaigning for de-Stalinization (Bulliet et al.). Throughout the USSR, anything that was seen to bear Stalin's name, such as streets and even schools, was renamed. The city that was once identified as Stalingrad was renamed to Volgograd. All of Stalin's paintings that were once influential were pulled down, and his body was removed from the Red Squares Mausoleum and buried in a nondescript location beside the Kremlin wall. Writers such as Alexandria Solzhenitsyn were allowed by Khrushchev to publish works that denounced Stalin's actions.

Though many people argue that the fall of the Soviet Union was due to its own weight, certain political leaders played a part in speeding the process. Reagan, for example, was convinced that the Soviet Empire offered both dangerous military power and aimed at collapsing the economic system. At that time, Reagan was a famous person, and he had people who listened to anything he said (Bulliet et al.). Reagan also aimed to change the Soviet Union to become a more pluralistic economic and political system. He aimed to do this through moving beyond containment, Jimmy Carter, on the other hand, had his one foreign policy goals. He believed in the principle of self-determination and wanted the US to take the lead when it came to promoting universal human rights. He also hoped the relationship with the Soviet Union would improve and the two would play a role in relaxing Cold War tensions. After taking over power, Carter was appointed to the NSC and was given an advisor who made him change his mind regarding the Soviet Union. Carter ordered a five-year defence buildup, which the Soviets did not receive well. A conflict arose, and as a result, Carter cut off grain sales, something that facilitated the USSR's downfall. By the time Bush took over power, the Soviet Union

was nearly falling apart, and the United States had a thawing relationship with the Soviet Union. No matter how hard he tried to establish a positive correlation, the Soviet Union was bound to collapse.

After the death of Brezhnev in 1982, many people knew the Soviet economy was going to face problems. Brezhnev had not actually ruled the country due to senility. After his death, politburo was governed by older men, and this overwhelmed Russia. Two men, one of them being Yury V. Andropov, took over the power in 1982 and ruled for three years, but their administration failed to solve critical problems. Andropov believed that the only way economic stagnation could be remedied was by ending corruption and emphasizing worker discipline. He never at once viewed the Soviet system as the cause of the state's economic problems. Later, Mikhail Gorbachev took over power, and he instantly knew he was the same as his predecessors. He was younger than his ageing party members, and he was aware that this would act as a problem. The USSR economy at the moment was not strong, and they relied on the US for military and political leadership. Gorbachev decided to take a new approach to these issues with the aim of solving them. He introduced reform programs that embodied his two concepts, Perestroika and Glasnost. Perestroika aimed to focus on an economic issue that aimed at replacing centralized government planning with greater reliance on market forces. Glasnost was targeting reducing strict social controls that had been imposed by the government. Mikhail allowed religious groups and media to express divergent views. Mikhail also oversaw reforms that loosened the Soviet grip and allowed nations to choose their own course with no outside interference. He hoped these changes would modernize and revitalize the Soviet Empire, but rather, they unleashed forces that resulted in the dissolution of the USSR.

Some of the causes of the deterioration of the Soviet empire include;

- *Nationalism*: Some political blunders resulted in the decline of public perception with regard to the Soviet Union, and this led to growing nationalism in States such as Latvia, Ukraine, Estonia, and Belarus.
- *Economic stagnation*: At that time, the Size of the Soviet empire was larger compared to present-day continents, e.g. Europe. It had extended and grown to the point that it had become extremely cumbersome to progress with state planning. The large Soviet economy had become too large for state planners to manage as they were unwilling to offer more autonomy at a localized level. This brought about a failure of economic policies that failed to provide scope for innovation while responding to continuous changes.
- *Ethnic differences*: Russia was the most favoured and dominant state in the Empire, while other countries were oppressed. This made the Russians view themselves as Superior, and as a result, other countries began separating steadily from the Soviet Union when it found itself in troubled waters.

Works Cited

Bulliet, Richard W., et al. The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History, Brief Edition, Volume I: To 1550.



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