



Disintegration of the Soviet Union

For Prelims: [Soviet Union](#), [Five-Year Plans](#), [NATO](#), [IMF](#), [World Bank](#), [European Union](#), [Nagorno-Karabakh](#), [ASEAN](#), [BrahMos missile](#), [International North-South Transport Corridor \(INSTC\)](#).

For Mains: Disintegration of USSR and its Impact on India and the World. [World War II](#), [Berlin Wall's fall in 1989](#), [Bipolar Global Order](#), [Cold War](#), [Liberalization in 1991](#), [Space Technology](#), [Nuclear Energy](#).

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, **25th December** marked the anniversary of the day when the Soviet flag was taken down from the **Kremlin** (Russian government's 'power centre'), marking the end of the [Soviet Union](#).

- The **Soviet Union**, officially the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)** was a socialist federation from 1922 to 1991, consisting of multiple republics, governed by the **Communist Party**, with **Russia** as the dominant power.



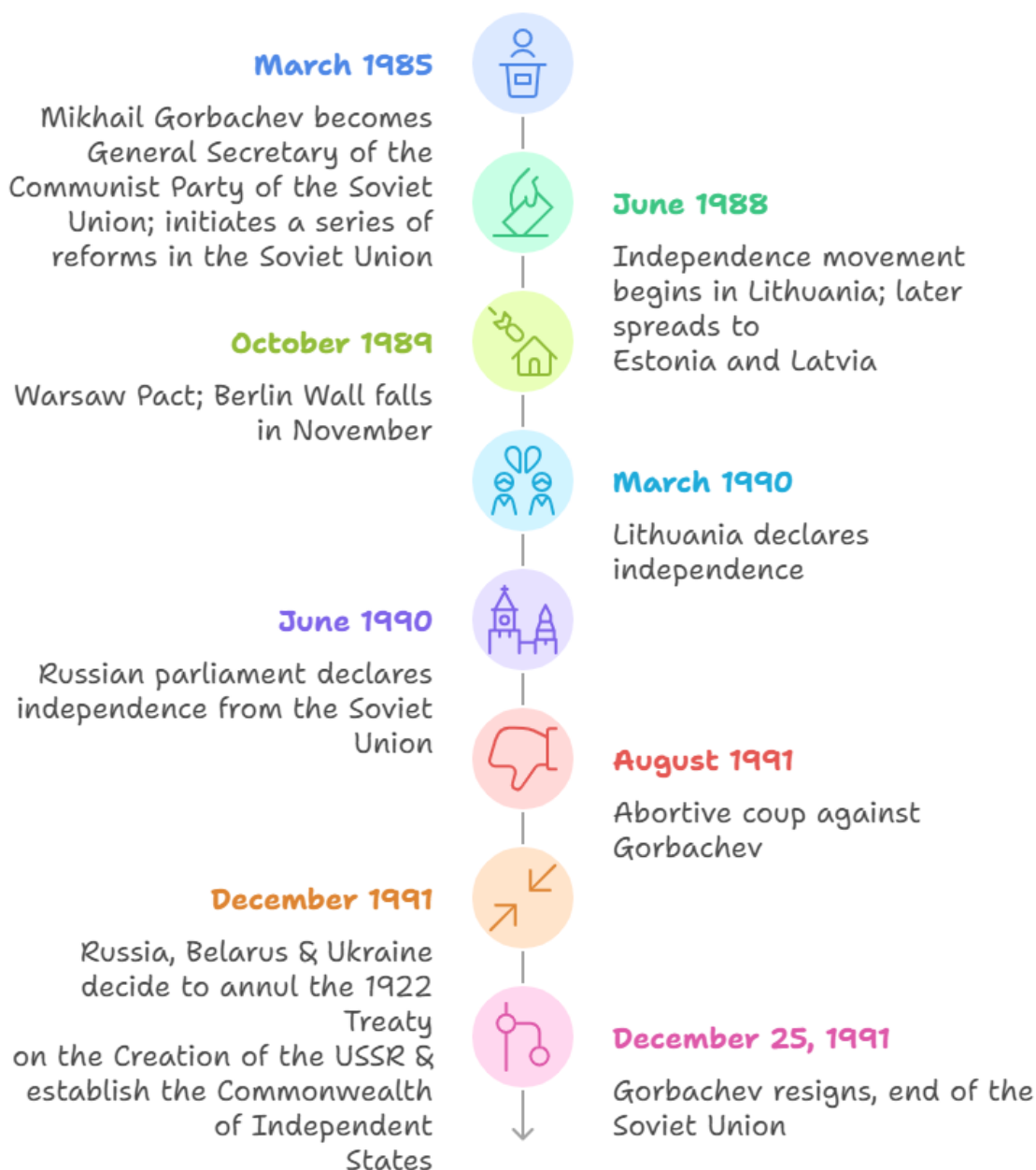
What Led to the Formation of the Soviet Union?

- **History (Tsarist Regime and Monarchy):** The Soviet Union's roots trace back to the Russian Revolution of 1917, which ended the Romanov dynasty's 300-year reign (1613-1917).
 - The **Tsar** wielded **absolute power** over governance, the military, and society.
 - Rising **inequality** and **economic hardship** triggered dissatisfaction, setting the stage for revolution.
- **February Revolution 1917:** Protests and strikes culminated in **Tsar Nicholas II's abdication**, ending the monarchy.
 - A **Provisional Government** replaced the Tsar but faced power struggles with the **Petrograd Soviet**, dominated by **socialist factions** like the **Bolsheviks** and **Mensheviks**.
- **October Revolution 1917:** **Lenin** and **Trotsky** led the **Bolsheviks** in the **October Revolution**, overthrowing the **Provisional Government** and declaring **"all power to the Soviets."**
 - This marked the establishment of **Soviet rule** and the start of communist policies like **nationalization**.
- **Russian Civil War 1918-1922:** The **Red Army** battled **anti-Bolshevik forces** (White Guards) during the civil war.
 - The **Bolsheviks** emerged victorious, consolidating power and paving the way for a unified state.
- **Formation of the USSR (30th December 1922):** The **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)** was officially declared, becoming the world's first **communist state**.
 - **Lenin's leadership** introduced **centralized economic planning** and communist governance.
 - Soviet leadership evolved from **Lenin's** Bolshevik consolidation to **Stalin's** centralization, the Great Purge of 1936, and Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany, followed by **Khrushchev's** reforms, **Brezhnev's** stability, and **Gorbachev's** restructuring efforts.
- **World War II and Lithuania- 1940s:** The **Baltic states** (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in **1940** ([World War II](#)) following the **Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**.
 - These **Baltic states had** gained independence in 1918, after the collapse of the Russian Empire
 - Post-war, the USSR emerged as a **superpower (Warsaw Pact)**, leading the **socialist bloc** and dominating [Cold War geopolitics](#).

How did Various Challenges Lead to the Dissolution of the USSR?

- **Economic Stagnation:** By the 1970s, the **Soviet economy** lagged in productivity and technology, with overemphasis on military and satellite states draining resources.
 - Citizens faced **consumer shortages** and rising dissatisfaction, despite state subsidies ensuring a minimum standard of living .
- **Gorbachev's Reforms:** Policies of Gorbachev like **glasnost** (openness) and **perestroika** (restructuring) aimed at reform but inadvertently weakened the Communist Party's authority.
 - Multi-party elections in 1990 and reduced censorship fueled **nationalist movements** in republics like **Lithuania and Ukraine** .
- **Collapse due to Cold War Pressures:** The costly **arms race** with the US, the defeat in **Afghanistan**, and the [Berlin Wall's fall in 1989](#) undermined Soviet control.
 - The USSR's failure to compete with Western economic models magnified internal inefficiencies .
- **Nationalist Movements and Secession:** Under leaders like **Yeltsin**, Russian nationalism weakened central control, while the **Baltic states and Ukraine** sought independence.
 - By December 1991, the **USSR dissolved** into **independent states**, marking the end of a [bipolar global order](#) .

The Fall of the Soviet Union: Key Events



How Did the Soviet Union's Collapse Reshape Global Power Dynamics?

- **Emergence of Unipolar World Order:** The USSR's collapse ended the [Cold War](#), leaving the **US** as the sole superpower, reshaping global alliances.
 - [NATO](#) expanded eastward, integrating former Soviet bloc countries like Poland and the Baltic states, reducing Russian influence.
- **Capitalism Gained Global Dominance:** Western institutions like the [IMF](#) and [World Bank](#) directed economic transitions in former socialist states, promoting **liberal democracy** and **free-market capitalism**.
 - Eastern Europe's integration into the [European Union](#) reinforced US-led global hegemony.
- **Regional Power Shifts Strengthened Multipolarity:** The collapse allowed **China** and **India** to assert themselves in global geopolitics.

- Central Asian republics emerged as strategic players, balancing ties with Russia, China, and the West.

How Does the Legacy of the Soviet Union's Collapse Influence Contemporary Conflicts?

- **Nationalism And Unresolved Disputes:** The disintegration left **territorial disputes** unresolved, including Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, fueling secessionist movements.
 - Russia's 2014 **annexation of Crimea** and the ongoing war in Ukraine reflect its effort to reclaim Soviet-era influence .
- **Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict:** The **Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict** over **Nagorno-Karabakh** stems from Stalin's 1923 decision to transfer the region to Azerbaijan, despite its majority Armenian population.
 - This decision sowed the seeds of ethnic tensions, which escalated into conflict after the Soviet collapse, as Armenia and Azerbaijan competed for control
- **Kosovo-Serbia Dispute:** **Kosovo** declared independence from **Serbia** in 2008, but Serbia and several countries still refuse to recognize it.
 - **Ethnic tensions** persist, particularly in **Serb-majority regions** like Northern Kosovo, contributing to ongoing instability and complicating the **Balkan peace process**.
- **NATO Expansion Escalates Tensions:** NATO's eastward growth is perceived by Russia as a direct threat, exacerbating its security concerns.
 - Also, this led to conflicts like that in **Afghanistan**, and its legacy continues to fuel geopolitical tensions and instability in **Eastern Europe and beyond**.
 - The **Russia-Ukraine war** symbolizes broader contestation between Western powers and Russian ambitions .
- **Energy Resources And Geopolitics Intertwine:** In absence of communist ideology and the USSR, Russia leverages its **oil, gas, and defense equipment** to exert influence, especially over **Europe**.

How did the Soviet Union's Collapse Affect India?

- **Economic Diversification And Liberalization:** The collapse disrupted India's trade with the USSR, necessitating economic **liberalization in 1991** to attract foreign investment.
 - India diversified its partnerships through the **Look East policy (now Act East Policy)** to strengthen ties with **ASEAN** countries and the recent **Act West policy** to enhance trade and strategic relations with **Western nations**.
- **Defence Ties Adapted To New Realities:** India transitioned from being a mere importer of **Russian military hardware** to bridging the gap through joint production agreements, such as the **BrahMos missile**, to meet mutual defense needs.
 - India also expanded **defense cooperation** with the US, France, and Israel to reduce reliance on any single source.
- **Geopolitical Realignment For Strategic Autonomy:** India balanced relations with **Russia and the US**, maintaining strong ties with Moscow while engaging in US-led initiatives like the **Quad**.
 - India also joined other organizations like **BRICS** and **SCO** to strengthen its strategic autonomy, enhance multilateral partnerships, and promote a more balanced global order.
 - Access to Central Asian resources, especially through initiatives like the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, remained a priority .
- **Cultural And Scientific Collaborations:** Soviet-era cultural exchanges left a lasting legacy, with Indian films and literature enjoying enduring popularity in former Soviet states.
 - Collaboration in **space technology** and **nuclear energy** continued, enhancing bilateral relations .

Drishti Mains Question

How did the Soviet Union's collapse transform the global power structure into a unipolar world?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. Which of the following countries share borders with Moldova? (2008)

1. Ukraine
2. Romania
3. Belarus

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

Code:

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q. The New Economic Policy – 1921 of Lenin had influenced the policies adopted by India soon after independence. Evaluate.(2014)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/disintegration-of-the-soviet-union>

