

## The Final Chapters of the Cold War (1970s and 1980s)

### 1. "Détente" in the 1970s

Definition: Period of the easing of Cold War tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union from 1967 to 1979. The era was a time of increased trade and cooperation with the Soviet Union and the signing of the SALT treaties.

Causes:

- The horrors of Vietnam shocked people.
- Growing anti nuclear feeling.
- Massive cost of weapons production and maintaining a huge armed force to the detriment of basic household goods was becoming quite crippling for the USSR. It was important for the Soviets to increase living standards to prevent unrest in the USSR and in satellite countries. Moreover, Détente would enable the USSR to have access to American technology and agricultural produce. The Soviets also worried about US/China thaw.
- The Americans were seeking an alternative to costly and inefficient "Vietnam style" containment policy.
- Western European nations worried because they would be on the front line if a nuclear war broke out. Willy Brandt (German chancellor) "*Ostpolitik*" of improved relations with Eastern European countries).

Facts:

1963 - hot-line established after Cuban Missile Crisis

1963 - treaty banning nuclear tests in the atmosphere

1969 - **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks** (SALT) start. Treaty signed in 1972.

1972 – 1974: Nixon's visits to Moscow, Brezhnev's visit to Washington

1975 - **Helsinki Agreement** — USA, USSR, Canada + major European powers accept European frontiers set up after World War Two. This recognized that Germany was divided and East European countries agreed to allow their people human rights such as freedom of speech.

1975 – *Apollo-Soyuz mission*

First setbacks:

- President Jimmy Carter (1977 – 1981) openly criticized the USSR treatment of its dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov

- In 1977, the USSR began replacing out-of-date missiles in Eastern Europe with new SS-20 nuclear missiles. The West saw these missiles as a new type of battlefield weapon that could be used in a limited nuclear war confined only to Europe. In response, President Carter allowed the US military to develop the Cruise missile. By 1979, the USA had stationed Pershing missiles in Western Europe as an answer to the SS-20.

- Persisting civil wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador and in Angola: Communist rebels (supported by Cuban and Soviet money and expertise) tried to overthrow the governments of these states in South America and Africa. The USA funded the governments against the rebels. In Angola, the USA and the USSR helped to fund a long-running civil war.

- **Failure of SALT2**: signed in 1979 but Congress refused to ratify the treaty.

### 2. Cold War Renewal in the 1980s

- The *Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979* triggered a renewal of the Cold War → *American boycott of the Moscow Olympics* in 1980 and embargo on grain sales to Soviet Union. Americans supplied weapons to the Mujahadeen fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

- Margaret Thatcher became the British Prime Minister in 1979, Ronald Reagan became US president in 1981. Both were strongly anti-communist. Pope John Paul II also provided a strong moral support for anti-communism.

- 1981 – 1983: Martial law in Poland

- 1983: Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech. *Strategic Defense Initiative* ("Star Wars")

- Sept 1983: Shooting of a South Korean civilian aircraft by Soviet fighter planes for entering Soviet airspace killing all 269 passengers and crew including a US Congressman.

- 1984 Soviet boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics.



### 3. The end of the Cold War

- The problems:

- US spent about 5% of GDP on defense, the Soviet Union 14 % of GDP. The US was also more technologically advanced (especially crucial for the military). The Soviet Union could not keep up with American defense spending.
- citizens' desire for greater personal freedom, greater individual wealth, access to consumer goods in Soviet Union and its satellite countries.
- Soviet ideology failed to win the people

- 1985: Mikhail Gorbachev ascended to power in USSR. He wanted to reform the USSR → *Glasnost* and *perestroika*, anti-alcoholism campaign.

- New *thaw* in US/Soviet relationships.

- 1985-1988: four summits between Reagan and Gorbachev
- arms reductions (for example the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) signed in 1987 in Washington removed more than 2,600 medium-range nuclear missiles from Europe).

- The year 1989:

- January: Soviet troops withdraw from Afghanistan
- March: Hungary decides to allow free elections and take down the fence between Hungary and Austria. Gorbachev says he will not stop the moves.
- June: Poland holds its first free elections. The Solidarity Party beats the Communists.
- July: Thousands of East Germans "vacation" in Hungary and then flee to the Austria and the West.
- October: East German leaders celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Communist GDR. Two days later 70,000 protesters demand an end to the regime. Russian troops stay in their barracks and GDR soldiers and police back down. Communist leader Honecker is voted out of office by the Politburo.
- November: Soldiers in East Berlin open some of the gates in the Berlin Wall. Crowds respond by tearing the wall down.
- November: Bulgaria's communist party leader resigns. Free elections held in June, 1990.
- December: Protests in Czechoslovakia. The government gives up without violence, and elections are held.
- December: Romanian communist forces kill 73 in riots. Crowds storm the government and later capture the leader Ceausescu. He and his wife are tried and executed. Elections are held.

- March 1990: Lithuania becomes the first Soviet Republic to declare its independence.

- The year 1991:

- April: end of Warsaw Pact
- August: attempted coup by Russian military leaders in order to save the Soviet Union. Boris Yeltsin, leader of the Russian Republic, occupies the Parliament building, defying the coup. The Army backs down.
- recognition of Lithuanian independence by the UN.
- December: The republics of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine act to dissolve the Soviet Union, thus freeing the other republics.



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