



EBOOK BY STUDYGUIDE.PK WHY DID THE COLD WAR END? THE INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN (1979) TO THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION (1991)

The collapse of détente – the effects of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

Background to detente

In 1963, following the Cuban Missiles Crisis, the **Hot-Line** was set up. This was a direct tele-printer between the Kremlin and the White House and was eventually replaced by a direct telephone link. It was hoped that this would speed up communications between the Superpowers in the event of another crisis. In the past, both sides had either relied on communication by wire or letters, as had been the case over Cuba.

Further progress was made in 1963 when the **Test Ban Treaty** was signed. This stopped nuclear tests above ground. Nevertheless, this progress did not mean that the USA and Soviet Union were growing too close. In 1964, the Soviet leader, Khrushchev, was forced to resign and was replaced by Brezhnev. Khrushchev fell from power because colleagues around him felt that he had suffered a great diplomatic defeat over Cuba and had compromised the Soviet Union. Brezhnev began to build up the Soviet Union's long range weapons. The arms race continued and the Soviet Union did not want to fall behind.

The Cold War continued in earnest and the arrival of US combat troops landed in Vietnam in 1965 showed how far President Johnson was prepared to go in order to halt the spread of communism. The Soviet Union's intentions were laid bare when, in 1968, Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia to put an end to Dubcek's Prague Spring.

The Brezhnev Doctrine

In a speech on 13 November 1968, Brezhnev stated:

When forces that are hostile to socialism try to turn the development of some socialist country towards capitalism it becomes not only a problem of the country concerned, but a common problem and concern of all socialist countries.

This became known as the Brezhnev Doctrine. It meant that the Soviet Union had the right to intervene in any neighbouring country where it felt that socialism was being threatened. In effect it meant that the Soviet Union would define socialism and any threat. Brezhnev used the Doctrine as justification for Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces invading Czechoslovakia. The Brezhnev Doctrine was also to be the basis for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.



Checkpoint: Détente

How did each of the following affect moves towards Détente in the 1960s?

The Hotline	
The Test Ban Treaty	
The Vietnam War	
Czechoslovakia	
Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty	



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Mega Lecture



Moves to détente after 1968

The moves to détente were never linear. The open hostility over Vietnam and Czechoslovakia seemed to be contradicted in 1968 when the Superpowers signed the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**. The Superpowers guaranteed not to supply nuclear technology to other countries.

There was even more progress when Richard Nixon became President of the USA in 1969. Nixon had promised to end the war in Vietnam. By the late 1960s, both Superpowers had spent huge amounts on the arms race and were looking for ways to reduce spending. The result of Soviet spending on arms was that by the early 1970s the USSR had a distinct advantage in ICBMs.

		1964	1974
USA	ICBMs	834	1054
	SLBMs	416	656
Soviet Union	ICBMs	200	1575
	SLBMs	120	720

(SLBMs were Submarine-launched Ballistic Missiles)

Brezhnev now wanted to reduce Soviet military spending so that he could sort out the problems facing the Soviet economy. The most obvious way was by cutting expenditure on arms. So in 1970 Brezhnev agreed to begin **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with the USA**. The talks soon became known as **SALT**, and later **SALT I** following the second agreements in the late 1970s.

Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty 1972 (SALT I)

The SALT talks led to the signing of the SALT I treaty in 1972. This limited the increase in numbers of nuclear missiles. There would be a five-year delay on the building of more missiles. At the end of the five-year period a further agreement would be necessary.

The figures agreed were,

	USA	Soviet Union
ICBMs	1000	1600
SLBMs	650	700

A separate treaty restricted the number of ABMs, Anti-Ballistic Missiles. These were missiles that could be used to shoot down ICBMs. At the same time the two sides agreed to begin Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Talks (MBFR). These

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continued until the 1980s, by which time there had been more than 300 meetings with almost no agreements. SALT I was the first time that the Superpowers had reached an agreement on arms limitation, but the talks only dealt with strategic weapons, long-range nuclear weapons. They did not cover multiple warhead missiles or battlefield weapons (tactical nuclear weapons). In fact the USA continued to produce multiple warheads, at the rate of three a day, throughout the 1970s.

President Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev signing the SALT treaty, 26 May, 1972 in the Kremlin in Moscow



Nixon visited Brezhnev, again in Moscow, in July 1974 and, as well as agreeing to relax tensions throughout the world; they said they would try to promote increased understanding between their two countries. **In addition**, the USA also signed a trade deal to export wheat to the Soviet Union and both sides agreed to develop artistic and sporting links. In 1975 Soviet and US astronauts linked up in Space for the first time.

Détente in space - astronaut Donald K Slayton (left, upside down) and cosmonaut Aleksey Leonov (right) in the *Soyuz* spacecraft, July 1975

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The Helsinki Agreement on Human Rights

Détente soon covered other areas, however, when in 1975 the USA and the Soviet Union, along with 33 other countries signed the Helsinki Agreements. Helsinki was seen as not only a significant step toward reducing tensions but also a major diplomatic victory for the Soviet Union. Helsinki included clauses which accepted the borders of countries and for the first time acknowledged the boundaries created by the Second World War.

Leonid Brezhnev and President Gerald Ford, Helsinki, 1975



The signatories at Helsinki guaranteed that they would:

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- respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

However, President Carter complained about Soviet violations of the 1975 Helsinki agreements. Carter criticised the Soviet Union's poor record on free speech and freedom of movement.

Follow-up meetings in Belgrade (1977–78), Madrid (1980–83), and Ottawa (1985) were marked by strong criticism of Soviet human-rights abuses and by Soviet rebuttals. For the Soviet Union, its hopes of securing acceptance of its territorial gains made during the Second World War had become marred because of its poor human rights record. By now, more countries in the world were prepared to criticise the actions of the Soviet Union

SALT II

SALT II talks began in 1974 and continued until 1979. Agreement was reached on further reductions in strategic weapons, which were to last until 1985.

President Carter and Leonid Brezhnev shaking hands after signing SALT II, June 1979



Weapons allowed	USA	Soviet Union
ICBMs	1054	1398
SLBMs	656	950

Checkpoint: Détente in the 1970s

Positive Moves	Negative Moves

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But even before agreement was reached on SALT II, relations between the Superpowers began to break down. In 1977 President Carter of the USA criticised the Soviet Union's human rights' record at the Belgrade conference. He wanted to link the issue of human rights to arms reduction. The Soviet Union was not prepared to do this. Moreover, the USA's recognition of the People's Republic of China in December 1978 proved annoying to the Soviet Union and led them to delay the arms control process. The Soviet Union feared that the United States would exploit its new ties with China to their disadvantage and wanted to prevent a closer Chinese-American relationship. In addition, in the late 1970s, officials in the Carter administration wanted to use arms control to curb Soviet activities in the Developing World. They hoped to check the Soviet Union's involvement in conflicts in Southern Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia by tying further progress on arms control to Soviet restraint in those regions. Relations between the Superpowers were damaged following revelations of a Russian combat brigade in Cuba in September 1979. The real crisis in Superpower relations, however, came in December 1979.

The effects of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

Why did relations break down between the USA and the Soviet Union in 1979?

A series of events made it seem as if the USA was at last being overshadowed by the Soviet Union. There was a revolution in Nicaragua where Communist guerrillas seized power. In Iran, the Shah, who was pro-western, was overthrown and an Islamic republic was set up. Furthermore, the US embassy was attacked and hostages seized in Teheran. Cuba sent armed forces to Africa to help rebels in Angola.

The Cold War began to heat up in Europe when new Soviet SS-20 missiles were sent to Eastern Europe, and conventional forces of the Warsaw Pact were increased. In response, NATO announced that Cruise and Pershing missiles would be deployed in Europe. However, the situation worsened on Christmas Day 1979 when Soviet forces entered Afghanistan. The president, Hafizullah Amin, was arrested and executed, and a pro-communist government was set up. President Brezhnev announced that the Soviet Union 'had responded to an urgent request from the Kabul government for help'. Babrak Kamal became the new president.

Why did Soviet forces invade Afghanistan?

Soviet tanks invading Afghanistan, 1979

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In 1978, a Marxist government had come to power in Afghanistan and a twenty-year treaty of friendship had been signed with the Soviet Union. In September of the following year, Nur Mohammed Taraki, the Marxist president of Afghanistan, was deposed and murdered. The post of president was taken by the Prime Minister, Hafizullah Amin. The Soviet Union feared that this would lead to a collapse of the Marxist government and intervened, citing the Brezhnev Doctrine. This stated that the Soviet Union was entitled to use force to protect socialism in any country where it was under attack. However, the situation in Afghanistan was more complex than the Soviet Union realised. In the summer of 1979, Muslim resistance groups had been set up to oppose land reforms and educational changes. When the Soviet forces invaded, the Mujaheddin, as they became known, continued their resistance not only to communist reforms but also to Soviet occupation.

What effects did the invasion have on relations between the Superpowers?

US reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

Since the late 1960s, there had been some clear improvements in relations between the Superpowers. However, almost immediately after the invasion, the good relations between the USA and the Soviet Union broke down.

The US reaction was swift and immediate. Exports of US grain to the Soviet Union were stopped and the US Congress refused to ratify SALT II. In addition, President Carter took a very firm line with the Soviet Union and his policy towards the Soviet Union became known as the Carter Doctrine. He made this clear in his 'State of the Union' speech to the people of America, 23 January 1980. Carter was making it clear not only to the people of the USA but also the world, that the USA would again challenge the spread of communism.

The Carter Doctrine

The region which is now threatened by Soviet troops in Afghanistan is of great strategic importance: It contains more than two-thirds of the world's exportable oil. The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway

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through which most of the world's oil must flow. The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position, therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil. The situation demands the participation of all those who rely on oil from the Middle East and who are concerned with global peace and stability. And it demands consultation and close cooperation with countries in the area which might be threatened. Let the US position be absolutely clear: an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

Mega Lecture



Checkpoint: Afghanistan

Why did the Soviet Union invade?	How did the USA react?

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Reagan and the US reaction

The deterioration in Superpower relations was made worse by the election of Ronald Reagan as president of the USA in 1980 and by illness of President Brezhnev and the deaths of his two successors, Andropov and Chernenko. For five years there was almost no progress in negotiations between the two countries.

The Olympic boycotts, 1980 and 1984

President Carter announced that the USA would boycott the Moscow Olympic Games if the Soviet Union failed to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. President Carter put pressure on the US Olympic Committee to boycott the games and hoped this would encourage other nations to follow the USA. In all, 62 countries refused to participate and some of those who boycotted the games held alternative ones called the 'Liberty Bell Classic'.

In 1984, Chernenko, leader of the USSR, announced the Soviet boycott of the Los Angeles Olympic Games. Chernenko stated that 'chauvinistic sentiments and an anti-Soviet hysteria being whipped up in the United States'. He also stated that the USA could not guarantee the safety of Soviet competitors. Thirteen other communist countries joined the Soviet boycott and as in 1980, alternative games were held. They were called the Friendship Games. The USA was not too concerned about the boycott, because the games were the largest ever held and China participated for the first time since 1932.

Why did the Soviet forces lose the war in Afghanistan?

The Soviet forces were initially successful; they were able to take control of the cities, but increasingly were unable to counter the guerrilla tactics of the Mujaheddin and lost control of the mountainous countryside. Many of the Soviet troops sent to Afghanistan were young conscripts, unprepared for the fighting that they were exposed to. Their heavy weapons could not be used effectively and they were subject to constant and sudden attacks. Increasingly there was little appetite for the war amongst the Soviet troops. Afghanistan did not seem worth fighting and dying for. Their opponents, on the other hand, believed that they were fighting for their religion, their country and their freedom.

Mujaheddin troops preparing for an attack on Soviet forces, 1984

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What effects did the Afghan War have on the Soviet Union?

Within the Soviet Union, there was increasing opposition to the war as casualties mounted. It was clear that a Superpower was being humiliated by a group of guerrillas. People began to see the comparison with the USA and the Viet Cong. Moreover, the financial cost of the war was colossal and played a significant part in the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. This in turn led to the attempts by Mikhail Gorbachev to reform the Soviet economy after he became leader in 1985.

The role of Ronald Reagan

Reagan became president in 1981 and throughout his campaign, made no secret of his hatred for the Soviet Union. He called it 'The Evil Empire'. He made it clear that he was prepared to discuss arms limitation, but was only prepared to negotiate from strength. If things did not work out, he was not prepared to compromise.

In a speech to the House of Commons, 8 June 1982, Reagan said -

We're approaching the end of a bloody century plagued by a terrible political invention - totalitarianism. Optimism comes less easily today, not because democracy is less vigorous, but because democracy's enemies have refined their instruments of repression. Yet optimism is in order because day by day democracy is proving itself to be a not at all fragile flower. From Stettin on the Baltic to Varna on the Black Sea, the regimes planted by totalitarianism have had more than thirty years to establish their legitimacy. But none - not one regime - has yet been able to risk free elections. Regimes planted by bayonets do not take root.

Reagan was keen to let the world know that the USA was still a Superpower. This meant restoring confidence in the USA and showing that the defeat in Vietnam was a thing of the past. For Reagan, this meant challenging communism. He wanted to show the people of the USA that he was not frightened of the Soviet Union.

When Reagan put forward his defence programme for the USA, he indicated he would spend one trillion dollars. Furthermore, US policy with regard to a nuclear war

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began to change – Reagan’s advisers persuaded him that the USA could win a limited nuclear war. This became known as - (Nuclear Utilization Target Selection – NUTS). Despite Reagan’s posturing, he did offer the Soviet Union some concessions when talks on Intermediate Range Missiles (SS-20s and Cruise) began in 1981. He put forward the ‘Zero Option’, whereby both Superpowers would dismantle and remove their weapons from Europe. Brezhnev refused.

Relations did not improve when the crisis over Poland developed. The Soviet Union interfered when the trade union ‘Solidarity’ led by Lech Walesa, held strikes and began demanding a more democratic state. The Soviet Union supported the Polish government when martial law was introduced. Reagan’s reaction was to stop high technology exports to the Soviet Union.

Even though there were Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) in 1982, little progress was made and it seemed as if there was a new Cold War. All talks soon became deadlocked. Reagan’s hatred of communism and intention to prevent its spread was seen in 1983, when he ordered US forces to land in Grenada to crush a Communist takeover.

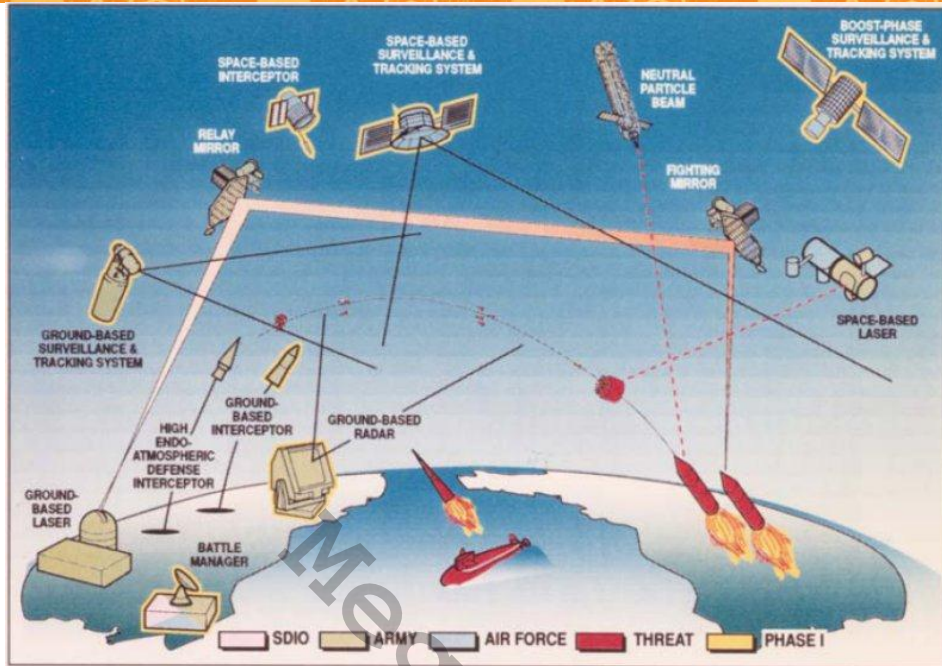
Any hopes of improving relations were made rather difficult during the years 1982-85. Brezhnev died in 1982, and the new leader Andropov soon became ill and on his death in 1984, was replaced by Chernenko. Chernenko died just over one year after becoming leader of the Soviet Union and was succeeded by Gorbachev. It was difficult for Reagan to develop any kind of relationship with the Soviet Union as a result of these changes because of the lack of continuity. It was only when Gorbachev took over that progress was made between the Superpowers.

The Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI or ‘Star Wars’)

In 1983 Reagan announced 'Star Wars', the Strategic Defence Initiative. This was a plan to shoot down Soviet missiles using lasers in Space. This was not a serious proposition in 1983, but it had the effect of putting pressure upon the Soviet leaders. The Soviet response to the announcement of SDI was to accuse Reagan of warmongering and he was portrayed as the man who was prepared to start a nuclear war and emerge as victor but of a world which would be a nuclear wasteland. Andropov, the Soviet leader, knew that if SDI was possible then the Soviet Union could not compete in the technological research because the Soviet economy was in dire straits.

Diagram of the SDI system as developed by 1987

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Checkpoint: 1981-85

How did Reagan try to put pressure on the Soviet Union?

Why were Soviet leaders unable to respond?

Reagan	Soviet Leaders



Gorbachev and Eastern Europe

The role of Mikhail Gorbachev

Gorbachev came to power with four slogans **PERESTROIKA** (RESTRUCTURING), **GLASNOST** (OPENNESS) and **DEMOKRARTIZATSIYA** (DEMOCRATISATION) and **USKORENIYE** (ECONOMIC ACCELERATION).

Perestroika referred to 'economic restructuring' in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev believed that the Soviet Union could only survive if the economy was completely rebuilt, doing away with the command economy which had existed since Stalin.

Glasnost referred to new sense of 'openness', both within the Soviet Union and also with the West. The powers of the KGB were restricted and criticism of the government was allowed. Free elections were eventually held in 1990.

Demokrartizatsiya referred to his aim to make the Soviet Union a more democratic state. He wanted to separate the Communist Party from the government and above all give greater political choice to the people of the Soviet Union.

Uskoreniye referred to the acceleration of economic development. He was aware that the Soviet Union could not compete with the USA or most of the West. He had to ensure that changes to industry brought incentives and even the profit motive.

When he became leader, Gorbachev indicated that the Soviet Union would no longer follow the Brezhnev Doctrine. Above all, Gorbachev realised that the Soviet Union's survival depended upon the West. He needed investment, new technology, but most of all arms agreements which would allow him to reduce the Soviet Union's massive defence spending.

Why was the Soviet Union bankrupt?

For forty years it had supported Communist regimes not only in Europe but around the world through COMECON. In 1977 Cuba had joined. Cuba depended almost totally on the Soviet Union for aid.

Prices in the Soviet Union were controlled and subsidised and this placed a tremendous strain on the government. The Space programme had been very ambitious and very expensive. Huge amounts had been spent on trying to outdo the USA – yet, though the Soviet Union had secured many firsts in the space race - first man, first woman – but it did not win the race to the moon. The USA achieved this in 1969.

Military expenditure had continued to rise and this also helped to cripple the Soviet Union's economy. This stopped spending on consumer goods and in the end led to discontent the citizens of the Soviet Union, who saw that their American counterparts



had access to a wide range of goods. No Soviet leader dared offend the military in case he was overthrown by a coup. The Afghan War was merely the final straw for the Soviet economy.

The Soviet Union had increasingly come to rely on imports of food and technology from the West. This had to be paid for in foreign currency. The Soviet Union was desperate for foreign currency. Sales of roubles were strictly controlled and foreign visitors were allowed to buy in 'Beriozka' shops which contained goods which were not available to Soviet citizens.

Soviet exports were usually of poor quality; 'Ladas', cheap 'Qualiton' records, for example. There was little incentive to workers to raise standards as everyone was guaranteed not only a job, but cheap housing and public services. Officially the last person to be unemployed in the Soviet Union had found a job in 1932!

As a result of the many economic problems, there was an immense 'black market' in western goods and currency. Tourists would be offered roubles at three or five times the official exchange rate. Tourists returning to Europe would tell of Soviet citizens asking to buy the clothes such as Levi jeans that they were actually wearing.

Gorbachev knew that if the Soviet Union was to survive, he had to reduce expenditure on arms and space technology. But Gorbachev also needed foreign aid and new technology in order to compete. The only way of getting it was by making agreements to reduce arms with the West.

Checkpoint: The Soviet economy

Explain four reasons why the Soviet economy was so weak

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Mega Lecture



Reagan and Gorbachev: the changing relationship between the Superpowers

The summit conferences and the end of the Cold War

Gorbachev was radical in his approach to the USA. He was prepared to reduce nuclear weapons and also conventional arms. He knew these would not be popular with many in the Soviet Union but he also knew that failure to take such steps would mean the end of the Soviet Union. It is ironic that in attempting to save the Soviet Union from complete collapse, he helped to bring about its end. The West saw how determined Gorbachev was when he announced the end of the Brezhnev Doctrine.

In a period of just over three years, Reagan and Gorbachev met at several summit conferences and eased the tension of the Cold War. In 1989, Gorbachev and President George Bush were able to announce the end of the Cold War. During the period of the summits Gorbachev made several visits to European countries. Wherever he went, he was greeted by huge crowds. The term 'Gorbymania' was coined and he was mobbed everywhere he went - it was as if he was a pop star. The world came to expect a great deal from him. In addition, even the wives of the two presidents also played important roles. Raisa Gorbachev was lively and outgoing and liked to dress fashionably. She was quite different from the wives of previous leaders. Nancy Reagan persuaded her husband to moderate his opposition to the Soviet Union. The two women got on well and their friendship wore off on their husbands.

Geneva Summit, 1985

Gorbachev and Reagan held their first summit meeting in **Geneva** in November 1985 and Reagan still insisted that the USA would develop 'Star Wars'. There were few firm decisions made, but it seemed that the two leaders liked each other and they met without advisers and aides – this was unprecedented between the leaders of the Superpowers.

As a result of the conference, the Geneva Accords were published which indicated that arms limitation talks and human rights were key concerns of the two Superpowers.

Reykjavik Summit, 1986

There were initial agreements but the fundamental differences over SDI caused the talks to break down. Gorbachev, in a news conference, painted a bleak picture of U.S.-Soviet relations and said that the talks had 'ruptured' over the fundamental differences between the superpowers on the Strategic Defence Initiative and the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty. He said Reagan's insistence on deploying SDI had frustrated and prevented the opportunity for an agreement.

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Reagan speaking about the summit as he was leaving Reykjavik

While both sides seek reduction in the number of nuclear missiles and warheads threatening the world, the Soviet Union insisted that we sign an agreement that would deny to me and to future presidents for 10 years the right to develop, test and deploy a defence against nuclear missiles for the people of the free world. This we could not and would not do.

Washington DC Summit, 1987

Despite the failure of Reykjavik, another summit conference was arranged for Washington DC in December 1987. It turned out to be a great success.

President Reagan speaking at the end of the summit

This summit has lit the sky with hope for all people of goodwill. And as we leave, it is up to both sides to ensure that the lustre does not wear off and to follow through on our commitments as we move forward to the next steps in improving the relations between our countries and peoples.

The Intermediate–Range nuclear Force (INF) Treaty was signed. **For the first time**, the Superpowers were to destroy nuclear weapons. By 1991, as a result of INF, the Soviet Union destroyed 889 of its intermediate-range missiles and 957 shorter-range missiles, and the U.S. destroyed 677 and 169 respectively. The Treaty included remarkably extensive and intrusive verification inspection and monitoring arrangements to check that weapons were being destroyed. It was this acceptance by the Soviet Union that convinced the USA that the two countries could trust each other.

Reagan and Gorbachev at the Washington DC Summit, December 1987





Moscow Summit, 1988

At this conference, the INF Treaty was formally ratified. Yet, despite the friendship between Reagan and Gorbachev, Reagan still felt able to criticise the Soviet Union on its poor record of human rights. At the conference, Gorbachev indicated that he would withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Further talks were held to discuss the reductions in armaments and also conventional forces. The talks were known as Strategic Arms Reduction Talks – (START).

New York Summit, 1988

This was the last summit between Reagan and Gorbachev and it was also attended by President-elect George Bush Snr. Gorbachev indicated he was going to speed up arms reduction wanted to complete the START Treaty before Bush became president. However, President-elect Bush and his own advisers were less trusting of Gorbachev than Reagan and this seemed to slow negotiations during the summit.

Malta Summit, 1989

This summit was between George Bush, the new President of the USA, and Gorbachev. Gorbachev assured Bush that he would never start a 'hot war' against the USA. Observers were quick to point out that if Yalta (1945) was the beginning of the Cold War, then Malta (1989) was the end of it.

At the press conference which closed the summit, Gorbachev said

The world is leaving one epoch and entering another. We are at the beginning of a long road to a lasting, peaceful era. The threat of force, mistrust, psychological and ideological struggle should all be things of the past.

Washington DC Summit, 1990

President Bush and Gorbachev discussed Strategic Arms Reduction (START) and this eventually produced the Treaty for the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START I). It was signed on 31 July 1991. This meant reducing 25 to 35 per cent of all their strategic warheads. The U.S. and U.S.S.R. would set a ceiling of 1,600 strategic nuclear delivery aircraft and 6,000 warheads for each country if the treaty was ratified. Following the work of the previous summits, the representatives of NATO and the Warsaw Pact signed the Conventional Armed Forces Treaty (CFE) which led to the reduction of weapons based in Europe.



Checkpoint: The Summits

How did the mood and relations between the leaders change at each summit

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The loosening Soviet grip on Eastern Europe

By the late 1980s, Gorbachev was not prepared to use force to try to keep the countries of Eastern Europe under control, and in any case the Soviet Army was unwilling to act. Its morale had been destroyed in Afghanistan and many soldiers did not always receive regular payments. Gorbachev quickly rejected the Brezhnev Doctrine and therefore the satellite states of Eastern Europe knew that there would not be the kind of response seen in 1956 (Hungary) and 1968 (Czechoslovakia) if there were challenges to Soviet authority.

Moreover, Gorbachev openly accepted that the countries of the Warsaw Pact could make changes to their own country independently. This became known as the Sinatra Doctrine – from the song ‘My Way’. The phrase was coined on 25 October 1989 by Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov, a Soviet spokesperson who was appearing on a US news programme. Each state was eventually permitted to follow its own political path.

There then followed a chain of events in Europe that no one could have foreseen. Firstly, Communist rule in Poland collapsed during 1989, and Lech Walesa became President in 1990 after the first free elections since the end of the Second World War. During September 1989, Hungary opened its borders with Austria and East Germany opened its borders with Austria. Massive numbers of refugees began to flood west. This then became the signal for change because it now seemed that the ‘iron curtain’ could no longer hold back those who opposed Soviet domination.

The Collapse of the Berlin Wall, 1989

When Gorbachev visited East Germany in October 1989 he indicated that he would no longer interfere in events within that country. Unrest then began to grow in East Germany and at the beginning of November 1989, the demonstrators demanded changes to the system of government. The demonstrations increased in intensity and at one meeting it was estimated that there were more than one million protestors. The East German government tried to defuse the situation by opening the border with West Germany. This served only to allow hundreds of thousands of East Germans to swarm into the West to visit relatives. East Germans then began attacking the Berlin Wall and the world saw startling images of the Berlin Wall being dismantled. The date was 9 November 1989.

The end of the Berlin Wall, 1989

Memorial to those killed trying to escape

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Events then moved even more quickly for the two halves of Germany. In preparation for reunification, East Germany left the Warsaw Pact in 1990 and on 3 October 1990, East and West Germany were reunited.

The collapse of the Soviet Empire

As 1989 drew to a close, the Soviet satellite states were able to break free from communist domination. The Communist governments of Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria both resigned in 1989. Then Soviet troops were withdrawn from the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which had been occupied since 1940. The Soviet Union accepted their independence in 1991 independent again. In December 1989, Nicolai Ceausescu, the Romanian dictator was overthrown and shot. As an indication of how far things had moved on under Gorbachev, the first free elections since November 1918 were held in the Soviet Union during 1990.

The end of the Warsaw Pact

Once the former satellite states were no longer dependent of the Soviet Union, they no longer needed the Warsaw Pact. In January 1991, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland announced they would leave the Warsaw Pact. The following month, Bulgaria also announced its intention to withdraw from the Pact. Once again, the Soviet Union did not challenge these decisions. It stated that the military structure of the Pact would be dismantled at the end of March 1991.

The Warsaw Pact was formally ended on 1 July 1991.

Why did Gorbachev do nothing to stop the collapse of the Soviet bloc?

Gorbachev was not prepared to use force and risk bloodshed. Furthermore, the Red Army had not been paid regularly and its morale had been destroyed in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union could not afford any prolonged conflicts with one or more of its satellite states. Gorbachev needed economic aid from the West and he knew that he would not get it if he ordered a clampdown on the East. His hopes of keeping the Soviet Union intact would be challenged further if he were to embark on military expeditions.



Gorbachev was also faced with problems within the Soviet Union as a result of the demands for independence from the satellite states. Events in Eastern Europe influenced different national and ethnic groups inside the Soviet Union. The Baltic States began to press for independence in 1989 and were granted freedom by 1991. In May 1991, the new president of the Russian state, Boris Yeltsin began to encourage the other socialist republics of the Soviet Union to break away. The fragmentation of the USSR had begun.

Gorbachev's gamble on arms talks and reduction had also failed. He had hoped that in return for concessions, the West would offer financial and technological help which would enable the Soviet Union and communism to survive. His gamble did not pay off. Whilst Reagan welcomed Gorbachev's overtures, he was determined to reject any requests for help; consequently the Soviet leader ended up with nothing to show for his concessions.

Checkpoint: Why Gorbachev unsuccessful in his attempts to save the Soviet Union?

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Mega Lecture



There was one last attempt to save the Soviet Union.

In August 1991 Communist hard-liners tried to overthrow Mikhail Gorbachev while he was on holiday in the Crimea. Within three days the coup had failed. The Soviet army refused to back the coup. The leading figure in the defeat of the Communists was Boris Yeltsin, the Russian president. For the first time in seventy-two years the White, Blue and Red flag of Russia, outlawed under Communism, flew over the Kremlin. The Soviet Union no longer existed. On December 8, 1991 the Soviet Union was officially declared dissolved and it was replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev resigned as president of the USSR. Twelve years after the invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet Union no longer existed.

The impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union on world affairs

The collapse of the Soviet Union not only brought an end to the Cold War, but it also produced much greater co-operation between the countries of East and West. Within a matter of years, former members of the communist bloc were seeking admission to NATO and the European Union. The United Nations Security Council began to work with much greater unity. Communist regimes around the world collapsed for lack of support. Only Cuba and China managed to survive, but both were forced to look for economic support from the West, either by industrial and financial aid or through increased tourism. In Africa and South America, Soviet support for rebel groups disappeared overnight.

The division of the Soviet Union into separate republics led to an increased threat of nuclear accidents, as nuclear weapons fell into the hands of the Ukraine and Belarus. Inside the Russian federation, separatist movements developed in autonomous regions such as Chechnya. This led to increased instability in Russia itself.

In 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize**. The citation for the prize said:

During the last few years, dramatic changes have taken place in the relationship between East and West. Confrontation has been replaced by negotiations. Old European nations have been allowed to regain their freedom. The arms race is slowing down and we see a definite and active process in the direction of arms control and disarmament. The Nobel Committee wants to honour Mikhail Gorbachev. The greater openness that Mikhail Gorbachev has brought about in Soviet society has also helped international trust.



Mega Lecture