

LESSON 2

Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How does war result in change?
- What challenges may countries face as a result of war?

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

- enhanced
- participation
- sole

Content Vocabulary

- heavy industry
- de-Stalinization
- détente
- dissidents

TAKING NOTES

Key Ideas and Details

Comparing As you read, use a table like the one below to compare the policies of Khrushchev and Brezhnev.

Policies	Khrushchev	Brezhnev

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Stalin was a repressive leader who wanted to bring Eastern Europe under Soviet control. Many Communist countries came under Soviet control during this era, including Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. After Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev denounced the most brutal policies of the Stalin regime.

Postwar Soviet Union

GUIDING QUESTION What political, economic, and social shifts occurred in the Soviet Union during the Cold War?

World War II devastated the Soviet Union. To create a new industrial base, Stalin returned to the method that he had used in the 1930s. Soviet workers were expected to produce goods for export with little in return for themselves. The incoming capital from abroad could then be used to buy machinery and Western technology.

Economic recovery in the Soviet Union was spectacular in some respects. By 1950, Russian industrial production surpassed prewar levels by 40 percent. New power plants, canals, and giant factories were built. **Heavy industry** increased, chiefly for military benefit. The hydrogen bomb in 1953 and the first space satellite, *Sputnik I*, in 1957 **enhanced** the Soviet Union's reputation as a world power.

Yet the Soviet people were shortchanged. The production of consumer goods did not increase as much as heavy industry, and there was a housing shortage. As a British official in Moscow reported, "Every room is both a living room by day and a bedroom by night."

The Rule of Stalin

Stalin was the undisputed master of the Soviet Union. He distrusted competitors, exercised **sole** power, and had little respect for other Communist Party leaders. He is reported to have said to members

of his inner circle in 1952, “You are as blind as kittens. What would you do without me?”

Stalin’s suspicions added to the regime’s increasing repression. In 1946 the government ordered all literary and scientific work to conform to the state’s political needs. Along with this anti-intellectual campaign came political terror. The threat of more purges in 1953 disappeared when Stalin died on March 5, 1953.

The Khrushchev Era

A group of leaders succeeded Stalin, but the new general secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, soon emerged as the chief Soviet policy maker. After he was in power, Khrushchev took steps to undo some of the worst features of Stalin’s regime.

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party in 1956, Khrushchev condemned Stalin for his “administrative violence, mass repression, and terror.” The process of eliminating the more ruthless policies of Stalin became known as **de-Stalinization**.

Khrushchev loosened government controls on literary and artistic works. In 1962, for example, he allowed the publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. This novel, written by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (SOHL • zhuh • NEET • suhn), is a grim portrayal of life in a Siberian labor camp. Many Soviets identified with Ivan as a symbol of the suffering endured under Stalin.

Khrushchev also tried to place more emphasis on producing consumer goods. He attempted to increase agricultural output by growing corn and cultivating vast lands east of the Ural Mountains. The attempt was

heavy industry the manufacture of machines and equipment for factories and mines

enhanced improved

sole being the only one

de-Stalinization the process of eliminating Stalin’s more ruthless policies

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

Contrasting these depictions of Soviet society

Soviet control over the arts was rigid. Artists had to work within the confines of socialist realist art, which was meant to portray the ideals of Soviet society. Common themes included portraits of Soviet political leaders, people performing manual labor, and industrial progress, such as the sculpture Worker and Kolkhoz [collective farm] Woman by Vera Mukhina (right). Not everyone worked within these confines, however. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was exiled for writing The Gulag Archipelago, which revealed life in the forced labor camps to which many political opponents were sent in the 1950s. “Archipelago” was his metaphor for forced labor camps and “Gulag” is an acronym for the agency that supervised the camps.

“But the whole central meaning of their existence was identical for serfdom and the Archipelago; they were forms of social organization for the forced and pitiless exploitation of the unpaid labor of millions of slaves.”

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, from *The Gulag Archipelago*



DBQ Analyzing Historical Documents

- 1 **Differentiating** How do the text and the sculpture demonstrate differing views of life under the Soviet regime?
- 2 **Making Inferences** Serfdom was abolished in Russia in 1861. What do you think Solzhenitsyn means when he writes that the “meaning of their existence was identical for serfdom and the Archipelago”?

BIOGRAPHY

Natan Sharansky (1948-)

During the 1970s, the Soviet government continued to experience protests from within and to send political prisoners to labor camps in Siberia. One example was Natan Sharansky, a Soviet Jew who wanted to emigrate to Israel in 1973 but was denied the right.

The government's refusal led Sharansky to help found the Refusenik movement, a group of activists speaking out about Soviet political oppression. The Refuseniks gave special attention to the plight of Jews in the Soviet Union. Sharansky worked as a human rights activist and spoke to Western journalists to spread the word about life in the Soviet Union.

In 1977 Sharansky was arrested and charged with treason and spying. This was a common charge by the government against anyone voicing opposition to Soviet power. If a person spoke with a Westerner about anything state-related, it was easy for the government to claim that the information hurt the USSR. Sharansky was convicted in a secret trial and sent to a labor camp in Siberia.

Sharansky spent almost ten years in prison. To help him get through the experience, he played chess matches in his head. During his imprisonment, his wife and leaders in the West called for his release. These pressures helped lead to his release in a prisoner exchange in 1986. He soon moved to Israel where he entered politics, rising to the level of Deputy Prime Minister.

unsuccessful and damaged Khrushchev's reputation within the party. This failure, combined with increased military spending, hurt the Soviet economy. The industrial growth rate, which had soared in the early 1950s, now declined sharply from 13 percent in 1953 to 7.5 percent in 1964.

Foreign policy failures also damaged Khrushchev's reputation among his colleagues. His rash plan to place missiles in Cuba was the final straw. While he was away on vacation in 1964, a special meeting of the Soviet leaders voted him out of office (because of "deteriorating health") and forced him into retirement.

The Brezhnev Era

When Nikita Khrushchev was removed from office in 1964, two men, Alexei Kosygin and Leonid Brezhnev (BREHZH • nehf) replaced him. Brezhnev emerged as the dominant leader in the 1970s. He was determined to keep Eastern Europe in Communist hands and was not interested in reform. Brezhnev insisted on the Soviet Union's right to intervene if communism was threatened in another Communist state (known as the Brezhnev Doctrine).

At the same time, Brezhnev benefited from **détente**, a relaxation of tensions and improved relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the 1970s, the two superpowers signed SALT I and SALT II (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties) and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty to limit nuclear arms. Because they felt more secure, Soviet leaders relaxed their authoritarian rule and allowed more access to Western music, dress, and art. Of course, **dissidents**—those who spoke out against the regime—were still suppressed. For example, Andrei Sakharov, father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, was punished for defending human rights.

In his economic policies, Brezhnev continued to emphasize heavy industry. Two problems, however, weakened the Soviet economy. First, the government's central planning led to a huge, complex bureaucracy that discouraged efficiency and led to indifference. Second, collective farmers had no incentive to work hard. Many preferred working their own small private plots to laboring in the collective work brigades.

By the 1970s, the Communist ruling class in the Soviet Union had become complacent and corrupt. Party and state leaders, as well as army leaders and secret police (KGB), enjoyed a high standard of living. Brezhnev was unwilling to tamper with the party leadership and state bureaucracy regardless of the inefficiency and corruption that the system encouraged.

By the 1970s, détente had allowed U.S. grain and consumer goods to be sold to the Soviet Union. However, détente collapsed in 1979 when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. A new period of East-West confrontation began. The Soviet Union wanted to restore a pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan. The United States viewed this as an act of expansion. To show his disapproval, President Jimmy Carter canceled U.S. **participation** in the 1980 Olympic Games to be held in Moscow. He also placed an embargo on the shipment of U.S. grain to the Soviets.

Relations became even chillier when Ronald Reagan became president of the United States. Calling the Soviet Union an "evil empire," he began a military buildup and a new arms race. Reagan also gave military aid to the Afghan rebels to maintain a war in Afghanistan that the Soviet Union could not win.

✓ READING PROGRESS CHECK

Contrasting How were U.S.-Soviet relations different during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev regimes?

Eastern Europe

GUIDING QUESTION *How was Eastern Europe affected by communism after World War II?*

At the end of World War II, Soviet military forces occupied all of Eastern Europe and the Balkans (except for Greece, Albania, and Yugoslavia). All the occupied states came under Soviet control.

Communist Patterns of Control

The timetable of the Soviet takeover varied from country to country. Between 1945 and 1947, Soviet-controlled Communist governments became firmly entrenched in East Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, and Hungary. In Czechoslovakia, where there was a tradition of democracy and a multi-party system, the Soviets did not seize control of the government until 1948. At that time they dissolved all but the Communist Party.

Albania and Yugoslavia were exceptions to this pattern of Soviet dominance. During the war, both countries had strong Communist movements that resisted the Nazis. After the war, local Communist parties took control. Communists in Albania set up a Stalinist-type regime that grew more and more independent of the Soviet Union.

In Yugoslavia, Josip Broz, known as Tito, had been the leader of the Communist resistance movement. After the war, he created an independent Communist state in Yugoslavia. Stalin hoped to take control of Yugoslavia, just as he had done in other Eastern European countries. Tito, however, refused to give in to Stalin's demands. He gained the support of the people by portraying the struggle as one of Yugoslav national freedom.

Tito ruled Yugoslavia until his death in 1980. Although Yugoslavia had a Communist government, it was not a Soviet satellite state.

Between 1948 and Stalin's death in 1953, the Eastern European satellite states, directed by the Soviet Union, followed Stalin's example. They instituted Soviet-type five-year plans with emphasis on heavy industry rather than consumer goods. They collectivized agriculture, eliminated all noncommunist parties, and set up the institutions of repression—secret police and military forces.

Revolts Against Communism

Communism did not develop deep roots among the peoples of Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Soviets exploited Eastern Europe economically for their own benefit and made living conditions harsh for most people.

After Stalin's death, many Eastern European states began to pursue a new course. In the late 1950s and 1960s, however, the Soviet Union made it clear—especially in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia—that it would not allow its Eastern European satellites to become independent of Soviet control.

détente a phase of relaxed tensions and improved relations between two adversaries

dissident a person who speaks out against the regime in power

participation having a part in or sharing in something



▲ The head of a destroyed statue of Stalin in the middle of a Budapest street during the Hungarian revolt of 1956.

► CRITICAL THINKING

Analyzing Visuals What is the symbolic importance of the fallen statue?

In 1956 protests erupted in Poland. In response, the Polish Communist Party adopted a series of reforms in October and elected Władysław Gomułka as first secretary. Gomułka declared that Poland had the right to follow its own socialist path. Fearful of Soviet armed response, however, the Poles compromised. Poland pledged to remain loyal to the Warsaw Pact.

Developments in Poland in 1956 led Hungarian Communists to seek the same kinds of reforms. Unrest in Hungary, combined with economic difficulties, led to calls for revolt. To quell the rising rebellion Imre Nagy, the Hungarian leader, declared Hungary a free nation on November 1, 1956, and promised free elections. It soon became clear that this could mean the end of Communist rule in Hungary.

Khrushchev was in no position at home to allow a member of the Communist group of nations to leave, however. Three days after Nagy's declaration, the Soviet Army attacked Budapest. The Soviets reestablished control over the country. Nagy was seized by the Soviet military and executed two years later.

The situation in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s was different. There, Stalin had placed Antonín Novotný, the "Little Stalin," in power in 1953. By the late 1960s, however, he had alienated many members of his own party. He was especially disliked by Czechoslovakia's writers. A writers' rebellion, which encouraged the people to take control of their own lives, led to Novotný's resignation in 1968.

In January 1968, Alexander Dubček (DOOB • chehk) was elected first secretary of the Communist Party. He introduced a number of reforms, including freedom of speech and press and freedom to travel abroad. He relaxed censorship, began to pursue an independent foreign policy, and promised a democratization of the Czechoslovakian political system. Dubček hoped to create "socialism with a human face." A period of euphoria broke out that came to be known as the "Prague Spring."

The euphoria proved to be short-lived. To forestall the spreading of this "spring fever," the Soviet Army invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and crushed the reform movement. Gustav Husák replaced Dubček, revoked his reforms, and reestablished the old order.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Drawing Conclusions Why was Yugoslavia different from other Eastern European countries during the Cold War?



▲ Soviet tanks left Hungary on October 30, 1956, but the Soviets soon returned, crushing the revolt and reestablishing control.

KeyStone-France/Gamma-Keystone/Getty Images

LESSON 2 REVIEW

Reviewing Vocabulary

1. **Making Connections** How did the period of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union lead to a relaxation of authoritarian rule?

Using Your Notes

2. **Comparing and Contrasting** Use your notes to compare and contrast the rule of Khrushchev and Brezhnev.

Answering the Guiding Questions

3. **Drawing Conclusions** What political, economic, and social shifts occurred in the Soviet Union during the Cold War?

4. **Analyzing Information** How were Eastern Europeans affected by communism after World War II?

Writing Activity

5. **Informative/Explanatory** Research and write an essay about the "Prague Spring." What did it hope to achieve, and why was it unsuccessful? Be sure to include a bibliography of the sources you consulted.