

Key Issue

- Why did détente collapse in the early 1980s?

DÉTENTE UNDER THREAT

In 1980, America elected Ronald Regan as its new president. Reagan was fiercely anti-communist and this quickly led to a further deterioration in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States. However, the situation of détente between the two superpowers was already under threat before Reagan took over the presidency in 1981.

AFRICA

From the mid-1970s, the civil war in the former Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique provided the Soviet Union with an opportunity to extend its influence into new regions of Africa. Angola became the focus of Cold War tension because of its oil resources. The Russians provided weapons and 50,000 Cuban troops to the Marxist MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) faction while South Africa and America backed the anti-communist forces. The civil war continued into the 1990s despite the end of the Cold War.

CENTRAL AMERICA

In 1978, Soviet influence also extended into Central America. The Sandinistas, a Marxist guerrilla group,



'Contra' guerrillas in Nicaragua, 1980. These were the anti-communist fighters equipped by Reagan.

attacked and overthrew the pro-US government in Nicaragua. Soviet influence in Central America was of even more concern to the United States because it was that much closer to them.

THE 'EVIL EMPIRE'

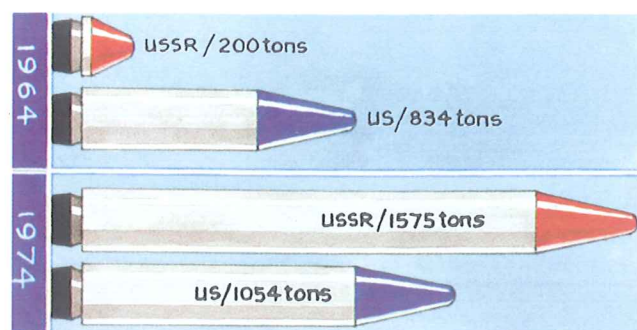
The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 brought an end to a decade which saw several setbacks for the United States. President Carter's responses to these were considered too soft by Reagan. Carter had refused to sell the American grain to the Russians and had boycotted the 1980 Olympic games held in Moscow. Reagan was determined to turn events America's way more decisively as the new Cold War gathered pace.

Reagan made clear his determination to confront the Soviet Union by approving the development of the neutron bomb. The neutron bomb killed people but did not destroy buildings. He also announced a \$32 billion increase in the defence budget and decided to deploy Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe. These were intermediate-range missiles which could not be spotted by enemy radar. For good measure, just in case the Soviets had not got the message, Reagan called the USSR the 'evil empire'. These developments all seemed to make a war that little bit more likely.

Despite this, the USA and the USSR began new arms talks in Geneva in July 1982. These were called START (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks). The two sides discussed limiting intermediate nuclear weapons in Europe.

STRATEGIC DEFENCE INITIATIVE

However, Reagan continued to keep the pressure on the Soviet Union. In 1983, he announced the beginning of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI). The



How strategic warheads grew, 1964-74.

plan was to build a laser shield around the United States which would have made it impossible for Soviet missiles to hit American targets. People nicknamed it 'Star Wars'. Star Wars was controversial because it suggested that the US no longer accepted the principle of MAD. Reagan seemed to be suggesting that the United States could wage a nuclear war and survive.

In fact, the United States did not have the technology to make Star Wars a real possibility, but the Soviet Union did not know this and was greatly worried. The Soviet delegation walked out of the START negotiations in protest. The options facing the USSR were not encouraging. They knew they did not have the technology to match the SDI project and neither did they have the funds to pay for the research. Their only choice was to come to terms with Reagan.

1	Build up US defences, making it too expensive for the USSR to keep up	
2	Stop western and Japanese technology getting into the USSR	
3	More use of US radio stations, such as Radio Free Europe	
4	Financial aid to communist countries which protect human rights	
5	Secret help for reform movements in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia	

Reagan's plan to undermine the USSR.

A SOURCE

A British cartoon of 1978. Soviet planes had attacked a Korean airliner which strayed into Russian airspace.



ENTER GORBACHEV

Fortunately, from 1985 the Russians had a new leader who was willing to face this fact head on. Mikhail Gorbachev knew that the future of the communist system and the Soviet Union depended on its ability to deliver a higher standard of living to its people. It could not afford to spend huge sums of money on the military in order to compete with the United States. Gorbachev's Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevernadze, later calculated that as much as 50% of the Soviet Union's national income was spent on defence, arms and the armed forces. At the same time, the United States was spending just 6%.

Questions

- Study Source A. Explain the message of this cartoon, which shows Brezhnev riding on a dove, the symbol of peace. Support your answer by referring to details of the cartoon and your own knowledge. [6 marks]
- Explain why the process of détente had come to an end by 1981. [9 marks]