

CHAPTER 2

The End of Bipolarity

CBSE Class 12 · Political Science ·
Contemporary World Politics · Chapter 2

CBSE · Political Science · Class 12

WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES

A Explain what bipolarity meant and how it ended.

B List the four causes of the disintegration of the USSR.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

TODAY'S MISSION

Today's mission

1

Explain what bipolarity meant and how it ended.

2

List the four causes of the disintegration of the USSR.

3

Define shock therapy and its consequences.

4

Describe India-Russia relations. Score 6/7 on this chapter's slice.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Why this chapter matters

- 1 5-7 marks every CBSE board paper — 'causes of disintegration' + 'shock therapy' are near-certain questions.
- 2 It is the hinge of the whole textbook: it ends the Cold War (Ch 1) and sets up US dominance + alternative centres (later chapters).
- 3 Real-world relevance: today's US-Russia tensions, the war in Ukraine, and the post-Soviet states all trace back to 1991.

TOPIC

A

What was bipolarity?

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

Bipolarity — Definition + How It Ended

“ **BIPOLARITY** is a world order in which power and influence are concentrated in **TWO** superpowers — the USA (capitalist bloc) and the USSR (communist bloc) — around whom most other states cluster into two opposing blocs.

STATEMENT

The 'end of bipolarity' refers to the **DISINTEGRATION** of the Soviet Union in December 1991, which removed one of the two poles. With only the USA left as a superpower, the bipolar order collapsed into a

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Bipolarity had structured the entire post-1945 world — alliances (NATO vs Warsaw Pact), the arms race, proxy wars, and the Non-Aligned Movement all existed **BECAUSE** there were two blocs
- Remove one pole and the whole structure had to be rebuilt.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Bipolarity (the **STRUCTURE** — two poles) is not the same as the Cold War (the **CONTEST** inside it). They ended together in 1991 but are different ideas.

TOPIC

B

The Soviet system — strength and weakness

TOPIC

How the Soviet system rose — and why it weakened

ORIGINS + STRENGTHS

The Soviet system was born from the 1917 Russian (Bolshevik/ socialist) Revolution, inspired by the ideals of socialism and the need to end inequality. After WW2 the USSR became a superpower with the world's second-largest economy, a vast state apparatus, and control over Eastern Europe

STRUCTURAL WEAKNESSES

Over time the same centralised system became its own trap. The bureaucratic, one-party (CPSU) state grew authoritarian and unaccountable; ordinary citizens had no real political voice or freedom to dissent. The economy stagnated: the planned model could not innovate,

THE ARMS RACE + AFGHANISTAN

Maintaining military and nuclear parity with the United States imposed an unbearable cost on a far smaller economy. The intervention in AFGHANISTAN (1979-89) became the Soviet Union's own draining, unwinnable war — a decade of casualties, expenditure and

PEOPLE STOPPED BELIEVING

By the 1980s a crucial intangible had eroded: ordinary Soviet citizens had stopped believing in the system. They could see, through smuggled goods and information, the higher living standards and political freedoms of the West, and they resented the gap between the ruling

TOPIC

C

Gorbachev and the reforms

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

Gorbachev — Perestroika and Glasnost

“ Mikhail GORBACHEV became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, inheriting a stagnating economy and a discontented society. He launched reforms to MODERNISE and SAVE the Soviet system — not to end it.

STATEMENT

PERESTROIKA
 ('restructuring') sought to reform the **ECONOMY** — introducing some market mechanisms, reducing central planning's rigidity, cutting military spending, and ending

WHY THIS MATTERS

- The reforms were a genuine attempt to fix the system's failures and normalise relations with the West
- But they **RAISED** expectations the system could not satisfy, **EXPOSED** its deep failures once people could speak freely, and gave **NATIONALIST** movements in the

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Gorbachev's **INTENT** (save socialism) and the **OUTCOME** (collapse of the USSR) were opposite. Never write that he wanted to break up the Soviet Union.

TOPIC

D

Why the USSR disintegrated

TOPIC

Four causes of the disintegration of the USSR

1. ECONOMIC STAGNATION

The fundamental cause was the failure of the centrally-planned economy. By the 1980s it was stagnant, inefficient and technologically backward compared with the capitalist West; it could not innovate, could not satisfy consumer demand, and produced chronic shortages of basic goods that forced

2. ARMS RACE + AFGHANISTAN

Maintaining superpower military parity with the United States imposed a crushing financial burden on a smaller, weaker economy. The decade-long war in AFGHANISTAN (1979-89) deepened the drain — it was costly, unwinnable, demoralising, and bled both money and morale.

3. POLITICAL OVER-CENTRALISATION

The one-party rule of the Communist Party (CPSU) had become rigid, authoritarian, unaccountable and deeply corrupt. Ordinary citizens had no genuine political voice, no freedom to dissent, and no faith in their unresponsive institutions. A privileged party elite

4. RISE OF NATIONALISM (THE TRIGGER)

The IMMEDIATE cause of the breakup was the rise of NATIONALISM and a desire for sovereignty within the 15 republics — most powerfully in the more prosperous and Westward-looking ones such as the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Russia itself, Ukraine and Georgia.

TOPIC

E

The collapse — 1989 to 1991

WORKED EXAMPLE

How the collapse unfolded (1985–1991)

- 1** 1985: Mikhail Gorbachev becomes General Secretary of the CPSU; launches perestroika + glasnost to reform the system.
- 2** 9 November 1989: the BERLIN WALL falls. Across Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, etc.) Soviet-aligned communist governments collapse — the end of Soviet control over Eastern Europe (NOT yet the USSR itself).
- 3** 1990-91: nationalist movements in the republics (Baltics, Ukraine, Georgia) demand independence; central authority weakens.
- 4** August 1991: a COUP by Communist Party hardliners tries to reverse Gorbachev's reforms and restore the old order. It FAILS — popular resistance (led notably by Boris YELTSIN) defeats it, fatally discrediting the old guard and the centre.

TOPIC

F

Consequences of the collapse

TOPIC

What the end of bipolarity produced

END OF COLD WAR + UNIPOLARITY

The most immediate consequence was the **END OF COLD WAR CONFRONTATIONS**. The ideological contest between capitalism and communism, the arms race, and the threat of a third world war and nuclear holocaust all receded. With the USSR gone, the UNITED

SPREAD OF CAPITALISM

Ideologically, the collapse meant the apparent **TRIUMPH** of the capitalist and liberal-democratic model. The former communist countries of Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet republics abandoned central planning and one-party rule and began transitioning to market economies and

NEW STATES + NEW CONFLICTS

The political map of the world was redrawn: 15 new states emerged from the USSR, and Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia also broke up. But the end of bipolarity did **NOT** bring universal peace. The Balkans saw violent ethnic wars as Yugoslavia disintegrated; the post-

IMPACT ON INDIA + THE THIRD WORLD

For the developing world the end of bipolarity transformed the international landscape. The **NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT** lost its original purpose, since there were no longer two blocs to be non-aligned between, and it had to redefine its role. Many developing nations,

TOPIC

G

Shock therapy

WORKED EXAMPLE

Shock therapy and its consequences

- 1** **WHAT IT WAS:** the model of transition from a centrally-planned (communist) economy to a capitalist market economy adopted by Russia, Central Asia and East Europe in the 1990s, influenced by the WORLD BANK and the IMF. It demanded a TOTAL and RAPID switch — not a gradual one.
- 2** **FEATURE 1 — Private ownership:** complete shift to free-market capitalism, with rapid PRIVATISATION of state-owned industries and collective farms.
- 3** **FEATURE 2 — Free trade + financial openness:** economies opened to foreign trade and investment; the controlled value of the rouble was removed.
- 4** **FEATURE 3 — Reorientation:** the old internal trade structure of the Soviet bloc was broken and these economies were redirected toward Western markets and the world capitalist economy.
- 5** **CONSEQUENCE 1:** the 'LARGEST GARAGE SALE IN HISTORY' — valuable state industries were undervalued and sold off cheaply.

TOPIC

H

India and Russia

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

India's relations with Russia

India and Russia share deep, time-tested ties described as a 'SPECIAL AND PRIVILEGED STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP', rooted in the Cold-War-era friendship between India and the Soviet Union (notably the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation).

STATEMENT

The relationship is **MULTIDIMENSIONAL**: (a) **DEFENCE** — Russia is a major arms supplier and partner in co-development and licensed production (e.g. BrahMos, S-400, aircraft, submarines);

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Both countries share a vision of a **MULTIPOLAR** world — one not dominated by any single power — with collective security, greater regionalism, negotiated settlement of disputes, and a strong UN
- India benefits from arms, energy and diplomatic backing

Russia values India as a major

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE The relationship is NOT only about buying weapons — always mention energy, space and diplomatic support to score full marks on this question.

TOPIC

Bipolarity vs Cold War

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Bipolarity and the Cold War are the same thing.

✓ **CORRECT** BIPOLARITY is the STRUCTURE — a world order in which power is concentrated in TWO superpowers (USA + USSR) and most other countries align with one of the two blocs. The COLD WAR is the RIVALRY that played out within that structure. When the USSR collapsed in 1991, BIPOLARITY ended (only one pole left) AND the Cold War ended together — but they are conceptually distinct: the structure vs the contest inside it.

TOPIC

When the USSR collapsed

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The Soviet Union collapsed in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell.
- ✓ **CORRECT** The BERLIN WALL fell in November 1989 — this marked the collapse of Soviet control over EASTERN EUROPE, not the USSR itself. The SOVIET UNION ITSELF disintegrated in DECEMBER 1991 (Gorbachev resigned 25 Dec; the USSR formally ceased to exist 26 Dec 1991). Two years and two different events — keep them separate.

TOPIC

Gorbachev wanted to end the USSR

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Gorbachev introduced reforms in order to break up the Soviet Union.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Gorbachev's perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness), begun in 1985, were intended to SAVE and STRENGTHEN Soviet socialism by modernising the economy and reducing repression. They BACKFIRED — openness exposed the system's failures and energised nationalist movements in the republics, accelerating a collapse Gorbachev never wanted. Intent and outcome were opposite.

TOPIC

Shock therapy worked

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Shock therapy quickly made Russia and Eastern Europe rich, capitalist democracies.
- ✓ **CORRECT** SHOCK THERAPY (the rapid, total switch from a planned to a market-capitalist economy, advised by the World Bank/IMF in the 1990s) was largely a DISASTER in the short-to-medium term. It caused the 'largest garage sale in history' (privatisation of state assets at throwaway prices), the rouble collapsed, inflation soared, industry was devastated, the welfare/PDS system collapsed, and a mafia/oligarch class captured wealth. It deepened inequality and poverty before any recovery. CBSE expects the NEGATIVE consequences.

TOPIC

Unipolar = peaceful

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** After 1991, with the USA as the only superpower, the world became peaceful and stable.

✓ **CORRECT** The end of bipolarity produced a UNIPOLAR moment (USA as sole superpower) — but NOT global peace. It opened space for new conflicts: ethnic wars in the Balkans (Yugoslavia broke up violently), wars and instability in post-Soviet republics (Chechnya, Central Asia, the Caucasus), and US-led interventions. Unipolarity meant DOMINANCE of one power, not the absence of conflict.

TOPIC

All 15 republics were equal

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** When the USSR broke up, the 15 republics all became equally powerful.
- ✓ **CORRECT** The USSR dissolved into 15 INDEPENDENT republics, but RUSSIA was the clear successor state — it inherited the USSR's permanent UN Security Council seat, its nuclear arsenal, and most of its assets and debts. The others (Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Baltic states, the Central Asian republics, etc.) became sovereign but far weaker. Many joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) formed December 1991.

TOPIC

India-Russia is only military

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** India's relationship with Russia is purely about buying weapons.

✓ **CORRECT** India-Russia ties are MULTIDIMENSIONAL and built on a 'special and privileged strategic partnership'. They span DEFENCE (yes — BrahMos, S-400, licensed production), but also ENERGY (oil, nuclear — Kudankulam), SPACE, science and technology, and DIPLOMATIC coordination. Russia has consistently supported India on Kashmir in the UN and India's UNSC permanent-seat aspiration. The relationship is rooted in the Cold-War-era Indo-Soviet friendship but is now broad-based.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-mark: 'Explain the causes of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.'

1 SET THE FRAME
1 m

The Soviet Union (USSR), one of the two Cold War superpowers, disintegrated in December 1991. Its collapse was caused not by a single event but by an accumulation of deep INTERNAL WEAKNESSES that Gorbachev's reforms exposed rather than cured.

2 FOUR CORE CAUSES
2 m

(1) ECONOMIC STAGNATION: The centrally-planned economy became inefficient, technologically backward, and unable to meet consumer needs; shortages and queues were chronic. (2) HUGE MILITARY + ARMS-RACE BURDEN: Maintaining nuclear parity with the USA and the costly war in AFGHANISTAN (1979-89) drained resources from the civilian economy. (3) POLITICAL STAGNATION + OVER-CENTRALISATION: The one-party CPSU rule was authoritarian, unaccountable, and corrupt; ordinary people had no political voice, breeding deep discontent. (4) RISE OF NATIONALISM in the 15 republics — especially the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Ukraine and Georgia — was the IMMEDIATE cause; once glasnost loosened control, demands for independence became unstoppable.

3 THE TRIGGER — GORBACHEV'S REFORMS
1 m

Gorbachev's PERESTROIKA (economic restructuring) and GLASNOST (political openness), begun in 1985 to reform the system, instead RAISED expectations he could not meet and EXPOSED the system's failures. People wanted reform faster; the old guard wanted it stopped (the failed August 1991 coup). Caught between the two, the centre lost authority.

4 CONCLUSION
1 m

By December 1991 the republics had declared independence; Russia, Ukraine and Belarus formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); Gorbachev resigned and the USSR ceased to exist on 26 December 1991. The deeper truth: the Soviet system collapsed under its own internal contradictions — economic, political, and national — not from external attack.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-mark: 'What was shock therapy? Discuss its consequences.'

1 DEFINE SHOCK THERAPY

1 m

SHOCK THERAPY was the model of transition from a centrally-planned (communist) economy to a capitalist market economy adopted by Russia, Central Asia and East Europe in the 1990s, under the influence of the World Bank and the IMF. It required a TOTAL and RAPID shift — not a gradual one.

2 WHAT IT INVOLVED

1 m

It involved: (a) complete switch to PRIVATE OWNERSHIP and free-market capitalism, with rapid PRIVATISATION of state assets and collective farms; (b) FREE TRADE — opening economies to foreign investment and trade, and ending the rouble's controlled value (financial openness); (c) breaking up the existing trade structure within the Soviet bloc and reorienting these economies toward Western markets and the capitalist world economy.

3 CONSEQUENCES (THE FAILURE)

2 m

The consequences were largely DISASTROUS: (1) the 'LARGEST GARAGE SALE in history' — state industries were undervalued and sold off cheaply; (2) the value of the ROUBLE collapsed and INFLATION soared, wiping out people's savings; (3) the old welfare/social-security system (the public distribution system) collapsed, pushing large sections into POVERTY; (4) GDP and industrial output fell sharply (deindustrialisation); (5) a MAFIA / OLIGARCH class emerged that captured the privatised assets; (6) inequality rose dramatically and a small rich elite arose amid mass impoverishment.

4 EVALUATION / CONCLUSION

1 m

Shock therapy ignored each country's own social structures and was imposed as a one-size-fits-all Western model. It did NOT build democracy and capitalism organically; it caused economic ruin and social misery in the 1990s before any partial recovery. CBSE conclusion: the shock therapy model is widely judged a FAILURE in its human and economic cost.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-mark: 'Examine the consequences of the end of bipolarity / disintegration of the USSR.'

- 1** **FRAME THE SHIFT**
1 m

The disintegration of the USSR in 1991 ended the BIPOLAR world order. With one of the two poles gone, the global power structure was fundamentally restructured for the first time since 1945.
- 2** **THREE BIG CONSEQUENCES**
2 m

(1) END OF COLD WAR CONFRONTATIONS: the ideological arms race and proxy wars between capitalism and communism ended; the possibility of a third world war and nuclear holocaust receded. (2) US UNIPOLARITY: the USA became the SOLE SUPERPOWER, and a unipolar world emerged in which the US-led capitalist and liberal-democratic model became globally dominant; institutions like the IMF and World Bank gained influence over the transition economies. (3) NEW STATES + NEW CONFLICTS: 15 new states emerged from the USSR; many post-communist states (the Balkans, Chechnya, Central Asia, the Caucasus) saw ethnic and political conflict; the world map was redrawn.
- 3** **FOR INDIA + THE THIRD WORLD**
1 m

The end of bipolarity changed the meaning of NON-ALIGNMENT (the two blocs to be non-aligned between no longer existed). Many developing countries, including India, shifted to market-oriented economic reforms (India's 1991 liberalisation) and adopted a more multi-aligned foreign policy.
- 4** **CONCLUSION**
1 m

In sum, the collapse ended a 45-year rivalry, created a unipolar US-dominated order, spread capitalism and liberal democracy, but also unleashed new ethnic and regional conflicts. Bipolarity gave way first to unipolarity and, over time, toward a more multipolar world.

PYQ PATTERNS

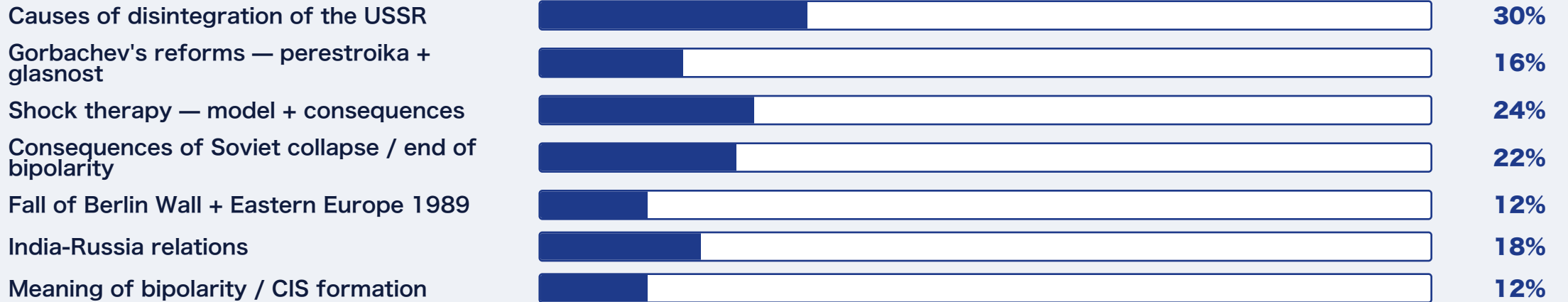
Top PYQ patterns to drill

#1	Explain any four/five causes of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. (5 marks)	Annual
#2	What was 'shock therapy'? Discuss its consequences. (5 marks)	2018, 2020, 2022, 2024
#3	Examine the consequences of the disintegration of the USSR / end of bipolarity. (5 marks)	Most years
#4	What were Gorbachev's reforms (perestroika and glasnost)? Why did they backfire? (3 marks)	2019, 2021, 2023
#5	Describe India's relations with Russia. (3 marks)	2018, 2020, 2023

MARKS DISTRIBUTION

10-year marks distribution

10-YEAR PYQ MARKS DISTRIBUTION



RECAP · MEMORISE THESE

Recap

1 Bipolarity ends — USSR disintegrates Dec 1991 → one pole gone → US unipolarity. Berlin Wall (1989) ≠ USSR collapse (1991).

2 4 causes — Economic stagnation + arms race/Afghanistan + political over-centralisation + nationalism in the 15 republics (trigger). Gorbachev's reforms exposed, not cured, the rot.

3 Shock therapy — Rapid planned → capitalist switch (World Bank/IMF). 'Largest garage sale', rouble collapse, welfare collapse, oligarchs — a failure.

4

WHAT'S NEXT

What's next

- Chapter 3 — US Hegemony in World Politics (the unipolar moment examined in depth).
- Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill.
- Then the full Board-Pattern Paper — 25 marks.

You've mastered the end of bipolarity.

Causes, collapse, shock therapy — now prove it.

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