

UNIT

8

How did the Cold War come to an end in the 1980s?

What is this unit about?

This unit focuses on the events of the 1980s which produced an end to the Cold War that had developed between the superpowers. It will give you an understanding of the ways in which both US and Soviet foreign policy changed in the 1980s. Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev were to change the landscape of the Cold War, and their policies were to have consequences that produced an end to the USSR and to the Cold War itself. In this unit you will:

- examine the philosophy that lay behind the Reagan Doctrine
- find out what factors weakened the hold of the USSR over Eastern Europe
- discover the ways in which Mikhail Gorbachev changed Soviet Foreign policy in the 1980s
- investigate the significance of the fall of the Berlin Wall
- understand the sequence of events that was involved in the ending of the Cold War.

Key questions

- How and why did US and Soviet foreign policy change in the 1980s?
- How did the Cold War come to an end?

Timeline

1981	
January	Ronald Reagan becomes US President Wave of strikes in Poland organised by the illegal trade union, Solidarity
1982	
November	Brezhnev dies, Andropov becomes new Soviet leader
1983	
March	Strategic Defense Initiative announced by USA
September	South Korean airliner KAL 007 shot down by Soviet air force
October	US troops invade Grenada to depose left-wing government
1984	
February	Andropov dies; Chernenko becomes new Soviet leader
1985	
March	Chernenko dies; Mikhail Gorbachev becomes new Soviet leader
November	Geneva Summit between Reagan and Gorbachev

1986	
October	Reykjavik Summit between Gorbachev and Reagan
1987	
December	Washington Summit. The INF (Intermediate Nuclear Forces) agreement is signed
1988	
May-June	Moscow Summit between Reagan and Gorbachev
December	Gorbachev announces major reductions in Soviet forces in Europe
1989	
September	First free elections in Poland; Solidarity wins and forms government Hungary opens border with Austria
November	Fall of the Berlin Wall, dismantled by crowds Collapse of communist regimes in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria
December	Malta Summit between Gorbachev and Bush Collapse of communist regime in Romania
1990	
October	Reunification of Germany
1991	
August-December	Baltic States and Ukraine vote for independence from USSR
December	USSR formally dissolved

Introduction

In November 1982 the tensions of the Cold War seemed permanent. If anything, those tensions had increased. The USA had been under the presidency of Ronald Reagan since January 1981. His more strident attitude towards the USSR had done little to improve international relations. Leonid Brezhnev, the aged Soviet leader, had died and had been replaced by Yuri Andropov. To dissidents living within the USSR, the hope for change diminished as Andropov clamped down on any action that might undermine the power of the Communist Party. It was a period when fear predominated over hope. Yet despite this seemingly permanent situation international relations were soon to be transformed, resulting in the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe, including the USSR. In the words of one Soviet dissident, 'History is like a mole. It burrows away unnoticed.' By 1989 a lot of the 'burrowing' was to finally produce results in a sequence of events that saw hope triumph over fear.

How did Ronald Reagan view the USSR and in what ways was the Reagan Doctrine designed to bring about an end to the Cold War?

One of the factors identified as having a vital role in helping to undermine the Soviet Union has been the role of Ronald Reagan and his policy of militarised counter-revolution.

The start of Reagan's presidency in January 1981 is often heralded by the American right as marking a fundamental shift in US foreign policy towards a more aggressive, strident anti-communist approach. This shift had, however, been one of the trends during the presidency of Jimmy Carter (1977–80), as witnessed by the growing influence of Brzezinski as National Security Adviser. Nonetheless, under Reagan this approach was to be clearly in the ascendant. Reagan's anti-communist rhetoric indicated that he was ready to pursue the so-called Second Cold War with vigour on all fronts.

The key features of Reagan's militarised counter-revolution

1 Increasing nuclear arms

Reagan was able to convince the US Congress to increase military spending on a scale that was unprecedented in American history. The actions of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the decision of the USSR to deploy the more accurate SS-20 nuclear missiles in Eastern Europe were used to bolster Reagan's argument. Defence spending was increased by 13 per cent in 1982 and over 8 per cent in each of the following two years. New methods of deploying nuclear missiles were developed, including the Stealth bomber and Trident submarines. Central to this arms build-up was the Strategic Defense Initiative, announced in 1983. SDI, or 'Star Wars' as it was better known, was the development of anti-ballistic missile systems in space. It was a system that would require vast sums of money and resources to develop, and in order for the USSR to keep pace with this they would face bankruptcy. The aim of this arms programme was to regain American military supremacy against the Soviet Union to the extent that they would not be able to continue the Cold War. Thus, supremacy in arms would allow the USA to gain more meaningful concessions from the Soviet leadership through a position of strength.

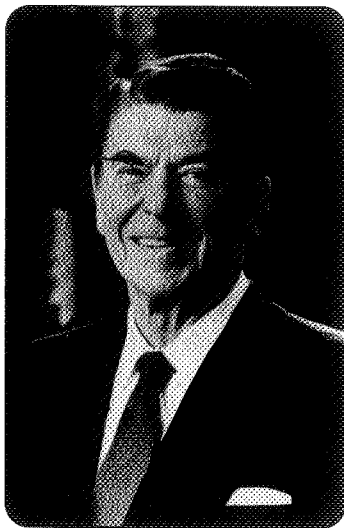
2 The Reagan Doctrine

Reagan took decisive measures to try to halt the growth of Soviet influence in the Third World by developing what became known as the Reagan Doctrine. This term was given to the policy of sending assistance to anti-communist insurgents as well as anti-communist governments. In Nicaragua, the doctrine was used to supply military aid to the Contras, a right wing guerrilla group fighting against the communist government of the Sandinistas. In El Salvador the USA supported an unpopular right-wing government facing a growing popular revolt by the left.

Definition

Militarised counter-revolution

Those policies implemented by Ronald Reagan as US President to undermine the forces of communism. It was a much more aggressive strategy than Carter's policy towards the USSR and included extensive re-arming and providing covert help to those fighting against communist forces or governments.



8.1 Ronald Reagan

The Reagan Doctrine was designed to weaken the Soviet Union 'at the edges' and to supply counter-revolutionaries with enough support to ensure that Soviet support for revolutionary regimes would entail a much greater military, political and economic cost. The advantage for the USA was that, in reality, it led to very few instances of direct use of American troops. One example was the invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada in 1983 when US forces deposed its left-wing government. More often, however, covert methods were used. The strategy entailed a massive rise in CIA operations in support of counter-revolutionary groups. In Afghanistan Stinger anti-aircraft missiles were supplied to the mujahedeen who were fighting the Soviet forces. In Europe radio broadcasts such as 'Voice of America' and 'Radio Free Europe' were used to encourage those living in Eastern Europe to protest against their communist governments. When the Polish government banned the independent trade union Solidarity, US loans and bank credits to the country were cut off and tariffs placed on Polish exports to the USA.

The actions undertaken under the Reagan Doctrine were not always popular in the wider world and were often counter-productive. US actions in Grenada, Nicaragua and El Salvador showed the apparent willingness of the USA to interfere in the internal politics of other countries. These actions were often criticised by liberals and socialists in the West as a threat to the freedom of people to choose their own destiny. This sentiment was also supported by governments in the developing world who were left-wing. Some of the regimes supported by the USA, such as the Marcos government in the Philippines, may have been anti-communist but they had a very poor record on human rights. Nonetheless, the Reagan Doctrine showed the Soviet Union that the USA was prepared to take forceful action against communism and its expansion.

What made Reagan's approach more effective was the support he received from Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister. The two leaders shared a view of the USSR as the 'evil empire'. Thatcher's harsh attacks on communism led the Soviet press to dub her the 'Iron Lady'. She established a highly effective working relationship with Reagan, and her agreement to have US nuclear missiles based in Britain was of vital importance in putting pressure on the Soviet Union. Without European bases the threat to use nuclear missiles against Soviet territory would have been much diminished.

Source A

Reagan's view of the Soviet Union

During the late seventies, I felt our country had begun to abdicate its historical role as the spiritual leader of the Free World and its foremost defender of democracy. Some of our resolve was gone, along with a part of our commitment to uphold the values we cherished. Predictably, the Soviets had interpreted our hesitation and reluctance to act and had tried to exploit it to the fullest, moving ahead with their agenda to achieve a Communist-dominated world . . . The Soviets were more dedicated than ever to achieving Lenin's goal of a communist world . . . I deliberately set out to say some frank things about the Russians, to let them know there were some new fellows in Washington.

From Ronald Reagan, *Ronald Reagan: An American Life* (published in 1990)

Source B

Reagan makes a private joke at a radio station but forgets the microphone is on

My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you I just signed legislation which outlaws Russia forever. The bombing begins in five minutes.

Ronald Reagan, spoken during a radio microphone test (1984)

Source C

How do you tell a communist? Well, it's someone who reads Marx and Lenin. And how do you tell an anti-Communist? It's someone who understands Marx and Lenin.

Ronald Reagan, speech on communism delivered to US business people (September 1987)

Source D

In Britain's Margaret Thatcher, Reagan found a triple ally. First, she shared his ideological belief in free markets and an unleashed capitalism as the path to prosperity, and as the buttress against socialism at home and abroad . . .

Second, Mrs Thatcher's strategic loyalty was rooted in the Atlantic Alliance, and in the old 1940s' perception of the world which held that the ambitions of the Soviet Union would only be kept in check by a full revival of the old special relationship between London and Washington.

Third, Mrs Thatcher shared one key aspect of the Reagan temperament, a belief in the importance of morale in public life. He spoke of the American spirit, she of the national soul. She too talked in terms of spiritual revival, of the bracing effects of freedom on both the economic and above all the moral fibre of the nation.

From Martin Walker, *The Cold War* (published in 1994)

Source E

From the minutes of a meeting of the Soviet Politburo, 31 May 1983. The meeting is chaired by the Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov. Also speaking is Mikhail Gorbachev from the reforming wing of the Communist Party

Andropov: The actions of President Reagan, the bearer and creator of all anti-Soviet ideas, creator of all untrue insinuations regarding our country and the other countries of the Socialist community, deserve very critical and harsh reactions from our side . . . The imperialist countries of the West want to put together a bloc against the USSR.

It is true that we shouldn't scare people with war. But in our propaganda we should show more clearly and fully the military actions of the Reagan administration and its supporters in Western Europe, which in other words means disclosing the full scale aggressive character of the enemy. We need that, so we could use facts to mobilise the Soviet people for the fulfilment of social and economic plans for development of the country. We can't, comrades, in this situation forget the defence needs of our country.

Gorbachev: You said it right, Yuri Vladimirovich [Andropov], that the time now is calling us to increase our actions, taking the necessary steps to develop a broad programme of counter-measures against the aggressive plans of the Western countries.

As quoted in Jussi Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War* (published in 2003)

SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 How do Sources A–C illustrate Ronald Reagan's views of the USSR?
- 2 Use your own knowledge to explain how Reagan's foreign policy was designed to bring the Cold War to an end?
- 3 Using Source D, and your own knowledge, assess the importance of Margaret Thatcher in reinforcing Reagan's foreign policy.
- 4 To what extent does Source E show Reagan's foreign policy towards the USSR to be successful?

Investigation: Star Wars

Source F

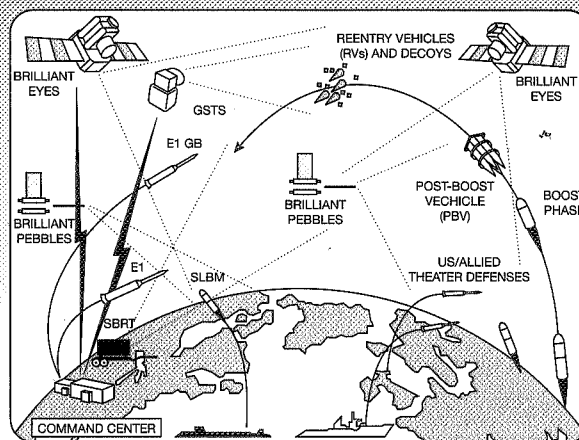
SDI was a technologically ambitious and extremely expensive plan to develop a nationwide ballistic-missile defense system that would deploy weapons in outer space to destroy enemy missiles in flight. Popularly known as Star Wars, SDI threatened to violate several US–Soviet agreements, including the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, and the ABM Treaty of 1972 . . .

Many analysts regarded SDI as a dangerous and destabilising attack on mutual deterrence, which was based on each side's ability to retaliate against a nuclear attack . . . [they] also warned that SDI would accelerate the arms race.

In addition to re-establishing US military superiority, which they believed had been lost during Détente, and regaining the initiative in the Cold War, Reagan and some of his supporters later claimed that they planned to use an arms race, especially in fields where the United States was technologically superior, to place great strain on the Soviet economy. Although the US build-up, and especially SDI, alarmed the Soviets, there is no evidence that Soviet defense spending, which had begun to level off in the mid-1970s, increased significantly in response to Reagan's initiatives.

From David Painter, *The Cold War: An International History* (published in 1999)

Source G



8.2 The SDI concept

Source H

Reagan was deeply committed to SDI: it was not a bargaining chip to give up in future negotiations. That did not preclude, though, using it as a bluff: the United States was years, even decades, away from developing a missile defense capability, but Reagan's speech [of 8 March 1983] persuaded the increasingly frightened Soviet leaders that this was about to happen. Having exhausted their country by catching up in offensive missiles, they suddenly faced a new round of competition demanding skills they had no hope of mastering. And the Americans seemed not even to have broken into a sweat.

The reaction, in the Kremlin, approached panic.

From John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (published in 2005)

SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 Using Sources F and G, outline the key features of the SDI.
- 2 Using Source F and your own knowledge, explain how the US government hoped to use SDI against the Soviet Union.
- 3 To what extent do Sources F and H support the view that SDI weakened the USSR?

What factors weakened the hold of the Soviet Union over Eastern Europe in the early 1980s?

By the early 1980s considerable pressure was building within many of the states of Eastern Europe that threatened the hold of the Soviet Union over the region. Internal weaknesses became more pronounced, and public opinion in Eastern Europe was more critical of their regimes.

There were many reasons for popular discontent against the governments of Eastern Europe.

Economic issues

By the 1980s there were clear signs that the socialist economies of Eastern Europe were unable to deliver the degree of prosperity evident in the West. The state-controlled industries of Eastern Europe were inefficient both in terms of quality and quantity of goods produced. Since the 1950s most of the countries of Eastern Europe had concentrated their resources on heavy industry rather than consumer goods, and as a result food, clothing and housing were in short supply and often inadequate. Industrial pollution was bad enough to have a serious impact on the health of the people of the region. Management had become a privileged group with little concern for innovation as long as their position in society was maintained. The increase in oil prices in the mid-1970s had made it difficult for governments to get credit for foreign exchange and investment. By the 1980s the technology used in the region was becoming rapidly out of date. The USSR was slow to develop new technologies, such as personal computers, robotics and video equipment. Eastern Europe had become reliant on Soviet technology and as a consequence also fell behind the West.

Living standards in Eastern Europe had long fallen behind those of the West, but by the 1980s the expectations of its population were different. On the borders of East Germany and Czechoslovakia West German television stations could be received, with images of life under capitalism. Western music, cinema and fashion also had some influence on the people of Eastern Europe. The mass consumer society of the West provided a sharp contrast to living standards in the East. Not only did Western-style capitalism seem more attractive but the failure of socialism to provide the

living standards expected was evident to more and more of the citizens of Eastern Europe. A sense of impending economic crisis was helped by the slowdown in the rate of growth in industrial production. By 1985 all of the socialist economies of the Eastern Bloc had growth rates that were virtually negligible, including the more developed economies of East Germany and Czechoslovakia. The impression was given of a vast bureaucratic economic system grinding to an inevitable halt.

Calls for political reform

Criticisms of the regimes of Eastern Europe were not restricted to economic issues; there was often a conflict between those leaders who wished to maintain a hard line communist approach and others, including Communist Party members, who pressed for reform. The leaders of the Communist Parties of the Eastern Bloc were often portrayed in the West as uninspiring, mediocre men more interested in their personal power than the needs of their country. Although there is some truth in this view, it underestimates the conviction of some communist leaders who had suffered for their beliefs before 1945 and had, like Zhivkov, the Bulgarian leader, played an important role in resisting the German occupation during the Second World War. But by the 1980s the regimes of Eastern Europe were led by men who were increasingly out of touch with the needs of their country and had been in position long enough to enjoy the trappings of power. They were leaders who were reluctant to change a system that worked for them. Janos Kadar had been leader of Hungary since 1956, Gustav Husak had dominated Czechoslovak politics since 1968, Todor Zhivkov had led Bulgaria since 1956. With Communist Parties dominant and the use of a repressive police network, opposition in these countries was severely limited.

Definition

Stasi

The East German secret police.

Biography

Erich Honecker (1912-94)

East German leader from 1971 to 1989. Honecker had been responsible for implementing the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. He was a hard-line communist and against reform. Popular protests forced him to resign as leader in 1989. Despite attempts to arrest him and put him on trial for abusing his power, Honecker was allowed to go into exile in the USSR.

East Germany (the DDR or GDR) had a particularly effective system of surveillance. The **Stasi**, East Germany's secret police, kept files on 5.5 million East Germans through an elaborate system of informers. Over 600,000 people were employed directly by the Stasi with an additional 100,000 informers. When government files were opened after the country collapsed it was clear that husbands were informing on their wives who in turn were informing on their husbands. The leadership of **Erich Honecker** had little respect from his own people. The position of the DDR was unique in that the country was itself an artificial creation of the Cold War. Attempts to forge a sense of national unity through sporting achievements had produced lots of medals but also popular resentment at the privileges and pampering given to athletes by the government. Most East Germans adopted an attitude of resignation, making the most of life under a regime they had little choice but to accept. It was not exactly a ringing endorsement of the 'people's' republic but it was enough to keep the regime of Honecker relatively secure.

In Romania the leadership of **Nicolae Ceausescu** was firmly entrenched by the early 1980s despite his growing paranoia and megalomania.

Biography

Nicolae Ceausescu (1918–89)

Communist leader of Romania from 1965 to 1989. He pursued policies of forced industrial development and heavy repression. He developed a cult of personality to extreme proportions and by the mid-1980s most of his support was manufactured rather than real. His rule was not merely ruthless but also vindictive. In 1989 popular unrest led to the overthrow of Ceausescu. He and his wife were executed on Christmas Day 1989.

Definition

Securitate

The Romanian secret police under Ceausescu.

Ceausescu's regime was one of the most repressive in Eastern Europe. His secret police, the **Securitate**, ruthlessly crushed any opposition. There was a very tight system of censorship, which involved the registration of all typewriters by their owners every year. Government propaganda was the only source of information for the vast majority of Romanians. As Ceausescu's hold on power grew, so did his ability to push through more extreme policies. In the mid-1980s he introduced a policy of 'systematisation', which involved the demolition of whole villages to be replaced by agro-industrial complexes. Ceausescu seems to have chosen villages for this policy on a whim, and the policy was very unpopular.

Although Ceausescu had been courted by the West because of his independent stance in foreign affairs, by 1985 he had alienated virtually the entire Romanian population, with the exception of the Securitate.

Thus the nature of the governments of Eastern Europe and their policies produced discontent and latent opposition. The events in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 showed that the USSR would not permit the governments of Eastern Europe to go too far in placating the wishes of those who wished to reform. This pattern was again followed in 1981 when discontent in Poland threatened to get out of hand.

Attempts by the Polish government to increase prices as a response to economic problems were met with unrest. This unrest was strengthened by the emergence of Solidarity, an illegal, independent trade union in 1980–81. Those seeking to challenge communist rule received encouragement from the visit to Poland of Pope John Paul II, a Pole himself by birth, in June 1979. His message of 'Do not be afraid' gave consternation to the Polish government and courage to Solidarity. **Lech Walesa** (see page 166), the leader of Solidarity and a devout Catholic, was popular enough to wield considerable influence over the industrial workers of the shipyards in Gdansk. Edward Gierek, the Polish Communist Party leader, decided to negotiate with Solidarity, leading to an agreement that gave Solidarity legal status as an independent trade union. The USSR was concerned that this concession would encourage groups elsewhere within the Soviet Bloc and threaten the hold of communism over Eastern Europe. As the USSR undertook army manoeuvres along its border with Poland, the message was clear. **General Jaruzelski** (see page 166), the new Polish leader, declared martial law on 12 December 1981 and used the army to quell the unrest. Although greatly despised by many Poles for his action, Jaruzelski realised that the alternative was a Soviet invasion to restore order. This option would have probably led to greater bloodshed. As it was, the actions of the Polish army restored order. Solidarity was abolished, but millions of trade unionists continued to work together underground. They hoped that circumstances would become more conducive to change in the future.

The prospects of change were limited at the beginning of the 1980s, but it was not long before external factors were transformed to give encouragement to those forces seeking reform.

Biography

General Wojtech Jaruzelski (b.1923)

A general in the Polish army who served as Minister of Defence before becoming Prime Minister in 1981. His appointment was made in order to use the army to suppress unrest organised by the trade union Solidarity. He remained Prime Minister until 1989 when the Communist Party lost power after free elections. He served as President from 1989 until 1990 when he was succeeded by Lech Walesa, the leader of Solidarity.

Biography

Lech Walesa (b.1943)

An electrician at the Lenin shipyard in the Polish port of Gdansk. Walesa was active in the trade union movement and in 1980 founded the independent trade union Solidarity. It soon had a membership of 10 million, and in 1980 the communist government in Poland gave in to pressure and gave it legal status. When General Jaruzelski became Polish leader in 1981 Solidarity was banned. Walesa and his supporters continued to operate underground until the government reopened negotiations in 1986 and agreed to legalise Solidarity again. When free elections were held in 1990 Walesa was elected President of Poland, a post he retained until 1995.

Source I



8.3 Pope John Paul II meeting crowds in Poland in 1979

SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 What were the main causes of popular discontent in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 1980s?
- 2 Why would the Soviet Union find the scene shown in Source I embarrassing?
- 3 What do the events in Poland in 1981 tell us about the strength of the Soviet hold over Eastern Europe at this time?
- 4 In what circumstances might the Soviet hold over Eastern Europe be threatened?

Why was the Soviet leadership so ineffective in responding to international relations between 1980 and 1985?

The election of Ronald Reagan as American President in 1980 resulted in foreign policy changes. Soviet policy in the early 1980s, however, was grinding to a halt. No new initiative was possible from the Soviet leadership because of the nature of its leaders during this period. A succession of old and infirm leaders, sometimes referred to as a **gerontocracy**, resulted in inertia in decision-making. The increasingly aged and confused Brezhnev finally died in 1982. His physical incapacity had prevented any change in the direction of Soviet foreign policy. Brezhnev's successor was Yuri Andropov who, at 69 years old, was only seven years younger than Brezhnev. It seems likely that Andropov would have introduced policy initiatives – he attempted to start domestic reform – but he was an ill man. Being wired to a dialysis machine for most of his time as leader led to the joke that he was 'the most switched-on man in the Kremlin'. He succumbed to kidney failure in February 1984. His replacement was Konstantin Chernenko, a conservative who represented the desire of the majority of the Politburo to avoid reform. Chernenko was unable to have an impact on policy. He was dying of emphysema when he became leader and lived little more than a year in office. As Ronald Reagan commented, 'How am I supposed to get any place with the Russians, if they keep dying on me?'

An example of the impact inertia had on relations between the superpowers is shown by the response to the shooting down of the Korean airliner KAL 007 by Soviet fighters in 1983. The incident, which cost the lives of all 269 passengers, caused outrage in the West. The aircraft had been en route from Alaska to Seoul when it strayed into Soviet airspace. The Soviet authorities assumed it was a spy plane and shot it down. The Politburo showed its inflexibility during the furore that followed. Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, ignored questions from the West, and the Soviet military merely reiterated the standard line that any unidentified aircraft flying over Soviet airspace would be treated in exactly the same way. Old age and illness had rendered the Soviet leadership incapable of action. It was unable to respond to the incident in any meaningful manner. The 1970s had shown that the best method of improving relations was by face to face meetings between the US and Soviet leaders. The condition of Andropov had made this impossible during the KAL 007 affair. The incident marked a low point in the Second Cold War.

When Chernenko died in March 1985, after only 13 months as leader, the Soviet Politburo chose **Mikhail Gorbachev** as his successor. At 54, Gorbachev represented a younger generation. Change was now possible.

What was the impact of Mikhail Gorbachev's New Political Thinking?

As a committed communist Mikhail Gorbachev's aim on gaining the Soviet leadership in 1985 was to make the Soviet system more productive and

Definition

Gerontocracy

Rule by the elderly (geriatrics). The term is used to describe the Soviet leadership in the years 1980–85, i.e. the last years of Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko. At a time when the Soviet Union was in desperate need of reform it was led by a series of men whose physical condition prevented strong, decisive leadership.

Biography

Mikhail Gorbachev (b.1931)

Leader of the USSR from 1985 to 1991. Gorbachev represented a younger generation of Soviet politicians who believed socialism needed to be reformed. His policies aimed to make the Communist Party more responsive and to liberalise the economy. He encouraged those in Eastern Europe who wished to make similar reforms. In international relations Gorbachev recognised the inability of the USSR to compete with the USA in the arms race and called for limitations on nuclear weapons and an end to the Cold War. Gorbachev's political career came to an end with the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

responsive. 'We can't go on living like this,' he had told his wife in 1985. Gorbachev recognised that in order to achieve change within the USSR, military spending had to be reduced. This could only be done if arms limitation talks were reopened with the USA. Arms agreements would allow Gorbachev to reduce military spending without leaving the USSR exposed to attack, thereby avoiding opposition at home from the Soviet armed forces.

Gorbachev's new approach was strengthened by the emergence and promotion of like-minded individuals of ability. One such individual was Eduard Shevardnadze, who replaced the veteran Gromyko as Foreign Minister in 1985. Together Gorbachev and Shevardnadze launched a charm offensive on the West with their New Political Thinking. Margaret Thatcher had met Gorbachev in 1984 and declared, 'This is a man with whom I can do business.' To the new Soviet leadership confrontation between the superpowers was viewed as unproductive because it led to an escalation in arms and retaliatory measures that increased insecurity.

The Soviet experience in Afghanistan led to a re-evaluation of Soviet intervention in the affairs of other countries. The Afghan War had dragged on without a decisive result and highlighted the cost of making a commitment to supporting communist regimes. Over 15,000 Red Army soldiers were killed in the war, which cost \$8 billion per annum. Supporting communist regimes in Cuba, Vietnam and Afghanistan, and even in Eastern Europe, had become a drain on Soviet resources. The USSR spent approximately \$40 billion annually on propping up communist governments throughout the world. This money could be used to promote domestic reform. Instead of seeing foreign policy as an implement of class struggle against the forces of capitalism, Gorbachev focused on universal values of human rights to promote the interests of all peoples. Thus, Soviet foreign policy was 'normalised': it would no longer be an instrument for furthering the interests of world communism.

The impact of the New Political Thinking was felt quickly.

- 1 *November 1985: Geneva Summit.* Reagan and Gorbachev met. Little was decided at the summit, but it was important in establishing a personal rapport between the two leaders. Reagan hated everything the Soviets stood for but liked Gorbachev and the other Soviet representatives he met. Gorbachev soon realised Reagan found detail hard to grasp and ensured discussions focused on general principles. The Geneva Summit was important in laying the foundations for future negotiation in an atmosphere of cordiality.
- 2 *October 1986: Reykjavik Summit.* Gorbachev proposed phasing out nuclear weapons and offered a series of ever-increasing concessions that took the US leadership by surprise. The price of these concessions was to be the withdrawal of the American SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative) programme. At Reykjavik Reagan was not prepared to put SDI on the negotiating table and no agreement was reached.

- 3 *December 1987: Washington Summit.* At this summit the deadlock was broken. The INF (Intermediate Nuclear Forces) agreement was signed, leading to the scrapping of all intermediate-range ballistic missiles. It was the first time the superpowers had agreed to arms reduction rather than arms control.
- 4 *May-June 1988: Moscow Summit.* At this meeting Reagan and Gorbachev signed agreements on the more complex detail of the INF Treaty. In December Gorbachev met Reagan in New York and announced further cuts in Soviet arms. Gorbachev also met George Bush, who was due to become US President in January of the following year.
- 5 *December 1989: Malta Summit.* At this first full summit between Gorbachev and Bush the two leaders established a good working relationship. No new agreements were made but both leaders declared that the Cold War was over. Shevardnadze was able to announce that the superpowers had 'buried the Cold War at the bottom of the Mediterranean'.

Gorbachev's New Political Thinking was also to have a considerable impact on domestic reform within the USSR. He recognised that the whole Soviet system, which had become so entrenched, was performing badly. As a committed communist, Gorbachev made a genuine attempt to rejuvenate the Soviet Union. His policies included:

- *Perestroika:* a restructuring of the economy that involved a measure of private enterprise to promote production, efficiency and higher quality goods
- *Glasnost:* a policy of openness that encouraged the population to put forward new ideas and show initiative
- *Democratisation:* an attempt to get more people involved in the Communist Party and political debate.

The result of these policies was to lead to a more critical approach towards communism, and this encouraged reformers to push for further liberalisation. Within four years popular opinion in the Soviet Union had shifted towards an adoption of some aspects of the political and economic ideas of the West: others called for a wholesale rejection of communism. Gorbachev's policies encouraged reformers in the Communist Parties of Eastern Europe to press for similar measures. By 1988 'Gorby-mania' was sweeping much of Eastern Europe as those pushing for change called for Gorbachev's ideas to be implemented in their own country. In September 1989 a non-communist government was elected in Poland, and the floodgates were opened. What made these changes different to previous attempts to liberalise was the changed attitude of the USSR towards Eastern Europe. In 1985 Gorbachev had made it clear that he would not uphold the Brezhnev Doctrine.

The end of the Brezhnev Doctrine

The so-called Brezhnev Doctrine had been formulated after the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Brezhnev had made it clear that, 'Whenever internal and external forces hostile to Socialism try to reverse the development of a Socialist country towards the restoration of capitalism . . . this becomes the concern of all Socialist countries.' Gorbachev, however, decided that he would not uphold the right of the USSR to intervene in the affairs of other Socialist countries. Why?

- 1 There was growing disillusionment with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.
- 2 Supporting unpopular and inefficient regimes in the Soviet sphere was costly. Even before Gorbachev the Soviet leadership had decided not to use the Brezhnev Doctrine in 1981 when Poland was destabilised by unrest and the growth of Solidarity. Andropov informed the Politburo that using armed force 'will be very burdensome for us'. Yet the USSR did not make this known for fear of the consequences. It was able to convince the Poles that they would apply it so that its own government would clamp down on the unrest and restore order.
- 3 Gorbachev had a genuine belief that the way to rejuvenate socialism was by introducing a degree of liberalisation.
- 4 He believed the use of armed intervention was, in most cases, morally wrong. He refused to use force to keep the population under control.
- 5 Without the tensions generated by the Cold War, there was no longer a need for the USSR to exert control over Eastern Europe.

The end of the Brezhnev Doctrine meant the peoples of Eastern Europe could now choose their own governments. The consequences of this change were to be spectacular.

Source 1

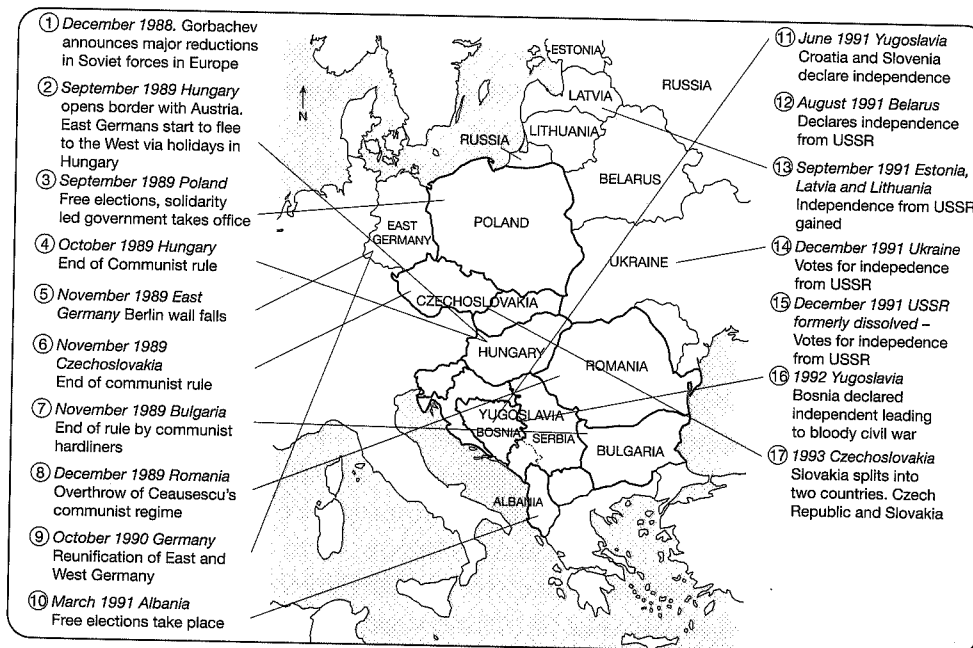


8.4 Mikhail Gorbachev meeting Margaret Thatcher

What were the consequences of the ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine?

Gorbachev's reforms in the USSR led to attempts by some governments in Eastern Europe to reform in response to the new Soviet lead and to an increase in the pressure for change from the public. This trend gathered momentum and the pace of events took many by surprise. Those governments that resisted these trends were to become quickly isolated.

The ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine posed a particular problem for those Eastern European leaders who wanted to resist reform. They could not rely on Soviet military intervention to buttress their regimes. Evidence that Gorbachev meant what he said came in 1989 when Hungary adopted a multi-party system and Polish elections returned a non-communist government. The USSR took no action; Gorbachev even offered his encouragement. The result was to be the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe.



8.5 The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe

1 Poland

In Poland General Jaruzelski had suppressed the independent workers' organisation Solidarity in 1981 and declared a state of martial law. Despite the fact that Solidarity had to operate illegally, its support remained high due to a failure of the government to solve economic difficulties. This support included the endorsement of the Catholic Church, reinforced by further Papal visits in 1983 and 1987. By 1988 the government had lifted martial law and was prepared to introduce some reforms in response to Gorbachev's policies in the USSR. Solidarity was legalised, and, in an important step, the government decided to allow it and any other political groups to stand in elections. In the general elections of 1989 Solidarity was able to defeat the Communist Party by a landslide. In the face of this lack of support, the Communist Party collapsed as an organisation and by 1990

it held no position in the coalition government formed after the election of 1989. The USSR had done nothing to stop these events happening; indeed, Gorbachev seemed to approve of the Poles deciding their own future. The message was clear to all those pressing for change in other East European states: the USSR no longer had any wish to impose itself on the internal affairs of Eastern Europe.

2 The communist collapse spreads

a) Hungary

In Hungary the pressure for reform came from within the Communist Party, and in 1988 Kadar, the hard-line leader who had been in office since 1956, was sacked. The government, now dominated by reformers, decided to allow other political parties to contest elections. The decision of the Hungarian government to open its borders to the West in September 1989 was to seriously undermine East Germany. Thousands of East Germans on holiday in Hungary were now free to travel to the West. On one day alone, 11 September, 125,000 East Germans crossed into Austria and the freedom of the West. The exodus was highly embarrassing to the hard-line East German regime of Erich Honecker.

b) East Germany

The end of the Brezhnev Doctrine was of particular concern to the East German regime. The creation of East Germany had been a result of superpower tension and hostility after the Second World War. As an artificial country, East Germany was more reliant on Soviet support than the other regimes of the region. When Gorbachev visited East Berlin in October 1989 he became the focus of those East Germans who wanted to reform the country. Erich Honecker, the East German leader, refused to contemplate reform of any kind, and his intransigence led to his removal by other members of the East German Politburo. With mass demonstrations on the streets of East German cities, the pressure for reform became unstoppable. Earlier in the year the Chinese government had responded to demonstrations calling for reform by using force. The massacre of students in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in June had illustrated one method of dealing with the situation. Egon Krenz, the new East German leader, refused to sanction widespread repression and amidst the growing chaos decided to open access across the Berlin Wall. On 9 November the Berlin Wall, the symbol of Cold War Europe, 'was dismantled by 'people power'.

c) Czechoslovakia

Also in November 1989 the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was forced to make concessions in response to public demonstrations calling for reforms. An organisation called Civic Forum emerged to coordinate the campaign to get rid of the communist government. Under severe public pressure the communists caved in, reforms were introduced and in 1989 Vaclav Havel, a leading playwright and opponent of communism, was

elected President. Despite the scale of the demonstrations in Czechoslovakia, there was little violence. Thus, the events in Czechoslovakia were described as **the Velvet Revolution**. Another consequence of the collapse of communism was the separation of the country into the Czech and Slovak republics.

d) Romania

Throughout the turbulent events in Eastern Europe that took place in 1989, Romania seemed the most immune to calls for change. Ceausescu was confident enough to leave for a visit to Iran in early December after receiving 67 standing ovations at the Communist Party Congress. The crisis that brought about the collapse of Ceausescu started with the seemingly unimportant actions of Laszlo Tokes, a priest from Timisoara in northern Romania. Tokes had broken the law by allowing poetry to be recited in public during his services. The police ordered him to be transferred out of the area. When he refused, crowds demonstrated in support. Being close to the border with Hungary, the people of Timisoara had some awareness of events in the rest of Europe via Hungarian television and radio stations. Ceausescu sent the army in and opened fire on the demonstrators. Despite attempts to keep knowledge of the massacre of 71 people from the Romanian people, rumours spread quickly. When Ceausescu appeared at a rally in Bucharest, a week later, the crowds booed. The noise of the crowd could be clearly heard above the tape-recorded cheers that were usually played at rallies. This time the army was unwilling to take action against the demonstrators. Ceausescu and his wife were forced to flee Bucharest by helicopter but were later arrested by the army. The Securitate remained loyal to Ceausescu and continued to engage in fierce street fighting until the execution of Ceausescu and his wife, on Christmas Day. Communism, and the man who had completely discredited the system, had been overthrown in Romania.

The situation by the end of 1989

People power had played a large part in the dismantling of communism in Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Romania. In Hungary the hard-line leaders were dislodged by reformers within the ranks of the Communist Party. A similar pattern occurred in Bulgaria where Zhivkov was deposed by his own ministers. Across Eastern Europe the forces of communism had collapsed. It had been a swift and largely peaceful process, with the exceptions of Romania and Yugoslavia. In Yugoslavia the collapse of communism was accompanied by the disintegration of the country and a bloody civil war as Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia attempted to break away from Serbian dominance.

The role of Gorbachev was vital in changing the context in which the communist regimes of Eastern Europe operated. The USSR was no longer willing to support unpopular communist governments, which were no longer crucial to its security and were in danger of becoming a political embarrassment and a financial drain.

Definition

The Velvet Revolution

A term used to describe the collapse of communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989. The communist regime was brought down by widespread demonstrations and protests that involved little violence. The revolution was therefore relatively smooth compared to the violence that marked the overthrow of communism in some of the other Eastern European states such as Romania.

SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 How far would you accept the view that the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe was the result of 'people power'?
- 2 Explain why the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe was a key stage in the ending of the Cold War.

By the end of 1989 every pro-Soviet communist government in Eastern Europe had disintegrated.

To what extent was the fall of the Berlin Wall a result rather than a cause of the end of the Cold War?

One of the most symbolic acts of the Cold War was the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. It was a symbol of the changes that had swept through Europe in 1989 and of the end of the divisions that had marked the essential character of the Cold War: the ideological split between capitalism and communism.

In 1989 the DDR was 40 years old and the East German leadership prepared to celebrate its anniversary. At what should have been an event to consolidate the country, the tide was turning against the regime.

Gorbachev's reforms had important consequences for the very existence of East Germany as a separate country. The DDR was a product of Cold War tensions, which had prevented the unification of Germany after the Second World War. Without these tensions there seemed little reason for Germany to remain divided. Honecker recognised that the DDR could still have a reason to exist if it remained socialist and therefore different from West Germany. Honecker was not in favour of any reform, but the East German population could not be isolated from events in the rest of Europe.

Large numbers of East Germans had fled from the country via Hungary during the summer of 1989, but even more serious for the government were those who were staying put. Gorbachev's reforms of communism in the USSR had encouraged many East Germans to push for change. Political groups such as New Forum were formed. When huge crowds of demonstrators gathered in the city of Leipzig they were shouting 'We are staying.' Honecker seemed paralysed by events. He was seriously ill for much of 1989, and in his absence government decision-making ground to a halt. It was in these circumstances that, in October, Gorbachev visited Berlin to attend a parade to mark the 40th anniversary of the DDR.

Source K

Guests – including Gorbachev himself – were arriving in East Berlin for the official commemorations on October 7–8, 1989. To the horrors of his hosts, the Soviet leader turned out to be even more popular than he had been in Beijing. During the parade down Unter den Linden the marchers abandoned the approved slogans and began shouting, 'Gorby, help us! Gorby stay here!' Watching from the reviewing platform next to an ailing Honecker, Gorbachev could see that 'these were specially chosen young people, strong and good-looking . . . The regime was doomed'.

Gorbachev tried to warn the East Germans of the need for drastic changes: 'One cannot be late, otherwise one will be punished by life.' But trying to get through to him [Honecker] was 'like throwing peas against a wall'.

From John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (published in 2005)

Honecker decided to meet further protest with police action. He was in favour of using the tactics followed by the Chinese government in June 1989, when students protesting in Tiananmen Square in Beijing had been massacred by the armed forces. Fortunately, the East German Politburo overruled Honecker and he was sacked as leader, to be replaced by Egon Krenz. Krenz was aware of the need for reform but as a former head of the Stasi his reputation did not endear him to the public. With popular pressure forcing events to run out of his control, on 9 November 1989 Krenz decided that the Berlin Wall should be opened.

Source L

As the newly appointed Central Committee Secretary for the Media, Schabowski was entrusted with announcing the new travel regulations. It soon became apparent under questioning that he was not familiar with the details. He had only received them from Krenz (the General Secretary) shortly before the conference and he had not been present when the document had come before the Politburo earlier in the day. What Schabowski did confirm was that applications for private visits . . . could take place via Checkpoints in Berlin with 'immediate effect'. He had, however, overlooked the reference in paragraph three of the document that the new dispensations should not be introduced until the following day.

Did this mean that the Berlin Wall was about to be lifted? Immediately after the end of the conference, a flustered Schabowski acknowledged that 'it is possible to go through the border' . . .

Thousands flocked through into West Berlin and joyous celebrations began on the Kurfurstendamm and the city's other streets. At the Brandenburg Gate young people climbed and danced on top of the Wall. Even if Krenz had not wished to open the Wall . . . the popular pressure was so intense that the final lifting of the Iron Curtain could not have been long delayed.

From Mike Dennis, *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic* (published in 2000)

Source M



8.6 Crowds dismantling the Berlin Wall, 1989

SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 What does Source K tell us about the influence of Gorbachev on the people and government of East Germany?
- 2 Using Sources L–N, explain the role of popular pressure in the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- 3 How far would you agree with the view that the fall of the Berlin Wall occurred by accident?
- 4 Was the fall of the Berlin Wall more a result than a cause of the ending of Cold War tensions?

Source N

A misunderstanding was born and it caused an avalanche. The false information spread like wild fire and the rumour became the truth. This was not how the SED* leadership had envisioned the new DDR travel law: masses of people storming the Berlin border-crossings in the middle of the cold night, cheering, celebrating, disrespectfully dancing on the Wall and turning the Anti-Fascist Protective Wall into a farce.

In November 1989, the DDR leadership no longer held the reins of History. Back on August 13 1961, the communist state leadership had taken its residents by surprise. Twenty eight years later, on the night on November 9, the population caught its rulers and their henchmen off guard . . . The citizens of the DDR had run out of patience. They were running the show now: on the streets, at demonstrations, in their demands for democracy and the right to travel.

From Christian Bahr, *Divided City* (published in 2008)

*the Socialist Unity Party, the name given to the Communist Party in East Germany

Events followed quickly from the fall of the Berlin Wall. The government of the DDR was shocked by the pace of events, and revelations of corruption weakened the Communist Party.

The future position of Germany, however, still remained in Gorbachev's hands. If Germany was to reunite, Gorbachev wanted it to be neutral. Helmut Kohl, the West German Chancellor, called for German membership of NATO, and bolstered by the election results in East Germany in March 1990, which saw a victory for parties favouring unification, Kohl was able to persuade Gorbachev to accept a reunified Germany with NATO membership. The Soviet Union also gave up any claim to occupy German soil. Gorbachev appears to have seen these developments as inevitable, but the close relationship between himself and Kohl certainly helped speed up the process.

On 3 October 1990 the process of German reunification was formally completed.

How did the Soviet Union come to an end?

By the summer of 1991 the superpowers had signed the START (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks) Treaty. Nuclear arsenals were to be rapidly reduced. The hostility between East and West was gone. Cold War conflict was a thing of the past, but for those who saw the Cold War as a conflict between the competing ideologies of the superpowers the fall of the USSR in 1991 was the final conclusion to a conflict that had threatened the world since 1945.

Feted as a hero abroad, Gorbachev had become increasingly unpopular at home. His policies for economic restructuring had failed to improve the living standards of the Soviet population. Food queues, strikes by workers

in key industries who had not been paid wages for months, inflation and rising crime were all features of Soviet life by 1988. Most Soviet citizens felt that life had become more difficult since Gorbachev had attempted to breathe new life into the communist system. This situation was coupled with a growing freedom of the Soviet people to express their own opinion and the call for greater democracy. Glasnost had encouraged wider discussion of political issues in the USSR and was also responsible for the Soviet media presenting the public with information that the government would previously have withheld. Discoveries of mass graves in Belarussia and the Ukraine in 1988–89 were revealed as evidence of Stalin's terror. These revelations damaged the Communist Party, as did repeated cases of corruption by party officials. In 1985 Gorbachev had asked the Soviet people for new ideas on how to improve the communist system. By 1989 the answer was that a large section of the population wanted the entire system dismantled.

The forces for change unleashed by Gorbachev's policies ran out of his control. By the summer of 1991 the monopoly of the Communist Party was legally ended and reformers within the party were now free to establish the Democratic Reform Movement.

Gorbachev was caught between those liberals who wanted greater reform and conservatives who wished to uphold the communist system. As a result he gained the resentment of both sides. Conservative elements, supported by many from the upper echelons in the Soviet armed forces, feared a reduction in power that a break-up of the Soviet Union would bring. In August they staged a coup against Gorbachev, who was held under house arrest. The coup collapsed after three days in the face of huge popular protests led by the Russian president Boris Yeltsin.

When the coup collapsed Gorbachev was back in power but no longer in control of events. The rise of nationalist sentiment in the Soviet republics had led the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to declare their independence from Moscow by the end of 1990. In December 1991 the remaining republics dissolved the Soviet Union as a sovereign state. The Cold War was over.

Source O

Gorbachev and his allies did not anticipate the rapidity with which party rule in eastern Europe would collapse... The most critical decisions of 1987–89 were arguably those of Western leaders to withhold large-scale aid to perestroika, and those of hard-line east European leaders not to launch perestroikas of their own.

From Robert English, 'Ideas and the End of the Cold War', in S. Pons & F. Romero (ed.), *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War*, published by Cass (2005)

Source P

The role of the nation's leader is crucial in explaining Soviet behaviour during the Cold War, both at the beginning of the conflict... and at its end, when Gorbachev's no less momentous choices made this confrontation irrelevant. Whilst it is impossible to imagine the end of the Cold War without the agency of such Western leaders as Ronald Reagan and George Bush, their contribution was secondary in importance. The contribution of Gorbachev, whatever his motives, was primary and absolutely crucial to events.

From Vladislav Zubok, 'Unwrapping an Enigma: Soviet Elites, Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War', in S. Pons & F. Romero (ed.), *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War*, published by Cass (2005)

SKILLS BUILDER

Sources O, P and Q give different interpretations on the importance of Gorbachev in the end of the Cold War.

- 1 Summarize the view of each source in no more than 5 words.
- 2 What phrases or words would you quote from each source to illustrate their view?
- 3 State one way in which Source O agrees with Source P.
- 4 State one way in which Source P agrees with Source Q.

Source Q

... moments between 1970 and 1986 symbolised profound changes that, in the end, contributed to the end of the Cold War ...

Some scholars believe that moving the beginning of the end of the Cold War back by a decade would deny Mikhail Gorbachev and his Soviet leadership their place as the prime movers of change. This of course is not the case. Gorbachev's greatness consisted in recognizing many of these trends shortly after coming into office and having the courage to act in accordance.

From Odd Arne Westad, 'Beginnings of the End', in S. Pons & F. Romero (ed.), *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War*, published by Cass (2005)

Unit summary

What have you learned in this unit?

In 1980 the division of Europe that had developed with the Cold War after 1945 looked to be entrenched. Yet despite this image of stability there were many forces that were to produce a dynamic situation. The election of more strident anti-communist leaders in the West, such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, was to result in the adoption of policies that aimed to undermine the Soviet Union by economic pressures. The response of the Soviet leadership was one of inertia until Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary in 1985. Gorbachev's New Political Thinking brought about change within the USSR and encouraged other communist regimes that had previously been tightly controlled from Moscow to reform and liberalise. This, coupled with the Soviet Union's renouncing of the Brezhnev Doctrine, made the hold of communism over Eastern Europe much more precarious. As popular pressure on communist regimes to reform increased, the governments of Eastern Europe found themselves isolated and bowed to the seemingly inevitable tide of events during 1989. The collapse of communism weakened the position of the Soviet Union and furthered calls by its own population for reform. Amidst this weakening position the USSR drew closer to meeting the demands for controlling arms that were presented by the USA. By 1989 the two superpowers had reached agreement on arms reduction and their relationship was cordial enough for their leaders to declare that the Cold War was now buried. The formal dissolution of the USSR in 1991 marked what many saw at the time as the final victory of the West in the Cold War.

What skills have you used in this unit?

You have been introduced to the key events that led to the ending of the Cold War between the superpowers during the 1980s. You will have understood the changes brought about by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, the sequence of events that followed and how they played a part in the process of ending international tension between East and West. This understanding will be crucial for the work in the next unit where you will be studying the differing interpretations that have been put forward to explain why the Cold War came to an end.

Exam style questions

This unit has been concerned with setting the context for one of the key controversies of this topic, namely how and why historians' interpretations of the ending of the Cold War differ. It is, therefore, useful for you to reinforce your understanding of the content in readiness for the evaluation of interpretations regarding this controversy that you will consider in the next unit.

The questions centred on this controversy will appear in Section B of the exam. They will ask you to use two or three sources and your own knowledge to make a judgement on an interpretation. For example:

- How far do you agree with the view that the Cold War came to an end because popular protest in the Communist Bloc during the 1980s weakened the Soviet hold over Eastern Europe?

Exam tips

To answer this question you will need to examine the role played by popular protests in Eastern Europe in bringing an end to the Cold War and assess how it links to other factors such as Reagan's foreign policy, Gorbachev's New Political Thinking, the actions of Pope John Paul II and the pressure of economic weaknesses. Interpretations, such as the one given in this question, require you to use the sources you are presented with in the exam and your own knowledge. You will be examining examples of sources by historians in the next unit. To help you assess these by using your own knowledge, use the material you have covered in this unit to identify evidence that could be used to support the following:

- evidence that popular protests in Eastern Europe brought an end to the Cold War
- explain how this factor can be linked to:
 - Reagan's foreign policy
 - Gorbachev's New Political Thinking
 - the actions of Pope John Paul II
 - the pressure of economic weaknesses.

RESEARCH TOPIC**The end of communism?**

A key factor in the ending of the Cold War was the collapse of communist regimes, often misleadingly termed 'the collapse of communism'.

Your task is to use your research skills to find out how many countries are still ruled by regimes who claim to be communist. Aim to find out:

- the key features of these regimes and their leaders
- why they have survived the collapse of the USSR
- why their survival has not produced a continuation of the Cold War
- what relevance, if any, communism has to addressing the problems of the modern world.

9 Why did the Cold War come to an end in the 1980s?

What is this unit about?

This unit focuses on the key historical controversy of why the Cold War came to an end in the 1980s. In the last unit you looked at the events that saw the ending of the Cold War; this unit builds upon that knowledge by examining the ways in which historians have debated the significance of the factors that produced these events. The relative importance of the causes that led to the end of the Cold War has been a highly contentious issue, and this unit seeks to help you explore the differing interpretations offered by historians. Ultimately, this will enable you to assess and evaluate these interpretations and present convincing arguments of your own. In this unit you will:

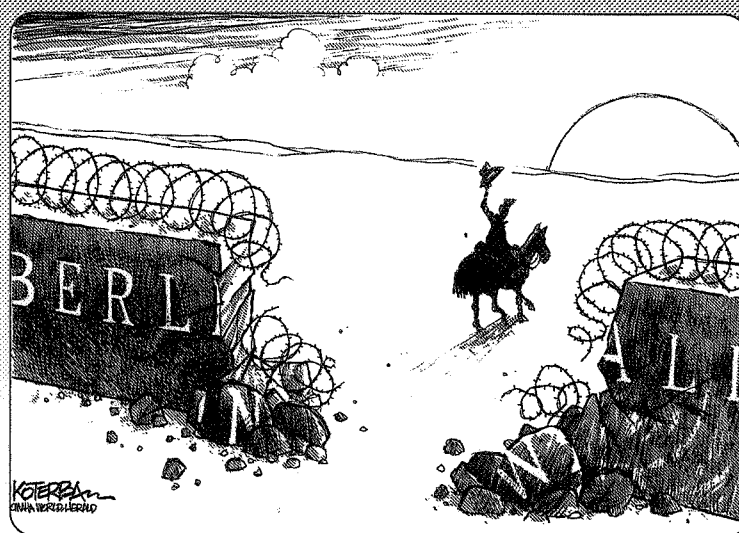
- consider the different interpretations of the role played by individuals in the process of ending the Cold War
- assess and evaluate historical interpretations of the causes of the ending of the Cold War
- come to your own reasoned judgement as to why the Cold War came to an end.

Key questions

- What roles were played by Reagan, Gorbachev, Thatcher and Pope John Paul II in the ending of the Cold War?
- How and why do interpretations of the end of the Cold War differ?

Introduction

Source A



9.1 A cartoon from 1989 showing Ronald Reagan on a horse riding into the sunset

Source B

9.2 Crowds gather outside the Communist Party Central Committee building in the centre of Bucharest, 22 December 1989

Discussion point

How do Sources A and B suggest different interpretations of the ending of the Cold War?

It is no surprise that events as momentous as the ending of the Cold War have produced a debate amongst historians over the relative importance of the factors involved. The Cold War is said to have ended with the fall of the Soviet Union, after which the unique ideological conflict between the two superpowers came to an end. Two key approaches have been adopted: one stresses the importance of external pressures on the USSR that helped undermine its control over Eastern Europe and its satellite states; the other focuses on the importance of internal factors that weakened the Soviet system from within.

Each approach, in itself, highlights a range of individual factors, events and key individuals. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these in detail in order to help a full evaluation to take place.

Problems facing historians examining the ending of the Cold War

For the historian a study of the ending of the Cold War poses particular challenges. The origin and development of the Cold War has attracted a lot of attention and a wide range of serious scholarly research. In contrast, the end of the Cold War, while attracting attention, has yet to be covered by a wide range of detailed analytical works. This has been largely the result of the problems the topic poses. These are as follows:

- Many records are unavailable due to matters of national security or because it is still in the interests of the various governments that exist today to restrict access to material that is considered sensitive.
- The events of this topic are relatively recent. The historian is still heavily influenced by the values and attitudes of societies that were moulded by the Cold War and affected intimately by its ending.
- History is often said to be written by the victors. In the case of the Cold War this has meant the Americans. In the case of the former Soviet Bloc it has been written by supporters of democracy and greater freedom and therefore by critics of the old communist system that collapsed with the ending of the Cold War.

- The ending of the Cold War coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and this has left a lot of bitterness in Russia. It has made serious and detached reflection on the events very difficult.
- The impact of the process that brought about the end of the Cold War is difficult to assess due to the fact that only a limited amount of time has passed since the events themselves.
- Historians, political scientists and journalists have often been tempted to move on to examine the events that have followed the Cold War. The so-called war on terrorism, involving the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan of the 1990s and beyond, have drawn attention away from the ending of the Cold War itself. In fact, historians such as Denise Artaud have argued that the Cold War was merely one stage in a longer struggle between totalitarianism and democracy. Thus, the struggle continues and therefore the ending of the Cold War is of limited importance and interest.

All judgements by historians are provisional, and this is especially true of events that are recent, where the historian will struggle to detach him or herself from the issues and dilemmas they pose for the present day. This is not to invalidate the research conducted by historians on this topic but it should always be borne in mind.

The role of individuals in the end of the Cold War

In tracing the developments that led to an end to the Cold War, key individuals are identified as having an important role in determining the course of events. However, in order to assess fully their role it is necessary to consider the context within which these individuals operated. The following table highlights key information on these individuals.

SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 Using the information in the table, present a case for each of the key individuals, highlighting their role in the events that ended the Cold War.
- 2 After considering the role of each individual, rank them in order of their importance in bringing about the end of the Cold War.
- 3 Check your ranking against that of other students in your group. Do you agree? If not, why?
- 4 What factors could be highlighted as limiting the influence of all of these individuals?

Pope John Paul II



Basic details

Born 1920.
Real name Karol Wojtyla.
Son of a Polish army lieutenant.
Entered the underground seminary at Krakow in 1942.
Became bishop of Ombi in 1958, archbishop of Krakow in 1963.
Became Pope in 1978.
Died in 2005.

Character Inspiring and courageous, willing to stand up for beliefs. Sometimes referred to as having 'heroic faith'.

Ideas A conservative within the Catholic Church on theological matters. A believer in the importance of human rights and therefore critical of communist regimes.

Policies Spoke out against human rights abuses by the governments of Eastern Europe.

Influence His speeches inspired those resisting communism: 'Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilisation and development. Do not be afraid!'

Visited Poland in 1979, 1983 and 1987. Each visit reinforced support for Solidarity and helped it gain concessions from the government.
Lech Walesa, the leader of Solidarity, was a devout Catholic.

BUT

The Catholic Church was only strong in Poland and the Baltic States, and its impact was limited in the other countries of Eastern Europe.

Ronald Reagan



Basic details

Born 1911.
Son of a shoe store owner.
Developed a career as an actor in Hollywood.
Joined the Republican Party and then served as Governor of California 1967-75.
President of the USA 1981-89.
Died 2004.

Character Astute rather than intelligent. Could be very strident when convinced he was right. Generally personable and able to establish good relations with other leaders.

Ideas Saw communism as 'evil', a view shaped by traditional American values. A staunch believer in free market capitalism.

Policies Increasing nuclear arms and developing SDI (Star Wars) in an attempt to put economic strain on the USSR. Reagan Doctrine supplied aid to groups against communism.

Influence Caused difficulties for the USSR in Afghanistan. Put pressure on its government to grant concessions to Solidarity by reducing financial aid to Poland. SDI alarmed the Soviet leadership.

BUT

May have delayed the end of the Cold War by showing the USSR that the USA was so hostile.

Soviet leadership did not try to engage in Reagan's arms race.

SDI viewed by many as unrealistic.

Sometimes supported regimes that were not a good advert for capitalism and freedom, e.g. the Philippines.

Margaret Thatcher



Basic details

Born 1925.
Daughter of a grocer.
Secretary of State for Education and Science 1970-74.
Leader of the Conservative Party from 1975.
Prime Minister 1979-90.

Character Strident, forceful approach to politics. Strong-willed; dubbed the 'Iron Lady' by the Soviet press.

Ideas Opposed to all forms of communism. A strong supporter of free market economics.

Policies Allowed Ronald Reagan to deploy Cruise nuclear missiles to Britain in the early 1980s.

Launched strong verbal attack on Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Influence Strong supporter of Reagan and able to present Reagan's perspective in Europe.

Her decision to deploy US missiles in Britain was crucial to the success of Reagan's policy.

Her strong personality gave her considerable influence in face-to-face meetings.
Established good relations with Gorbachev in 1984.

BUT

Essentially a support player to Reagan.

Mikhail Gorbachev



Basic details

Born 1931.
Son of an agricultural mechanic.
Studied law at Moscow University.

Became member of Communist Party Central Committee in 1971.
Youngest member of the Politburo in 1980.

Elected General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985.
Soviet leader 1985-91

Character Established good relations with foreign leaders. Affable and honest but prone to hesitation and vacillation.

Ideas A communist, but he believed that the Soviet system needed to be reformed to make it more responsive to the needs of the Soviet people.

Believed that the arms race diverted too many resources away from more productive sectors of the economy.

Policies Glasnost: greater freedom and openness.
Perestroika: restructuring of the economy.

Democratisation: need to make politics more democratic.

Introduced moves to reduce nuclear arms.

Ended the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Influence An inspiration to those who wanted to reform communism.

Ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine weakened the hard-line communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

Prepared to make concessions to reduce arms, which led to progress towards the INF Agreement, 1987.

His policies brought about the collapse of the USSR.

How and why do interpretations of the end of the Cold War differ?

Discussion point

Who might Source C be referring to when it mentions 'other stories of ... people, in different places and in different ways'?

Source C

The collapse of the Soviet Union ended the Cold War. But the story of why the Soviet Union collapsed is itself intimately linked to many of the other stories of how people, in different places and in different ways, broke out of the stranglehold that they felt the ideas and the practices of the Cold War represented.

From Jussi Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War* (published in 2003)

Historians and political commentators have argued over the relative importance of the factors involved in bringing about an end to the Soviet Union. The Cold War came to an end primarily because of changes in the Soviet Union that affected its thinking. The Soviet leadership came to the conclusion that the Cold War was no longer worth fighting.

The causes of the end of the Cold War can be categorised as either external factors that bore down upon the USSR or as internal factors that undermined the Soviet system from within.

1 External factors

The role of changes in international relations are emphasised by the *Realist School* of historians.

a) The Triumphalists

The factor that has received a lot of attention from this school has been the role of Ronald Reagan and his policies towards the USSR. Politicians and historians from the American right credit the hard-line approach of the USA in the early 1980s as providing the pressure that caused the Soviet Empire to collapse. SDI was the final straw for a Soviet economy on the brink of bankruptcy. Unable to match the increased defence spending of the USA, the USSR had no choice but to call an end to the arms race and the Cold War. This view is presented by historians such as J. L. Gaddis, in *We Now Know* (1997), and by many writers who played a role in the formulation and implementation of Reagan's foreign policy, such as William Clark and Richard Allen.

Reagan's approach was strengthened by the support he received from Margaret Thatcher in Britain, which enabled him to deploy nuclear missiles in Europe as tangible evidence of his new anti-communist approach.

The importance of Reagan and Thatcher's hard-line stance against communism has been highlighted by historians of the Right who see firm action as the only effective way of standing up to aggression.

This approach has been reinforced by events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, such as the war in Iraq against the dictator Saddam Hussein. This perspective often comes from those who supported Reagan's stance against the Soviet Union and see it as the main factor that produced the US 'victory' in the Cold War. This school of historians has therefore tended to view the Cold War in a triumphalist manner, using the end of the Cold War as a justification for the foreign policies of Reagan.

The triumphalists include writers who served in the Reagan administration, such as Caspar Weinberger, Robert McFarlane, Richard Pipes and Richard Pearle. The historian Peter Schweitzer based a lot of his research on interviews with these individuals. It is perhaps of no surprise that in his book *Victory* (1994) Schweitzer argues that the end of the Cold War was due to Reagan turning away from the foreign policy of Détente towards a more aggressive stance against the USSR. In this respect Schweitzer has much in common with the views of other triumphalists who see Reagan's foreign policy as marking a change from that of previous US administrations.

b) Critics of the triumphalists

Critics of the triumphalists, such as George Shultz, argue that US pressure did little to help win the Cold War. A hard-line stance against communism had proved ineffective when applied in Vietnam in the 1960s. Thus there was no guarantee that a more aggressive approach to the USSR would bring about the desired change in Soviet policy. Nonetheless, they do see aspects of US foreign policy as effective. The fact that both Reagan and Bush made serious attempts to engage with Gorbachev in a dialogue that aimed to reduce international tension produced results that led to an ending of the Cold War.

c) Interpretations of Gorbachev's role

One of the key divisions between the views of the triumphalists and their critics has been on the role of Gorbachev. The triumphalists emphasise that it was difficult to trust Gorbachev because of his aims. They argue that Gorbachev's reforms were designed to strengthen the USSR by revitalising its economy and providing clear political leadership. This would allow the USSR to retain its place as a superpower with global interests and influence in ways that were wider and more effective than the old method of imposition through military means.

The critics of the triumphalists argue that Gorbachev's change in intentions and attitude to working with the West was the key factor that reduced mistrust and fear, and therefore international tension, between the superpowers. To some historians and commentators Gorbachev is the hero who brought about the end of the Cold War. These writers sympathised with Gorbachev's New Political Thinking. Raymond Garthoff, in his book *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (1994), argues that the end of the Cold War was due to Gorbachev's New

Political Thinking and the concessions he was prepared to offer to the USA. As Archie Brown has argued in *The Gorbachev Factor* (1996), if Reagan had listened to the more conservative elements in his administration, he would not have taken the opportunities offered by Gorbachev but continued a policy based on mistrust and fear.

Russian historians and commentators are divided along lines that parallel those in the West when assessing the role of Gorbachev. Many veterans of the Gorbachev administration and former members of the Soviet secret police, the KGB, claim that the USA won because of pressure exerted on the USSR through subversive activities, often organised by the CIA. Due to this pressure Gorbachev gave in and 'surrendered' to the West. These views are still deeply held in Russia by nationalists who claim that the goal of the USA was not to end the Cold War but to destroy the Soviet Union and then weaken Russia. Sergei Akhromeyev and Georgi Kornienko have presented these views in *With the Eyes of a Marshall and a Diplomat: A Critical View of Foreign Policy of the USSR Before and After 1985* (1992).

The foreign policies of Gorbachev have been defended by Gorbachev himself and key members of his administration, such as Anatoly Chernyaev. They see the end of the Cold War as a separate event to the collapse of the Soviet Union. They highlight the importance of New Political Thinking as an alternative to the conduct of superpower relations based on fear and confrontation. Although these studies have come from individuals who played a part in the events themselves, they are often based on impressive use of evidence.

d) The role of Pope John Paul II

Another individual who is highlighted as having a significant impact on the Soviet system is Pope John Paul II. His speeches gave encouragement to those living under communist rule to stand up for human rights. The fact that John Paul II was Polish gave him considerable influence over the predominantly Catholic population of his home country. This influence has been highlighted by biographers of the Pope, such as Jonathan Kwitny in *Man of the Century: the Life and Times of Pope John Paul II*. Yet the role of the Catholic Church in leading opposition to the communist regimes of Eastern Europe can be overstated. Catholicism was strong in Poland, but elsewhere in Eastern Europe Protestantism or the Orthodox Church had more followers. Much of the opposition had no affiliation to any religion.

2 Internal factors

Domestic changes within the Soviet system have been highlighted by the *Ideational School*. The views of those on the right who see Reagan's role as key have been challenged by historians who point to the fact that Soviet leaders had already come to the conclusion that superpower rivalry was counterproductive before the arms programme of Reagan. Soviet scientists did not consider SDI to be a realistic policy – rather, something in the

realm of science fiction. In the debates and discussions that went on among Soviet policy-makers – reflected in records of Politburo and Central Committee meetings that have become public – there is hardly mention of – let alone emphasis on – a race to catch up with Reagan's new weapons. A top general who proposed such an effort was fired for it in 1984.

The Soviets had a long-standing problem of over-committing resources to the military, a problem that burdened the United States as well. The Afghan commitment had been an enormous drain even in the days before Reagan. Thus Reagan's arms programme created little additional pressure. According to M. Bowker, in *Russian Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (1997), Reagan's policies may have delayed the end of the Cold War by giving conservative elements within the Soviet leadership a better case for continuing the conflict by highlighting the hostility of the enemy.

Thus another school of historians has developed that focuses on internal factors that undermined the Soviet system. To those writers heavily critical of communism, the key factor has been the weaknesses inherent in the ideology of communism. Thus the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War was inevitable. The inefficiencies in a state-controlled economy and the inability of a communist system to meet the needs of its people would eventually lead to crisis. By the 1980s this crisis had come to a head.

The development of popular protest movements – 'people power' – across Eastern Europe in 1989 was certainly a consequence of the failure of communist regimes, if not communism as an ideology. By the 1980s the regimes of Eastern Europe had become so entrenched that they had lost touch with much of their own population and even with members of their own party. The photographs of large crowds physically dismantling the Berlin Wall with hammers in November 1989 remains one of the abiding images of people power in action. Yet the popular movements that brought about the collapse of communist regimes were only possible because of the changes brought about by the Soviet leadership. In fact, people power played a small role in the collapse of the USSR itself. Yet change from above was to be the catalyst for change from below. Gorbachev's encouragement of new ideas for reforming communism coupled with a refusal to use force to support unpopular communist regimes was to transform the context within which change was to become not only possible but develop a life of its own. Thus Gorbachev's policies produced a chain of events that took almost everyone by surprise and resulted in an end to the Cold War.

3 The influence of attitudes and ideology

New evidence available from Soviet archives has allowed a revision of some of the previous views on the ending of the Cold War. This has resulted in a re-evaluation of the impact of national experiences and ideology on policy-making. One of the key factors highlighted has been the change in attitudes held by the Soviet people and leadership. The Russian historian Vladislav Zubok has drawn attention to this factor, arguing that

the fading of the traumatic memories caused by the Second World War was to have a marked impact on how the USSR saw the West. Images of burning buildings, devastated land and millions of dead had produced a hostile view of the outside world after 1945. By the 1980s the survivors of the wartime generation were dying out. This generational shift in society was to be reflected by the generational change amongst the leadership. The attitudes and principles of the Soviet elite started to change. Out went the rigid adherence to communist ideology as decided by the Party. There was no longer seen to be a need to spread the ideology of communism or build up an empire based on it. Gorbachev's New Political Thinking rejected the idea that Soviet control over Eastern Europe could be justified by ideology or the need to defend itself against Nazism. Thus what made Gorbachev's impact so important was the change occurring in Soviet society during the 1980s.

No historian would see only one cause for an event as complex as the ending of the Cold War, but there is still plenty of debate to be had as to the relative importance of a range of individuals interacting with their wider context.

Source exercise: Interpretations of the end of the Cold War

Source D

It was Gorbachev's acceptance of a non-communist government in Poland that, more than anything, opened the floodgates for political change in Eastern Europe . . .

While the events in Eastern Europe were unfolding, Gorbachev insisted on absolute Soviet non-intervention. As he explained to his Politburo, the Soviet Union could not afford to intervene, financially or in terms of the cost in its relationship with the West. But most importantly, Gorbachev believed that it would not be *right* to intervene . . .

From Jussi Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad,
The Cold War (published in 2003)

Source E

Mikhail Gorbachev did not suddenly emerge from nowhere. He, or some similar Soviet reformer, may even have been inevitable. He was the most prominent of that extraordinary generation of democratically minded reformers who suddenly broke through to the top of the Communist Party.

From Martin Walker, *The Cold War* (published in 1994)

Source F

Because of the pressing domestic, political and economic demands that confronted Gorbachev, he went further than any other Soviet leader in reducing Soviet commitments. But this was not abandonment but retrenchment. What ultimately mattered for the forces of international revolution was the domestic strength of individual revolutionary states with or without Soviet support.

From Richard Saull, *The Cold War and After* (published in 2007)

Source G

For Gorbachev any attempt to maintain control over unwilling peoples through the use of force would degrade the Soviet system by overstretching its resources, discrediting its ideology, and resisting the irresistible forces of democratisation that, for both moral and practical reasons, were sweeping the world ... 'It is obvious,' he argued, 'that force and the threat of force cannot be and should not be an instrument of foreign policy ... Freedom of choice is a universal principle, and it should know no exceptions.'

It suddenly became apparent, just as Reagan was leaving office, that the Reagan Doctrine had been pushing against an open door. But Gorbachev had also made it clear, to the peoples and the governments of Eastern Europe, that the door was now open.

From John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (published in 2005)

Source H

The upheavals of 1989 caught everyone by surprise ...

What no one understood, at the beginning of 1989, was that the Soviet Union, its empire, its ideology – and therefore the Cold War itself – was a sandpile ready to slide. All it took to make that happen were a few more grains of sand. The people who dropped them were not in charge of superpowers or movements or religions: they were ordinary people with simple priorities who saw, seized, and sometimes stumbled into opportunities. In doing so, they caused a collapse no one could stop. Their 'leaders' had little choice but to follow.

From John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (published in 2005)

Source I

What caused the collapse of communism?

... the communist economic crisis of the 1980s was about how the entire economy, domestic and military, was to be run. Poland and the other occupied states of Eastern Europe were in a similar economic bind, and they weren't trying to build a competitive 'Star Wars' system.

... One could also say that communism was doomed by technology. The arrival of the information age meant the end of mass industrial labour – Marx's proletarian class – in modern economies ...

... If Solidarity had not come along to take advantage of these sweeping technological changes, something else would have. But Solidarity did come along – not anything else.

Father Avery Dulles, the theologian and son of the US secretary of state who helped father the Cold War, says John Paul's role was 'crucial. It wasn't the whole thing, but it was decisive. Poland was the key to the end. It influenced the other countries in Eastern Europe. Walesa was on TV saying he never would have had the courage to act without the pope.

From Jonathan Kwitny, *Man of the Century: The Life and Times of Pope John Paul II* (published in 1997)

SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 How do Sources D and E differ in their view of the importance of the role of Gorbachev in ending the Cold War?
- 2 Using your own knowledge, assess the validity of these two views.
- 3 How might Sources F and G be used to challenge or modify the view that Gorbachev's role in the ending of the Cold War was important?
- 4 Using Source H, and your own knowledge, explain how far you agree with the view that popular protest was a significant factor in bringing an end to the communist regimes in Eastern Europe.
- 5 Using Source I, and your own knowledge, assess the role of Pope John Paul II in the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

Linking the factors involved in ending the Cold War

Ronald Reagan's foreign policy	1	This reinforced Reagan's stand against the USSR by allowing US nuclear missiles in Europe 4
Mikhail Gorbachev's New Political Thinking	2	This greatly weakened the ability of the communist regimes to oppress their own population
The ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine	3	It threatened to economically bankrupt the USSR
The role of Margaret Thatcher	4	It turned many people away from communism as an answer to their needs 7
Popular protests in Eastern Europe	5	These gave encouragement to the people of Eastern Europe to demand change
The role of Pope John Paul II	6	It helped strengthen the resolve of those protesting against communism
The moral bankruptcy of communism	7	This showed the lack of support for the regimes of Eastern Europe that refused to reform 16

SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 Using the table above, find the box in the middle column that provides the link between a factor in the left-hand column and one in the right hand column.
- 2 What other links can you explain between the factors?
- 3 Which factors are highlighted by the realist school of historians?
- 4 Which factors are highlighted by the ideational school?
- 5 Does the exercise using the table suggest that these two historical approaches are incompatible?
- 6 You have now considered a range of differing interpretations for the ending of the Cold War. Which of these do you consider to be the most valid?
 - Use your own knowledge to support your argument.
 - Do not just accept the view of one interpretation without reasoning. For example, do you think that a combination of interpretations provides the most convincing explanation? Explain how you would link them.
 - Explain why you reject the other interpretations.

*Unit summary**What have you learned in this unit?*

The Cold War came to an end when the USSR lost its will for empire. A range of factors combined to weaken the Soviet hold over Eastern Europe and ultimately over its own people. It is the relative importance of these factors and the ways in which they link together that have been the focus of debate by historians.

The role of the changes to US foreign policy brought about by Ronald Reagan has received a lot of attention from American historians, particularly those on the political right. Reagan's foreign policy was a strident attempt to get the Soviet leadership to change its ways. The USSR could not sustain the resources needed to pursue an empire it no longer felt it needed in order to secure itself against its enemies. Cold War conflict had involved the superpowers building empires abroad to secure spheres of influence. As the USA found in Vietnam and the USSR found in Afghanistan, empire building was a painful and costly policy.

Yet change in history is never driven by one cause only. Reagan's policies did not operate in a vacuum. The failings of the communist system had already persuaded reformers within the Soviet leadership that change was needed. The difference was that after 1985 Gorbachev was in a position to bring these changes about. The chain of events unleashed by Gorbachev's ideas and actions produced results he had not intended: the collapse of communism rather than its revitalisation.

Much of the historiography of the ending of the Cold War has been concerned with the role of individuals, but, perhaps ironically given the rejection of Marxism that the events entailed, the masses of Eastern Europe played their role in the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. It is tempting to see this process of 'people power' that swept Eastern Europe in 1989 as one force, but despite some common features the experience, attitudes and values of the people in each country also relate to their own stories.

The many dimensions of the ending of the Cold War give this topic a richness that is likely to provoke continued debate in the future.

What skills have you used in this unit?

You have examined the ways in which historians have debated the issue of what factors led to the ending of the Cold War between the superpowers during the 1980s. You will also have understood why historians have offered differing interpretations. This understanding has enabled you to assess the validity of these interpretations and to offer clear, reasoned judgements on them. As a result you can present your own interpretations with conviction and confidence.

Exam style questions

The questions centred on this controversy will appear in Section B of the exam. They will ask you to use two or three sources and your own knowledge to make a judgement on an interpretation. An example is given below.

Source J

Reagan and his foreign policy advisers came into office on a wave of hyperbole* about the Soviet threat designed to rally the American public to support a major military build-up. A number of Reagan's advisers belonged to an ideological faction whose views had not been substantively represented in Washington since the 1950s. Like their counterparts in the domestic arena who proudly proclaimed that they had come to create a 'revolution' in government, they were radicals, in a sense of going back to the roots, and their ambitions were high. Like their forebears in the Eisenhower years, they wanted to roll back the Soviet empire and win the Cold War.

From Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (published in 2000)

*exaggerated statements

Source K

It was Gorbachev and the East Europeans themselves, not the Americans, who rolled back the Iron curtain and ended the cold war. It is an exaggeration to claim that America's military spending in the 1980s prompted the Soviet counter-measures and economic dislocations that forced the evil empire to surrender. Not only does such an argument downplay Lech Walesa's Solidarity movement in Poland and Vaclav Havel's 'velvet revolution' in Czechoslovakia, it ignores the degree to which the cold war had become institutionalized on both sides by the 1980s . . . Worst-case analysis wherein generals and admirals overstated the strength of the adversary to justify larger weapons systems and budgets became standard operating procedure on both sides. If anything, the Reagan military build-up may have delayed an earlier Soviet move toward detente.

From J. Garry Clifford, 'History and the End of the Cold War: A Whole New Ball Game?', in *Organization of American Historians* (vol. 7, Fall 1992)

Source L

The pressure from the West in the early 1980s revived Cold War tensions, but it is hard to see it as a decisive factor in the end of the Cold War world order. The ending was, in a way, a 'victory' of the West, but attempts of some US leaders to take credit for this victory cannot be corroborated by the new evidence from the Soviet side. The role of longer-term processes within the Soviet Union (the erosion of ideology, the pent-up desire for relaxation) played a much greater role than the short-term measures of the Reagan or Bush administrations.

On the other hand, the personal roles of Gorbachev and other 'new thinkers', decisive as they were in the turn from the Cold War, should not be idealized. They let the war in Afghanistan continue, needlessly, for three more years under their leadership. In concrete terms, their new foreign policy gave them only limited achievements . . . What finally ended the Cold War was the process of liberalization inside the Soviet Union that they unleashed and over which they later lost control. As a domestic reformer, Gorbachev failed terribly . . . The end of the Cold War was, in many ways a byproduct of this failure. The new evidence demonstrates dramatically that it was not only Gorbachev's 'good will', but also the progressive paralysis of his 'revolution from above', the lack of guidelines and orientations, that made possible the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.

From an article by Vladislav Zubok, 'Why did the Cold War End in 1989? Explanations of "the Turn"', in O. A. Westad (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War* (published in 2000)

- Use Sources J, K and L and your own knowledge. How far do you agree with the view that Reagan's actions to roll back the Soviet empire led to the ending of the Cold War?

Exam tips

Note the instruction 'use Sources J, K and L *and* your own knowledge'. This is not a choice.

Weaker answers will tend to discuss the sources first and deal with own knowledge separately. It is much more effective to integrate your own knowledge with the sources. For example:

- Use your own knowledge to explain phrases in the source, to place the source into its context by clarifying what it is saying and the circumstances that it is about, and to test the validity of the interpretation in the source.

For example, in Source J:

- The rise of the neo-conservatives could be discussed in order to provide context for 'Reagan's advisers'.
- Your own knowledge should be used to explain how these attitudes led to policies such as the Reagan Doctrine.
- The debate over whether the Soviet leadership took seriously Reagan's SDI programme could be discussed.
- Why might a historian writing at this time be positive towards Reagan's policies?

For Source K:

- Discuss the assertion that 'It was Gorbachev and the East Europeans themselves . . . who ended the cold war'. This would require you to examine the validity of the supporting assertion 'It is an exaggeration to claim that America's military spending in the 1980s prompted the Soviet counter-measures and economic dislocations that forced the evil empire to surrender.'
- Explain the role of Lech Walesa's Solidarity movement in Poland and Vaclav Havel's 'velvet revolution' in Czechoslovakia.
- Is the date of publication of this source significant?

For Source L:

- This source challenges the interpretation given in the question. You need to explain how. This is an opportunity to cross-reference this source with Source J.
- Source L finds some agreement with Source K, another opportunity for cross-referencing.
- But Source L offers another interpretation that needs to be assessed for its validity. Own knowledge should be used to explain how Gorbachev's domestic failures led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Note that you will be asked to refer to at least two sources in your answer. These sources will be deliberately chosen to remind you that there is more than one interpretation on the issue and that you are dealing with a historical debate. Your answer should therefore engage in this debate and give a reasoned judgement on the interpretation of the issue highlighted in the question.

RESEARCH TOPIC**Biographies**

The events that produced the ending of the Cold War appear to have been dominated by several key players. Biographies are often used as a source of information for the historian but can pose particular dangers if not used with care.

Compile a list of biographies available on the key individuals involved in the end of the Cold War.

- Why might these biographies be both useful and misleading to a historian of the Cold War in the 1980s?

To help you think about this question consider the purpose of a biography and how this differs from a piece of historical analysis.

Which school of historians is a biography most likely to support? Why?