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What does 'qualifying text' mean?
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The Fall of the Soviet Union: Causes

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. For more than seven decades, the USSR had been a global superpower, rivaling the United States in military strength, political influence, and ideological reach. Its sudden disintegration shocked the world and marked the end of the Cold War. The fall of the Soviet Union was not caused by a single event but by a combination of deep-rooted economic problems, political weaknesses, social pressures, leadership failures, and international factors. Together, these forces gradually weakened the state from within until it could no longer survive.

One of the most important causes of the Soviet Union's collapse was its failing economic system. The Soviet economy was based on central planning, where the government controlled production, prices, and distribution of goods. While this system initially helped the USSR industrialize rapidly, it became increasingly inefficient over time. Chronic shortages of basic goods, declining productivity, and lack of innovation frustrated ordinary citizens and weakened confidence in the system.

By the 1970s and 1980s, economic growth had slowed dramatically. Factories focused more on meeting quotas than producing quality goods. Innovation was discouraged, and industries lagged behind Western economies in technology. Heavy military spending further strained the economy, leaving fewer resources for consumer needs and social services.

The Soviet political system also contributed to its collapse. Power was centralized in the Communist Party, and political opposition was not tolerated. Corruption and bureaucracy became widespread, creating a disconnect between the government and the people. Public trust in leadership steadily declined.

Reforms introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev, such as perestroika and glasnost, were intended to save the system but instead exposed its weaknesses. Glasnost allowed open criticism of the government, while perestroika disrupted the economy without fully fixing it. These reforms weakened central authority.

Nationalism also played a major role. The Soviet Union was made up of many ethnic groups, and as political control loosened, nationalist movements grew stronger. Several republics demanded independence, weakening the unity of the state.

Leadership challenges further accelerated the collapse. Gorbachev lost support from both hardline communists and reformers. The failed coup attempt in August 1991 demonstrated the loss of control by the Communist Party and hastened the breakup of the Soviet Union.

International pressure from the Cold War arms race and comparison with Western living standards highlighted the weaknesses of the Soviet system. When the USSR stopped using force to control Eastern Europe, its influence rapidly declined.

In conclusion, the fall of the Soviet Union was caused by a combination of economic failure, political rigidity, nationalism, leadership struggles, and international pressure. In December 1991, the Soviet Union officially dissolved, ending the Cold War and reshaping global politics.