

CUET · POLITICAL SCIENCE · CLASS XII · CODE 323

The End of Bipolarity

CUET unit: Contemporary World Politics — Cold War and after; Disintegration of the USSR; Emerging World Order

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Snapshot

- Tracks the dramatic collapse of the "second world": the toppling of the Berlin Wall (1989), the fall of East European communist regimes, and the formal disintegration of the USSR in December 1991.
- Explains the **nature of the Soviet system** (socialist economy, one-party rule, Warsaw Pact, state ownership) and the **internal weaknesses** (economic stagnation, technological lag, bureaucratic authoritarianism, lack of accountability).
- Covers **Gorbachev's reforms** (perestroika and glasnost), the 1991 coup, Yeltsin's rise, and the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).
- Examines the **consequences**: end of Cold War, US as sole superpower, rise of liberal democracy/capitalism, "shock therapy" in post-communist states, and resulting ethnic-secessionist conflicts.
- Discusses **India's relations** with post-communist countries, especially Russia (Indo-Russian Strategic Agreement, 2001), and the shared vision of a multipolar world.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

The Berlin Wall — built in 1961 to seal off East from West Berlin — stood for 28 years as the most visible symbol of the Cold War's bipolar divide, and was torn down by ordinary Berliners on **9 November 1989**. The Wall's fall was the prelude to a much larger collapse: within two years, the **second world** — the bloc of socialist states led by the USSR — had ceased to exist.

What was the Soviet system? The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) came into being after the **socialist revolution in Russia in 1917**, inspired by ideals of socialism, opposition to capitalism, and the goal of an egalitarian society achieved through the abolition of private property (NCERT §What was the Soviet System?, p. 2). The Soviet political system was built around the **Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)**; no other party or opposition was allowed; the economy was **planned and controlled by the state**. After WWII, the East European countries liberated by the Soviet army came under the USSR's tutelage; modelled on the Soviet system, they were

collectively called the **Second World or "socialist bloc"**, held together by the **Warsaw Pact** military alliance.

NCERT then catalogues both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Soviet system. The USSR became a great power after WWII; its economy was more developed than any in the world except for the **United States**, with complex communications, vast energy resources, machinery production, a domestic consumer industry, and a state-guaranteed minimum standard of living. But by the 1970s the strengths were being eaten up by structural weaknesses. The system had become **bureaucratic and authoritarian**, lacked democracy and freedom of speech, was unaccountable to its citizens, and ignored the urge of the **fifteen republics** to manage their own affairs — Russia dominated everything (NCERT p. 2). The **arms race** with the United States imposed extraordinary costs; the USSR lagged in technology and infrastructure; the **Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979** drained men, money and morale. By the late 1970s the economy had stagnated, shortages were endemic, and the USSR was importing food.

Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU in **1985** and launched twin reforms — **perestroika** (economic "restructuring") and **glasnost** (political "openness") — to bring the USSR abreast of the Western information and technological revolutions, normalise relations with the West and democratise Soviet political life (NCERT §Gorbachev and the Disintegration, p. 3). The reforms unleashed forces Gorbachev had not anticipated. East European protests gathered momentum; the USSR under Gorbachev refused to intervene; one-by-one the communist regimes of Eastern Europe collapsed in 1989. Inside the USSR, Communist Party hardliners attempted a **coup in August 1991** to reverse the reforms; the coup failed, and **Boris Yeltsin** emerged as a national hero by resisting it, going on to win the popular election in the Russian Republic.

In **December 1991**, under Yeltsin's leadership, **Russia, Ukraine and Belarus** — three Slavic republics — declared the USSR disbanded; the CPSU was banned; capitalism and democracy were adopted as the new order. The **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)** was formed; the **Central Asian republics**, initially excluded, were made founding members shortly afterward. **Russia became the successor state** of the USSR, inheriting its UN Security Council seat and its nuclear arsenal (NCERT §Why did the Soviet Union Disintegrate?, p. 4).

The **causes of disintegration** (NCERT pp. 4–5): first, the **internal weaknesses** of Soviet political and economic institutions — they failed to meet the aspirations of the people. Second, **economic stagnation** caused by huge expenditure on nuclear/military arsenals, the upkeep of satellite states, and unproductive subsidies. Third, **administrative-political stagnation** — an unaccountable CPSU, deep corruption and citizen alienation. Fourth, **Gorbachev's reforms themselves**, which set in motion forces their author could not control. Fifth and most immediate, the **rise of nationalism** in the republics — Russia, the **Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia,**

Lithuania), Ukraine and Georgia — which NCERT calls "the final and most immediate cause" of disintegration.

The **timeline box** (p. 6) is the single most testable diagram: **March 1985** Gorbachev elected; **June 1988** independence movement in Lithuania; **November 1989** Berlin Wall falls; **February 1990** end of the CPSU's 72-year monopoly; **March 1990** Lithuania becomes the first republic to declare independence; **August 1991** abortive coup; **December 1991** CIS formed; **25 December 1991** Gorbachev resigns — the end of the Soviet Union.

The **consequences of disintegration** are presented under three heads (NCERT §Consequences of Disintegration, p. 7). First, the end of **Cold War confrontations** and the arms race — the great ideological dispute about which system, socialist or capitalist, was the better model lost its real-world stakes. Second, a **change in world power relations** — the United States became the **sole superpower**, capitalism became the dominant economic system, the **World Bank and IMF** gained leverage, and **liberal democracy** emerged as the preferred model. Third, the emergence of **many new countries** with their own aspirations — Baltic and east European states sought EU and NATO membership; Central Asian states explored multiple alignments.

The most analytically distinctive contribution is its treatment of **shock therapy** — the painful transition from authoritarian socialist to democratic capitalist system, influenced by the **World Bank and the IMF** (NCERT §Shock Therapy in Post-Communist Regimes, p. 8). Shock therapy required a **total shift** to capitalism — no "third way", no gradualism. **Private ownership** was to be the dominant pattern; state-owned enterprises were to be **privatised**; **collective farms were to be replaced by private farming**. It also meant a sudden switch to **free trade**, FDI, **financial deregulation** and currency convertibility; old Soviet-bloc trade alliances broke up; states were linked directly to the West and absorbed into the Western economic system (NCERT p. 9).

The **consequences of shock therapy** were brutal (NCERT pp. 9–10). About **90 per cent of Russia's industries** were sold off to private hands — "the largest garage sale in history." The ruble's value collapsed; hyperinflation wiped out the savings of a generation; collective farms disintegrated; **Russia's real GDP in 1999 was below 1989 levels**; social welfare was destroyed; the mafia emerged; new and stark disparities opened between rich and poor and between regions; democratic institutions were weak, but presidents (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) became authoritarian. **Revival from 2000** was driven mainly by the **export of natural resources** — oil, natural gas and minerals (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan are major producers) and by **pipeline rents**.

The **tensions and conflicts** the disintegration left behind (NCERT pp. 10–11): Russia has faced **Chechnya and Dagestan** secessionist movements; **Tajikistan endured civil war till 2001**; **Nagorno-Karabakh** in Azerbaijan saw Armenian secessionism; **Georgia** suffered civil war; Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan have had unstable politics; river-water disputes recur. **Czechoslovakia split peacefully** into the Czech and Slovak

republics; **Yugoslavia** broke apart in the most severe of all the post-communist conflicts — Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia & Herzegovina seceded; ethnic Serbs resisted; the massacre of non-Serb Bosnians prompted NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

The final section examines **India and post-communist countries** (NCERT §India and Post-communist Countries, pp. 11–13). India maintains good relations with all post-communist states; the strongest is with Russia. Indo-Russian relations are multi-dimensional. **More than 80 bilateral agreements** have been signed under the **Indo-Russian Strategic Agreement of 2001**. The two share a vision of a **multipolar world order** — coexistence of several great powers, collective security, regionalism, negotiated settlements and a strengthened UN. India is the **second-largest arms market** for Russia; Russia supplies most of India's military hardware; Russia has helped India through **oil crises**, with its **nuclear energy plans**, and with the **cryogenic rocket** for the Indian space industry; investment cooperation extends to oilfields with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The Cold War partnership was equally multi-dimensional — **economic** (Soviet aid for Bhilai, Bokaro and Visakhapatnam steel plants and BHEL; willingness to accept Indian rupees in payment), **political** (Soviet support to India on Kashmir at the UN; Soviet backing in the 1971 war with Pakistan), **military** (joint production of military equipment) and **cultural** (Hindi films and Indian artists were popular in the USSR). The "Flashback" box (p. 12) is itself a likely CUET source.

2.2 Definitions to memorise

| Term | Definition | Page |
|--|--|------|
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics — came into being after the 1917 socialist revolution in Russia; comprised fifteen republics | 2 |
| Second World / Socialist Bloc | Group of east European countries modelled on the USSR, held together by the Warsaw Pact | 2 |
| Warsaw Pact | Military alliance led by the USSR that held the socialist bloc together | 2 |
| Perestroika | "Restructuring" — Gorbachev's economic reform policy | 6 |
| Glasnost | "Openness" — Gorbachev's political reform allowing freedom of expression | 6 |
| CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) | Body formed in December 1991 by Russia, Ukraine and Belarus after disbanding the USSR; later included Central Asian republics | 4, 6 |
| Shock Therapy | Painful, sudden transition from socialism to capitalism in Russia, Central Asia and east Europe in the 1990s, guided by World Bank and IMF | 8 |
| Successor State | Russia — inherited the Soviet seat on the UN Security Council and the nuclear arsenal | 4 |

| Term | Definition | Page |
|--|---|------|
| Baltic Republics | Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania — first to push for independence; joined NATO in March 2004 | 6 |
| Near Abroad | Russia's term for the former Soviet states it considers within its sphere of influence | 11 |
| Berlin Wall | Symbol of Cold War division, built 1961, broken 9 November 1989 | 1 |
| Fifteen Republics | Constituent units of the USSR | 2 |
| CPSU | Communist Party of the Soviet Union; the sole permitted party | 2 |
| Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 1979 | Drained Soviet resources and morale | 3 |
| August 1991 coup | Failed hardliner attempt to reverse Gorbachev's reforms | 3 |
| Indo-Russian Strategic Agreement, 2001 | Framework for more than 80 bilateral agreements with Russia | 12 |
| Multipolar world order | Indo-Russian shared vision: coexistence of several powers, collective security, strong UN | 11 |
| Russia's "largest garage sale" | NCERT phrase for the privatisation of ~90% of Russian industry | 9–10 |
| Hyperinflation (1990s Russia) | Wiped out generational savings | 9 |
| Real GDP 1999 < 1989 levels (Russia) | Headline statistic of shock-therapy failure | 9 |
| Yugoslavia break-up | Most severe post-communist conflict | 11 |
| Czechoslovakia split | Peaceful division into Czech and Slovak republics | 11 |
| Bhilai, Bokaro, Visakhapatnam | Indian steel plants built with Soviet aid | 12 |
| Cryogenic rocket | Russian transfer to India's space programme | 13 |

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Berlin Wall imagery** (chapter opener, p. 1): built in 1961 to separate East from West Berlin; stood for 28 years; broken on 9 November 1989; symbolised division between capitalist and communist worlds.
- **Timeline box of disintegration** (p. 6): from March 1985 (Gorbachev elected) to 25 December 1991 (Gorbachev resigns). Key dates — June 1988 Lithuania movement, October 1989 Soviet declaration that Warsaw Pact members are free, November 1989 Berlin Wall falls, February 1990 end of CPSU monopoly, March 1990 Lithuania declares independence, August 1991 abortive coup, December 1991 CIS formed.

- **Map of Central, Eastern Europe and the CIS** (p. 8): student is asked to locate the Central Asian Republics.
- **Leaders panel** (margins, pp. 2-7): Lenin (1870-1924), Stalin (1879-1953), Khrushchev (1894-1971), Brezhnev (1906-82), Gorbachev (b. 1931), Yeltsin (1931-2007).
- **Process map** — Soviet system & strengths (§What was the Soviet System?) → weaknesses (§What was the Soviet System? cont.) → Gorbachev's reforms (§Gorbachev and the Disintegration) → coup and Yeltsin (§Gorbachev) → disbanding and CIS (§Why did the USSR Disintegrate?) → causes ranking (§Why did the USSR Disintegrate?) → consequences (§Consequences) → shock therapy (§Shock Therapy) → tensions and conflicts (§Tensions and Conflicts) → India and post-communist countries (§India and Post-communist Countries).

2.5 Key Articles / Treaties / Events

| Reference | Source / Subject | NCERT cite |
|--|--|------------|
| 1917 Russian Revolution | Founded the USSR | p. 2 |
| Warsaw Pact | Soviet-led military alliance of the Second World | p. 2 |
| Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 1979 | Drained Soviet economic and military resources | p. 3 |
| March 1985 — Gorbachev becomes General Secretary | Launched perestroika and glasnost | p. 6 |
| June 1988 — Lithuania independence movement | First major republic-level secession push | p. 6 |
| 9 November 1989 — Fall of the Berlin Wall | Symbolic end of Cold War divide | pp. 1, 6 |
| February 1990 — End of CPSU's 72-year monopoly | Constitutional dismantling of one-party rule | p. 6 |
| March 1990 — Lithuania declares independence | First Soviet republic to do so | p. 6 |
| August 1991 — Abortive hardliner coup | Yeltsin emerges as national hero | p. 3 |
| December 1991 — CIS formed | Russia, Ukraine, Belarus declare USSR disbanded | pp. 3, 6 |
| 25 December 1991 — Gorbachev resigns | Formal end of the USSR | p. 6 |
| March 2004 — Baltic states join NATO | Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania | p. 6 |
| Indo-Russian Strategic Agreement, 2001 | Framework for over 80 bilateral agreements | p. 12 |
| | Built with Soviet economic aid | p. 12 |

| Reference | Source / Subject | NCERT cite |
|--|-------------------------------|------------|
| Bhilai, Bokaro, Visakhapatnam steel plants | | |
| Russian cryogenic rocket transfer | Aid to India's space industry | p. 13 |

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Who declared the USSR disbanded** — it was Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (three Slavic republics), **not** all fifteen republics; Central Asian republics were initially excluded and later included in the CIS.
- **Perestroika vs Glasnost** — perestroika is economic restructuring, glasnost is political openness; NTA frequently swaps these.
- **Cause "rank"** — NCERT calls the **rise of nationalism** the "final and most immediate cause" of disintegration (p. 5). Economic stagnation is a deeper cause but the immediate trigger is nationalism — a common trap.
- **Russia's status post-USSR** — Russia is the **successor state**, not merely "one of the new states"; it took the UN Security Council seat and the nuclear arsenal.
- **Baltic states ≠ Central Asian states** — Baltic (Estonia/Latvia/Lithuania) wanted to leave and joined NATO; Central Asians did not initially ask for independence and wanted to remain with the Soviet Federation.
- **Shock therapy was guided by World Bank and IMF**, not by NATO or the UN — a frequent distractor.
- **Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989** — NOT December 1989 or November 1991.
- **Gorbachev became General Secretary in 1985**, not 1989. He resigned on **25 December 1991**.
- **Yugoslavia's break-up** was the most severe conflict; **Czechoslovakia split peacefully** — trap items swap the descriptors.
- **Indo-Russian Strategic Agreement is from 2001**, not 1991 or 2011.

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is one of the most heavily tested in CUET (UG) Political Science — questions consistently appear on the dating/sequencing of disintegration events (1985, 1989, 1991), the perestroika–glasnost pair, shock therapy and its consequences, India–Russia ties (especially the 2001 Strategic Agreement), and the role of Gorbachev–Yeltsin. Expect

1–2 chronological/match-the-following items per paper and 1 case-style question on shock therapy or Indo-Russian relations.

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.22 (CUET 2023) NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) formed in 1949, was an association of how many states?

- A) 14 states B) 12 states C) 15 states D) 11 states **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.24 (CUET 2023) Which among the following statements with reference to “Shock Therapy” is incorrect? A. Privatisation led to new disparities between rich and poor regions B. The value of the Russian currency declined C. Private farming was replaced by collective farming D. The value of industries was sold to individuals Options:

- A) A and D B) C and A C) C and D D) B, C and D **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.25 (CUET 2023) Match List I with List II A. The Russian Revolution B. Fall of the Berlin Wall C. Soviet invasion of Afghanistan D. Disintegration of the Soviet Union I. 1989 II. 1991 III. 1917 IV. 1979 Options:

- A) A-III, B-I, C-IV, D-II B) A-III, B-II, C-IV, D-I C) A-II, B-I, C-III, D-IV D) A-IV, B-III, C-I, D-II **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.26 (CUET 2023) Who hailed the emergence of the “New World Order”?

- A) George Bush B) Bill Clinton C) Donald Trump D) Jimmy Carter **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.27 (CUET 2023) Match List I with List II (U.S. dominance in world politics) A. New World Order B. Global War on Terror C. Taliban regime D. Operation Iraqi Freedom I. George H. W. Bush II. 11 September 2001 III. Afghanistan IV. 19 March 2003 Options:

- A) A-II, B-III, C-IV, D-I B) A-I, B-II, C-III, D-IV C) A-III, B-IV, C-II, D-I D) A-IV, B-I, C-III, D-II **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.22 (CUET 2024) The model of transition in Russia, Central Asia and East Europe influenced by World Bank and IMF is known as:

- A) Current Therapy B) Shock Therapy C) Fiscal Therapy D) Glasnost **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.23 (CUET 2024) In which year was Mikhail Gorbachev elected as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union?

- A) 1982 B) 1983 C) 1984 D) 1985 **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.30 (CUET 2024) At the Yalta Conference, the 'Big Three' stood for:

- A) Roosevelt, Churchill, Khrushchev B) Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin C) Deng Xiaoping, Churchill, Stalin D) Kennedy, Attlee, Stalin **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.24 (CUET 2025) The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolised:

- A) Disintegration of Germany B) Unification of Germany C) Beginning of Cold War D) Collapse of Second World War **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.26 (CUET 2025) Arrange events related to disintegration of the Soviet Union: (A) Boris Yeltsin appointed head of Communist Party in Moscow (B) Soviet Union declares Warsaw Pact members free (C) Boris Yeltsin becomes President of Russia (D) Commonwealth of Independent States established Options:

- A) (A), (B), (C), (D) B) (B), (A), (C), (D) C) (C), (A), (B), (D) D) (B), (C), (A), (D) **Tests:** Bipolarity, Soviet disintegration, shock therapy **Answer:** Not in extracted key