

## CHAPTER 35

### *The End of the Cold War and the Shape of a New Era: World History 1990-2006*

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its subject regimes ended the cold war. Global history took a sharp turn. Colonialism's end opened new possibilities for either human improvement or international and social conflicts, and for the emergence of a truly globalized economy.

**The End of the Cold War.** By the 1980s, reforms began a process ending in the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the end of communism in eastern Europe. Conservative and untalented Soviet leaders were unable to solve growing problems. To counter the threat of Islamic fervor unleashed by the Iranian Revolution, the Soviets in 1979 invaded Afghanistan and became caught in an unpopular and expensive war. Western Europe's successful economy put Communism on the defensive in eastern Europe. China demonstrated how a Communist authoritarian nation could flourish by joining the international economy. The United States increased its pressure on the Soviets by large increases in military spending and interventions in favor of anti-Marxist regimes.

**The Explosion of the 1980s and 1990s.** By the mid-1980s, the intense rivalry with the United States contributed to a deteriorating Soviet economy. Forced industrialization had caused extensive environmental disaster throughout eastern Europe. Related diseases impaired morale and economic performance. Infant mortality rates soared. Industrial production slowed and economic growth stopped, but one-third of national income continued to go to military production. Younger leaders recognized that the system might collapse.

**The Age of Reform.** In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev introduced reforms. He urged nuclear reduction and negotiated with the United States a limitation of medium-range missiles in Europe. The war in Afghanistan was ended by Soviet withdrawal. Internally, Gorbachev proclaimed *glasnost*, or openness, the freedom to comment and criticize. He urged use of market incentives and reduction of bureaucratic controls. But strong limits on political freedom remained and the centralized planning apparatus resisted reform. Gorbachev's policies partly reflected an ambivalence about the West as he reduced isolation but still criticized Western values. He wanted reform, not abandonment, of basic Communist controls. The keynote to reform was *perestroika*, or economic restructuring. This meant more private ownership and decentralized control of aspects of the economy. Foreign investment was encouraged and military expenditures were reduced to free resources for consumer goods. In 1988 a new constitution gave considerable power to a parliament and abolished the Communist monopoly of elections. Gorbachev was elected to a new and powerful presidency in 1990 as people argued for or against reform. The economic and political conditions provoked agitation among minority nationalities; some demanded independence.

**Dismantling the Soviet Empire.** The states of eastern Europe took advantage of the new times to seek independence and internal reform. Soviet troops were withdrawn. Bulgaria arranged free elections in 1989; Hungary and Poland in 1988 installed non-Communist governments and moved toward a free economy. Czechoslovakia did the same in 1989. East Germany in 1989 removed its Communist leaders; the Berlin Wall came down and full German unification

occurred in 1991. The only violence occurred in Romania when an authoritarian ruler was overthrown. The Communists retained power, through elections, in Bulgaria and Romania; in Albania a more flexible Communist regime took control. The new situation in eastern Europe was marred by ethnic clashes. Yugoslavia fell apart and brutal fighting broke out among its former components. The new governments faced serious economic and environmental problems.

**Renewed Turmoil in the 1990s.** In 1991, Gorbachev survived an attempted coup because of popular support. Central authority weakened. Minority republics sought independence and the Baltic republics gained independence. By the end of 1991, the Soviet Union had been replaced by a loose union of republics. Gorbachev had resigned and was replaced by Boris Yeltsin. Economic and political tensions were rampant. By the late 1990s Yeltsin had lost support and was succeeded by Vladimir Putin. He pledged reforms and commitment to democracy. Debate continued over the future of Russian society.

**The Spread of Democracy.** A dramatic surge of democracy began in the 1970s, spreading worldwide. Fed by the fall of international communism, democracy spread further between 1989 and 2005. Important holdouts and regressions complicated the trend.

**Democracy and Its Limits.** From the late 1970s, multiparty democracy had spread to many new regions. The cold war's close reduced the need for great power support of authoritarian regimes. China and the Middle East remained exceptions. Questions about democracy's future persisted because of uncertain economic futures.

**The Great Powers and New Disputes.** The United States became the sole superpower, while Russia's power dramatically declined. Other nations were unhappy with the new single-power dominance, but efforts at alliances did not change the situation. The United States pushed its political and economic model, and worked against potential threats from smaller nations. It intervened in regional conflicts, as in the Persian Gulf War of 1991 and in the Balkans. The terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001 raised new issues. The United States responded by changing the Islamic fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan.

**The Former Soviet Empire.** The Soviet Union had kept a lid on hosts of potential internal disputes. When it collapsed, the lid came off. Ethnic and religious clashes occurred in several of the new nations, including Chechnya, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Czechoslovakia. The most post-Soviet clash occurred in Yugoslavia with long-standing tensions dividing different Slavic groups and minority nationalities. A second conflict developed at the end of the 1990s over the province of Kosovo. Albanian pressure for independence was met by Serbian resistance. NATO intervention ended the violence and led to a new, more democratic regime in Serbia.

**Endemic Conflicts.** The end of the cold war did not cause several of the most troubling regional conflicts. However, the reduction of cold war tension and controls contributed to new regional latitude. The Middle East remained a troubled spot with Iraqi and Iranian and Israeli-Palestinian tensions. Tensions between India and Pakistan also increased with borders disputes over the territory of Kashmir.

**Ethnic Conflict and Other Conflicts: A New Surge.** A surge in ethnic conflict was prominent in the post-cold war era. Increased global interaction and the collapse of multinational nations generated hostilities. In Europe, ethnic groups gained new opportunities for expression and

movements arose to limit immigration. Czechoslovakia peacefully divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, but other states proceeded less peacefully. The Muslim region of Chechnya in Russia declared independence in 1990 and a persisting harsh conflict followed. The foremost example of a multiethnic state's collapse was Yugoslavia during the 1990s. An international military force intervened to impose peace. Another intervention was required to halt strife in Kosovo. The 1990s also witnessed African disorder in Rwanda, Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

**The United States as Sole Superpower.** United States military power had no global rival by the 1990s, but a variety of reactions constrained American power. A new round of terrorism targeted the United States.

**In Depth: Terrorism, Then and Now.** In the last years of the 20th century, terrorism has become a major issue for the international media, the world's military and political leaders, and civilians across the globe who became both targets and mass victims of increasingly indiscriminate violent assaults. Although today's terrorist activity is often treated as a unique phenomenon, the decades before World War I saw terrorist attacks as a major concern and were carried out by dissident groups in many areas of the globe. In both time periods, the main sources of terrorist assaults were small, secret, and highly politically motivated organizations with the main objective to discredit or weaken political regimes. But at the turn of the 21st century by contrast, terrorist assaults have come mainly from sectarian extremists claiming affiliation with one of the world's greatest religious traditions. In both time periods, however, terrorist acts were carried out by young men. Since the advance of technology which makes leaders and governments virtually inaccessible, terrorist organizations have begun to attack unarmed civilians. The outcome of these types of attacks includes public outrage and negative world opinion to the cause the terrorist group was attempting to publicize. Shifts in the nature and targets from the early 20th century to the early 21st century have greatly increased the cost in human lives and property.

**Anti-American Terrorism and Response.** American interests had been targets of terrorist attacks since the 1960s. Hijacking of airplanes and other moves expressed hostility to U.S. policies, particularly those in the Middle East. The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon by Islamic militants on September 11, 2001 created a new level of threat. These attacks altered U.S. policy and focused the administration on a war against terrorism. A first response led to the military attack that successfully toppled an Islamic fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan. In 2003, U.S. attention turned to Iraq. Joined by other allies, the U.S. invaded and quickly conquered the country. The results of this action in terms of Iraq's future, broader global reactions to the U.S., and the flexibility of American policy itself are not yet clear.

**Global Connections: New Global Standards, New Divisions.** The end of the cold war reduced divisions in the world and dramatically lowered the danger of nuclear war. The larger spread of democracy also suggested new kinds of global links and agreements. But the escalation of regional conflicts, with their violence and dislocation, argued against the optimism of a future of peace and democracy.

## KEY TERMS

**Mikhail Gorbachev:** Leader of the U.S.S.R. (1985-1991); inaugurated major reforms that led to the disintegration of the Communist regime.

**Glasnost:** term meaning openness; Gorbachev's policy opening the opportunity to criticize the government.

**Perestroika:** term meaning economic restructuring; Gorbachev's policy for the economic rebuilding of the U.S.S.R. by allowing more private ownership and decentralized economic control.

**Boris Yeltsin:** Successor to Gorbachev; failed to reform the economy; succeeded by Vladimir Putin in 1999.

**Globalization:** The increasing interconnectedness of all parts of the world; opposed by many environmental and social justice groups.

**Multinational corporations.** Business organizations with connections across political borders.

**Persian Gulf War:** 1991 war led by the United States and various allies against Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The war led to Iraqi withdrawal and a long confrontation with Iraq about armaments and political regime.

## LECTURE SUGGESTIONS

**Which aspects of globalization do you find most influential in forming the conditions of life around the world at the close of the 20th century?**

Open discussion session with answers based on personal preferences.

**What are the varieties of prognostication for the future? Which do you find the most meaningful? What sort of future do you foresee?**

Open discussion session with answers based on personal preferences.

## COURSE REVIEW LESSON SUGGESTION

Have students trace various themes (interaction among societies, technology, social systems, cultural interaction and developments, political structures) through various areas of civilization.