

Mikhail Gorbachev, First and Only President of the Soviet Union, Dies at 91

Mikhail Gorbachev, the first and only President of the Soviet Union, has died, according to Russian media. He was 91.

He will be remembered, at least in the West, as a pragmatic leader who transparently transitioned the Soviet Union away from its days as an Evil Empire and toward a more modernized economy that was integrated on a global scale.

At home, however, he is largely seen as the man who brought a collapse of Soviet-era prestige and power, preaching reform while protecting his own influence. In a 2017 poll of Russians, 30% said they had anger or distaste toward him, and 13% said they felt disgust or hate for him. For many, he was the harbinger of the end of Russian greatness.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, which has led to punishing economic sanctions and the highest tensions with the U.S. and Europe since the Cold War, has been seen as an attempt to reclaim at least some of the power and glory lost as a result of Gorbachev's legacy.

Gorbachev himself refrained from commenting publicly on the war, but argued in 2016 that tensions were the fault of Kyiv's lean toward NATO. "This conflict was not of Russia's making. It has its roots within Ukraine itself," Gorbachev argued.

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