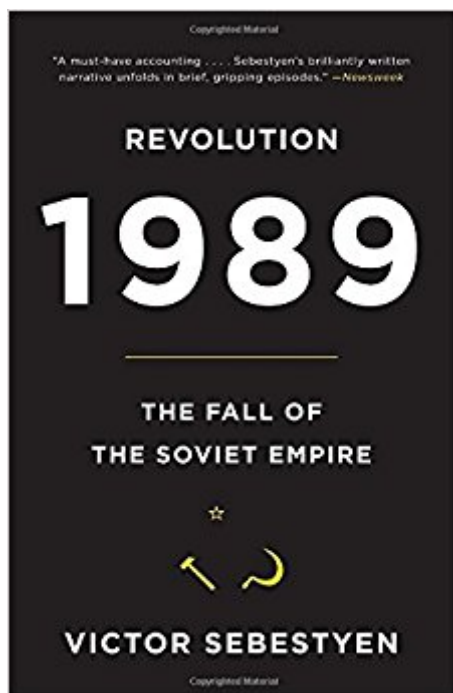


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# Revolution 1989: The Fall Of The Soviet Empire



## Synopsis

Revolution 1989 is the first in-depth, authoritative account of a few months that changed the world. At the start of 1989, six European nations were Soviet vassal states. By year's end, they had all declared national independence and embarked on the road to democracy. How did it happen so quickly? Victor Sebestyen, who was on the scene as a reporter, draws on his firsthand knowledge of the events, on scores of interviews with witnesses and participants, and on newly uncovered archival material. He tells the story through the eyes of ordinary men and women as well as through the strategic moves of world leaders. He shows how the KGB helped bring down former allies; how the United States tried to slow the process; and why the collapse of the Iron Curtain was the catalyst for the fall of the entire Soviet empire.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Victor Sebestyen on Revolution 1989 The principal reasons the Soviet empire fell was the USSR's disastrous decade-long war in Afghanistan, which is eerily reminiscent of the conflict the West is involved in now. Soviet generals of 20 or 25 years ago were saying almost identical things about their war against the Mujahideen (The Army of God) as NATO soldiers are saying now fighting the Taleban. Just substitute the names and it would be hard to spot the difference. Even more topically, many of the places where battles are being fought now are the same as then. Almost nobody predicted the sudden and speedy collapse of Communism--and its defeat was the last war that the West won. Almost nobody in politics, diplomacy, the military, the media or academia saw it coming.

Least of all was it predicted by the intelligence agencies. Despite trillions of dollars and rubles spent on spying in forty years of Cold War--as well as a vast industry in espionage books and movies--the spooks in the East and West were hopelessly ill informed. The CIA consistently over-emphasized the strength of the Soviet bloc. Even in the Spring of 1989 the then Director of the CIA, Robert Gates, said the Soviets would use force to keep their hold on the East Europe states and, amongst other wrong calls, said the Kremlin would "never" let the Berlin Wall come down. Robert Gates is now US Secretary for Defense. Ronald Reagan was a great President, but he is admired for the wrong reasons. The classic explanation for the collapse of Communism is that Reagan's tough rhetoric against the "Evil Empire" and his arms build-up defeated the Soviets. Quite the opposite is true. We can now take a more nuanced view. When he took a hard line Reagan got nowhere. In fact, it nearly led to a nuclear war by accident. He was successful when he took a soft line and began negotiating with the Russians, in particular with Mikhail Gorbachev. His greatness was in seizing that opportunity--not by ideology. It is hard to see why Reagan is a hero amongst conservatives at all. Western bankers did more to bring down Communism than did Presidents or Prime Ministers. Foreign debt forced a crisis in countries like Poland and East Germany and Hungary, which were spending three quarters of their income on paying the interest on loans from the West. The debt crisis--another topical theme now--was a vital factor in the story of 1989. The book reveals new information about how the first President Bush tried to slow down the process of change in 1989. He was worried the revolutions were happening so quickly that "global security" was at risk and that some of the East European dissidents were not ready to take power. There is a dramatic scene in the book when George Bush goes to Poland in the summer of '89 to plead with the Communist general in charge of the country to cling on to office for a while longer. • "Victor Sebestyen (Photo © Stacey Mutkin) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

• "A must-have accounting. . . . Sebestyen's brilliantly written narrative unfolds in brief, gripping episodes. • "Newsweek • "Numerous books have [attempted] to synthesize the compelling story of the fall of communism, but Revolution 1989 comes closest to being the essential volume. Sebestyen's elegant narrative lays out in crisp episodes what was happening . . . throughout the tumultuous 1980s. • "The Daily Beast • "Full of sharp snapshots and crisp narrative . . . vivid personal glimpses and striking details. • "The New York Review of Books • "Vivid, panoramic. . . . The writing is taut, the scene-setting dramatic, giving the book an almost cinematic feel. • "The Sunday Times (London) • "A digestible and colourful history of that miraculous year. • "The Economist • "It's a complex story spanning many countries, but this exciting yet

deeply researched work brings it impressively to life. . . . Compelling.â • â "The Observerâ œSebestyenâ ™s strength is his sharp focus and racy prose. . . . Here is history written like a Greek tragedy.â • â "The Times (London)â œA compelling and illuminating account of a great drama in the history of our times which showed once again that ordinary men and women really can change the world.â • â "The Mail on SundayÂ Â â œA rollicking mix of high drama and sordid reality . . . spiced with telling quotations.â • â "The IndependentÂ Â â œA thrilling read. . . . Sebestyen is good at sketching the leading players but he also succinctly conveys what life was like for ordinary citizens.â • â "Daily ExpressÂ Â â œSebestyen brilliantly pulls together the events that led to the fall of the Soviet empire.â • â "The SpectatorÂ Â â œSuperblyÂ written and impressivelyÂ documented.â • â "Times Literary Supplement

This is one of a handful of books published on the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain. Unlike some others, REVOLUTION 1989 does not focus solely on the events of 1989. Two-thirds of the book cover background developments, going back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the occupation strike at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk and formation of Solidarity in 1980.

This was a fascinating deconstruction of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. However, if you're looking for a book about the collapse of the Soviet Union, this is not it. It focuses on the members of the Warsaw Pact and while the Soviet Union and the figures that ran it play an important role, the book stops just before the collapse of the Soviet Union itself. I would like the book to have continued and followed to the endgame of Gorbachev's reforms, but it stops at 1990. But disappointing really. It's also interesting to think what a wonderful thing the current free movement Europeans have in this context when many were prisoners in their own countries.

This has got to be one of the best "history books" I have ever read. There is a goldmine of information that you wouldn't find in your normal history class. It gives a masterfully-written and engaging look at virtually all of the Soviet Satellites between the late 1960s up to 1991, including the Afghanistan War, Solidarity, the Power Politics behind all of it, and the eventual crumble through the regimes of Bulgaria, Romania, East Berlin, Poland, Czech, and Hungary. Even if you are not looking to use this as an educational experience, this dynamic text is a must-have for fans of central-eastern European history.

I am writing this review from the perspective of someone who has lived through the changes described in the book, participated in some of the demonstrations and followed most of the events closely. The fall of the communist regimes while I was a 20-something old citizen of an East-European communist country was the most momentous and amazing event I've experienced, and one that gave me personal freedom and ability to become a successful professional in USA. I sought out this book in dismay of how little has been remembered and known in USA about these events and the socialist-communist societies that were horrifically dull and personally oppressive. In addition, I detest the recent mass media documentaries, giving more credit to historically insignificant events like Tom Brokaw asking a confusing question at a press conference than to the enormous moral, political and economic confrontation started by Reagan and Thatcher. Well ... some of us have seen and remember the real reasons for the fall, and I attest that this book chronicles the events with high accuracy and in-depth knowledge. I am impressed by the historical detail and intricate knowledge of the author and would HIGHLY RECOMMEND this book as much better than other documentaries (which tend to be limited in historical detail, revisionary and self-promoting). While the book is excellent source for anyone who wants to learn as much historical detail as possible, it may be a bit longish and boring at times to occasional readers. Luckily the author has included enough anecdotal stories to keep it a bit more lively. In disagreement with another reviewer, I find these anecdotes of personal fallacy and corruption (many of which I knew from my youth) an essential component of the historical canvas. Spread around as "kitchen hearsay" they were essential for stirring dissent in societies where all mass media was tightly controlled. On the criticism side, I think the book mostly misses the impact of the the economic and technological dominance achieved by the West. To put it simply, while many people do not care for personal freedom, everyone hated watching Russian vacuum bulb TVs in the age when the people in the West were getting PCs. On a bigger scale here, the book mostly misses the devastating consequences of CoCom, which I have observed personally. Lastly, the story ends at the day of the fall of the last regime (in Romania), but does not explore the following momentous events of disintegration of the Soviet Union. I would encourage the author to write a briefer book exploring the process of disintegration of the Soviet empire to its very end.

Victor Sebestyen's gripping masterpiece in what transpired in Eastern Europe culminating in the startling events of 1989 makes us realize that it just didn't happen. This remarkable treatise provides us with only the beginnings of understanding these historical events. Sebestyen explains the Warsaw Pact relationships of the old guard and how these countries operated under the careful

auspices of "Mother Russia". In doing this, we see the basic structure and dependency of these satellite Communist states of the USSR. Sebestyen goes into detail about the basic failures and flaws of these totalitarian states and that the events played out in 1989 just didn't happen. The Author summarizes the life and times of Mikhail Gorbachev and his rise to leadership and his introduction of glasnost and perestroika. In essence he shows the USSR at an economic and political crossroads. The old regime of Leonid Brezhnev et al was tired, ineffective and no longer could "sell the big lie". It took three generations, but when Gorbachev came into power the USSR was totally bankrupt economically and politically. With this in mind Sebestyen weaves an excellent historical perspective of all the iron curtain countries and shows their similarities and also their differences. His narrative explains these events that seem spontaneous but in reality were actions which were bottled up for decades within these countries which have experienced a "long hard winter". This study will enlighten all who read it. I would highly recommend this as a general outline study for these historical events. One thing I was surprised about in this scholarly study was that the editing was not good. Sebestyen's writing is very good, however on more than one instance words were missing and sentences were fragmented. In all this was a remarkable read. Hopefully the editing will be better for future editions

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