

The End of Bipolarity

Class 12 Political Science — Detailed Chapter Notes

1. What was Bipolarity?

After the Second World War, the world was divided into two powerful groups:

- **United States** supported the capitalist system.
- **Soviet Union** supported socialism and communism.

Key Concept: Both countries wanted to increase their influence across the world. This situation was called **Bipolarity** because the world was divided into two major power centers or "poles".

2. What was the Soviet System?

The Soviet Union operated on a vastly different political and economic system compared to the West.

Features of the Soviet System

- **(a) Socialist Economy:** All factories, industries, and resources were controlled by the government. Private businesses were very limited.
- **(b) One-Party System:** Only the Communist Party ruled the country. Other political parties were strictly prohibited.
- **(c) Welfare Facilities:** The government provided free education and healthcare. The state was also responsible for providing jobs to people.
- **(d) Idea of Equality:** The system tried to reduce the economic gap between rich and poor people.

3. Why did problems arise in the Soviet System?

- **(a) Weak Economy:** The government-controlled economy became inefficient. Production was slow, and state-owned enterprises incurred increasing losses.
- **(b) Shortage of Consumer Goods:** Daily-use and modern products such as fashionable clothes and electronics were not easily available to citizens.
- **(c) Lack of Political Freedom:** People could not openly criticize the government and lacked basic democratic rights.
- **(d) Arms Race:** Both the USA and USSR spent massive amounts of money on weapons and military competition. This severely weakened the Soviet economy further.

4. Mikhail Gorbachev and Reforms

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union. Recognizing the deep systemic issues, he introduced crucial reforms to improve the Soviet system.

(a) Glasnost — "Openness"

The aim of this policy was to make Soviet society more open and transparent.

Changes:

- More freedom for media
- People could criticize the government
- Public discussions increased

Result: People became much more aware of the weaknesses and corruption within the government.

(b) Perestroika — "Restructuring"

This policy aimed to fundamentally improve and restructure the economy.

Changes:

- Limited permission to private businesses
- Economic reforms introduced
- Foreign investment encouraged

Result: The economy did not improve quickly, leading to increased confusion and instability.

5. Disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991)

In 1991, the Soviet Union officially broke apart, marking a monumental shift in global geopolitics.

Main Causes Explained

- **(a) Economic Crisis:** The economy had become very weak. The government did not have enough funds for national development.
- **(b) Rise of Nationalism:** Different republics inside the USSR (like Ukraine, Georgia, etc.) wanted complete independence.
- **(c) Political Instability:** People started losing trust in the ruling Communist Party.
- **(d) Failed Reforms:** Gorbachev's reforms (Glasnost and Perestroika) could not solve the major problems in time.
- **(e) Heavy Military Spending:** The USSR spent too much money competing with the USA in military power, neglecting domestic needs.

6. What happened after the USSR collapsed?

- **(a) Formation of 15 New Countries:** The individual republics of the Soviet Union became sovereign, independent countries. Examples include **Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus**.
- **(b) End of the Cold War:** The decades-long ideological and military rivalry between the USA and USSR finally ended.
- **(c) End of Bipolarity:** Only the USA remained as the strongest superpower, shifting the world temporarily into a **unipolar** state.

7. What was Shock Therapy?

After the collapse of the USSR, the newly independent countries shifted from a socialist economy directly to a capitalist economy. This sudden and painful transition process was called **Shock Therapy**.

Features of Shock Therapy

- **(a) Privatization:** Huge government industries were handed over to private companies and individuals.
- **(b) Free Market Economy:** Prices, wages, and businesses were no longer controlled by the state but by market forces.
- **(c) Open Foreign Trade:** Trade barriers were lifted, and engagement with other countries increased.

Negative Effects

- **Unemployment:** Many people lost their state-guaranteed jobs.
- **Poverty:** Problems faced by the poor increased significantly.
- **Inflation:** Prices of basic goods increased rapidly.

Positive Effects

- **Growth of Business:** Private companies started growing and innovating.
- **Foreign Investment:** Other countries and multinational corporations began investing in these economies.

8. Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

After the USSR collapsed, some former republics formed a regional intergovernmental organization called the CIS.

Aim of CIS

- Economic cooperation among member states
- Security cooperation and mutual defense
- Maintaining friendly and diplomatic relations

9. India–USSR Relations

Relations between India and the Soviet Union were historically very strong and deeply strategic.

Areas of Cooperation

- **(a) Defence Support:** The USSR was a major supplier of military equipment and technology to India.
- **(b) Industrial Development:** It helped India establish heavy industries and steel plants (e.g., Bhilai, Bokaro).
- **(c) Scientific Cooperation:** It supported India heavily in science, space exploration, and technology.

After the Collapse of USSR: India successfully continued its friendly and strategic relations with Russia, the principal successor state.

10. Chapter Summary

- The world was divided into two major superpowers (Bipolarity).
- Economic and political problems steadily increased in the USSR.
- Mikhail Gorbachev introduced crucial reforms (Glasnost and Perestroika).
- The Soviet Union officially collapsed in 1991.
- The Cold War and the era of Bipolarity came to a definitive end.
- The USA emerged as the sole global superpower.
- "Shock Therapy" was introduced to transition former Soviet states to capitalism.