

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review question

What was the impact of the invasion of Afghanistan on the Cold War up to 1985? To answer this question comprehensively, refer back to Chapter Eleven and Chapter Thirteen.

Research question

To what extent do you agree that Afghanistan was the Soviet Vietnam?

Essay question

To what extent was the Soviet Union successful in maintaining control over its satellite states in the period 1945–1980?

Essay planning hints

Introduction: For your introduction, you need put the question into context, that is, to explain briefly how the Soviet Union tried to control the satellite states and the main challenges to that control that took place up to 1980. Also identify your main line of argument – whether you think that they were or were not successful.

Main body: You want to avoid a chronological run-through and description of the challenges. Keep to the question which is to *assess the success* of the Soviet Union in keeping control. How can you do this?

- You could consider looking firstly at where and in what ways the Soviet Union was successful in keeping control and then where and in what ways it was not successful.
- You may also want to discuss what the cost of its 'successes' were for the satellite states (and future Soviet control), also what factors affected the Soviet Union's success or failure.

Essay skills review activity

The opening words of an essay are key for telling you what exactly you should be aiming to do in your essay, and what the focus of your key arguments should be. Below are essay questions on the Cold War. The opening key words or phrases in each essay question have been italicized. In pairs, briefly discuss what each of the words/phrases is expecting you to do in the essay and how they might have an impact on how you structure the essay:

To what extent was the Soviet Union successful in maintaining control over its satellite states in the period 1945–1980?

How far were the policies of Truman responsible for the cold War?

Assess the importance of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences for the development of the Cold War, 1945 to 1949.

Analyse the impact of the Korean War on the development of the Cold War after 1950.

Account for the growing hostility between China and the Soviet Union up to 1970.

Evaluate the impact of the Cold War on newly independent countries.

Examine the role of ideology in the origins of the Cold War.

Compare and contrast the part played by Vietnam and Afghanistan in the Cold War.

How and why did superpower rivalry dominate international politics after 1945?

In what ways could Stalin be held responsible for the origin and development of the Cold War up to 1953?

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THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR



There are several questions that need consideration when attempting to explain why the Cold War ended:

- What was the role of Gorbachev? To what extent was Gorbachev forced to end the Cold War?
- What role did the American administration and a renewed arms race play in the fall of the Soviet Union?
- How far did the economic problems within the USSR and its sphere of influence dictate the changes in policy under Gorbachev?
- What was the role of 'people power' and nationalism in the fall of the USSR?

The end of the Cold War baffles us; almost nobody expected it.

Melvyn Leffler



◀ The Berlin Wall is dismantled, 1989.

When Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as president of the USSR on Christmas day 1991, the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. The Cold War was finally over. This monumental turning point in modern world history had occurred, amazingly, with little bloodshed. Perhaps just as astonishing was that no one had predicted this rapid collapse of the 'other' superpower. The United States and British intelligence services were as surprised as the East German border guards when the iconic symbol of the Cold War, the Berlin Wall, was torn down in November 1989. The collapse of the Soviet Empire meant that the Cold War was definitely at an end. However, even before this happened in 1989, relations between the Soviet Union and the United States had changed dramatically.

Timeline of key events leading to the end of the Cold War

- 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan
- 1979 Solidarity movement set up in Poland
- 1980 Brezhnev dies, succeeded by Andropov
- 1984 Andropov dies, succeeded by Chernenko
- 1985 Chernenko dies, succeeded by Gorbachev (March)
Perestroika reform era begins
- 1986 *Glasnost* era begins (April)
Chernobyl nuclear disaster
- 1987 Washington Summit (December) – Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty is signed
- 1988 Law on State Enterprises (January) – Soviet state no longer responsible for debts on economic enterprises
Electoral Law – new multi-candidate elections established in USSR and used in the elections for the new Congress of People's Deputies (October)
Gorbachev's speech to UN – outlines Warsaw Pact troop reductions and a withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan (December)
- 1989 Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (February)
Commission on Economic Reform set up to consider ways to reform Soviet economy (July)
Anti-Soviet movements begin in Warsaw Pact countries. Gorbachev maintains he will not intervene (October)
Fall of the Berlin Wall (November)
Malta Summit. Gorbachev and Bush declare the 'end of the Cold War'
- 1990 Article 6 of USSR constitution is dropped – ends monopoly of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) within the USSR (February)
Baltic Republics declare independence (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), (March – May)
- 1991 Vilnius Massacre in Lithuania (January)
Boris Yeltsin elected President of Russia (June)
Coup against Gorbachev by hard-liners is unsuccessful (August 19-21)
Yeltsin outlaws CPSU in Russia (August 23)
Gorbachev resigns as general secretary of CPSU, and dissolves the party (August 24)
Minsk Agreement – ends the USSR, replaced by Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan.



What was the impact of Mikhail Gorbachev?

For the Soviet Union, Stalin's 'legacy' meant that politically the Soviet Union remained an authoritarian, one-party state and that economically it was focused on producing military hardware rather than housing, transport, food, consumer goods and health care. 'We can't go on living like this', Mikhail Gorbachev is reported to have said on the eve of his succession as General Secretary to the Politburo. Not only was he the youngest leader to have this position since Stalin, but he was also the first university-educated leader since Stalin.

Gorbachev introduced two key reforming ideas – *perestroika* and *glasnost*. *Perestroika* (restructuring) aimed at restructuring the economy and *glasnost* (openness) was the principle that every area of the regime should be open to public scrutiny. This represented a radical change in politics in the Soviet Union. It involved greater 'democratization', with more people involved in the Communist Party and in political debate.

Through these strategies, Gorbachev intended to make the Soviet system more productive and responsive, and he realized that part of this process also had to involve a reduction in military spending. He knew that, if his reforming ideas were going to work, the Soviets could not rise to the challenge of matching Reagan's SDI system. He decided to abandon the arms race and attempt a negotiated reduction in arms with the USA. It was not just for economic reasons that Gorbachev wanted arms control. 'He called for a new thinking in international affairs, and he said that there could be 'no winners' in a nuclear war. Gorbachev declared the world to be interdependent and likened all its people 'to climbers roped together on the mountainside' (John Mason, *The Cold War*, Routledge, 1996).

The Chernobyl disaster, when an explosion destroyed a reactor at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the Ukraine, only heightened Gorbachev's awareness of the dangers of nuclear power. As Anatoly Chernlayev, an aide to Gorbachev, put it, 'Gorbachev knew even before that catastrophe about the danger of nuclear weapons. That explosion showed that, even without war and without nuclear missiles, nuclear power could destroy human kind' (quoted in the CNN television series, *The Cold War*).

Reagan was also interested in disarmament and had previously put forward to the Soviets an arms control proposal known as 'Zero Option', which would eliminate all intermediate-range missiles in Europe. Gorbachev, unlike his predecessors, was prepared to discuss this option. This resulted in the two leaders meeting together in four summits to discuss arms control:

- Geneva Summit, November 1985: No substantial progress was made but the two leaders did agree that 'a nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought'.
- Reykjavik Summit, October 1986: Talks ended without agreement, mainly because of disagreement over SDI. Gorbachev said that SDI should be 'confined to the laboratory', but Reagan refused to make any concessions. However, the talks also covered the most sweeping arms control proposals in history, and Gorbachev declared that it had 'been an intellectual breakthrough' in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union.
- Washington Summit, December 1987: An Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF Treaty) was signed which actually agreed to abolish weapons – land-based missiles of intermediate and shorter range. This was an important first step in reducing the nuclear stockpiles of the two superpowers. Agreement was also reached for the first time on inspection of the destruction of missiles.
- Moscow Summit, May 1988: Again there was disagreement over SDI, but arms reductions negotiations continued. Standing in Red Square, Reagan confessed that he now no longer believed in the 'evil empire'.

Other foreign policy initiatives by Gorbachev were reassuring to the West. By 1988, Gorbachev had announced his plans to withdraw from Afghanistan and he pulled back Soviet aid to its 'allies' in the developing world.

The 'thawing' of the Cold War continued under the new U.S. president, George H.W. Bush. At the Malta Summit between the U.S. and Soviet leaders in 1989, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze announced that the superpowers had 'buried the Cold War at the bottom of the Mediterranean'.

What was the role of Ronald Reagan?

Clearly, Gorbachev's willingness to tackle the issue of nuclear weapons, along with his new style of politics and doing business with the West, were key to explaining the breakdown of the Cold War. However, many historians also give Reagan credit for this and argue that

it was his approach to the Soviet Union in the early 1980s that was crucial for pushing the Soviet Union into arms negotiations. An article critical of the 'Reagan victory school' describes this view below:

As former Pentagon officials like Caspar Weinberger and Richard Perle ... and other proponents of the Reagan victory school have argued, a combination of military and ideological pressures gave the Soviets little choice but to abandon expansionism abroad and repression at home. In their view, the Reagan military build-up foreclosed Soviet military options while pushing the Soviet economy to the breaking point. Reagan partisans stress that his dramatic Star Wars initiative put the Soviets on notice that the next phase of the arms race would be waged in areas where the West held a decisive technological edge.

D. Deudney and G.J. Ikenberry, 'Who won the Cold War?', in Foreign Policy, no. 87, Summer 1992, p.124

This 'Reagan victory school' view is therefore critical of the 'détente' approach to relations with the Soviet Union as explained below by Patrick Glynn:

The Jimmy Carter-Cyrus Vance approach of rewarding the Soviet build-up with one-sided arms control treaties, opening Moscow's access to Western capital markets and technologies, and condoning Soviet imperial expansion was perfectly designed to preserve the Brezhnev-style approach, delivering the Soviets from any need to re-evaluate (as they did under Gorbachev) or change their policies. Had the Carter-Vance approach been continued ... the Cold War and the life of the Soviet Union would almost certainly have been prolonged.

Patrick Glynn, letter to the Editor, Foreign Policy, no. 90, Spring 1993, pp.171-3

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Document analysis

Read the two sources above again.

Questions

- 1 Identify three reasons from the first source to explain why Reagan's policies could be seen as responsible for ending the Cold War.
- 2 What criticisms does Patrick Glynn have of détente?

Other historians, such as Michael MacGwire, also claim that Reagan played an important role, but believe this role was more connected to his views on anti-nuclearism, which helped to convince Gorbachev at the different summits of the possibilities of halting the nuclear arms race. Reagan's character and willingness to engage with Gorbachev was also important:

I know of no one else of a leadership stature in the United States in those days who would have moved forward as Reagan did, to engage Gorbachev, to engage the Western Alliance, to truly lead the Western Alliance, and to take us through what became, of course, a very constructive introductory period to the end of the Cold War.

Rozanne Ridgeway, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State interviewed on the CNN television series, The Cold War

Ridgeway's view is supported by historian R.J. McMahon:

To his great credit, Reagan proved willing first to moderate, and then to abandon, deeply held personal convictions about the malignant nature of Communism, thereby permitting a genuine rapprochement to occur.

From R.J. McMahon, The Cold War, A Very Short Introduction (OUP, 2003) p.162

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Review question

Who do you believe played the more important role in bringing about a new relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union – Gorbachev or Reagan?

Long-term factors in the ending of the Cold War

What was the role of the Soviet economy?

Although the actions of Gorbachev and Reagan are important for explaining how events turned out as they did, it is also important to look at the long-term forces that were at work in pushing the Soviet Union into ending the Cold War. By the time Brezhnev died in 1982, both the political and economic policies of the Soviet Union were in crisis.

Under Brezhnev the Soviets spent even more resources on foreign policy. Although involved in important arms treaties with the USA, it was under Brezhnev that the USSR achieved 'parity' with the USA in the nuclear field and, in some areas, surpassed it. This was achieved at a high price. Brezhnev's era is remembered as a period of stagnation and decline in the USSR. This is due to the serious lack of spending not only on consumer goods, but on the domestic economy as a whole. Brezhnev left his successors an economy that was still based on the 'command economy' structure of Stalin's day. It was falling behind in modern technology and industrial output was declining. A large proportion of the agricultural workers lived below the poverty line and grain was imported from North America. Workers had little incentive to work harder or produce better goods. Labour morale was low, with high absenteeism and chronic alcoholism.

When Gorbachev took over, he inherited an economy in serious trouble. It could thus be argued that Gorbachev was forced to take the actions that he did in both internal reform and negotiations with the West. Given this situation in the Soviet Union, some historians argue, in direct contradiction with the historians of the 'Reagan victory school', that keeping the Cold War going through containment and détente played a role in bringing about the end of the Cold War rather than prolonging it.

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Document analysis

The West did not, as is widely believed, win the Cold War through geopolitical containment and military deterrence. Nor was the Cold War won by the Reagan military build up and the Reagan Doctrine ... Instead, 'victory' for the West came when a new generation of Soviet leaders realized how badly their system at home and their policies abroad had failed. What containment did was to successfully stymie Moscow's attempts to advance Soviet hegemony. Over four decades it performed the historic function of holding Soviet power in check until the internal seeds of destruction within the Soviet Union and its empire could mature. At this point, however, it was Gorbachev who bought the Cold War to an end ...

Raymond L. Garthoff 'Why Did the Cold War Arise and Why Did it End?' in Michael J. Hogan (ed), The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications (CUP, 1992) p.129

Questions

- 1 Explain the meaning of the following phrases used in the extract:
 - geopolitical containment
 - military deterrence
 - Soviet hegemony
 - internal seeds of destruction.
- 2 What is the overall message of this document regarding the reasons why the Cold War ended?
- 3 Compare and contrast what Raymond Garthoff says about the reasons for the end of the Cold War with those given by Patrick Glynn on page 212.